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Evaluation of the Financial Support by the World Bank Group with the Development Grant Facility to Support the "Partnership for Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS)"

July 2017

PROJECT EVALUATION SERIES

**Evaluation of the Financial Support by the
World Bank Group with the Development
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“Partnership for Agricultural Market
Information System (AMIS)”**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF EVALUATION**

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Office of Evaluation (OED)

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For further information on this report, please contact:

Director, Office of Evaluation (OED)
Food and Agriculture Organization
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 1, 00153 Rome
Italy
Email: evaluation@fao.org

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AMIS	Agricultural Market Information System
DGF	Development Grant Facility
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
G20	Group of Twenty
GEOGLAM	Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Monitoring Initiative
RRF	Rapid Response Forum
ToC	Theory of Change
ToRs	Terms of Reference

Executive summary

Introduction

- 1 This evaluation report is prepared in the context of the evaluation of the Partnership for Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) (herein referred to as the Partnership). The World Bank Group, through its Development Grant Facility (DGF), funded the Partnership (USD 1.2 million) from 2012 to 2016. Mr Alexandre Daoust and Mr Niels Morel (the consultants or evaluation team) have conducted the assignment with the Office of Evaluation (OED) from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This section depicts the purpose and the scope of the evaluation.

Purpose and scope

- 2 The purpose of the evaluation is twofold:
 - a. To assess progress made towards achieving the objective, outcomes and activities stated in Annexes 1 and 2 of the DGF Grant Agreement through meeting the development and intermediate outcomes, and identifying the results achieved.
 - b. To derive lessons learned, for broader application to AMIS, and identify potential areas for improvement, in terms of the quality of activities and their usefulness in meeting the needs of AMIS stakeholders.
- 3 The evaluation covers all DGF funded activities implemented from July 2012 to June 2016. The DGF funded activities are however intimately linked to AMIS as a whole and often DGF funding has been used as “co-financing” for specific activities. The evaluation assessed therefore the DGF support within the broader framework of AMIS, including strategic focus, effectiveness, coordination; efficiency of DGF implementation, including institutional set-up and coordination and steering mechanisms; and sustainability of results.

Methodology

- 4 The DGF funding was intended to play primarily a supporting and enabling role, leading to direct - and also indirect - but important outcomes for AMIS. To measure these indirect outcomes as well as assess AMIS more broadly, the evaluation used a technique called ‘contribution analysis’¹ to develop a holistic understanding of how the DGF-financed activities contributed to the overall AMIS objectives.
- 5 The evaluation questions, as stated in the Terms of Reference, served as the basis for the evaluation. For each question, an operational and measurable indicator has been developed to track a change over predetermined targets or time. Whenever possible, the indicators stated in the *Programme Result Framework* (see Annex 1) were used as a first point of reference to assess development and intermediate outcomes. The data collection mainly relied on document review and semi-structured interviews conducted by telephone or Skype. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the AMIS programme team at FAO; Representatives from the World Bank Group; Representatives from the member organizations of the AMIS Secretariat (10); a sample of representatives from AMIS participating countries (15). The evaluation then applied the information and data triangulation method to answer the evaluation questions raised.
- 6 The evaluation of the DGF support within the broader framework of AMIS was conducted taking into account certain challenges the contribution analysis methodology can generate:
 - Attributing the results directly to the DGF funding: the evaluation needs to encompass the achievement of the additional expected benefits resulting from Global/Regional Partnership Programme such as AMIS, not just the benefits of the discrete activities supported.

1 Reference: http://betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guides/contribution_analysis/ilac_brief

- It is to be noted that the number of interviews conducted with non-G20 representatives has been limited.
- It would have also been interesting to talk with private sector as well as non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives which would have enhanced the analysis of how AMIS data is used. This was not planned in the inception report.

Background and context of AMIS

- 7 AMIS is a Group of Twenty (G20) response to the global food price surges that occurred in 2008 and 2010. AMIS was launched by the G20 to generate and disseminate reliable and timely data on the prices of four different agricultural commodities, namely wheat, maize, rice and soybeans. To carry out its functions, AMIS consists of the Global Food Market Information Group, the Rapid Response Forum (RRF) and the Secretariat. The AMIS Secretariat, housed at FAO headquarters in Rome, comprises 11 international organizations and entities and supports all functions of the RRF and the Information Group of AMIS. It is governed by a Steering Committee that unites representatives from each of the 11 member organizations.
- 8 The higher order goal of the DGF Partnership grant (USD 1.2 million disbursed in three separate tranches between 2012 and 2016) for AMIS was to improve the transparency of global agricultural markets by generating better information on the supply and demand of maize, rice, soybeans and wheat, putting this information in the public domain and by supporting the capacity of participating countries to provide information and conduct policy discussion of global food price spikes.

Key findings

- 9 Findings on Relevance
 - The objectives, outcomes and activities of the DGF Partnership were relevant, to the higher order goal of improving transparency of the global agriculture markets. As AMIS evolved, the activities and outputs became increasingly relevant for the higher order goal.
 - Data point to the fact AMIS' *design* is aligned with the priorities of the government representatives, in terms of usefulness to their work. Other stakeholders, such as representatives from the private sector and NGOs use AMIS' data which seems well aligned with their needs.
 - Although many of the participating countries' and international organizations' representatives interviewed do not necessarily use the information AMIS provides, they value it. A few have mentioned that they *do* use it. In these cases, the content of the Market Monitor has in most cases been referred to as a trustworthy additional source of information.
 - In an environment where sources of information have multiplied, for the 'competitive edge' of AMIS products to be maintained, AMIS services must be constantly improved.
 - The DGF funding contributed to the development and continuous improvement of the AMIS website and its functionalities.
- 10 Findings on Efficacy:
 - Overall, AMIS was effective and achieved the majority of its targets, and hence the intermediate and development outcomes have been achieved to a good extent. It is the opinion of the majority of the respondents that this would not have been possible without the DGF funding, in addition to other in kind contributions from the international organizations. Indeed, the respondents who were knowledgeable of the DGF funding were under the impression that this financial support was instrumental in supporting the establishment of AMIS and the coordination of the activities.
 - It took time and efforts to ensure the participating countries were actually contributing the needed data for AMIS' dissemination (forecast and policy and use of the harmonized methodology) and there is still work to be done. The deployment and presentation process of the harmonized methodology was parallel to the increase in participation (as the harmonized methodology was better known and understood, the participation of

countries increased) in terms of providing required data. In this context, the AMIS Secretariat initially took a more central role in terms of data “treatment” (analysis) than expected.

- Regarding capacity-building activities, many member countries representatives interviewed have expressed satisfaction with the support provided, as it was directly linked to AMIS-introduced methodologies.
- Both the Information Group and RRF meetings were considered as highly important and unique by the respondents. The respondents increasingly appreciated the meetings as over time they became more comfortable in actively participating.
- The Market Monitor, the AMIS website and Information Group and RRF meetings were effective tools in making the improved information available to the public.
- Based on the conceptual definition of FAO’s Strategic Objective (SO) 4, and the rationale and objectives of the initiative, AMIS could be said to make important contributions towards the outcome.

11 Findings on Efficiency

- By focusing on the secretariat’s core functions, DGF resources were allocated in a relevant manner considering the DGF Grant’s overall objectives.
- By nature, the AMIS initiative is a partnership and multiple examples of synergies have been found by the evaluation team, directly aligned with and contributing to the DGF goals.
- The partnership for AMIS has led to harmonization of efforts between donors for the capacity building activities.
- The annual nature (by tranche) of DGF funding presented some challenges.
- Since there was no DGF funding-specific activity planning process beyond the result framework, it was not possible to track executed activities against planned ones and specific results or outputs against specific activities.
- DGF funding was less tied than other bilateral sources of funding that AMIS has benefited from, allowing the Secretariat to channel resources towards hard-to-finance expenditures, notably staff time (around 75 percent of all expenditure).

12 Findings on Governance and Management

- Formally, the set-up of AMIS and its governance did see very few changes over the period examined, as technical matters have been at the centre of the participants’ interests and launching the initiative technically was perceived as the most pressing challenge.
- Putting de facto the decision-making role into the hands of the Steering Committee members (composed of “information experts and providers”) rather than the participating countries may have been a pragmatic initial choice but shows its limits.
- Financial information on the AMIS initiative has increasingly been shared with participating countries (in particular at the RRF meetings) and systematically been discussed with Steering Committee members

13 Findings on Sustainability

- A foundation has been established as a result of the Grant but changes that have been achieved through DGF-financed activities are only sustainable if AMIS itself becomes sustainable as a mechanism and initiative.
- A growing number of partner institutions are making contributions that are varied in nature and increase the attractiveness of AMIS products. For now, the sustainability of these contributions does not appear to be compromised.
- The initiative has succeeded in retaining the participation of many actors, including at the level of the participating countries. But the feeling of belonging appears stronger at the level of the Steering Committee than at the level of the participating countries.
- Stakeholders have a clear overall view of the risks to the initiative. AMIS has taken actions to solidify its position regarding perceived risks, but some structural constraints are difficult to counter.
- While complementary financing sources seem adequate to ensure AMIS’ programme of work for the coming two years, sources of longer term core financing have not yet been identified.

- While the DGF funding has clearly supported some core functions of the Secretariat that might have otherwise remained vacant, there hasn't been a specific exit strategy for it, nor has there been a notable contribution to shaping a longer-term vision.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Relevance

- 14 The establishment of AMIS was a relevant initiative in the post-2008 food prices crisis context and there is a good satisfactory degree of alignment between the initial concept presented to the G20 and the actual initiative. The design phase of AMIS, was, however, short. The turnaround time to design and put together an initiative in response to the food crisis of 2007–2008 was limited - a few months. This led to a situation where the organizations that agreed to form the AMIS Secretariat did not consider who would use AMIS' outputs and what were the needs of participating countries, in particular the non-G20 ones and more broadly, the entirety of its users.

Conclusion 2. Efficacy

- 15 Undoubtedly, the DGF partnership was effective. The DGF deliverables were achieved and most of the targets were attained. Through the support provided by the grant, the supply of timely and relevant market information has increased. It took time and effort, but activities financed through the DGF also helped in encouraging stakeholders to increasingly participate and contribute to AMIS. This has allowed AMIS products to become progressively more accurate, relevant and appreciated, although efforts are still needed to ensure the accuracy and regularity of data provided by the countries. There is, however, limited practical evidence of the use of AMIS' specific products by government representatives. Efforts to build the capacities of the non-G20 participating countries could have been more effective if based on an initial assessment. They also could have reached a broader outcome if deployed by trainings systematically in each country or regionally.

Conclusion 3. Efficiency

- 16 The AMIS Secretariat seems to have used the DGF resources economically and the initiative leveraged additional resources during the DGF implementation period. There is overall satisfaction over the convening role the Secretariat played. There is also an overall stakeholder perception that AMIS is a good example of a multilateral initiative producing concrete results for a reasonable cost. The DGF funding, by being well aligned with core AMIS needs and mobilized in a timely way, has been able to reach the Bank's objective of "catalysing partnerships through convening and building coalitions, and raising funds".

Conclusion 4. Governance and Management

- 17 Although the fact that the DGF is operationalized through annual agreements presented some challenges, there is overall satisfaction over the funding modalities. In addition, by providing non-tied funding, the DGF has allowed the Secretariat to channel resources towards hard-to-finance but necessary expenditures.

Conclusion 5. Sustainability

- 18 AMIS has taken a solid first step, but important questions remain about its future in an environment where information is increasingly available. Participants would welcome an initiative aimed at crafting a renewed vision for AMIS. The exercise would, however, include numerous challenges. Some of these are: i) potentially diverging views from AMIS stakeholders (international organizations, participating/member countries) on the way forward; ii) the need to produce information in more demand-driven than supply-driven fashion; iii) the necessity to reshuffle the institutional set-up and governance modalities, particularly increased voice for participating countries; and iv) mobilizing more perennial sources of funding.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. It is recommended to conduct a formal and extensive assessment to have a better idea of who uses AMIS' outputs and what type of data and information is specifically needed by users/countries.

Recommendation 2. It is recommended that the Steering Committee seeks a mandate from the G20 to launch and lead a comprehensive exercise aimed at crafting a renewed/enhanced vision and mission for AMIS.

19 In the present context - the end of the DGF funding - the timing is good to rethink AMIS. From data collected during the evaluation, the idea would not be to change the initiative in its essence, as overall results to the evaluation questions are positive in a balanced way. However, at this point, it could be interesting to open an in-depth assessment with the participating countries: what are their needs considering the higher order goal of AMIS? How can the initiative's data be of enhanced use for them? It is understood that AMIS is to produce information that is destined to the public good. But consulting the participating countries would be important in the context of AMIS as it is considered and defined as a partnership and should be the result of a collaborative effort. AMIS has been conducting Monitor use surveys since 2014; this approach could be the basis for a wider, "end-of-phase" study that would have the potential of bringing a renewed and more participatory approach to the initiative.

Recommendation 3. In the context of the exercise proposed, consider the possibility to request another international organization to host the AMIS Secretariat for the next five years in order to counter the natural tendency of the hosting organization to become at the centre of the initiative and for AMIS to benefit fully from the comparative advantages of AMIS Secretariat members. This recommendation is not stating that the AMIS Secretariat should be hosted in another international organization, but discussing the idea would be aligned with the above recommendations in terms of seizing the opportunity of organizing open sessions with all stakeholders to plan the upcoming years.

20 The evaluation has demonstrated that there are solid reasons why AMIS has been housed in FAO, with which the majority of respondents agree; and during this period of time the initiative has undoubtedly benefited from this arrangement. Seeking the embedment of the Secretariat in a new host organization could also be a potential avenue to enrich and enhance further AMIS methodologies, products and services. Over time, the same way AMIS has benefited from being hosted by FAO since its inception, the initiative could benefit from the comparative advantages of other host organizations.

21 Opening up to the other international organizations to ask if other organizations would want to house AMIS would either result in the renewal of the confidence of partners in having FAO house the Secretariat (with a recognition of the good work done over the past five years) or in the transfer of the Secretariat to another international organization, showing all the more the solid partnership AMIS has fostered.

Recommendation 4. More effort should be put into developing a structured approach to evaluating countries' capacity building needs and agreeing on ad hoc pluri-annual capacity building plans coordinated with other capacity building initiatives in country.

22 Assessing and developing capacities of member countries is an integral part of the Secretariat's role and responsibility as stated in the AMIS ToRs² (2011). In the future such effort would need to be sustained and guided by adequate needs assessment methodologies. These needs assessment would ideally need to be comprehensive enough to allow the initiative to get a clear view of what other capacity building efforts are in place and how best to coordinate the efforts at country and regional level. Later on, these exercises need to be translated into detailed and pluri-annual capacity building plans that are acceptable to the said countries. Future capacity building efforts could also benefit from using approaches used by regional initiatives such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Plus Three Food Security Information System (AFSIS).

2 "The Secretariat [...] assesses capacity development needs in member countries, in coordination with relevant International Organisations, Regional Organisations and supports development of national market information systems; AMIS efforts in capacity building will focus on..."

1. Introduction

1 This evaluation report is prepared in the context of the evaluation of the Partnership for Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) (herein referred to as the Partnership). The World Bank Group, through its Development Grant Facility (DGF), funded the Partnership (USD 1.2 million) from 2012 to 2016. Mr Alexandre Daoust and Mr Niels Morel (the consultants or evaluation team) have conducted the assignment with the Office of Evaluation (OED) from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This section depicts the purpose and the scope of the evaluation.³

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

2 As stated in the "Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of the Partnership for Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) Development Grant Facility" (herein referred to as the ToRs),⁴ the purpose of the evaluation is twofold :

- a. To assess progress made towards achieving the objective, outcomes and activities stated in Annexes 1 and 2 of the DGF Grant Agreement through meeting the development and intermediate outcomes, and identifying the results achieved.
- b. To derive lessons learned, for broader application to AMIS, and identify potential areas for improvement, in terms of the quality of activities and their usefulness in meeting the needs of AMIS stakeholders.⁵

1.2 Intended audience

3 The main target audiences of the evaluation to which the findings and recommendations will be presented are the AMIS Secretariat, the AMIS participating countries and the World Bank Group DGF Secretariat and Agriculture Global Practice.

1.3 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

1.3.1 Scope

4 This evaluation focuses on the financial support provided by the Word Bank Group with the DGF to the AMIS Initiative as reflected in the Grant Agreement.

5 The evaluation covers all DGF-funded activities implemented from July 2012 to June 2016. *The DGF funded activities are however intimately linked to AMIS as a whole* and often, DGF funding has been used as "co-financing" for specific activities. The evaluation therefore assessed the DGF support within the broader framework of AMIS, including strategic focus, effectiveness, coordination; efficiency of DGF implementation, including institutional set-up and coordination and steering mechanisms; and sustainability of results.

1.3.2 Evaluation questions

6 The evaluation questions categorized by evaluation criteria are as follows:

3 Much of the content in the subsection derives from the Terms of Reference of the Evaluation.

4 See Annex 3.

5 FAO, Office of Evaluation (OED). August 2016. Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of the Partnership for Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) Development Grant Facility. P.8.

Table 1: Evaluation questions by evaluation criteria

Questions
Relevance
1. The relevance of the objectives, outcomes and activities of the DGF Partnership to the higher order goals of improving transparency of the global agriculture markets.
2. To what extent do AMIS participating countries value: i) the information provided by AMIS on the supply and demand of maize, rice, soybeans and wheat, including stockholdings; ii) the capacity building activities aimed at improving the collection and reporting of market information (where appropriate); iii) how their participation in policy discussions related to global food prices has been enabled, including through the Rapid Response Forum; and iv) any other additional value elements that have emerged from the DGF Partnership activities (against a counterfactual of these not being available).
Efficacy
3. To what extent have the intermediate and development outcomes reflected in the Programme Results Framework under the DGF Partnership been achieved, against the counterfactual of no DGF resources being provided: 3.1 How have these results contributed towards achieving the objectives of the DGF Partnership which include: - generating better information on the supply and demand of maize, rice, soybeans and wheat, including stockholdings; - making this information available to the public domain; - supporting the capacities of participating countries to provide timely information using a harmonized methodology; - supporting capacities to conduct policy discussions related to global food prices, including timely policy discussions when price spikes are likely.
4. For FAO, to what extent is AMIS contributing to results under FAO's Strategic Objective 4 (Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems)?
Efficiency
5. For the World Bank Group, in its dual capacity as AMIS Secretariat member and donor, assessing (in addition to the other evaluation questions) to what extent has the DGF Partnership for AMIS achieved or is expected to achieve: i) efficient allocation of DGF resources; and ii) benefits that are more cost effective than those that could be achieved by providing the same service on a country-by-country basis?
6. To what extent did the flexibility in the DGF financing through the Partnership help AMIS respond appropriately to needs as they arise?
Governance and Management
7. Governance and management of the DGF Partnership implementation, including: • institutional set-up and efficiency and effectiveness of coordination and steering mechanisms; • extent to which governance and management of the DGF Partnership is transparent in providing information about the Partnership; is accountable to all stakeholders; and is clear with respect to roles and responsibilities.
Sustainability
8. To what extent are the intermediate and development outcomes supported by the DGF Partnership sustainable? In particular, the extent to which the underlying activities financed by the DGF Partnership will continue, reflective of both their ownership by AMIS members (inclusive of participating countries and institutions), and willingness to finance.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Evaluation specificities/challenges and how they were addressed

- 7 A first important specificity/challenge worth mentioning here is that AMIS distinguishes itself from other common subjects of evaluation - projects, country-specific programmes and policies - and thus requires special treatment in evaluation. AMIS is in essence what can be referred to as a Global and Regional Partnership Program (GRPP). **GRPPs are notably distinguished by the expectation of benefits arising from the partnership, over and above the benefits associated with the discrete activities supported.** These additional benefits of the partnership may come from the large scale, from joint activities enabled by

the partnership, or from the cross-fertilization and enrichment of knowledge among the large number of partners. Thus, the evaluation needs to encompass the achievement of these additional expected benefits, not just the benefits of the discrete activities supported.⁶

- 8 Fully acknowledging the nature of the AMIS initiative, as depicted in the preceding paragraph, the evaluation team technically made use – as and when needed - of the World Bank-Independent Evaluation Group/Development Assistance Committee “Sourcebook for Evaluating Global and Regional Partnership Programs Indicative Principles and Standards” in terms of both process and substance.
- 9 Second, it is equally important to highlight clearly here that there is an overall issue of attribution. This attribution issue is in fact twofold as:
 - a. The results of GRPPs -such as AMIS - are the joint product of global/regional and country-level activities and of parallel activities financed by other development agents. The attribution may therefore often be particularly difficult to discern.
 - b. The evaluation focuses on the financial support provided by the DGF to support the AMIS Partnership - the DGF funding representing only a relatively limited portion of the overall AMIS resources.
- 10 The DGF funding was intended to play primarily a supporting and enabling role, leading to direct - and also indirect - but important outcomes for AMIS. To measure these indirect outcomes as well as assess AMIS more broadly, the evaluation used a technique called ‘contribution analysis’⁷ to develop a holistic understanding of how the DGF-financed activities contributed to the overall AMIS objectives.
- 11 Contribution analysis explores attribution through assessing the contribution a programme is making to observed results. It sets out to verify the theory of change (ToC) behind a programme and, at the same time, takes into consideration other influencing factors. Causality is inferred from the following evidence:
 - The programme is based on a reasoned ToC: the assumptions behind why the programme is expected to work are sound, plausible and are agreed upon by at least some of the key players.
 - The activities of the programme were implemented.
 - The ToC is verified by evidence: the chain of expected results occurred.
 - Other factors influencing the programme were assessed and were either shown not to have made a significant contribution or, if they did, the relative contribution was recognized.
- 12 This strategy facilitated the detailed examination of the less ‘tangible’ aspects inherent in any successful partnership including how the partnership has evolved in different contexts, locations and over time. As the evaluation does not include field visits this was less extensively covered but available documentation and interviews facilitated some analysis to draw lessons from different contexts.

1.5 Other evaluation specificities and potential limitations

- 13 **Timeline and resources:** Usually, available resources and timeline are the most important constraints to an evaluation process as they define the scope of the exercise. They also oblige the evaluation consultants to stay within the boundaries defined in the ToRs. These types of constraints in the present case have to be considered as the stakeholders are multiples and dispersed geographically and the consultants have a minimum of days to perform the evaluation. As mentioned previously, the evaluation team focused on e-communication (conference calls, Skype, e-mails, etc.) to reach out to the potential respondents.

⁶ “Sourcebook for Evaluating Global and Regional Partnership Programs. Indicative Principles and Standards”. 2007.

⁷ Reference: http://betterevaluation.org/en/resources/guides/contribution_analysis/ilac_brief

- 14 **Data availability:** The availability of relevant data, specifically related to the DGF funding, was also an important challenge to tackle in the course of the evaluation. Apart from the DGF progress reports, which are specifically dedicated to the World Bank DGF contribution, all other documents provided cover the entire AMIS initiative. This rendered the isolation of the specific contribution of the World Bank Group to AMIS as a delicate task.
- 15 **Stakeholders' availability:** The availability of relevant stakeholders was the most important challenge for this assignment. It is to be noted that the number of interviews conducted with non-G20 representatives has been limited. Unfortunately, after much effort to stimulate responsiveness of these representatives with particular profiles (non-G20 countries) in terms of their role in the initiative, the level of participation of these potential respondents was less satisfactory than expected. It would have also been interesting to talk with private sector as well as non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives which would have enhanced the analysis of how AMIS data is used. This was not planned in the inception report and the evaluation team considers this as a lesson learned for future, similar endeavours.

1.6 Evaluation approach, data gathering and analysis methods

- 16 The methodology adopted for this evaluation was designed to meet the requirements and expectations set out in the ToRs. There were several elements and steps to be considered for data collection, analysis and methodology in the evaluation hereafter described.
- 17 **Theoretical framework:** Generally, the present evaluation combined elements of the Goal Free (exploring expected and unexpected results), Theory-Based (based on predefined result framework) and Collaborative (fostering large participation) approaches.⁸
- 18 **Evaluation matrix:** The World Bank⁹ methodology inspired evaluation matrix was the central tool for this assignment.
- 19 **Evaluation questions:** The evaluation questions, as stated in the ToRs, served as the basis for the evaluation.
- 20 **Indicators:** For each question, an operational and measurable indicator has been developed to track a change over predetermine targets or time. Whenever possible, the indicators stated in the *Programme Results Framework* (included in the Grant Agreement, see evaluation matrix in Annex 2) were used as a first point of reference to assess development and intermediate outcomes.
- 21 **Targets:** Using targets for questions is possible only when previously stated in the *Programme Result Framework*. Therefore, only questions and/or sub-questions related to development and intermediate outcomes were tracked against predetermined targets.
- 22 **Document and data review:** Review of documents and reports provided to the evaluation team.
- 23 **Semi-Structured interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the following key informants:
- AMIS programme team at FAO;
 - representatives from the World Bank Group;
 - representatives from the member organizations of the AMIS Secretariat (10);
 - a sample of representatives from AMIS participating countries (15).

8 See KAHAN, Barbara. *Excerpts from Review of Evaluation Frameworks*, Saskatchewan, Ministry of Education, 2008, 67 pages.

9 See IMAS, Linda G. Morris and Ray C. Rist. *The Road to Results*, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2009, 611 pages.

- 24 **Triangulation of methods:** The evaluation applied the information and data triangulation method to answer the evaluation questions raised.
- 25 The main type of data that was collected during the evaluation was qualitative information through interviews. This was agreed upon by all involved stakeholders during the inception phase of the evaluation. Although there are some limitations to the evaluation data collection process - outside of the evaluation team's control and which are pointed out in the above section - the information collected is still valid and useful. The idea behind the data collection approach is to collect the views of participating individuals. These views are broad and can differ from what was initially planned when AMIS was launched. The qualitative data that was collected as supporting evidence to the findings is presented using a simple, straightforward and efficient benchmark:
- all respondents said...;
 - the majority of respondents said... (~ more than 75 percent);
 - many respondents said... (~ more than 50 percent);
 - some respondents said... (~between 25 and 50 percent);
 - a few said... (~ less than 25 percent);
 - one respondent said... (although this will most probably not be used because if only one person mentioned the information, it cannot be considered as evidence, unless it is fully triangulated with other sources of data).
- 26 The evaluation report is simply structured around the evaluation criteria (i.e. relevance, efficacy, efficiency, governance and management and sustainability). The evaluation criteria are then themselves structured around the evaluation questions provided through the evaluation's ToRs. To ensure the contribution analysis is aligned with what the World Bank and FAO had agreed upon, the evaluation report also relates to specific performance indicators presented in the inception report.

1.7 Structure of the report

- 27 Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents the background and context of AMIS, Chapter 3 presents the key findings and evaluation questions while Chapter 4 illustrates conclusions and recommendations.

2. Background and context of AMIS

2.1 AMIS in brief

- 28 AMIS is a Group of Twenty (G20) response to the global food price surges that occurred in 2008 and 2010. The volatility in food prices during these two crises pointed to weaknesses in food market information monitoring and in coordinated policy response. In this context, AMIS was launched by the G20 to generate and disseminate reliable and timely data on the prices of four different agricultural commodities, namely wheat, maize, rice and soybeans (the “AMIS crops”). To this end, the Global Food Market Information Group was set-up, consisting of technical representatives from countries participating in AMIS to provide regular data regarding the supply and demand position and its probable short-term development, as well as prices, of the AMIS crops. Furthermore, the Information Group organized the timely collection of national policy developments that could impact the market situation and outlook. In addition, the initiative established a Rapid Response Forum (RRF) composed of Senior Officials from countries participating in AMIS promote early discussion among decision-level officials about critical market conditions to encourage the coordination of policies and the development of common strategies. The Secretariat, housed at FAO headquarters in Rome, comprises 11 international organizations and entities (as of January 2017), and supports all functions of the RRF and the Information Group of AMIS. It is governed by a Steering Committee that unites representatives from each of the 11 member organizations.
- 29 The AMIS initiative can be described as a **Global and Regional Partnership Program** - a programmatic partnership in which: i) the partners contribute and pool resources (financial, technical, staff and reputational) towards achieving agreed-upon objectives over time; ii) the activities of the programme are global, regional, or multi-country (not single-country) in scope; and iii) the partners establish a new organization/a governance structure and management unit to deliver these activities.
- 30 Within FAO, which was asked to host the AMIS Secretariat, AMIS contributes towards FAO’s Strategic Objective 4 (SO4) (Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems). The AMIS Secretariat is located in the Trade and Markets Division (EST), which is housed within the Economic and Social Development Department (ES) of the Organization.

2.2 The development grant facility

- 31 The Development Grant Facility is the World Bank’s mechanism to provide direct grant support for innovative Global Partnership Programmes that are of high value to its client countries but cannot be supported adequately through regular Bank - country assistance operations or its economic and sector work. The DGF enables the Bank to participate with partners in funding GRPPs that support the supply of critical global public goods.¹⁰
- 32 In June 2010, the Bank’s Executive Board endorsed a strategic reorientation of the DGF towards a “venture capital” style approach with a greater emphasis on providing seed capital for innovation. This restructuring was meant to allow the DGF to better fulfil its original mandate, which was to support innovative initiatives and cutting-edge technologies that have the potential to promote partnerships as they address a broad range of global and regional development issues.¹¹

2.3 Objectives pursued by the DGF in the case of AMIS

- 33 The overall objectives of DGF programmes are to: i) encourage innovation through provision of seed money and support for cutting-edge approaches; (ii) catalyse partnerships through

10 <http://go.worldbank.org/OGQO8U0XN0>

11 The World Bank’s Involvement in Global and Regional Partnership Programs: An Independent Assessment. 2011 The Independent Evaluation Group (IEG). Page 97.

convening and building coalitions, and raising funds; and iii) broaden Bank services and increase the effectiveness of country programmes and projects.¹²

34 In the case of AMIS, Annex 1 of the DGF grant agreement¹³ specifies that the main objective was “to improve the transparency of global agricultural markets by generating better information on the supply and demand of maize, rice, soybeans and wheat, and putting this information in the public domain, and by supporting the capacity of participating countries to provide information and conduct policy discussion of global food price spikes”.

2.4 Activities financed

35 Through a grant of USD 1.2 million disbursed in three separate tranches between 2012 and 2016, the DGF was to contribute to the following activities:

- Activity 1: Improving statistic, market and policy information and analyses. Provision of support to: i) improving the web-based statistical tool for collecting and processing national agricultural commodity balances; ii) engaging with the participating countries to produce monthly updates to their national balances; iii) monitoring markets and policy developments, and assessing their impacts; iv) preparing and making available to the public regular updates on the global food outlook;¹⁴ and v) disseminating information and analyses on developments that may affect the behaviour of global agricultural markets.
- Activity 2: Coordination of capacity building, policy dialogue and project management. Provision of support to: i) building the capacity of a number of participating AMIS countries; ii) supporting technical and policy discussions carried out by the AMIS Rapid Response Forum and the AMIS Global Food Market Information Group; and iii) coordinating the project management activities, i.e. reporting, monitoring and communication activities.¹⁵

36 The following table presents an overview of DGF funded AMIS expenditures.

Table 2: DGF funded AMIS Expenditures by category (in USD thousands)

Budget line	Years	13	14	15/16	Total	%
Consultants		327	298	263	888	76%
Travel		42	52	53	147	13%
Expendable procurement			5		5	0%
Training				4	4	0%
Technical support service (covering evaluation costs)		4	12	39	55	5%
Support costs		26	26	25	77	7%
Total		399	393	384	1,176	100%

Source: Evaluation team calculation based on financial statements provided by FAO. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

2.5 The DGF partnership Results Framework and Theory of Change

37 The DGF Partnership Grant Agreement contains a Results Framework which is visually represented hereafter (also contained in Annex 1).

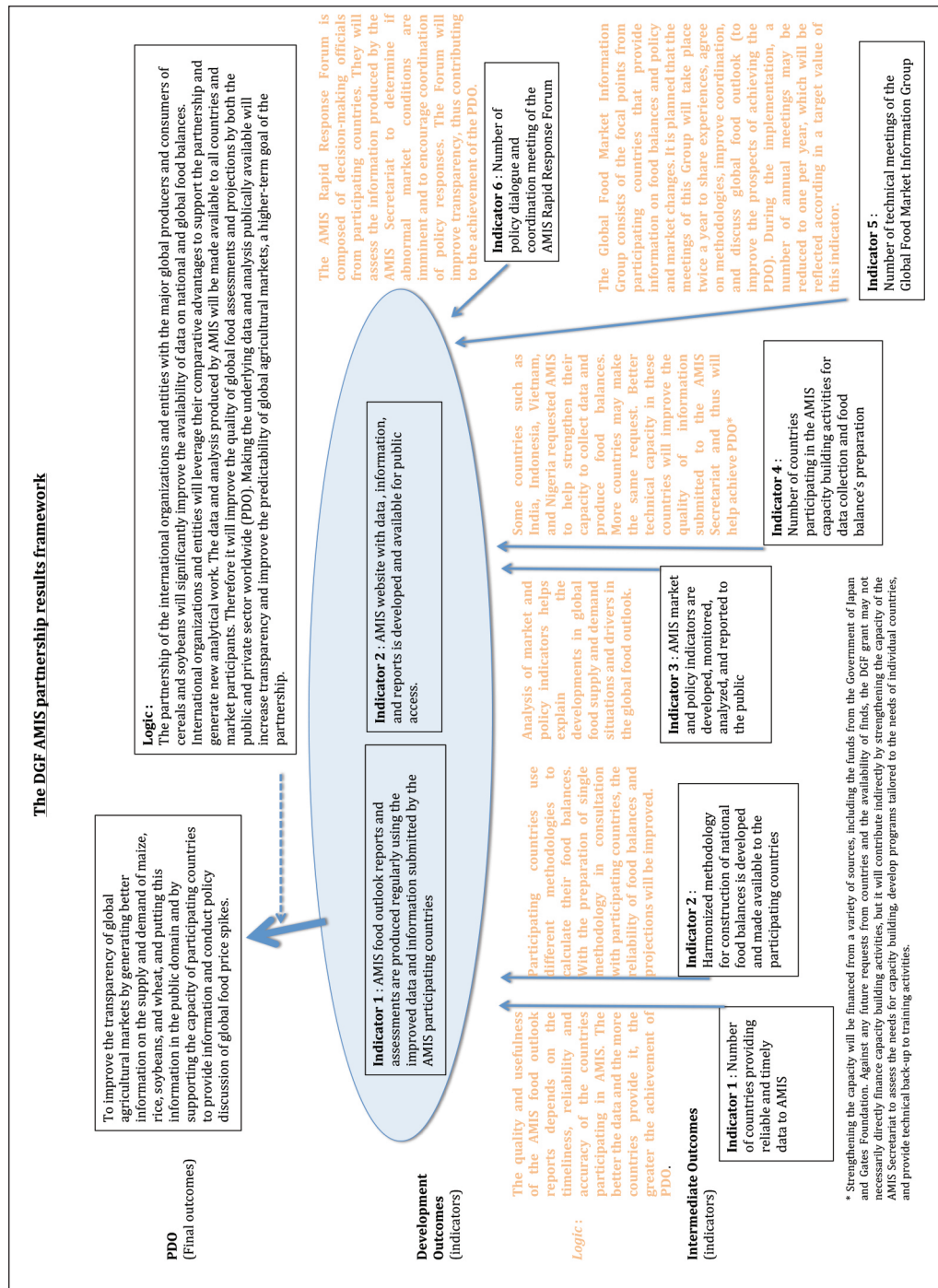
12 World Bank website: DGF objectives and eligibility criteria (<http://go.worldbank.org/ROMNH45871>).

13 FAO, Office of Evaluation (OED). August 2016. *Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of the Partnership for Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) Development Grant Facility*. P.7, par. 13.

14 <http://www.amis-outlook.org/amis-monitoring/monthly-report/en/>

15 World Bank. 2014. *FY2015 Development Grant Facility. Partnership for Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS)*. Annex 1.

Figure 1: DGF Partnership Grant Agreement Results Framework



3. Key findings

3.1 Relevance

3.1.1 Evaluation question 1

- The relevance of the objectives, outcomes and activities of the DGF Partnership to the higher order goal of improving transparency of the global agriculture markets.¹⁶

Relevant Evaluation Matrix Indicator: *Correlation between activities and results (outcomes and outputs).*

Finding 1: The objectives, outcomes and activities of the DGF Partnership were relevant, and over time, became increasingly relevant to the higher order goal of improving transparency of the global agriculture markets.

A response to food price spikes (or how has the higher order goal come to be?)

38 As already discussed above and as reported in the partnership's documentation (e.g. the partnership's Terminal Report), the idea behind the creation of AMIS was to provide a response (among others) to avoid and prevent excessive food price volatility as experienced during the global food market turbulences faced in 2007–2008. While regional turbulences were still taking place around the world, in 2010 and 2011, G20 member states came together to find a common ground response on which to work from to help avoid such situation to reoccur and contain commodity price volatility. The French Government, at the time assuming the Presidency of the G20, invited contributions from United Nations agencies, Bretton Woods institutions and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to come up with a menu of responses to improve global food security. As many causes were at the root of the price spikes, many ideas were also discussed on how to tackle the issue. Among other potential responses were:

- maintaining/building-up international commodity stocks to use in case of emergencies;
- improving the readiness of international humanitarian organizations in responding to such price volatility through food assistance programmes;
- enhancing the quality of information and communication flows among important stakeholders (e.g. importing and exporting countries, international organisations, private entities, etc.);
- better coordinating policy responses among national governments as well as relevant international institutions;
- working towards the productivity and resilience of developing country agriculture.¹⁷

39 The response elements that became central to AMIS were linked to the enhancement of the global agricultural market transparency (i.e. the higher order goal). It is within this logic that the DGF partnership's objectives, outcomes and activities are considered to be relevant in achieving AMIS' higher order goal (i.e. enhancing global agricultural market information made available in the public domain). Some respondents have raised the fact that the logic of the higher order goal was actually not the relevant approach to address the issue of commodity price spikes. For these respondents, the AMIS response was the lowest common denominator. However, it is beyond the scope of the present evaluation to assess this question further.

40 It is to be noted however that even on the question of improving transparency, interview data points to the fact that some G20 countries showed resistance early on, for example in terms of sharing information on their trade and food security policies. However, overall

¹⁶ A comprehensive assessment of the Theory of Change of the intervention is presented in Annex 2 of the report.

¹⁷ Contributions by FAO, IFAD, IMF, OECD, UNCTAD, WFP, the World Bank, the WTO, IFPRI and the UN HLTf, June 2011. Policy Report: Price Volatility in Food and Agricultural Markets: Policy Responses. 68 pages.

there was a consensus on the objective of increasing transparency of global agricultural food market information.

- 41 In the post 2007–2008 crises context, some of the respondents saw AMIS' design as a way of structuring the global commodity analysis process. In other words, the way AMIS was designed would help organize and then analyse data on the global commodity markets. Bringing G20, as well as non-G20 country representatives to the AMIS table to collectively generate more accurate data was perceived by these respondents as the right approach to solve pending transparency issues (i.e. lack of reliable and up-to-date information on crop supply, demand, stocks and export).¹⁸ The basic idea was to provide decision makers with such improved data on commodities.

More AMIS? What is AMIS to produce to achieve the higher order goal?

- 42 One discussion point on the subject of relevance that has generated many reactions among respondents is the degree of "openness" AMIS has had or should have had. On one side, some respondents think that AMIS should have been more open: AMIS should not have limited itself to four basic commodities and should have opened participation to more than the actual participating countries. On the other side, *more* respondents consider that starting with the four commodities was logical to establish solid grounds on which to work in the medium-term. These respondents also point to the fact that in terms of number of participating countries, those actually involved represent 80 percent of the four commodities' market which is sufficient at this point in their views. In addition, not all of these countries are presently providing the needed information on the four commodities, so had AMIS been more open, the results would have been less positive - in terms of number of countries providing regular, good quality data. The countries involved is seen as well balanced in terms of production and consumption countries of the four commodities.
- 43 Over time, data generated and presented in the public domain by AMIS on forecast production, consumption and trade and information on policies linked to the four commodities were improved. Just as an example, information on growing conditions around the world, provided by GEOGLAM, was added to the monthly Market Monitor to enhance the focus on crop growing conditions analyses (which was already part of the information generated by AMIS).
- 44 Throughout the implementation period assessed by the evaluation, AMIS evolved extensively. For example, as mentioned by many respondents and as noted in AMIS events documentation, the activities leading to the main fora of AMIS (mainly the Information Group and Rapid Response Forum) evolved and were improved: more discussion points (e.g. roundtable discussions on policy developments, presenting the outlook by country focal points), more participation from the country representatives, better coordination, etc. (see below for more details on the improvements to AMIS' meetings).
- 45 In this context, it seems the relevance of the DGF activities and outputs to the outcomes and higher order goal increased. For some of the respondents however, this demonstrates the fact that AMIS did not really have a clear pathway or clear targeting during its initial phase. The idea was to produce data and analyse it and to generate dialogue among stakeholders. But questions like "How much data should AMIS produce? What is missing exactly? To whom would it be useful for specifically, beyond making it available in the public domain? What is the difference between the work AMIS does and that of others like the International Grain Council (IGC) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and even other FAO work?" were not necessarily answered early on. The strategies to achieve AMIS' objectives only became clear after some time.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicators: *Existence of a (continuous) needs assessment and alignment of the initiative's design with the needs and priorities.*

¹⁸ FAO (2010). *Final Report of the Extraordinary Joint Intersessional Meeting of the Intergovernmental Group (IGG) On Grains and the Intergovernmental Group on Rice*, 24 September 2010.

Finding 2: Data point to the fact AMIS' design is better aligned with the government representatives interviewed priorities than needs. Based on information collected during the evaluation, not many respondents have a "use" for the information produced by AMIS. Other stakeholders, such as representatives from the private sector and NGOs do use the data which seems better aligned with their needs.

Alignment with needs

- 46 The DGF partnership terminal report states: "(...)it is now widely accepted that a lack of reliable and up-to-date information on crop supply, demand, stocks and export availability constituted one of the most important drivers(...)"¹⁹ of the market turbulences of 2007–2008. In other words, there was a need for better data on the global food market. AMIS was designed to generate this type of data. As the AMIS five years report affirms, AMIS is aligned with the needs and priorities identified by the G20 agricultural ministers during the 2011 meeting in Cannes. However, the question can be asked: to whose needs was AMIS designed to respond? For now, data points to the fact that it is not fully clear for whom exactly these data are supposed to be useful. Many of the respondents interviewed during the evaluation claim that they do not use the data produced by AMIS and that they turn to other sources of data for their needs. AMIS higher order goal of « enhanced transparency » was determined as a global public good. So beyond the evaluation respondents and as shown in the efficacy section below, the information is used by other types of stakeholders. However, the users of AMIS' data were not initially clearly identified and their needs were not *continuously* assessed. In 2014, two years after the initial Market Monitor was produced, AMIS started conducting surveys with its users.
- 47 As the RRF has not been significantly "put to the test" - during the evaluated implementation period of AMIS, there were no intense global food market turbulences to which the forum would have been called to respond - this question really refers to the Information Group and the Market Monitor. The RRF was part of AMIS' design but it is actually not possible to assess its relevance as it was not formally activated for its purposes.
- 48 From data collected during the evaluation by the evaluation team, the first years of AMIS' existence were dedicated to enhancing the quality and regularity of data as planned. For many respondents, although they actually were already producing similar data, they did so less frequently. In other words, for these respondents, by participating in AMIS they were already producing the data but had to produce their data more frequently to satisfy AMIS' requirements. Again, from data collected during the interviews, doing so meant that focal points from national institutions had to convince their superiors (not the ministers but their directors) in doing so even though the initial decision was taken at the ministerial level. Looking at AMIS' results (see efficacy section below), it seems many of the focal points were able to demonstrate that the importance of producing the data was worth the extra resources required to produce and send the data every month. Some of the reasons the respondents have pointed to which explain why they are sending the data to AMIS are:
- the G20 countries have committed to doing so;
 - they want their country to be a global citizen and to be transparent. It is a statement;
 - they post the monthly data on the national website;
 - the private sector and NGOs are interested in using the data.
- 49 Looking at this list, it seems the items can be better defined as priorities rather than needs. Indeed, AMIS, as it was designed, seems to correspond to the participating countries' priorities more than their needs. The governments' representatives to which the evaluation team talked to did not refer to them finding a use into what AMIS was producing but more linked to. They explained their participation in AMIS as a result of the initiative being aligned with their priorities and the role they wanted to play on the international scene. From information provided by many respondents, there appears to be an alignment between AMIS' data dissemination outputs - which is part of how AMIS was designed -

19 Terminal report p. 11.

and needs among private sector representatives.²⁰ It also seems that the evolution of AMIS' information output was based on opportunities as exemplified by the integration of GEOGLAM information.

International organizations and AMIS governance

50 Core discussions initially took place between the international organizations involved in the Secretariat concerning AMIS governance design as some felt it was not well aligned with their expectations. Indeed, some international organization respondents mentioned that they felt the initiative was "invading" their field of work or mandate. Nevertheless, after some exchanges on the matter, and as the mandate had been given to the international organizations by the G20, an understanding was reached among them. It is in this context, and as requested by the World Bank, that the Steering Committee was put together to ensure the international organizations had a say in the way AMIS was managed. The Steering Committee "oversees the activities of the AMIS Secretariat. It is composed of one representative (Member) of the international organizations forming the Secretariat, plus one Member without decision-making rights who is appointed to serve as Chair of the Steering Committee.[...] Subject to the overall fiduciary and administrative responsibility of FAO and its Director General for the hosting of the AMIS Secretariat, the Steering Committee ensures that the activities implemented by the Secretariat are consistent with the provisions in the AMIS Terms of Reference and the decisions of the Forum".²¹ The Steering Committee kept the decision-making separate from the technical work and this reassured international organization representatives. This AMIS Secretariat design element was an important benefit for many respondents. Other international organization representatives pointed to the relevant technical exchanges among international organizations during meetings that AMIS made possible. For these respondents and others, not many other initiatives allow this kind of grouping of international organizations. This is a reflection of what the French Government was looking for while assuming the Presidency of the G20, when AMIS' basic idea took form. As one respondent described it, the French Government was sending a message: "learn how to work together and we will listen to you." Initially, the international organizations had different agendas and ideas but later on, during implementation, at least some of the international organizations started to work together on AMIS.

51 Another important design aspect of AMIS that was central to many respondents' satisfaction was the fact that FAO brought together many member countries. In a way, FAO helped depoliticize AMIS, which was initiated by a more "political" entity, the G20. Housing AMIS in FAO was a decision that made this possible, as FAO is considered to work towards serving all its member states' priorities which is aligned with the higher order goal of producing better global agricultural market information for the public domain. Other international organizations could also have housed AMIS although the expertise of FAO was seen as better aligned with the objectives of the initiative. In addition, the Steering Committee helped further render neutral AMIS' Secretariat (as stated above, the Steering Committee was to ensure activities implemented by the Secretariat are consistent with the provisions in the AMIS Terms of Reference and the decisions of the Forum). In other words, if ever there would have been any tentative political influence made by FAO or its senior staff to try and use AMIS to its advantage - a situation that did not take place, the Steering Committee was there to counter-balance through the views of the other Steering Committee members. However, looking back, many respondents (from the evaluation data collection interviews) reflect that the design of AMIS - *not its implementation* - was quite influenced by FAO's vision of what it should be. The quick turnaround from the Cannes 2011 G20 summit, when it was decided to create AMIS, and the first meeting in the fall of the same year, is apparently the reason for this. Indeed, FAO took the lead in designing AMIS and hence leveraged its expertise and knowledge, which consequently gave an FAO flavour to AMIS. Some respondents are under the impression that this lack of participation of other international organizations and member countries in the design of the initiative concentrated the management of AMIS in the Secretariat's hands where in fact AMIS should have been a much more collaborative approach. As stated in AMIS' ToRs, AMIS "will be the result of a collaborative effort between main producing, exporting and importing countries, in association with international organizations and involving the private sector in conditions to be defined by participating countries".²²

20 Unfortunately, this type of stakeholders was not listed as identified stakeholders to interview for the evaluation.

21 AMIS, 2012. *Multi-Donor Trust Fund of the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS)* p. 24.

22 AMIS, September 2011. *AMIS Terms of Reference*. P.1.

Funding

52 Once the decision to house AMIS in FAO was taken, the questions about how the initiative would be financed came into play. The fact is that it involved representatives from the different institutions, including from FAO, who did not know how much implementing AMIS would cost. They had trouble estimating the costs because they did not know what form AMIS would take and they did not know how much time it would last. In the views of some respondents, over time, the ambitions of AMIS' design surpassed the available financing provided by the World Bank DGF (among other in kind funding), from FAO and other international organizations). The amount provided by the World Bank DGF was decided on commitments made by other donors earmarked for capacity building purposes (namely the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Japanese government).

3.1.2 Evaluation question 2

To what extent do AMIS-participating countries value:

- the information AMIS provides on the supply and demand of maize, rice, soybeans and wheat, including stockholdings;
- the capacity building activities aimed at improving the collection and reporting of market information (where appropriate);
- how their participation in policy discussions related to global food prices has been enabled, including through the Rapid Response Forum;
- any other additional value elements that have emerged from the DGF Partnership activities (against a counterfactual of these not being available).

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Level of stakeholders' satisfaction with the usefulness of the market information, the capacity-building activities, participation in policy dialogue and all other services and products provided by AMIS.*

Finding 3: Although many of the participating countries' and international organizations' representatives interviewed do not necessarily use the information AMIS provides on the supply and demand of maize, rice, soybeans and wheat, including stockholdings, they value it. Only a few have mentioned that they do use it. In these cases, the content of the Market Monitor has in most cases been referred to as a trustworthy additional source of information. The fact that it is the result of a collaborative effort is a distinctive feature.

53 Individuals representing the participating countries of AMIS as well as international organizations involved in the initiative who the evaluation team interviewed expressed a generally positive opinion on the value of the information produced by AMIS. This finding is consistent with the opinion that the AMIS Secretariat has formed on this subject from user surveys. Feedback received during interviews is consistent with AMIS RRF reports (e.g. 2016) regarding the "[...] reputation of AMIS as a reliable source of timely market information, as evidenced by a growing number of subscribers of the Monitor, strong ratings in user surveys, and new followers of the AMIS Twitter account".

54 In the feedback the evaluation team received on the data and information AMIS produces, it was fairly common for countries that do use AMIS' information to express appreciation for the fact that AMIS provides an additional source of information complementary to other sources they use.

55 Many countries express that the availability of multiple sources of information is a necessity rather than a disadvantage because it allows for a triangulation of information and draws users' attention to certain inconsistencies. Thus, the data provided by GEOGLAM, for example, although not the only source available on the market (some countries receive and use Landsat information) provides an additional layer of information comparable to other sources.

56 In this context, AMIS' methodological approach provides an additional advantage: that the data produced is largely the result of a collaborative effort, which increases the confidence

that AMIS members have in its quality. Through technical meetings, particularly those of the Information Group, the participating member countries can form a more precise opinion on the quality of the data provided by each country and, consequently, the degree of certainty that they could attribute to AMIS products.

Finding 4: Regarding capacity building activities, many member countries representatives interviewed have expressed satisfaction with the support provided, as it was directly linked to AMIS-introduced methodologies and activities and therefore helped the participating country teams/institutions deal more effectively with AMIS requirements.

57 Respondents appreciated the capacity building work carried out under the leadership of the Secretariat. Although the preparation and execution of such training was not based on a systematic diagnosis of countries' capacity building needs, their format and targeting appeared to be relevant and effective. However, the number of people trained remains very modest, which could be a problem in the long-term given the staff rotations in the services of the targeted administrations.

58 Nevertheless, even though respondents pointed to the fact that they would have wanted more interactions with their counterparts during the capacity building activities, they also expressed appreciation of the training provided, especially the training in Rome (i.e. the Exchange Programme). Although other capacity building efforts were provided under the AMIS Initiative, the respondents mainly discussed the Exchange Programme. This training allowed the focal points for the initiative to acquire the skills necessary for the development and exchange of data with AMIS. Some countries, however, regretted that training programmes in the member countries themselves had not taken place, as these could have reached a larger number of people. The Exchange Programme was designed in such a way to invite the focal points to Rome to "learn about the challenges of global aggregations, and familiarize themselves with different forecasting techniques".²³ However, some of the respondents feel it could have been designed with the inclusion of in-country trainings. It seems that once trained, the focal points were encouraged to share the knowledge with their colleagues. Some respondents have also expressed a preference for country-country exchanges which, in their views, should receive more attention.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Alignment of the services and products with stakeholders' needs and priorities.*

Finding 5: The Market Monitor is appreciated for its regularity, frequency and conciseness. For certain stakeholders, the Market Monitor as well as AMIS' website, including the market and policy database and online tools is regarded as valuable because it compiles a diverse but complementary range of relevant information, which is otherwise scattered throughout multiple sources. AMIS' product allows for a gain of time, not just a gain of information.

59 Member countries appreciate the Market Monitor for its data and analytical content, including information on policies. As already mentioned, a few of the respondents recognize the Market Monitor as a quality product whose frequent and regular publication meets a need for information at their level. One of the important dimensions respondents highlighted, even those that do not use AMIS' data, is that the Market Monitor (like the AMIS website) gathers a lot of important information from various complementary, reliable sources. It is, in a large part, the juxtaposition and concomitant analysis of these data that makes the Market Monitor so attractive for potential users.

60 It is important to note that most interviewees are themselves, due to their function or positions, in charge of regularly processing and producing information on the themes AMIS works on. In various capacities, they have the task of regularly constructing notes for decision makers, periodic news bulletins or thematic research. For a few of these stakeholders, as already mentioned, a synthesised source of information like AMIS is well-aligned with their immediate needs, especially since the compilation and analytical work AMIS Secretariat performs is perceived as a support task for the respondents' own work. Therefore, AMIS products allow these stakeholders to save time, not just gain additional

information. However, many of the respondents have pointed to the fact that they do not use AMIS to conduct their government work-related tasks.

- 61 Some exporting countries noted that AMIS allowed them to more comprehensively monitor their own market position *vis-à-vis* international markets. Other interlocutors directly reuse AMIS' analysis for their own needs: it may be extracted and copied into a national monthly bulletin, or posted on their website, for example. AMIS as a consolidated data source is therefore valued, even by those who do not use the data.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Perception of stakeholder on added value of AMIS products in comparison with other similar initiatives/products.*

Finding 6: The added value of AMIS products, as expressed by respondents, is linked to their perceptions of the reliability of the data sources and information sharing on methodologies used.

- 62 Most of the countries that participated in the evaluation expressed the fact that, compared to other sources of information, AMIS products had the advantage of presenting data with a known origin (i.e. they know where the information is coming from, i.e. mainly from the participating countries). For at least some of these countries, they had directly provided it. In addition, the exchanges between countries which AMIS organizes, especially at the level of the Information Group meetings, allows participants to understand more precisely how each country has gathered these data at the national level. This is particularly the case for data on stocks. Discussions between countries have allowed each one to better understand the methodological basis of the estimates and boosts the perception of reliability for all.
- 63 Some stakeholders noted that in the case of other comparable sources of data or information, the figures presented can be significantly different from those officially produced by the countries, without it being possible for users to know the origin of and the reason for these changes. Some stakeholders expressed that they were reassured to receive more information on the methodologies that some important countries applied, particularly for the estimation of stocks.
- 64 The opposite situation, however, also exists. Countries participating in AMIS and providing data considered it disappointing not to systematically find the data they provided in AMIS' information products. In other words, they would have liked to have noticed the added-value of them sending their data in the AMIS information outputs. This situation is considered damaging because it casts a shadow over the country's perception of the overall reliability of the AMIS' information. This is the perception that the respondents share with the evaluation team which is important to consider in the context of the evaluation report. It is to be noted, however on the other hand that the AMIS Secretariat compiles, analyses and disseminates information at the global scale. The Secretariat usually does not take country information at face value as the data need to fit into the global balance.

Finding 7: In an environment where sources of information have multiplied, for the 'competitive edge' of AMIS products to be maintained, AMIS services must be constantly improved.

- 65 Because of the 2007-2008 agricultural price crisis, initiatives on transparency and information about prices and markets for agricultural products multiplied. They are now relatively abundant. Some respondents felt this situation was positive, in contrast to the pre-crisis situation where information was missing.
- 66 These initiatives cover a growing number of countries' needs, and in the face of this changed situation, the approaches and services that AMIS brings need to constantly adjust for AMIS to retain its 'competitive edge'. As the supply of information changes, AMIS needs to address specific and still unmet needs expressed by interviewed country representatives. This could include more in-depth analysis of themes, testing and research activities on innovative data collection methodologies, research activities aimed at testing the validity of currently being used estimation approaches, and others.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Level of stakeholder satisfaction with the usefulness of specific discrete DGF-funded activities (see section 3.1 of the Inception Report).*

Finding 8: The DGF significantly contributed to the development and continuous improvement of the AMIS website and its functionalities. While no recent survey allows for a detailed assessment of the website's users' satisfaction, basic Google analytics indicate stable but regular frequentation from a quite broad range of stakeholders.

67 DGF funding was used in part to improve the AMIS website. It has gradually been enriched by specific sections and functionalities. For example, to allow for an efficient data transfer between countries and the AMIS Initiative, AMIS put effort into developing an "input tool" which could be accessed through the website. This allowed participating countries to enter their data on a monthly basis in the AMIS-prescribed formats. This process has gone through several revisions to satisfy countries and Secretariat members and is not yet complete. Importantly, the AMIS Secretariat sought countries' feedback regularly on the scope and functionality of the AMIS policy database. A workshop was held for this purpose with interested focal points in October 2014.

68 The basic data on the use of the AMIS website made available by the FAO team and mobilized by the AMIS Secretariat for this evaluation indicate, based on several factors, that the site is used regularly and by a fairly large number of countries. It should be noted that the top ten countries visiting the AMIS website (www.amis-outlook.com) are all AMIS member countries and G20 countries with the exception of Ukraine, which ranks tenth in this list. The lesser representation of non-G20 countries does not mean that the AMIS site is of less interest to them, but may reflect the fact that fewer potential users exist in countries with less developed institutions. Interestingly, India is the third most common AMIS site user, and China does not appear in the top ten countries visiting this site. These data would need to be considered with caution, as the user may be browsing from a certain country, but using a web server in any other country. In other words, the data presented can sometimes be misleading as indirect use of international servers distort the trends.

Finding 9: The evaluation team observed differences in the perceived usefulness of an initiative that the DGF funds has contributed to: the construction of a sentiment index.

69 The AMIS Secretariat has embarked, with some support from the DGF funding (in combination with FAO regular resource and seed funding from Canada), in the construction of a forward-looking indicator of price risk based on market sentiment. Although this initiative has not yet been completed, some respondents to our interviews have shown a lack of knowledge of its nature and methodological basis. In another case, the respondent asked about the relevance of the initiative. They suggested that it may not be desirable to develop indicators which may, if published, create anxiety at the level of market stakeholders and policymakers.

3.2 Efficacy

3.2.1 Evaluation question 3

- To what extent have the intermediate and development outcomes reflected in the Programme Results Framework under the DGF Partnership been achieved, against the counterfactual of no DGF resources being provided?

Finding 10 (for evaluation question 3 as a whole):

Overall, AMIS was effective and achieved the majority of its targets, and hence the intermediate and development outcomes have been achieved to a good extent. It is the opinion of the majority of the respondents that this would not have been possible without the DGF funding, in addition to other, in kind contributions from the international organizations. The funding was a catalyst for many efforts by many stakeholders (i.e. international organizations and countries).

It took time and efforts to ensure the participating countries were actually contributing the needed data for AMIS' dissemination (forecast and policy and use of the harmonized methodology) and there is still work to be done. The deployment and presentation process of the harmonized methodology was parallel to the increase in participation (as the harmonized methodology was better known and understood, the participation of countries increased) in terms of providing required data). In this context, the AMIS Secretariat initially took a more central role in terms of data "treatment" (analysis) than expected.

The approach to capacity building - in particular, the Exchange Programme - for data collection and food balance's preparation offered to the participating countries is considered centralised (it took place at FAO headquarters).

Both the Information Group and RRF meetings were considered as highly important and unique by the respondents. The respondents increasingly appreciated the meetings as over time they became more comfortable in actively participating.

Development Outcome – Indicator 1: AMIS Market Monitor reports and assessments are produced regularly using the improved data and information submitted by the AMIS participating countries.

70 The first AMIS Market Monitor was released in August 2012, roughly a year after the AMIS was launched. It has since then been produced almost every month except intentionally in January and August of each year. Over time, the Monitor improved the presentation of the data extensively. Many respondents appreciate the simplicity in which the data is presented and can be understood at a glance. As already mentioned, since September 2013, the report has featured the contribution from GEOGLAM which monitors croplands and crop growth. This feature, also by an initiative launched by the G20,²⁴ was very appreciated by all respondents. In May 2014, new charts were also integrated in the Monitor with information provided by USDA.

71 In 2015, another section was introduced in the Market Monitor on fertilizer markets, in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).²⁵

72 Over time, the data from which the Monitor is produced came more and more from the participating countries. However, some respondents mentioned that initially, and to a lesser extent, still now, much work is done at the Secretariat level to not only aggregate the data but also to collect it. In fact, all of the data are collected at Secretariat level, taking into account the inputs from countries, but not necessarily accepting it at face value. AMIS is supposed to be a partnership in which the countries are owners of the outputs. In the present context, as the Secretariat is doing much of the work, AMIS somewhat lacks the involvement of the participating countries in the production of the data and Market Monitor (see below level of participating countries). However, a respondent pointed to the fact that although the Secretariat is supposed to work together with participating countries in providing the best available information, it remains independent in ensuring the rigour of the data presented in AMIS outputs.

Development Outcome – Indicator 2: AMIS website with data, information, and reports is developed and available for public access.

73 The AMIS website was the first output of the initiative. It was considered as a way to establish the grounds of the information dissemination efforts. As for the Monitor, the website has evolved extensively over the years:²⁶

- the Monitor became electronically available, on the website, in 2014;²⁷
- it became easier to navigate and find needed information;
- the initiative's policy database was also housed on the website.

24 DGF Partnership progress report. Mid-year report July 2013.

25 DGF Partnership progress report. Mid-year report 2016.

26 It is to be noted that one of the features that was added to the website (statistical portal) now seems to have been retrieved (i.e. www.statistics.amis-outlook.org).

27 DGF Partnership Progress report. Yearly report 2014.

- 74 The policy database was launched in October 2015, hence somewhat recently in the DGF implementation period. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and the OECD work jointly to populate the database. The publication of the database on the website seems to have taken more time than expected according to reporting,²⁸ as some countries had initially voiced concerns about sharing and discussing policy issues. Indeed, the evaluation interviews suggest that it was more sensitive to publish policy information in comparison, for example, to forecasts and stocks on the four commodities. It took more time and negotiations before eventually convincing participating countries to accept this component of AMIS. As demonstrated below, the efforts have apparently been worth it.

Intermediate Outcomes – Indicator 1: *Number of countries providing reliable and timely data to AMIS.*

- 75 Initially, much of the information and analysis presented in the Monitor were derived from data provided by FAO, Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) and USDA.²⁹ During the implementation period, the participating countries increased their involvement in AMIS by steadily sending the relevant data. By 2013, 22 of the 23 involved countries had provided historical balances to AMIS (for some countries it took a full year to aggregate the historical data, which demonstrates commitment on their parts). However, after this initial success, the contribution by the countries in terms of data on forecasts every month became a challenge. Tackling this challenge became an important part of AMIS' Secretariat's work.
- 76 Capacity building activities as well as official visits to targeted countries were part of the overall strategy of re-engaging the countries that were less active. In addition to the Exchange Programme, motivating participation during meetings (mainly Information Group meetings) was also an approach that was used; the idea was to colour code the level of involvement of the countries (what are known as the score cards which encourages countries that are less active). A few respondents mentioned they felt that dealing with this subject during the meetings was not the best use of everybody's time. During the evaluation data collection phase, and as mentioned in the July 2016 mid-year DGF report, although the number of participating countries actually contributing data has significantly increased, the results (in terms of countries contributing data to AMIS) are still below targets although quite close to the needed "at least 20 countries". For those that do send the data sets the quality, reliability and timeliness of the data transfers has improved considerably.
- 77 For some respondents, the fact that around five countries are considered as not fully active demonstrates their lack of ownership over AMIS. There cannot really be any changes in this context unless there is a political transition towards opening up to AMIS. The decision makers have to feel the need to participate or they will only see their involvement as a burden and ineffective spending.

Intermediate Outcomes – Indicator 2: *Harmonized methodology for construction of national food balances is developed and made available to the participating countries.*

- 78 As already demonstrated above, AMIS took a step-by-step approach to its implementation, integrating new features along the way. The same method was used in the endeavour to harmonize the data AMIS received from all participating countries. The majority of the countries that regularly send their data sets follow the guidelines developed by AMIS. A few are still in the process of adapting their own procedures to that of AMIS. This is mainly the case for those that have significantly different methodologies. A few respondents mentioned that they could eventually start using AMIS' methodology for their national purposes - this would be an improvement in their views - but for now this has not yet materialized. The opposite is also true: many of the respondents that are contributing data to AMIS mentioned that the harmonized methodology for the balance sheets were similar to those they normally use, which lowered the needed level of effort to adjust to the initiative's guidelines. What they send to AMIS is the same data they normally produce. It is to be noted that training was provided on the methodology to those that showed interest - e.g. the Exchange Programme.

28 DGF Partnership Progress report. Mid-year report December 2013.

29 DGF Partnership Progress report. Yearly report 2014.

- 79 As already mentioned, AMIS introduced an “input tool” which allowed the country focal points to simply enter their data directly onto the website which was appreciated by respondents although there were some technical issues when it was first introduced and they still persist.
- 80 Some of the main variables which had to be taken into consideration for the development of a harmonized methodology were the production cycles of the participating countries which were different mainly because of their geographical location (i.e. different hemispheres) as well as because of the definition of specific elements in the balances (e.g. what does “industrial utilization” entail?).
- 81 As a respondent put it (representing what many have said): “the idea is to have a sense of the global stock levels each month and that is the hard part”.

Intermediate Outcomes – Indicator 3: AMIS market and policy indicators are developed, monitored, analysed and reported to the public.

- 82 Several market and policy drivers have been identified and published on the AMIS website since 2013. Concerning the market drivers, they refer to stocks-to-use ratios, energy prices and ocean freights among others. As for the policy drivers, they can be derived from the above-mentioned policy database that contains information on countries’ trade measures and domestic measures for the four AMIS crops as well as on biofuels. The six types of policy measures covered are: biofuel policies, export restrictions, export subsidies, import tariffs, tariff quotas and in-quota tariffs. From its initial version, the policy database has been adapted to reassure country focal points who initially expressed resistance to the idea of collecting and publishing policy information. The changes to the database incorporated suggestions made by the focal points during meetings. It is to be noted that achieving the target of this outcome has required quite a lot of efforts by the AMIS Secretariat. As stated above, the Secretariat is working extensively in the production of AMIS’ data; for knowledgeable respondents, doing so with the policy data is more time-consuming than the work on the Market Monitor at this point. The latter has been produced for a longer time now and as the policy database has started more recently, the learning curve is at its beginning. In addition, the collection of information on the policies is at this point quite dependent on the work of the WTO and OECD, more than that of the countries.

Intermediate Outcomes – Indicator 4: Number of countries participating in the AMIS capacity building activities for data collection and food balance’s preparation.

- 83 Although the capacity building activities cannot be directly attributable to the DGF funding - these activities were financed by other donors through commitments that actually predated the DGF financing - the World Bank’s funding supported the Secretariat’s efforts in coordinating the respective capacity building projects.
- 84 The capacity building offered to the participating countries through the Exchange Programme³⁰ was essentially designed as long-term visits (three months) to FAO to assimilate the approach of the AMIS harmonized methodology. Although the majority of informed respondents appreciated the capacity building (either for themselves and their countries or for the others when the interviewed persons did not participate themselves), some were under the impression that AMIS should have relied more on actual exchanges between countries which should have been more central to the capacity building component of AMIS (even though that was not how it was designed). For these respondents, fostering more exchanges among participating countries would have stimulated more ownership over the partnership (it does seem as though the Secretariat actually encouraged such exchanges). It is to be noted that seven country focal points received support through the Exchange Programme according to the DGF 2016 year report.

30 The respondents mainly addressed this programme. However, as already stated, other capacity building activities include country visits, regular support via email/telephone and multi-year capacity building projects (financed by BMG and Japan).

85 The capacity building component is depicted as multi-year and extensive by the sources of information considered for the evaluation (i.e.: it was time consuming for participants). Some respondents pointed to the fact that normally only one representative from each beneficiary country would participate in the Exchange Programme. In this context, it is important that this person becomes central in data collection for balance sheet development and ideally is named the focal point for AMIS. In the case where this situation does not materialize, the capacity building will have limited positive effects for AMIS itself and more broadly for the improvement of the available data in the national context of the beneficiary country (the nomination of focal points and candidates for the Exchange Programme is outside the control of the Secretariat).

Intermediate Outcomes – Indicator 5: Number of technical meetings of the Global Food Market Information Group.

86 The target of two meetings per year was met. The majority of the respondents pointed to interesting and useful meetings. Some questioned the relevance for AMIS of some of the studies presented in the context of the Information Group meetings. Additionally, as already mentioned, the discussions over the level of participation of some countries in AMIS during the meetings was seen by a few respondents as not necessarily an efficient use of the participants' time. However, the meetings were appreciated in the sense that not many other initiatives can claim to bring so many relevant stakeholders to the same table regularly. This gave the stakeholders a platform for exchanges of good practices and information.

87 The respondents (from both the evaluation interviews as well as to Information Group events' survey)³¹ particularly appreciated the more recent meetings as they created a context in which they felt more comfortable in actively participating (e.g. the Information Group meeting that took place in Milan in 2015 during the World Exhibition).

Intermediate Outcomes – Indicator 6: Number of policy dialogue and coordination meeting of the AMIS Rapid Response Forum.

88 The DGF terminal report states that the target for this indicator was also met.³² Indeed, regular RRF meetings were held during the evaluated period (minimally once a year). The RRF's members (mainly Senior Officials from AMIS participants) are also to meet in case of needs, i.e. if there are global market turbulences and price spikes in the global commodity markets (when the market situation and outlook indicates a high food security risk). As there were no such situations during the period being evaluated, the RRF did not meet in this context. For many respondents, although obviously no one desired such market instabilities, it is at this point impossible to say if the RRF is effective and efficient in case of needed policy coordination among AMIS countries. It is to be noted that one "virtual" RRF meeting took place in 2012, slightly earlier than the start of the DGF. As illustrated by discussions held during the last RRF in Berlin (2017), countries did appreciate the calming effect that this virtual meeting had on international markets (see below for more information on this).

89 At this point, the RRF was rather seen as a way of maintaining decision makers' interest in AMIS. It also served as a communication channel when minor risks occurred, by disseminating information among the international community.

3.2.1.1 Evaluation Sub-Question 3.1

- How have these results contributed towards achieving the objectives of the DGF Partnership? Have the results discussed in the above section contributed towards the DGF Partnership's objectives?

Finding 11: Overall, many of the respondents knowledgeable of the DGF funding were under the impression that this financial support was instrumental in supporting the establishment of AMIS and the coordination of the activities.

31 www.amis-outlook.org/survey

32 DGF Terminal Report. P. 12.

Considering the evolution of the AMIS data itself, overtime, its quality, accuracy and comparability has increased.

The Market Monitor, the AMIS website and Information Group and RRF meetings were effective tools in making the improved information available to the public. Based on data collected during the evaluation, the Market Monitor was more successful in the dissemination efforts than the AMIS website, which is nevertheless considered a useful resource. The accessibility of AMIS data is particularly appreciated.

90 The World Bank funding helped consolidate the partnership between the international organizations that form the Secretariat which predated the DGF grant agreement. The G20 had a specific objective (i.e. increased global food market transparency) when it was discussing response to the food market turbulences like those that arose in 2007–2008; the DGF funding, in addition to considerable in kind (staff) resources contributed by the international organizations and especially FAO, helped put together the needed elements to pave the way towards this objective. Bringing together the involved international organizations provides credibility to AMIS.

Relevant matrix indicator: *Generating better information on the supply and demand of maize, rice, soybeans and wheat, including stockholdings.*

91 The main idea behind the concept of “better information” is for the data to come directly from the countries. Hence, there should be an increased accuracy of the data. There is also an objective of enhancing the comparability of the data, which is linked to the harmonized methodology proposed by AMIS to produce and disseminate its information.

92 AMIS-analysed data is now more comparable to pre-existing sources of similar data such as that provided by USDA and IGC. The additions to the Market Monitor and AMIS’ website (e.g. GEOGLAM’s input and the policy database) have also contributed to generating *better* information. Some respondents mentioned an increased participation level of the private sector would have contributed to this objective still more results. Notwithstanding this fact, the sole fact that around 15 countries are now contributing better information to AMIS points to AMIS’ success.

Relevant matrix indicator: *Making this information available to the public domain.*

93 Linked to the above indicator, AMIS had the responsibility of disseminating the better information (data and analysis) on the supply and demand of maize, rice, soybeans and wheat.

94 Concerning the Market Monitor, many respondents pointed to its simplicity and accessibility. This was considered important for those who are not experts in the sector. On the other hand, those that are quite knowledgeable on the subject have mentioned they have more detailed sources of data they will use instead of the Market Monitor.

95 Compared to the use of the website, the Market Monitor has been more successful in terms of use/subscription. Indeed, if the subscriptions to the Monitor has steadily been increasing over time, the use of the website has stagnated according to Google Analytics documents as well as a review of the use of the website in 2015.³³ The latter document points to the idea that the higher use of the Market Monitor could eventually have positive repercussion on the use of the website but that AMIS would need to actively stimulate the reader to go to the website. This seems to have been the case in certain circumstances: for example, while in 2015 China did not extensively use the website, in the latest numbers, it seems that China representatives have been a lot more active. This coincides with the enhancement of the policy database which was appreciated by many respondents including those from China. However, looking at the overall trends in the Google Analytics documents, there does not seem to be a noticeable increase in terms of number of “hits” on the website (i.e. the use of the website). The 2015 IT review document³⁴ in which FAO invested resources to produce,

33 Prof. Sundeep Sahay, University of Oslo, Norway, March 2015. Strengthening AMIS Information Systems.

34 Ibid.

suggests going further in that sense: every AMIS component needs to be interconnected. The document suggested that the policy database needed to be developed in consideration of all the other AMIS elements. This is what the author called the Architecture perspective. Each AMIS element needs to refer to the other AMIS elements to present an exhaustive and holistic response for the users.

- 96 A few respondents affirmed that the Market Monitor evolved extensively, and in a good way, during the evaluated period. However, they consider that the potential of the Monitor lies in the medium and longer terms (i.e. its use will increase as the Monitor will continue to establish itself as a strong recognized source of data): in this perspective, new technologies will enhance the quality and timeliness of the data disseminated by AMIS through the Monitor as well as through the website. The platform developed by AMIS for the participating countries to send their data in a simplified way can be seen as an example of these technological advancements. One respondent provided an example of where the advancements will probably be most prominent: yield forecasts, which in this person's view, technicians will be able to do remotely.
- 97 As mentioned, many respondents were positive about the policy database and some pointed to the fact that they considered it as more interesting and useful than the Market Monitor. These respondents use the policy database for trade negotiations and trade and agricultural policy decisions. AMIS focal points have reported sharing summaries of the policy databases information to their colleagues. It is to be noted that, as demonstrated below, the collected data for the evaluation differs somewhat from the survey data on the use of the Market Monitor. This might be caused by the limits of the sample of representatives interviewed by the evaluation team, although most probably the difference can be explained by the fact that time has passed since the survey and AMIS stakeholders have become more interested in and acquainted with the policy database.
- 98 One point that came out from the discussions held during the data collection was that the Market Monitor was quite useful for the private sector representatives (a positive result for AMIS as it is a public good). Although the evaluation team was not able to talk with private sector representatives (e.g. traders and producers), an AMIS survey was conducted which generated interesting data in that sense (i.e. that the majority of respondents to the survey came from the private sector).
- 99 Regarding the Policy database, some respondents reported that AMIS has been respectful of sensitivities in terms of sharing policy information, as well as stocks and forecast data for that matter, to make sure countries felt comfortable with the dissemination efforts. AMIS representatives would however see the countries more supportive of the policy information sharing in the near future. Progress has been done in terms of increasing the submission by countries of the forecast/stockholdings data; now, efforts should be put into fostering more openness and willingness in terms of policy information sharing. The idea is to receive policy information that might affect the volatility of prices and for now countries do not seem to be aware of the effect such policies could eventually have on market turbulences. Many times, the country focal points are market experts and have less knowledge in terms of policy. This is because AMIS started with forecast data and added the policy component to its website afterwards; hence the focal points have been selected by the respective governments on the basis of the preliminary context. As already noticed, policy considerations and analysis have been part of the Monitor for a longer time.
- 100 A few respondents also pointed to the fact that the GEOGLAM information can also be helpful in contexts of policy negotiations as the prediction data can help determine hot spots to be integrated in meeting agendas.

Survey data on the use of the Market Monitor

- 101 As already mentioned, the evaluation team was provided with interesting survey results on the use of the Market Monitor (a survey conducted by the Secretariat). The present subsection presents overall trends and extracts from this data set.

- 102 A little under 200 respondents took part in the survey although they did not all respond to every question (some questions have 110 responses). Over 30 percent of the respondents were from the private sector. Government representatives and non-governmental organizations constituted 16 percent and 12 percent respectively, followed by consultants (11 percent) and research institution and universities (8 percent).
- 103 In terms of the most useful sections of the Market Monitor, the survey respondents' top three are:
- 1) The crop monitor (67 percent)
 - 2) World Supply and Demand outlook (63 percent)
 - 3) International prices (62 percent)
- 104 The three sections of the lowest reported use were:
- 1) United States Ethanol update (14 percent)
 - 2) Fertilizer outlook (23 percent)
 - 3) Policy developments (36 percent)
- 105 The majority of the survey respondents reported that they consult the Monitor "Frequently (e.g. whenever a new issue becomes available)" – 69 percent. This is consistent with the Google Analytics information that shows spikes of use of the website every early month when the Monitor is released. On a scale of 1 to 5, the survey respondents rated an average of 3.98 the overall usefulness of the Market Monitor.
- 106 Here are some trends in terms of qualitative quotes from the open-ended questions of the survey. To the question: "Could you describe how you use the Monitor?", the most cited quote is: "Overview of the current global market situation".
- 107 Many respondents pointed to the use of the Monitor's data for basic elements for further, more in-depth research. Some examples of fields for which the AMIS data is useful are: humanitarian operations (impact of commodities' price for budgets); investments in agriculture and agricultural machinery production. Journalists have also mentioned they use AMIS for producing articles. This corroborates other sayings from discussions with stakeholders pointing to the fact that AMIS is an interesting communication channel to convey food market information to the general public.
- 108 When asked how the Monitor could be improved, many of the responses pointed to more in-depth analysis and more details. Some point to more forecast of potential major foreseen commodities price change (with the understanding that this is a delicate endeavour because of expectations it can produce among readers); others point to an increase in the number of commodities addressed; still others would appreciate an improvement of the quality of the graphs. Again, some of these comments are aligned with what respondents during the evaluation's discussions have recommended, namely an increase in the added-value of the data generated through AMIS by upscaling, detailing its analysis.
- 109 Concerning the increase in number of commodities to be integrated in AMIS generated data, as already mentioned, not all respondents agree with this idea. Indeed, some of them are under the impression that it is important to ensure that the data generated on the first four commodities is of high quality, timely and fully accurate before opening up to other commodities.
- 110 By supporting the work of the Secretariat and notably the production of the AMIS Market Monitor, the DGF funding has helped to increase the transparency of the global agricultural market. AMIS, through its Market Monitor and website - including the policy database -, is seen as an additional source of basic data. AMIS' information products are considered convenient because they bring together data from many sources, synthesize it and allow for comparison.

Relevant matrix indicator: *Supporting the capacities of participating countries to provide timely information using a harmonized methodology.*

- 111 The respondents that had participated in the capacity building - mainly the Exchange Programme - reported having improved their capacity in using the AMIS harmonized methodology. For some of the respondents, this has led to improvements in terms of timeliness of the data provided to AMIS.
- 112 As already mentioned, the participants interviewed appreciated the quality training of the Exchange Programme at FAO headquarters and returned in their work environment better prepared to complete the balance sheets. Some of the respondents felt that it could have been interesting to have conducted a more official preliminary needs assessment to see the pre-existing knowledge of the participants. This would have allowed for a more tailored and "level of knowledge" adapted capacity building through the Exchange Programme, and would have generated more results. It is to be noted that the country representatives were consulted during the Information Group meetings on their needs (a positive aspect).
- 113 Others pointed to the fact that leaving the office for a three-months period to participate in the Exchange Programme is something that was difficult to convince senior managers to accept. At least one country focal point could not participate because of the extensive level of effort required to participate in the Exchange Programme. As a solution, a respondent pointed to in-country trainings.
- 114 Some of the respondents mention that the capacity building does not seem to have generated the expected results for countries to provide timely data. For these respondents, training one person from a ministry in one of the participating countries does not ensure that there will be an institutional change. Capacity building efforts should be more exhaustive and coordinated among available capacity building tools and initiatives.

Relevant matrix indicator: *Supporting capacities to conduct policy discussions related to global food prices, including timely policy discussions when price spikes are likely.*

- 115 As demonstrated above, both the Information Group and RRF meetings have been held regularly during the evaluated period. In this context, the answer to the indicator above, related to increased capacity of the participating countries to conduct policy discussions, is yes (i.e. as the countries are participating to the meetings, they learn how to exchange with one another on policy issues). All respondents who participated in one or the other of these meetings have affirmed that they engendered high added-value for them and everyone around the table. The large majority of stakeholders were impressed by the successful AMIS efforts to create a climate of trust among participating countries. This is mainly due to the regularity of face-to-face meetings held, in addition to the depoliticized context mentioned above in the relevance section. As stakeholders built trust among each other, they also felt more and more comfortable in openly discussing their approach to policy development. Many respondents mentioned that this trust was built *during the meetings*, among the individuals present. Interestingly, many of the participants have been the same since the beginning - mainly for the Information Group (the Secretariat has encouraged the continuous participation of the same individuals to build trust). In these meetings, the participants were mainly market analysts, experts or as some respondents call them, technicians: "we all talk the same language in what can be qualified as open discussions, almost informal" as a respondent put it. This is a positive element of AMIS although it can also be a risk: will the trust be maintained when the interpersonal links ensured by the continuity of participation among stakeholders start to shift with the inevitable staff turnover that normally occurs? Many respondents, if not the majority, brought up this "special" relationship between the members of the Information Group as something valuable. It is considered as a unique opportunity to generate information that cannot be found in documents; it is coming directly from the countries and the international organizations.
- 116 Some respondents pointed to a few logistical issues faced concerning their participation in the Information Group meetings. The short delay before confirming the meetings (more time should be given for preparation as for some getting visas, for example, can be complicated). A few respondents pointed to the importance of considering holidays for

the participating countries although this can be complicated considering the number of countries involved. Still others pointed to the fact that the Information Group meeting were too short; this would allow going further than just discussing AMIS activities (presentations by AMIS Secretariat representatives) and would ensure that more forward-looking, strategic discussions could take place among members. Some countries did present their views but not all. The actual location of the Information Group meetings should vary from one event to another. Traveling to Rome can be time-consuming for some participants and hinder the possibility of them actually participating.

- 117 The RRF had a different setting where the participants changed more rapidly over time. The profiles of individuals present were also different: RRF participants were higher-level decision makers from the participating countries - which was actually the intention at the base of the RRF's design. As there were no major global food price spikes during the evaluated period, the RRF was not "tested" (except for the "informal" RRF meeting in 2012 which was designed so that decision makers would be able to coordinate their policy to better respond to such turbulences). It is thus difficult to specifically answer the second part of the question in terms of knowing if holding regularly the RRF meetings supported the capacities of stakeholders to conduct *timely policy discussions when price spikes are likely*. From data collected during the evaluation, at one point during the evaluated period (2012), discussions took place to decide whether it would be a good idea to hold an ad hoc meeting in response to some signs of food price instabilities. It was decided not to hold an official meeting to avoid *enhancing* the potential of a crisis emerging. In other words, it was considered that if a meeting would have been organized in response to preliminary signs of turbulences, it would have given importance to these initial indications which, in turn, had the potential of spiralling negative policy reactions on all sides to finally worsen the situation. This decision is qualified as a sound one by the majority of the respondents with whom this was discussed. However, it is not fully clear on which grounds this type of decision should be taken. It is not clear what the threshold is; when passed this leads to the decision that the RRF meetings will take place. There have been efforts to establish these thresholds, most notably by working on market/policy indicators and having a protocol of how the RRF should react. The consensus view on this is that the Chair, in collaboration with the Secretariat, needs to decide on a case by case basis.
- 118 For some of the respondents, the fact that the RRF was not actually "used" in the sense of the forum "rapidly responding" to a crisis led to a shift in its role. Indeed, for these respondents, the RRF became a platform for decisions to be taken on the strategic orientations of AMIS.

3.2.2 Evaluation question 4

- For FAO, to what extent is AMIS contributing to results under FAO SO4 (Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels)?
- 119 The Goal of Strategic Objective 4 is to enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international level. FAO seeks to reach this goal through three broad outcomes: a) International agreements, mechanisms and standards that promote more efficient and inclusive trade and markets are formulated and implemented by countries; b) agribusiness and agri-food chains that are more inclusive and efficient are developed and implemented by the public and private sectors; and c) policies, financial instruments and investment that improve the inclusiveness and efficiency of agri-food systems are developed and implemented by the public and private sectors.³⁵
- 120 The work under Outcome (a) seeks to increase international (global and regional) trade flows, especially for the countries that have lagged behind relatively or have seen their export sectors decline. An aspect that is critical to success in adoption of inclusive trade-related agreements is developing the evidence base to inform the formulation as well as the negotiations of the required policies. For countries to effectively participate in negotiations and markets, they must have increased access and ability to use global market information to better understand and analyse market developments, trade policies, trade rules and related emerging issues. The timeliness, accuracy and transparency of this information and analysis is essential.

35 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/030/mk074e.pdf>

- 121 On the basis of the conceptual definition of this outcome, and the rational and objectives of the initiative, AMIS could be said to make important contributions towards SO4.
- 122 Data sources for this question were quite limited. Few of the respondents could actually answer this question. However, those that did address this question straightforwardly and without hesitation mentioned that AMIS, to the extent of the results reached discussed above, is fully contributing to FAO SO4's results. One respondent explained that as information on prices, demand and supply situation in different countries and globally is available through AMIS, it contributes to free and efficient markets.

3.3 Efficiency

3.3.1 Evaluation question 5

- For the World Bank Group in its dual capacity as AMIS Secretariat member and donor, assessing (in addition to the other evaluation questions) to what extent has the DGF Partnership for AMIS achieved or is expected to achieve:
 - efficient allocation of DGF resources;
 - benefits that are more cost effective than those that could be achieved by providing the same service on a country-by-country basis?

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Assessment of whether activities and outputs could have been delivered with fewer resources, without reducing their quality and quantity.*

Finding 12: *By focusing on the Secretariat's core functions, DGF resources were allocated in a relevant manner considering the DGF overall objectives.*

- 123 The available evidence does not allow the evaluation to strictly determine whether the DGF funding level has been optimal or whether comparable results could have been obtained with a lower level of funding.
- 124 One element to be considered, however, is the fact that DGF resources were directly oriented from the outset to two main categories of activities central to the *raison d'être* of the AMIS initiative. These were: i) improving statistical, market and policy information and analyses; and ii) coordinating capacity building, policy dialogue and project management. This provided direct support to the work of the Secretariat, which was naturally called upon to play a major role in the initiative, given its mandate.
- 125 Regarding the objective of building participating countries' capacities, the DGF was directed towards building capacity at the level of the Secretariat itself first.³⁶ In this sense, DGF's funding was directed towards the start-up of the initiative itself and the operationalization of its functions notably by hiring a project manager to help coordinate activities.
- 126 Several of the evaluation team's interlocutors pointed out that the DGF funding was mobilized at a time considered crucial for the start of AMIS. In this respect the DGF funding was instrumental in supporting the rapid implementation of the initiative's architecture (Steering Committee, Information Group, RRF). The DGF did encourage the creation of the SG, essentially to formalize the decision making among the international organizations of how to use the DGF finances (and implementation of other AMIS activities). Some of the stakeholders the evaluation team interviewed mentioned their impression that if a significant lag had occurred between the launch of the initiative and the publication of its first products, the confidence of many important stakeholders into the AMIS initiative would have been seriously eroded.

36 "[...] the DGF grant may not necessarily directly finance capacity building activities, but it will contribute indirectly by strengthening the capacity of the AMIS Secretariat to assess the needs for capacity building, develop programs tailored to the needs of individual countries, and provide technical back-up to training activities." Source: DGF Grant Agreement.

Finding 13: The majority of interviewed interlocutors have expressed the opinion that, overall, the AMIS Secretariat delivered considerable achievements with limited resources.

- 127 The evaluation team identified consistent opinions from important stakeholders that the Secretariat had done good-quality work with limited resources. Interlocutors highlighted the Secretariat's proactivity, the quality of services and products, and the regularity of the numerous meetings and events in the Organization.
- 128 With the elements made available, the evaluation team did not find any particular proof of inefficient use of the funds made available through the DGF. Funding was largely used for the mobilization of specialized consultants (75 percent of expenditure), which appears to be consistent with the functions of the Secretariat. In all, 3 870 days of specialized work were mobilized during the implementation period of the DGF, spread over a staff of 14 people. To some extent, the fragmented use of this funding has been cumbersome to manage. There were many ToRs to be developed, contracting processes for each, sometimes repeated over several years. On the other hand, this diversity also reflects the diversity of the Secretariat's tasks and therefore makes sense.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Evidence of partnerships to achieve programme goals.*

Finding 14: By nature, the AMIS initiative is a partnership and multiple examples of synergies have been found by the evaluation team, directly aligned with and contributing to the DGF goals.

- 129 In its conception, AMIS had the ambition to realize a partnership between many international organizations with specific and complementary competences, notably in terms of price/stock monitoring and analysis for agricultural markets. This reflects the orientation the French Presidency of the G20 gave that the international organizations involved in the G20 are carrying out a joint initiative on this theme.
- 130 Nevertheless, at the origin of AMIS, not all the partners were at the same level in terms of their willingness to participate. The effective realization of this partnership, beyond mere regular joint meetings, is a gradual achievement and the Secretariat has worked actively in this direction. On specific technical themes, bridges have thus been built between stakeholders. These include the regular and joint contributions of the OECD and WTO for policy information (policy database built by FAO), as well as the inclusion of the data and maps produced by GOEGLAM. These two elements were welcomed by many respondents as a real improvement in the quality of the AMIS Market Monitor.
- 131 Also, in partnership with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), a specific section on agricultural fertilizers was introduced at AMIS Market Monitor as well as a price section drafted by IGC. The DGF implementation reports also mention that "the AMIS Secretariat [...] successfully implemented a joint FAO/WFP/UNDP pilot exercise on price crowdsourcing in Indonesia". It should also be mentioned that regular reviews of the Monitor ahead of publication are done by all Secretariat members.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Evidence of additional resources leveraged/catalysed to achieve DGF/AMIS goals.*

Finding 15: The AMIS initiative has leveraged additional resources, but it cannot be demonstrated that the DGF resources have played a specific enabling role in terms of leveraging resources beyond the fact that they have covered part of the cost of running the Secretariat, which has played an active role in leveraging these additional resources.

- 132 In recent years, AMIS has acquired many resources in addition to the DGF, which is an important indicator of an ongoing interest for the AMIS initiative. Several countries and organizations have provided resources to AMIS, including in kind resources. These have been:

- The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), with two research grants (finalized)
- The Gates Foundation, for a capacity building project (ongoing, mobilized prior to DGF funding)
- The Government of Japan, for a capacity building project (finalized, mobilized prior to DGF funding)
- The United States., with direct support for a research paper (finalized)
- France, for the secondment of an expert (ongoing, mobilized prior to DGF funding)
- France, for initial financial support to the AMIS Secretariat (finalized, mobilized prior to DGF funding)
- Germany for financing an Associate Professional Officer (ongoing)
- Canada, France, Germany and the Russian Federation for providing resources to the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (ongoing)

133 These contributions are made in various forms. It is also necessary to note that many “in kind” contributions remain unaccounted for. This is the case, for example, for expenses incurred by international organizations on the Steering Committee and member countries of AMIS so that they can be represented at the forums and meetings AMIS initiates. For some organizations, this participation could be a particularly significant effort and should be interpreted as a sign of strong interest. Other organizations may have refrained from attending all meetings to focus on the most important ones or those not requiring significant travel.

134 Regarding AMIS governance, the Steering Committee has been created to oversee the management of all Secretariat activities, including the coordination of fundraising activities. In addition, the Steering Committee has the responsibility of approving proposed contributions, including those from the Members of AMIS Secretariat, donors and governments prior to their inclusion in the annual work plans of the AMIS Secretariat.

135 Fundraising has been an important element of the Secretariat’s work itself, part of whose existence has been based on DGF funding. It is thus possible to note here a possible contributory role of the DGF without any specific attribution being assured. It should be noted, however, that, as reported in the AMIS/DGF terminal report, “funding of the DGF Grant was used to finalize the 2016-17 Programme of Work and Budget, which was endorsed by the AMIS Rapid Response Forum in March 2016 [...] and [for] the establishment of a Multi-Donor Trust Fund (upon which three new grants were finalized) to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the initiative”.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Evidence that the AMIS partnership contributed to process harmonization of efforts between donors for the capacity building activities.*

Finding 16: The partnership for AMIS has led to harmonization of efforts between donors for the capacity building activities.

136 AMIS, by its very nature, is the result of a joint effort between development partners. This has allowed the initiative to design and carry out a joint capacity building effort in the direction of the countries. Substantial efforts were put into building harmonized methodologies and subsequently into raising the capacities of countries to use/apply these methodologies (notably through the Exchange Programme). Beyond this, harmonizing the fragmented capacity building efforts rolled out by numerous development partners in AMIS member countries would have required a very significant country-by-country effort that was far beyond the scope and means of AMIS (no country presence of AMIS teams in the countries in particular).

137 AMIS, also, appears to have benefited from being hosted by FAO, in particular regarding collaborations and synergies with teams working to strengthen statistical systems in AMIS member countries. Also, while the AMIS team has indicated that efforts have been deployed to integrate closely the multi-year capacity building projects into the work plan of the Global Strategy, one of the countries interviewed pointed out that opportunities

could have been found to better coordinate some of AMIS' efforts with the overall Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics.

- 138 The high visibility of AMIS may have influenced other programmes and encouraged them to target their support where AMIS did not intervene, but this remains only a hypothesis.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Evidence of benefits from having a multi-country approach (such as countries learning from others' experience, etc.).*

Finding 17: Information Group meetings have allowed members countries to present their experience and approaches and therefore given the opportunity for other less-experienced countries to learn. Also, the opportunity given to some countries to engage in cooperation activities such as peer learning has been appreciated.

- 139 By nature, activities such as the Information Group meeting could not have been possible if AMIS had taken an individualized country-by-country approach. These meetings have provided multiple opportunities for Focal Points from AMIS participating countries - particularly those belonging to the G20 - to present relevant (and instructive for other countries) elements on the methodologies they use. As reported by the AMIS Secretariat, these included presentations made by: i) the United Kingdom (on the impact of biofuels policy on global food prices); ii) the United States (on developing biofuel indicators for AMIS and on improving maize and soybeans forecasts); iii) Japan (on predicting seasonal climate-induced variations in global food production); and iv) the European Union (on issues in measuring volatility).
- 140 A recent (2015) meeting of the Information Group allowed for a panel discussion by countries that applied the monthly decomposition of their supply and demand balance and for presentations by South Africa and Viet Nam on their respective experiences participating in the AMIS Exchange Programme. As well, a similar Information Group meeting panel allowed several AMIS countries to present and exchange on their use of earth observation data.
- 141 It was mentioned during the evaluation interviews that AMIS carried out the conduct and facilitation of these exchanges between countries in an efficient way in comparison with other multilateral projects that some respondents had experience with.
- 142 The AMIS initiative also has promoted peer learning in the framework of the two capacity building projects (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Japan) it is implementing.

3.3.2 Evaluation question 6

- To what extent did the flexibility in the DGF financing through the Partnership help AMIS respond appropriately to needs as they arise?

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Evidence of changes or reallocations (if any) and nature of the process involved (FAO/World Bank interaction, duration and complexity of the administrative procedure, etc.).*

Finding 18: DGF funding was less tied than other bilateral sources of funding that AMIS has benefited from, allowing the Secretariat to channel resources towards hard-to-finance expenditures, notably staff time (around 75 percent of all expenditure).

- 143 In line with its objectives, the DGF funding was issued with a view to providing a flexible start-up investment for the AMIS initiative.
- 144 As mentioned in an earlier section of this report, activities defined under the DGF grants were only broadly demarcated without indications in terms of quantified inputs and also aligned very well with the overall scope of AMIS' work.

- 145 As a result, a need for changes or reallocations has never been strongly felt. Consultations could nevertheless take place between the Secretariat and the World Bank concerning certain expenditures. An example occurred when the Secretariat asked if the World Bank could fund the participation of any particular country to an Information Group meeting.
- 146 In fact, the DGF was one of the least tied bilateral funds that the AMIS Secretariat had access to and as a result this funding facilitated a certain “responsiveness”. In particular, the fact that 75 percent of DGF funding could be used to cover staff costs (consultants or staff) was useful. In a sense, the DGF gave the Secretariat the means to fulfil its mandate, and there were no modalities (or will) for micro-management of the grant by the Bank World.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Timeliness of decisions and delivery of inputs (including finance transfer).*

Findings 19: The most important decisions were those concerning the annual renewal of DGF funding, and these operations were carried out without any significant delay or complication.

The annual nature (by tranche) of DGF funding presented some challenges.

- 147 Annual renewal of DGF funding was conducted in simple ways. The results framework remained the same for each tranche, and so did the definition of the main categories of activities and results to be achieved. There was no specific discussion between the World Bank and FAO that could lead to a change in these elements. Nor does it appear that there were any elements in the course of the project which might have led to such modifications. Similarly, the reporting procedures remained the same during the period and the acceptance of the reports does not seem to have suffered any unusual delays.
- 148 In the case of decisions on the management of the DGF, the responsibility was transferred from one Task Team Leader to another during the period, without this appearing to cause delays, difficulties or loss of information which in turn could have delayed or altered important decisions.
- 149 Since the DGF funding is granted on an annual basis, the conduct of certain activities which could not be finalized before the end of an annual tranche could be complicated by the fact that each of the three tranches was disbursed separately. Most of the funding was used to cover the costs of mobilizing consultants and staff. This meant that contracts could not overlap on two annual DGF tranches, which increased the administrative workload of the Secretariat for ending and renewing contracts (without providing any real benefits for the outputs to be achieved).
- 150 In terms of flexibility, when the case arose, a no-cost extension of the last DGF tranche was granted. This allowed sufficient time to make up for previous delays and finalize the AMIS Policy Database as one of the main outputs of the Grant Agreement.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Alignment between implemented and planned activities.*

Finding 20: Since there was no DGF funding-specific activity planning process beyond the results framework it was not possible to track executed activities against planned ones and specific results or outputs against specific activities.

- 151 The DGF grant was intended to provide a flexible mechanism to provide seed funding to support an evolving initiative with potentially changing priorities and financial needs. Against this background, it does not appear that detailed annual plans (with quantified elements) presenting the activities to be specifically funded by the DGF have been developed and exchanged between the DGF recipient and the World Bank Manager. Instead, DGF funding was renewed each year on the basis of an annual reiteration of the main underlying elements that remained constant during the grant period: results framework, main categories of activities and broad categories of expected results. Since the categories of activities indicated in the grant agreement are broadly defined, a close

assessment of the alignment between planning and implementation of activities was not a useful exercise. Overall the activities implemented by AMIS using DGF funding are in line with the broad categories of activities that were defined. The broad categories of activities defined from the outset of the DGF grant remained the same and reporting has consistently been done against these categories. This was also somewhat compensated for by regular output-oriented discussions between the Bank and the Secretariat at the occasion of meetings (done on a biannual basis).

- 152 The AMIS Steering Committee oversaw approval of AMIS's annual work plans. Indicative activity plans were submitted by the Secretariat, and members of the Steering Committee commented on them. At AMIS's first Steering Committee (October 2012), the plan provided a preliminary indication of the funding source that would cover each activity. However, this does not seem to have been the case for the following Steering Committees. However, it is to be noted that the work plan and budget 2016-2017 was developed jointly with Steering Committee members, including during a virtual (Skype) Steering Committee meeting, which outlines activities and funding source.

3.4 Governance and management

3.4.1 Evaluation question 7

- Governance and management of the DGF Partnership implementation, including:
 - institutional set-up and efficiency and effectiveness of coordination and steering mechanisms;
 - extent to which governance and management of the DGF Partnership is transparent in providing information about the Partnership, is accountable to all stakeholders, and is clear with respect to roles and responsibilities.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Level of the partnership members' satisfaction with the institutional set-up; clarity of roles and responsibility.*

Finding 21: Formally, AMIS set-up and governance did see very few changes over the period examined, as technical matters have been at the centre of the participants' interests and launching the initiative technically was perceived as the most pressing challenge.

- 153 There have been few formal changes to the institutional architecture of AMIS and its governance structure as originally defined by the G20 and refined by the members of the Steering Committee. This can, in part, be interpreted as reflecting the relevance of the initial choices made regarding governance and institutional set-up. The initial choice of governance modalities for AMIS was adequate in relation to the immediate technical and practical objectives that were fundamental to the effective start of the initiative. These were to have a rapidly operational Secretariat, to bring together the protagonists, to promote a technical dialogue (Information Group, RRF) and to have a Steering Committee to oversee the "vital functions" of the initiative by overseeing its Secretariat activities. This committee was to oversee and coordinate the work of the Secretariat, strengthen its ability to bring together the participating international organizations in a partnership mode in spite of sometimes divergent interests and overlaps of mandate, and ensure the availability of sufficient funding.
- 154 Moreover, the chosen mode of governance allowed the proper integration of new partners (GEOGLAM and IGC) to the AMIS Secretariat and its Steering Committee as soon as the need arose.
- 155 Another notable development in the governance of the initiative was the invitation of the (past, present and – if known – future) member country chairing the initiative to be present at the Steering Committee's meetings.
- 156 This decision - apparently taken at the pressing request of a member country during its term as Chair - seems very relevant to the evaluation team as it contributes to a more transparent dialogue between the Steering Committee and the member countries in the initiative. It

is the view of the evaluation team that this also seems to prefigure a trend to give a more balanced voice to all the members of the initiative. It suggests a future where the Steering Committee is no longer a limited membership base with no countries.

Finding 22: Putting de facto the decision making role into the hands of the Steering Committee members (composed of “information experts and providers”) rather than the member countries may have been a pragmatic initial choice but shows its limits.

157 AMIS is “governed” by the G20 which created it and defined and endorsed its ToRs. The G20 asked the international organizations that had suggested the creation of AMIS to support the initiative by forming a Secretariat. Therefore, initially and for some time, the decision making role at the level of the initiative remained in the hands of the Steering Committee of the Secretariat which drove the initiative. This amounted to entrusting a decision making role to multilateral institutions that have been mandated to produce (among other things) information and play a technical role for the benefits of their members. This appears to have been a pragmatic choice in the launch phase of the initiative, as these institutions have played an important technical role in the G20 discussions on the issues AMIS tackled.

158 Progressively, a mode of governance giving potentially a more significant role to the countries that represent the “demand for information” has been discussed. This translated into the AMIS RRF “Concept Paper” adopted at the Second Session of the AMIS Rapid Response Forum (20 February 2013) and amended in December 2015, based on agreements from the Fourth Session of the AMIS RRF. The concept paper opens the possibility for “RRF meetings to [...] also help participating countries to: [...] discuss and decide on modifications of the AMIS Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure submitted by the Chair and the Secretariat”. While this option has apparently never been used, it could potentially ensure that the future orientations taken are more explicitly aligned with the demand of the member countries, both in terms of information produced and in activities to strengthen their capacities.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Evidence of high-level (Secretariat) coordination decision making process and high-level (Secretariat) coordination openness in both the formulation and execution of budgets and in decision taking.*

Finding 23: The Secretariat has showed openness and has been keen on seizing existing opportunities.

159 The Secretariat showed responsiveness when there were opportunities to improve the quality of AMIS products and stakeholders made suggestions. For example, the inclusion of GEOGLAM as a partner and provider of information to enrich the AMIS Market Monitor was cited in interviews as a case of the Secretariat’s openness and responsiveness to member ideas.

160 For suggestions of a more strategic nature, such as increasing the number of agricultural commodities (to pulses, or other), there have been no decisions despite the desire expressed by some participating countries. Upon request of countries, the Secretariat did prepare a paper on the costs and benefits of including additional commodities, which was presented at the tenth Information Group meeting. Countries agreed that, for the time being, AMIS should focus on the original four commodities.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Level of accessibility to DGF information, roles and responsibilities.*

Finding 24: Financial information on the AMIS initiative has increasingly been shared with country stakeholders (RRF meetings) and systematically been discussed with Steering Committee members.

161 In accordance with the AMIS governance document prepared in 2012, the Secretariat systematically presented information on AMIS’ financial situation to the initiative’s Steering

Committee members. This included information on ongoing partnerships and future funding needs. And naturally, donors and other stakeholders who contributed to AMIS have also been regularly informed of how their resources have been used, according to contractual obligations with the respective partners.

- 162 Progressively, financial information on AMIS has also increasingly been shared with AMIS participating countries through RRF meetings. Based on the RRF meetings reports that were available to the evaluation team, this type of information was shared as early as the March 2016 meeting (in Washington DC) and information on this subject was sent to participants ahead of the 2017 RRF. It appears that RRF meetings prior to 2016 have not been used as an opportunity to share this type of information. It is however the practice now that financial data from the Multi-Donor Trust Fund of AMIS, which is the main channel through which to finance activities of the Secretariat, is disclosed.

3.5 Sustainability

3.5.1 Evaluation question 8

- To what extent are the intermediate and development outcomes supported by the DGF Partnership sustainable? In particular, the extent to which the underlying activities financed by the DGF Partnership will continue, reflective of both their ownership by AMIS members (inclusive of participating countries and institutions), and willingness to finance.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Perceptions of qualified observers about how sustainable AMIS-influenced change is likely to be, and why.*

Finding 25: A foundation has been established as a result of the Grant but changes that have been achieved through DGF-financed activities are only sustainable if AMIS itself becomes sustainable as a mechanism and initiative.

- 163 The mobilization of the DGF has made a direct contribution to AMIS' functioning by strengthening the Secretariat and its functions. These achievements can be maintained on the condition that other sources of funding take over. This seems to be the situation at present. Other funding has been mobilized after the closure of the DGF without noticeable modification to AMIS effectiveness. The transition was smooth and did not result in any disruption of services. There does not seem to be any strong concern about AMIS funding for the short-term (two years). In the short-term, the "phasing out" of the DGF took place without any problems from a technical point of view.

- 164 There are legitimate questions about the future of the AMIS initiative in the long-term. In part, these questions stem from the fact that agricultural prices are again quite stable, and consequently the demand for AMIS information products and services is less prominent. The most recent G20 declarations nevertheless reaffirm this group of countries' interest in the initiative. In the communiqué of the most recent meeting of the G20 Agriculture Ministers, the group stated: "We acknowledge that AMIS, launched in 2011 by the G20 Agriculture Ministers, constitutes an important part of the international institutional food commodity information and analysis architecture [...] (and) encourage active participation in AMIS by all members of G20".³⁷

- 165 Due to its inherent nature of being a GRPP, the evaluation team observed a gap regarding leading the strategic direction of the Initiative. As the host institution of the initiative FAO is actively managing most of AMIS' technical work, but as a partner in the initiative it cannot exert its influence over more strategic initiatives. The Steering Committee does not seem to have begun formulating a renewed vision for AMIS on the medium/long-term, although it is true that the question of AMIS' future has been on the agenda of the latest RRF meeting (February 2017). Finally, the role that participating countries may be asked to take in defining the future orientations of AMIS has not yet been made clear.

37 www.g20.utoronto.ca/2017/170122-agriculture-en.pdf

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Evidence and quality of inputs from partner organizations and level of ownership and commitment from the partner institutions.*

Finding 26: A growing number of partner institutions are making contributions that are varied in nature and increase the attractiveness of AMIS products. For now, the sustainability of these contributions does not appear to be compromised.

166 Undoubtedly, AMIS has succeeded in bringing together a broad array of stakeholders and throughout the years, participation of stakeholders has increased. This was not at all a given at the start of the initiative. AMIS persuaded stakeholders to contribute. Ownership and commitment has taken various forms including financing, in kind support, expertise and seconded experts. The initiative is currently exploring avenues for more partnerships. Steering Committee members appear to be committed to sustaining their participation in the initiative.

Finding 27: The initiative has succeeded in retaining the participation of many actors, including at the level of the member countries. But the feeling of belonging appears stronger at the level of the Steering Committee than at the level of the participating countries.

167 There is a clear sense of accomplishment what most Steering Committee members share on the work AMIS did during the first years of the initiative. Contributions in kind made by international organizations members of the Secretariat also illustrate the interest in the initiative even though these contributions are not always systematically measured (or measurable). Clearly, the organizations and individuals who initiated the launch of AMIS are the ones for whom the sense of “belonging” and interest remain the strongest. Some individuals have represented their institution since the initiative started, which brings benefits in terms of continuity but may also present a risk due to inevitable staff turnover.

168 On the side of the participating countries, it would seem through the interviews conducted that the G20 countries have a greater level of interest than the non-G20 countries. Some countries even have a critical attitude when they cannot clearly see their contribution of data being used for AMIS products and have expressed the feeling that they are not “real participants”.

169 The fact that a limited number of participating countries (especially for non-G20 ones) showed interest in participating in the present evaluation exercise could also be interpreted as a sign of the fragility of the relationship AMIS has built with some countries.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Type and effects of enabling and limiting factors on achievement of sustainable results and evidence of risk mitigation strategies considered/implemented.*

Finding 28: Stakeholders have a clear overall view of the risks to the initiative. AMIS has taken actions to solidify its position regarding perceived risks, but some structural constraints are difficult to counter.

170 Interviewees during the evaluation mentioned many risks to the AMIS initiative: the relative calm of agricultural markets, the increase in the number of sources of information, the lack of ownership felt by and participation of some countries, the fact that its meetings have become too repetitive, the risk of the initiative being too heavily integrated into the host organization of the Secretariat and losing “neutrality”, etc. The Secretariat is aware of these risks and has taken many initiatives to minimize them, such as highlighting its work through an active and effective communication policy. But most structural constraints mentioned above cannot be solved by a strong communication and visibility policy, however successful.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Evidence of complementary financing sources.*

Finding 29: While complementary financing sources seem adequate to ensure AMIS’ programme of work for the coming two years, sources of longer term core financing have not yet been identified.

- 171 In the short-run, funding for the initiative does not seem to be an issue. However, it should be noted that the sources of funding available to date are by nature temporary. Organizations and development partners are not directly contributing core financing to the initiative, although some in kind contributions (such staff time) may be “core financed” by some partnering institutions. Identifying a perennial and stable source of financing is now the issue for AMIS and would constitute a real progress towards institutionalization.

Relevant evaluation matrix indicator: *Evidence of an exit strategy.*

Finding 30: While the DGF funding has clearly supported some core functions of the Secretariat, there hasn't been a specific exit strategy for it, nor has there been a notable contribution to shaping a longer term vision.

- 172 World Bank/DGF guidance documents indicate that the Bank should focus on building sustainable institutional arrangements that will survive its financial exit. In the case of AMIS, although no explicit exit strategy was present at the inception of the DGF funding, some elements have been put in place towards sustaining results of the partnership. These include the existence of complementary sources for the initiative and a solid partnership with shared governance arrangements. It is to be noted also that AMIS elaborated the Umbrella Programme which clearly outlined what the Secretariat (and AMIS) should achieve during the first five years. In commemoration of its fifth-year anniversary, the Secretariat produced a detailed review of achievements and outstanding challenges, and invited participating countries to share their thoughts on what has worked well, what needs to be improved and what should be changed. This revision of the AMIS mandate is viewed as an ongoing process and continued at the last meeting of the RRF.
- 173 However, many stakeholders expressed their feeling that the AMIS initiative is now at a crossroads in terms of its existence, five to six years after its launch. There are solid achievements, but there are also fragilities, and sustainability is not guaranteed. An initiative to renew and adjust the mandate of AMIS is needed and could perhaps have been taken earlier.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Relevance

174 The establishment of AMIS was a relevant initiative in the post-2008 food prices crisis context and there is a good satisfactory degree of alignment between the initial concept presented to the G20 and the actual initiative. The design phase of AMIS, was, however, short. The turnaround time to design and put together an initiative in response to the food crisis of 2007–2008 was limited - a few months. This led to a situation where the organizations that agreed to form the AMIS Secretariat did not consider who would use AMIS' outputs and what were the needs of participating countries, in particular the non-G20 ones and more broadly, the entirety of its users.

Conclusion 2. Efficacy

175 Undoubtedly, the DGF partnership was effective. The DGF deliverables were achieved and most of the targets were attained. Through the support provided by the grant, the supply of timely and relevant market information has increased. It took time and effort, but activities financed through the DGF also helped in encouraging stakeholders to increasingly participate and contribute to AMIS. This has allowed AMIS products to become progressively more accurate, relevant and appreciated, although efforts are still needed to ensure the accuracy and regularity of data provided by the countries. There is, however, limited practical evidence of the use of AMIS' specific products by government representatives. Efforts to build the capacities of the non-G20 participating countries could have been more effective if based on an initial assessment. They also could have reached a broader outcome if deployed by trainings systematically in each country or regionally.

Conclusion 3. Efficiency

176 The AMIS Secretariat seems to have used the DGF resources economically and the initiative leveraged additional resources during the DGF implementation period. There is overall satisfaction over the convening role the Secretariat played. There is also an overall stakeholder perception that AMIS is a good example of a multilateral initiative producing concrete results for a reasonable cost. The DGF funding, by being well aligned with core AMIS needs and mobilized in a timely way, has been able to reach the Bank's objective of "catalysing partnerships through convening and building coalitions, and raising funds".

Conclusion 4. Governance and Management

177 Although the fact that the DGF is operationalized through annual agreements presented some challenges, there is overall satisfaction over the funding modalities. In addition, by providing non-tied funding, the DGF has allowed the Secretariat to channel resources towards hard-to-finance but necessary expenditures.

178 AMIS' initial institutional and governance setup was adequate for the launching of the initiative. Participants have showed openness and collaborations have developed without unnecessary formalism. The setup will, however, need to evolve as AMIS evolves. There is a lack of leadership and the answer to "who could actually hold the steering function?" is less obvious now than it was at the start of the initiative.

Conclusion 5. Sustainability

179 AMIS has taken a solid first step, but important questions remain about its future in an environment where information is increasingly available. Participants would welcome an initiative aimed at crafting a renewed vision for AMIS. The exercise would, however, include numerous challenges. Some of these are: i) potentially diverging views from AMIS stakeholders (international organizations, participating/member countries) on the way forward; ii) the need to produce information in more demand-driven than supply-driven fashion; iii) the necessity to reshuffle the institutional set-up and governance modalities, particularly increased voice for participating countries; and iv) mobilizing more perennial sources of funding.

4.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. It is recommended to conduct a formal and extensive assessment to have a better idea of who uses AMIS' outputs and what type of data and information is specifically needed by users/countries.

Recommendation 2. It is recommended that the Steering Committee seeks a mandate from the G20 to launch and lead a comprehensive exercise aimed at crafting a renewed/enhanced vision and mission for AMIS.

180 In the present context - the end of the DGF funding - the timing is good to rethink AMIS. From data collected during the evaluation, the idea would not be to change the initiative in its essence, as overall results to the evaluation questions are positive in a balanced way. However, at this point, it could be interesting to open an in-depth assessment with the participating countries: what are their needs considering the higher order goal of AMIS? How can the initiative's data be of enhanced use for them? It is understood that AMIS is to produce information that is destined to the public good. But consulting the participating countries would be important in the context of AMIS as it is considered and defined as a partnership and should be the result of a collaborative effort. AMIS has been conducting Monitor use surveys since 2014; this approach could be the basis for a wider, "end-of-phase" study that would have the potential of bringing a renewed and more participatory approach to the initiative.

Recommendation 3. In the context of the exercise proposed, consider the possibility to request another international organization to host the AMIS Secretariat for the next five years in order to counter the natural tendency of the hosting organization to become at the centre of the initiative and for AMIS to benefit fully from the comparative advantages of AMIS Secretariat members. This recommendation is not stating that the AMIS Secretariat should be hosted in another international organization, but discussing the idea would be aligned with the above recommendations in terms of seizing the opportunity of organizing open sessions with all stakeholders to plan the upcoming years.

181 The evaluation has demonstrated that there are solid reasons why AMIS has been housed in FAO, with which the majority of respondents agree; and during this period of time the initiative has undoubtedly benefited from this arrangement. Seeking the embedment of the Secretariat in a new host organization could also be a potential avenue to enrich and enhance further AMIS methodologies, products and services. Over time, the same way AMIS has benefited from being hosted by FAO since its inception, the initiative could benefit from the comparative advantages of other host organizations.

182 Opening up to the other international organizations to ask if other organizations would want to house AMIS would either result in the renewal of the confidence of partners in having FAO house the Secretariat (with a recognition of the good work done over the past five years) or in the transfer of the Secretariat to another international organization, showing all the more the solid partnership AMIS has fostered.

Recommendation 4. More effort should be put into developing a structured approach to evaluating countries' capacity building needs and agreeing on ad hoc pluri-annual capacity building plans coordinated with other capacity building initiatives in country.

183 Assessing and developing capacities of member countries is an integral part of the Secretariat's role and responsibility as stated in the AMIS ToRs³⁸ (2011). In the future such effort would need to be sustained and guided by adequate needs assessment methodologies. These needs assessment would ideally need to be comprehensive enough to allow the initiative to get a clear view of what other capacity building efforts are in

38 "The Secretariat [...] assesses capacity development needs in member countries, in coordination with relevant International Organisations, Regional Organisations and supports development of national market information systems; AMIS efforts in capacity building will focus on..."

place and how best to coordinate the efforts at country and regional level. Later on, these exercises need to be translated into detailed and pluri-annual capacity building plans that are acceptable to the said countries. Future capacity building efforts could also benefit from using approaches used by regional initiatives such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Plus Three Food Security Information System (AFSIS).

5. List of Annexes

Annexes available at <http://www.fao.org/evaluation/en/>

Annex 1. Programme results framework – Development Grant Facility (DGF) Partnership

Annex 2. Review of the Theory of Change of the intervention

Annex 3. Evaluation matrix

Annex 4. Interview protocol

Annex 5. Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Evaluation of the Partnership for Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) Development Grant Facility (1 August 2016)



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