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Vita

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Monitoring Team:

Peter McEvoy

Susan Fraser and Oonagh O'Connor

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Acronyms

AFAP	Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CIP	International Potato Centre / Centro Internacional de la Papa
CLTS	Community Led Total Sanitation
CSDEU	Civil Society and Development Education Unit
CSF	Civil Society Fund
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DLS	Diffused Light Storage (of harvested potatoes)
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EIAR	Ethiopian Institute for Agricultural Research
EU	European Union
GoE	Government of Ethiopia
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HQ	Headquarters
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRM	Natural Resource Management
ODF	Open Defecation Free
PASDEP	Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Programme
RBM	Results Based Management
ROM	Results Oriented Monitoring
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (of Ethiopia)
ToR	Terms of Reference
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

The monitoring team found that the Vita Green Zone project, supported from Irish Aid's Civil Society Fund, is making an important contribution to the livelihoods of farmers in the targeted areas. Increased agricultural production has contributed to the elimination of the 3-4 month food gap which previously affected the communities. Key strengths of the project include (a) access to, and demonstration of, innovative agronomic practices (such as improved varieties of seed); (b) scale-up and replication of such innovations, informed by a strong evidence base; (c) value chain strengthening allied to producer cooperative organisation at local level; and (d) facilitation of 'quality of life' benefits in villages through whole-community self-organisation, specifically in regard to sanitation.

At the organisational level, a Programme Statement of Strategy (2011-2015) provides overall strategic direction while the Ethiopia Country Strategy for the same period sets out the framework for the country programme. The policy framework includes comprehensive technical guidelines and practical manuals. The development of other organisational policies has been significantly delayed and there are critical gaps in terms of a child protection policy and policy guidance on gender.

The project has a very strong technical focus and is managed and implemented by a team of competent and committed technical experts. The capacity building and related work being undertaken in partnership with the relevant zonal, woreda (fourth level administration division) and kebele (smallest administrative unit) level government units provide a strong basis for building a stronger and more productive agricultural sector in the targeted areas. Without doubt, this production-oriented technical focus has been instrumental in supporting agronomic innovation and specialist research-led expertise.

Growth in production however does not of itself ensure strong and balanced development outcomes. The monitoring team considers there to be scope for a broader development approach - extending beyond the sector-specific technical perspective - that would support wider social changes at individual, household and community level. As it approaches an important phase of strategic planning in the period ahead, it is important for Vita to ensure that the new strategies are informed by a wide-ranging and thorough context analysis, in order to provide a solid basis for a broader developmental approach to the country programmes. A broader context analysis will also provide a strong logic of intervention, linking and identifying potential synergies between different project components such as energy-efficient cook stoves, Community Led Total Sanitation and agricultural production.

Community Led Total Sanitation is considered by the monitoring team to be of particular value, and not merely as an 'entry point strategy', as it is described in the project documentation. There is much evidence at the field level to point towards Community Led Total Sanitation encouraging communities to be active participants in their own development and acting as a mechanism for forging community cohesion and inclusion. The community-wide benefits associated with Open Defecation Free status are of universal value to all and Community Led Total Sanitation is therefore a powerful development approach. The fact that the benefits are inclusive of the whole community

is a useful counterbalance to the agricultural activities which tend to support individual farmers.

Vita is well respected by the Government of Ethiopia, and is considered an important and reliable partner organisation at all levels (zonal, woreda and kebele). This view was shared by officials of the Irish Embassy and European Union Delegation. Working closely with and through government structures has proven critical for the successful implementation of the Green Zone project, and indeed is key in terms of sustainability and scale up. It is however the view of the monitoring team that there is an attendant risk of Vita's character and identity as a Non-Governmental Organisation becoming too closely associated with the machinery of government. There is an opportunity to address such concerns in the development of a carefully articulated Partnership Policy.

The other strategic partnerships that have been forged, e.g. with Teagasc, the Irish Potato Coalition, the International Potato Centre, universities and prestigious research institutes constitute a real achievement for Vita. Through this, Vita has successfully positioned itself to contribute to the higher-level discourse at regional and national levels, especially in relation to potato production, storage, marketing and processing. This engagement is firmly grounded in and complementing Vita's work at field level. The Potato Centre of Excellence initiative is an example of a strategic partnership which is attracting interest in terms of its potential to be replicated elsewhere in Ethiopia.

The producer and marketing cooperatives being formed under the project by groups of participant farmers represent important partnerships at the community level that can support community participation and ownership. This is an important contribution to the sustainability of the project and its benefits. The investment that Vita is making in building the capacity of the membership and leaderships of these cooperatives is undoubtedly of great long-term value.

As an organisation, Vita shows reasonably strong familiarity with the concepts and language of Project Cycle Management, distinguishing between outputs, outcomes and impact and the tenets of a results focused approach are in evidence. In recent years Vita has made progress in strengthening its field-based monitoring and data collection, and a significant amount of data is collected, although the focus is very much on the technical aspects at output level. A key issue is that the data is not being sufficiently analysed and interpreted and it is therefore not providing the evidence and learning necessary to inform programme design and implementation. The ability to do this is seriously constrained by the lack of an effective computer based monitoring system. Addressing this requires immediate attention if Vita is to adopt a strong Results Based Management Approach.

Section One: Background

1.1 Introduction

Irish Aid, the Government's overseas development programme, engages in partnerships with development Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in order to further its policy objectives reflected in Ireland's Policy for International Development – *One World, One Future* – as well as the Irish Aid Civil Society Policy (2008). Ireland's policy framework recognises the role of Irish NGOs in supporting the delivery of basic services and in facilitating vulnerable people to come together and participate in the development of their communities.

The Civil Society Fund (CSF), which has been in operation since March 2006, is designed to provide co-funding for periods of between one and three years, for development projects of Irish Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and selected invited international organisations. Its overall objective is to strengthen the capacity and voice of CSOs and to promote sustainable development, human rights and social justice. It involves an annual competitive grant round for NGOs engaged in development work in particular priority areas. The application and appraisal process is designed around a set of appraisal standards based on international best practice. Partners are expected to demonstrate a commitment to results and approaches that promote partnership, capacity building and participation.

1.2 Vita

Vita evolved from Refugee Trust International, which was established in Ireland in 1989, and rebranded as Vita in 2006. Vita supports projects in Ethiopia and Eritrea and according to its Statement of Strategy (2011-2015) its main focus is *'to tackle household food insecurity through community led sustainable projects that are scalable and replicable, with a special focus on women as the key enablers of sustainable development'*.

Vita has been an Irish Aid partner since 2001. In 2008, the organisation received three-year Block Grant funding of €2.275m. In 2012, following the appraisal of Vita's programme of work and Results Frameworks, Irish Aid agreed further funding of €700,000 over two years. This was subject to certain conditions, including Vita taking steps to strengthen its financial reserves and secure its future viability. The current funding contract covers 2014 and 2015 and was approved by the Minister of State in July 2014. The grant of €350,000 per annum from the CSF was for the continuation of the previous work in Eritrea and Ethiopia, with particular reference to:

- The empowering of women to sustain their families and their natural environment;
- The provision of innovative support for farmers to produce more food and become self-reliant; and
- The enabling of local communities and countries to access resources to lead their own development.

Vita has been working in Ethiopia since 2005, particularly in the Gamo Gofa Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR) - one of the poorest regions of the country. In line with its Strategic Plan, Vita has recently commenced programming in the Amhara region. Over the period 2006-2014, Vita implemented

thirteen agriculture and community livelihood projects in six rural and one urban woreda, to a total value of € 4,733,875, benefiting some 40,000 households.

Vita's current Ethiopia programme focuses on food security and has five objectives; (i) improved food production; (ii) rural entrepreneurship promoted; (iii) strengthened market linkages with participation of private sector and producer cooperatives; (iv) building local capacity; and (v) gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreamed. The average total country budget for each of the last 3 years stands at just over €1m per annum. Vita was awarded €937,786 from the Embassy of Ireland in Addis Ababa for a three-year project (January 2014 – May 2016) entitled 'Improving smallholder livelihoods and resilience through climate smart agriculture solutions'. Other donors to the country programme include / have included Europe Aid (with Food Facility, then Instrument for Stability and subsequently 'SHARE'), the International Potato Centre (CIP) / United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (for the Potato Centre of Excellence Initiative) and the Gates Foundation (for Improved Cook Stoves Project 2013-2014). Vita is currently the lead agency in the EU-SHARE project, in consortium with iDE, AMREF and Caritas.

1.3 Field Monitoring Visits

Field level monitoring visits are a key element of the monitoring strategy for NGO partners in receipt of CSF grants. The findings of these visits help to deepen Irish Aid's understanding of the work of the organisations and inform the direction of any future partnerships. The purpose of the monitoring visits (as with all NGO monitoring visits) was twofold; firstly, to assess the extent of Vita's progress towards expected project outcomes as set out in the Results Framework, and secondly, to assess the extent to which policies, systems and approaches outlined in the grant application are supporting project implementation at the field level. The methodology broadly followed the appraisal criteria of the CSF grant application and details can be found in the Terms of Reference (ToR) in Annex 1.

The monitoring visit was led by Peter McEvoy, an external Development Consultant, accompanied by Irish Aid staff from the Civil Society and Development Education Unit (CSDEU) – Susan Fraser and Oonagh O'Connor. They were joined on the monitoring visit by Vita's Programme Quality Officer, Thomas Caffrey Osvald. A pre-departure meeting was held with Vita management and staff in Dublin to provide an organisational overview and an update on systems, with a particular focus on how these support and relate to the Ethiopia programme. The monitoring team also undertook an extensive review of Vita's documentation, both in relation to the agency's programme and its organisational structures and systems.

In Ethiopia, the monitoring team received an introductory briefing on the country programme and systems in the country office in Addis Ababa. A three-day field visit was made to SNNPR for meetings with beneficiary groups and other stakeholders (see Annexes 2 and 3 for the itinerary, map of project sites and a full list of people met). There was also a discussion with relevant staff regarding financial procedures and systems. At the end of the monitoring visit a debriefing was held in Addis Ababa with the Vita country team.

The monitoring team acknowledges that time in the field was limited, and this monitoring visit does not therefore constitute a full assessment of the programme, nor an audit of systems and financial statements. The team would also note that this

monitoring visit aimed to assess the work and approach of Vita, rather than the specific operations of its partners. This is reflected in the findings and recommendations.

1.4 Operating Context - Ethiopia

Ethiopia is among the poorest countries in the world, with an annual per capita income of \$170.¹ Eight out of ten Ethiopians live in rural areas and subsist principally on agriculture. With only six percent of land currently irrigated, smallholder farmers are at the mercy of the performance of highly variable seasonal rains. Ethiopia also suffers from weak market linkages on both the input and output side, with numerous barriers that prevent quality products from reaching end users (e.g. insufficient packaging and storing, inability of Ethiopian products to meet international market standards, and restrictive trade regulations). In addition, Ethiopia faces challenges of limited capacity at all levels of government and in the private and financial sectors, which restricts the efficacy of the institutions that support market development and linkages.

However, the strong commitment by the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) to the agriculture sector over the past decade (attracting a 16 percent share of public expenditure) is resulting in important increases in agricultural output. In particular, the government five-year Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) 2006–2011 placed emphasis on resourcing the public agricultural extension system, the utilization of human labour, proper use of agricultural land, the combining of endogenous and exogenous knowledge, a focus on innovations adapted to agro-ecological zones, and an integrated development approach. Towards the end of the PASDEP, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) noted: “*Ethiopia’s achievements in rural development and extension as a result of this commitment and strategy include increased “modernization” and revitalization of agriculture through improved and new crops, livestock, and natural resource management (NRM) technologies. They also include the increase in input use by farmers [and] use of improved seed varieties*”.²

Since 2005, the agricultural growth strategy pursued by the GoE has been accompanied by a reduction in poverty of 4 percent a year, suggesting that it is yielding benefits in terms of higher incomes for poor farmers with access to markets. Government spending on basic services and effective rural safety nets has also helped the least well-off in Ethiopia: the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) alone has lifted 1.5 million people out of poverty.³ Nevertheless, recent agriculture sector studies conclude that Ethiopia must transform its approaches to agriculture for current positive trends to continue. For example, one diagnostic study⁴ found that by adopting commercial seed and improved practices on just a quarter of current crop areas, farmers could increase wheat production by over sixty percent.

¹ USAID (2011). *Feed the Future Multi-Year Strategy for Agriculture in Ethiopia 2011-15*. Available at: www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/USAID%20FiF%20MYS%20Final%20Version.pdf

² International Food Policy Research Institute (2010). *In-Depth Assessment of the Public Agricultural Extension System of Ethiopia and Recommendations for Improvement*. IFPRI Discussion Paper 01041. page 1.

³ World Bank (2015). See: www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/01/20/poverty-ethiopia-down-33-percent

⁴ Alemu et al (2010). *Seed system potential in Ethiopia* (IFPRI). Part of BMGF Diagnostics Series.

Section Two: Strategic Planning and Policy Framework

2.1 Strategic Planning

At the organisational level, Vita has a Programme Statement of Strategy for the period 2011-15. This strategy clearly sets out the organisation's vision, mission and programme goal, as presented below;

- Vision: Rural African families empowered to sustain their livelihoods.
- Mission: To tackle household food insecurity through community led sustainable agricultural projects that are scalable and replicable, with a special focus on women as the key enablers of sustainable development.
- Programme Goal: To create a material improvement in nutrition through food availability, access and affordability for 250,000 households over five years and to leverage additional impact through replication.

The strategy also clearly articulates the organisation's added value, core competence, thematic focus and values. These are "*respect, empowerment, partnership, accountability and transparency, impact and learning.*"

The process of developing the Programme Statement of Strategy was a consultative process with a high degree of involvement of the country teams (Ethiopia and Eritrea) and wider stakeholders. The Strategy states that a contextual review was undertaken at the country level, and Appendix 1 of the Strategy provides a very brief summary of this. While it seems that the contextual review covered broad thematic areas, it is unclear how and to what extent this informed the formulation of the Strategy. Given Vita's commitment to focusing on women as agents of change, it is also surprising that gender was not a specific focus of the contextual review. While the Strategy notes that it builds on past achievements, an honest assessment of successes and challenges and how this clearly informed decisions is lacking. These aspects should be taken into account in the development of the new Strategy which is currently ongoing.

During 2012/13 Vita articulated a Theory of Change at a strategic level and there is a paper that is a first elaboration dated November 2013. Developing such an approach to its work is a very positive initiative on the part of Vita. The purpose of the Theory of Change paper is to address the questions of 'who', 'why' and 'how' in relation to Vita's approach and programming. The paper contains a significant amount of important information, including discussions around targeting, Vita's development strategy and an outline of thematic areas and expected impact. It is the opinion of the monitoring team however that the model presented is quite limited and that the richness of the text is not fully captured. There is considerable potential for a strong Theory of Change to more fully guide approaches and strategies at the field level.

There is also an Ethiopia Country Strategy for the period 2011-2015 which was the result of an extended consultation and reflection process in-country, involving a broad range of stakeholders. Similar to the organisational level Strategy, there is a clear articulation of the vision, mission, values and goal, but less clarity on how the Strategy builds on learning and experiences of programming. The Strategy describes very relevant aspects of the global context, however the country context is weak and does not provide a strong logic of intervention for the proposed objectives. This should be addressed in the development of the next Country Strategy, which will begin shortly.

2.2 Policy Framework

Comprehensive technical guidelines are in place at the project level, utilising as far as possible those which are already provided by the GoE, for example in regard to environmental conservation and water resources. Where project areas have their own local language, e.g. Chench, Vita arranges for the translation of these materials from Amharic. New technical guideline material is also provided (with involvement from Teagasc) to accompany technical innovations, and to maximise the understanding of these, e.g. in relation to the cultivation of improved potato varieties, Diffused Light Storage (DLS) of seed potatoes, or the successful management of bacterial wilt disease.

Vita and GoE extension staff have also jointly produced practical manuals offering guidance to support training and capacity building in non-technical - but crucially important – aspects. A notable example is in relation to the establishment and promotion of producer cooperatives; as well as being trained in technical specifics such as post-harvest management and disease control, cooperative members were being trained in topics such as meeting procedures, basic financial management, record keeping, business planning and the management of household and personal finances. Vita has also supported the recent Guidelines on Project Intervention Area and household Farmer Beneficiary Selection for Ethiopia (April 2015).

The development of other organisational policies has been significantly delayed by the time-consuming discussions regarding the anticipated alliance with the Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific (AFAP) and Concern Universal; a venture that now seems unlikely to come to fruition. It was expected that this alliance would enable Vita to tap into significant levels of expertise, however this has not turned out to be the case. This delay has been acknowledged in Annual Reports to Irish Aid. It has resulted in significant delays in terms of both systems and policy development.

Critical current policy gaps are in relation to an up-to-date partnership policy, a child protection policy (at both country and project levels) and a gender policy. A child protection policy was approved by Vita in November 2014, but this has not yet been adapted to the Ethiopian context and should be done so as a matter of priority. Until 2008, when the gender advisor position was vacated, there had been significant progress on developing policies and strategies on gender. Many policies were developed, including a Draft Gender Policy Discussion Paper (October 2008), a Gender Policy (Draft 2, November 2008), a Gender Assessment Framework (September 2008), an Organisational Gender Assessment First Draft Synthesis (October 2008) and a Gender and Livelihoods Baseline Study (2008). However unfortunately this investment did not translate into a strengthened focus on gender; the momentum has not been maintained and there is currently no policy on gender that informs project design, implementation and monitoring (apart from two clauses in the *Strategy 2011-15*). To address this gap Vita has commissioned a gender audit which is now underway and should form the basis for the formulation of policy support on gender. This should also influence the development of the Strategic Plans at organisational and country level.

Section Three: Intervention Approaches

3.1 Partnership

Vita's Strategic Plan 2011-2015 outlines the organisation's approach to partnership, whereby local partners (both government agencies and non-state actors) are regarded as "both joint implementers of projects and as replicators and disseminators of learning generated by projects." The Strategic Plan goes on to state that "Vita regards the Ministry of Agriculture [in operational countries] as a core partner in agriculture programmes, bringing research and extension resources, promoting sustainability at community level, and wider impact through replication and enhanced practice."

In 2010, internal organisational partnership guidelines were produced as an interim framework for identifying suitable and appropriate partners. The 2014 Annual Report to Irish Aid indicates these 'interim partnership guidelines' are still in place. According to the grant application to CSF (2013), "due to the increasing collaborative ventures and project consortia, new partnership guidelines and system will be developed during 2014/2015 to define standard practice from initial assessment to exit"; this definitive set of guidelines is still pending.

Vita Ethiopia has a very strong partnership with the GoE, at zonal, woreda and kebele levels, in the implementation of the CSF funded project. It was clear to the monitoring team that Vita is well respected by the GoE and is considered an extremely important partner at all levels. At the field level, Vita staff work hand in hand with the GoE extension workers and there is excellent coordination and collaboration, supported by formal structures such as the Woreda Implementation Team (bringing together officials from the divisions of Agriculture, Cooperative Promotion, Women's Affairs and Finance), and the Zonal Steering Committee (e.g. in Gamo Gofa). While this has been critical for the successful implementation of the project, and indeed is key in terms of sustainability and scale up, it is the opinion of the monitoring team that there is an attendant risk of Vita's character and identity as an NGO becoming too closely associated with the machinery of government. It is important that the flavour and distinctiveness of being an NGO finds expression in its approaches and ways of working. There is an opportunity to address such concerns in a carefully articulated Partnership Policy informed by stakeholder consultation and developed in consultation with senior management and Board.

Vita Ethiopia engages in numerous strategic partnerships, most notably within the Potato Coalition, which brings together a wide range of partners, spanning academia, civil society (international and national NGOs) and research institutes, and linking research, development and business across six African countries. More specifically, the agriculture research institutes, such as the Ethiopian Institute for Agricultural Research (EIAR), are key partners in the CSF project, focusing on seed development and quality. Through these partnerships Vita has successfully positioned itself to engage in and contribute to higher-level discourse at regional and national levels.

The CSF grant application commits the organisation to building local partner capacity, although it recognises that systems to assess partner capacity need strengthening. This is important if Vita is to follow-through on its commitment to on-granting, which is currently not a feature of this CSF project. There is also very limited support to building the capacity of civil society to implement effective projects and/or to hold the GoE to account. In order to make an organisational shift in this direction, the updating and finalisation of the partnership guidelines will be important.

3.2 Targeting

Vita's Programme Statement of Strategy states that the target group is poor rural households, with an emphasis on working with women, and female-headed households in particular. It is clear that target communities should have 'actual or potential access to the livelihood assets needed to enable the achievement of programme objectives'. This targeting approach is echoed in the Ethiopia Country Strategy. The CSF grant application provides an additional level of detail, noting that the target group comprises 'smallholder rural households in the Gamo Gofa zone of Ethiopia; more specifically, highland or midland mixed crop farmers, including a significant proportion of female headed households, who no longer have access to social transfers/safety net programmes or other external aid, but have not yet built sustainable livelihoods'.

Clear criteria for the selection of project sites are set out in the document entitled 'Project Intervention Area and Household Farmer Beneficiary Selection Guideline'. The approach taken in this document, identifying differentiated target groups for diverse project activities, is appropriate, and evidence on the ground suggested that the Guideline is being applied effectively. Local government authorities at kebele and woreda level provide the beneficiary list to Vita who then review and approve together with the community through a wealth ranking exercise. , As there is often a process of negotiation with government required before agreeing on the final beneficiary list it is critical that Vita has and communicates absolute clarity on its poverty focus. The targeting process should also critique the assumption that households chosen for future inclusion merit selection just because they had previously been beneficiaries of the PSNP. Transparency around the application of targeting criteria is as important for those that are *not* included in the list of selected beneficiaries, as for those that are – otherwise there is a risk that divisions and conflict can appear within the community.

Vita is clear that the activities requiring at least a modicum of access to land and resources, particularly potato seed production, do not target the poorest people in the community. Rather they target farmers with land, self-motivation and capacity to become 'progressive' or model farmers in their area. This approach makes sense and is consonant with considerations of value for money and multiplier effect in a project intervention such as this. However it would be good to have some assurance that the project is reaching down *as far as possible* in terms of poverty levels; so that it is not the most able farmers that are targeted, but those that have the minimum requirements for inclusion in the project.

It is clear that other activities, such as the vegetable production and ware potato production, target more vulnerable households. In addition, the use of communal land for potato seed production means that the landless are now participating in the project. The Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) is an excellent example of an activity that targets the whole community, including the most vulnerable households. It is the opinion of the monitoring team that while there are several activities that meet the needs of very vulnerable households, this is not currently coming across strongly. Vita could do more to articulate how it is including the less able farmers in the project and how vulnerabilities such as HIV are integrated into the targeting criteria. This would demonstrate a greater poverty focus than is currently presented in organisational and project documentation.

Another issue to be considered here is the rather restrictive way in which the project staff tend to define 'direct' beneficiaries. This descriptor is used to denote those with whom the project engages face to face, through for example capacity building, or through being a recipient of a donated asset such as seeds, a fuel-efficient cook stove

or rope-pump irrigation equipment. A lot of the indicators in the Results Framework focus on the number of individual farmers, rather than the number of households and people (in particular, children) who are benefiting from the project. For the CLTS component, it reports on the number of woredas covered rather than the number of households and individuals reached. The project may thus be in danger of understating the benefits conferred and ultimately the impact on quality of life amongst the communities in the target areas.

3.3 Sustainability

The close and consistent working relationship that Vita has with the GoE is a strong basis for sustainability. Some beneficiary kebeles from phase one of the project, which have already been ‘handed over’ to the GoE, have continued to show an increase in production. This demonstrates that changes brought about by the project continue after the initial phase of direct intervention. The cooperatives formed by groups of participant farmers are also an important approach for sustainability. The investment that Vita is making in building the capacity of the membership and leaderships of these cooperatives is undoubtedly of great long-term value.

There were also several examples of replication and scale-up. The GoE has scaled up potato production into new kebeles, however this potential for this is somewhat limited by the input intensive approach. Within the project areas, there were examples of individual farmers buying seeds (sometimes on credit) from lead farmers in the project, leading to replication of the project activities. This demonstrates that there is willingness on the part of farmers to purchase inputs. Discussions with the GoE also revealed that it recognises the powerful benefits of CLTS and is committed to scaling this up also in ‘non-project’ communities.

Although Vita’s 2014 Annual Report states it seeks to “avoid the payment of high-cost subsidies to target communities” (which is commendable), it is not clear from the report, nor from the field visit, what – if any – cost sharing arrangements exist (for example with beneficiaries of cook stoves and DLS seed potato stores). These are valuable assets which generate a stream of income to the household over time, and some mechanism for clawing back a portion of the initial investment would seem to be potentially worthwhile. Indications suggest that there is certainly a willingness on the part of the beneficiaries to make a contribution to the inputs (sometimes using credit from microfinance institutions). Looking ahead to future project-related inputs, the monitoring team urges Vita to incorporate an element of cost-sharing with individual beneficiary households in the provision of assets such as cook stoves, DLS stores and rope pump small-scale irrigation equipment.

3.4 Mainstreaming

The organisational Programme Statement of Strategy identifies the cross-cutting issues of gender, environment & climate change, climate change and disaster risk reduction, governance and human rights and HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. The Ethiopia Country Strategy specifically highlights gender and HIV/AIDS that are to be mainstreamed across all objectives. The CSF grant application is less clear on what issues are to be mainstreamed.

There is generally good awareness of the importance of addressing gender, with

ambitious targets in the Results Framework for levels of female participation. However with no strategy in place to promote female participation, particularly female headed households, it is quite possible that these targets will not be reached. The current focus is very limited to increasing numbers of women, while engaging at a more strategic level to address more qualitative aspects of gender, such as household decision-making, leadership and empowerment, is not yet an integral dimension of the project. It should be noted however that the monitoring team saw evidence of how the project is indeed bringing about such changes; the challenge is to engage more deliberately at this level and to capture this type of qualitative information in reporting. In terms of organisational profile, the monitoring team noted a pronounced imbalance in the gender composition of Vita's staff team both at Headquarters (HQ) and at country level.

Other mainstreaming issues are addressed in various parts of the project. Governance is a strong feature of the formation of the cooperatives and is included in the initial training. The training also integrates aspects of HIV, although the mainstreaming of HIV could have been stronger across the project (including within targeting criteria). Environment is addressed through the provision of drought resistant seeds and other climate-smart agricultural activity, the CLTS component and the fuel-efficient cook stoves. The issue of carbon credits did not feature in the monitoring visit proceedings (since this is confined to the Eritrea country programme). In any case, the international market volatility in the energy sector is such that Vita may wish to reconsider investing resources in attainment of the Gold Standard Certification.

3.5 Community Led Total Sanitation

Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) is a participative methodology for mobilising communities to completely eliminate open defecation. Communities are facilitated to conduct their own situation analysis, and take their own action to become Open Defecation Free (ODF). CLTS focuses on the behavioural change needed to ensure real and sustainable improvements – investing in community mobilisation instead of hardware, and shifting the focus from toilet construction for individual households to the creation of open defecation-free villages.⁵

The project documentation describes CLTS as an 'entry point' strategy; however this descriptor is not literally or consistently the case. Indeed it is often not the initial project intervention that is undertaken, with enhanced agricultural production interventions often starting before CLTS is triggered. As discussed previously, the monitoring team saw much potential for the CLTS to be much more than an 'entry point' – it is already evident that the approach is extremely effective for community mobilisation and is resulting in broader development gains for the community as a whole, in terms of health, environment and human dignity. The fact that the benefits are inclusive of the whole community is a useful counterbalance to the agricultural activities which tend to target the progressive farmer stratum of the community. This wider-angle appreciation of CLTS was well articulated in a 2010 Evaluation Report of Vita's earlier project work, which noted that *"This [CLTS] component of the intervention strategy is focused towards developing a stronger sense of social solidarity and self-respect, encouraging*

⁵ Source: www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/page/clts-approach

*collective local actions and mobilization of local resources for achieving common goals”.*⁶

Section Four: Results Based Management

4.1 Results Based Management (RBM) Systems

Even prior to the start of the 2014/5 CSF funded project, efforts have been made by Vita to move towards an RBM approach (broadly-defined). Steps in this direction have included the incorporation of Project Cycle Management (PCM) principles and practices, taking on aspects of the Department for International Development’s (DfID) Sustainable Livelihoods Framework on an experimental basis into programme structure and exploring the ‘Most Significant Change’ methodology as a way of generating reliable qualitative evidence on an ongoing basis. Efforts were also made to strengthen the Programme Sub-committee of the Board with a mandate to oversee programme quality and impact. In addition, from 2009 Vita successfully positioned itself as an implementing agent for European Union (EU) funding streams (comprising the multilateral ‘Food Facility’, plus in-country micro projects in Ethiopia and Eritrea). This required Vita staff in Ireland and country offices to follow the ‘Results Oriented Monitoring’ (ROM) protocols that accompany EU funding awards. Taken together, all of the above factors have created in Vita a reasonably strong institutional familiarity with the concepts and language of PCM (distinguishing between outputs, outcomes and impact), and with the tenets of a results focused approach.

However Vita’s rate of progress towards internalising a fully-fledged RBM approach slowed considerably in recent years as a result of several inter-related constraints, such as financial considerations, staff capacity, the investment of management and board time in a succession of negotiations on potential alliances and federations, the formation of the Irish Potato Coalition and the formation of the strategic partnership with Teagasc. Some progress was made in 2014 with the recruitment of a Programme Quality Officer in Ireland; an internal review of systems was subsequently undertaken and an action plan was produced which outlined 14 key areas for action. This has resulted in improvements in processes focusing on programme quality, such as a monitoring plan, increased support/supervision and capacity building (although this has focused on the narrower issue of monitoring rather than on an overall RBM approach).

The absence of a computer based Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system at country level however presents the biggest stumbling block towards the adoption of a strong RBM approach (the rationale for this is discussed further below). The 2014 Annual Report to Irish Aid noted that operating Irish Aid’s RBM approach and the EU ROM approach is a challenge, however much of this is due to the fact that the necessary systems are not in place. It is the opinion of the monitoring team that the systems and structures necessary to support an RBM approach remain weak and a considerable scale up of organisational investment and capacity building is necessary if this challenge is to be addressed.

⁶ Ryan, O. (2010). *Preliminary Evaluation of CLTS and Stoves in Chencha CLLD Project*. Page 6.

4.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

Vita Ethiopia has M&E Guidelines which situate M&E within the overall PCM and has two key functions, namely (i) providing systematic, evidence based tracking of the progress of each project, both for Vita's own needs and for its donors; and (ii) generating learning towards improving Vita projects and development practice. An annual M&E plan has recently been developed for the CSF project and this sets out how and when the indicators in the Results Framework will be measured.

There is robust collection of data at the field level, with field offices carrying out data collection in conjunction with relevant government colleagues and then submitting it to the project offices. The Vita M&E officer at the project office then collates this information and submits it to the Vita M&E officer in the country office. Information is also shared with government at local level. There is a significant amount of data collected, however at present this is mainly focused on progress in relation to the implementation of activities and is at the output level. It is also focused to a very large extent on the technical agronomy-related aspects - yields, areas under cultivation, plant and soil health, etc. The approach equates agricultural production results with development and does not capture important quality-of-life changes arising, for example, from improved household earnings, or the gender dimension of altered patterns in control over household-level resources and decision-making.

Mid-term reviews and final evaluations are carried out by the GoE for all NGO projects, in collaboration with NGO staff. These reviews and evaluations are mainly focused on the technical aspect of the project at the output level. If these reviews and evaluations are to be a useful exercise that can support an RBM approach, then some analysis on the effectiveness of approaches and whether they are contributing to the realisation of the outcomes is necessary. Vita should reflect on how this can be built into their monitoring and evaluation process. Not addressing this aspect of the project will mean that only the narrow technical benefits of the project will be recognised, while issues such as targeting, accountability, risk management, participation, etc. will be missed. This is currently an important missing part of Vita's RBM approach.

The absence of a computer based M&E system for the CSF project presents a serious obstacle to the analysis of data and the tracking of trends. Such data analysis is an essential part of any M&E system, and supports decisions regarding the ongoing implementation of the project. The tracking of trends over time facilitates an understanding of what is working and what is challenging, and leads to more effective project management. It also helps to provide an indication of whether outputs are contribution to the realisation of outcomes. For Vita, the development of a RBM approach requires a substantial investment both in terms of finances and capacity building, to ensure that an appropriate system is in place.

4.3 Progress Towards Outcomes

A standard part of Irish Aid monitoring visits is to assess the progress towards expected outcomes. This is based on the most recent narrative reports and Results Framework, alongside observations from the field visit. The monitoring team acknowledges that as this project is just beginning its second year, the reporting is still at the output level, rather than the outcome level. While this is understandable, there is a need to ensure that these outputs are contributing to the achievement of objectives and outcomes.

The Results Framework should facilitate such an approach, however the current format of the Results Framework does not support this. The format only lists what outputs have been achieved, but it is not clear if they are on track, nor whether they are contributing to the objectives or outcomes. This is the second (2 year) phase of what is essentially a four year project, and many of the baselines have therefore been carried forward. However this does mean that the targets relate to baselines from 2012, and the missing gap is what the starting point for this phase of the project is. This information is absolutely necessary if the indicators are to make sense and provide a useful planning tool.

The 2014 reporting to Irish Aid showed mixed progress. There were two main reasons for delays in certain areas. The first was due to delays in signing the MoUs with the zonal administrations. In Gamo Gofa zone, this was the second phase of the project, however the agreement of a new MoU took 4 months rather than the 1-2 months that were envisaged and it was only signed in August 2014. In Amhara, the new project area, Vita expected that the MoU would be in place by mid-year, however this was only completed in October 2014. While the monitoring team acknowledges that these processes are highly complex, it also considers that greater anticipation of the time that these processes can take could have prevented such delays in the start-up of the project. The second reason for a delay in some of the activities was the emergence of evidence of bacterial wilt in two operational woredas which required significant changes in Vita's approach to the provision of improved seeds to farmers and cooperatives. Vita responded to this in a responsible and appropriate manner although some anticipation of such a risk would have perhaps facilitated the decision making around the changes necessary (see Section 5.1).

The progress in 2014 as described in the annual narrative report and Results Framework is summarised below. Reporting is still very much focused at activity level.

Outcome 1: Improved Food Security and Increased Incomes through Seed and Ware Potato Production

Objectives: (1) Improved individual farmer productivity and overall production of Irish potato in four targeted woredas of two regions (SNNPR and Amhara)

(2) Established sustainable and profitable potato seed system operating in four target woredas.

(3) Improved household dietary quality and food habits in two target regions (SNNPR and Amhara)

Progress under Outcome 1 was mixed. Objective 1 is off track in SNNPR due to the incidence of bacterial wilt, although the monitoring team witnessed how this is being addressed on the ground and significant progress has been made to rectify the problem. There was limited progress in Amhara due to the delay in reaching the agreement. For Objective 2, this is also impacted by the bacteria wilt in SNNPR, although progress has been made in strengthening the capacity of cooperatives and increasing female participation. This was apparent during discussions with cooperative members during the field visit. In Amhara, there are again delays due to the delays in signing the agreement, and much activity is planned for 2015. Under Objective 3 there was little progress, with the exception of establishing a baseline in Amhara and the recruitment of a nutritionist.

Outcome 2: Improved Livelihoods Due to Access and Use of Latrines and Fuel-Efficient Stoves

- Objectives:**
- (1) Improved sanitation, health and local environment through construction and use of latrines
 - (2) Community led livelihood systems developed out of CLTS intervention in two target woredas
 - (3) Reduced dependency on firewood evidenced amongst target groups in two woredas through construction of stoves

Progress under Outcome 2 was also mixed. The target for latrine construction was not met; however sensitisation, mobilisation and training continued. A review of ODF kebeles was carried out which has formed that basis for the action plan in 2015. As planned there was no recorded progress under Objective 2. The annual report notes that as a result of the CLTS, communities requested support in areas beyond livelihoods. Rather than dismissing this, Vita could explore how these wider developmental initiatives can be supported. Progress under Objective 3 is largely on track. The trial is well under way and a full assessment will be carried out in 2015.

Outcome 3: Improved Capacity of Local Government and Civil Society Institutions to Scale-Up Interventions

- Objectives:**
- (1) Creation of a scalable and sustainable model for CLTS, Potato production and hybrid highland maize seed multiplication by farmers groups.
 - (2) Local government and CSOs driving projects in Zonal Steering Committee and in position to plan, evaluation and replicate potato and CLTS interventions in the zone.

The annual narrative reports cite good progress on this outcome. It refers in particular to the strong response from local government and civil society to the incidence of bacteria wilt and the strengthening of the Potato Centre of Excellence. The Results Framework refers to examples of scale-up of CLTS but it would seem that scale-up of potato seed (evidence of which was provided in the field) is not being captured in reporting. It was clear from the monitoring visit that capacity building efforts were previously concentrated on local government personnel, however more efforts are now beginning to be directed to civil society, in the form of the nascent agricultural cooperative movement in Chenchu and Dita; in the monitoring team's view, this is a welcome move.

4.4 Policy engagement and Working at Different Levels

Given the relatively small size of Vita as an organisation and the size of the CSF project, the level of policy engagement at different levels is impressive. Vita is actively engaged in dialogue around policy and practice in a way that is well-thought through, appropriate to the operational context and very strategic. Its policy engagement is closely aligned with its technical competence, for example on issues such as seed certification, cook stoves, cooperatives registration, and climate-sensitive agriculture. This results in a strong link between policy and practice that has considerable benefits for all of the projects in the country programme.

Vita operates effectively at micro, meso and macro level and there are strong linkages between the different levels of engagement. One good example of this way of working is the potato initiative. At the micro level, the monitoring team saw first-hand evidence of how better seeds, improved varieties, more effective farming methods and post-harvest storage can treble the previous average yield of 8 tonnes per hectare. With these higher yields, the smallholders can not only feed their families better, but can sell their surplus for cash and boost household income, quality of life, health status and educational opportunity of children. At meso level, the formation of area farmers' cooperatives is being galvanised by a regional-level Farmers' Cooperative Union (e.g. Arba Minch). Bringing together 21 member cooperatives representing some 7,000 individual farmers, this Union provides a vital link in the market chain, whereby producers can gain access to national markets and beyond, not only for their potatoes, but for mangos, bananas and vegetables as well. Furthermore, the bulking of farm produce opens up potential for downstream processing and value addition. At macro level, Vita is the prime mover in the Irish Potato Coalition, which brings together a wide range of partners, spanning academia, civil society (international and national NGOs) and research institutes, and linking research, development and business across six African countries.

4.5 Learning

Vita is firmly committed to generating learning and innovation. For the most part this is achieved through its strategic partnerships. The current Vita / Irish Aid agreement identifies a number of project components that have a learning dimension, such as:

- to build on the partnership between Teagasc and the EARI to introduce research led agriculture to rural households;
- to continue to develop the Potato Centre of Excellence and its associated benefits;
- to complete a review of its approach on low-energy cook stoves to ensure sustainable local production, marketing and purchase of stoves (a collaboration with the Gates Foundation).

Vita has also carried out research that is linked to the Green Zone project. A very positive aspect of this has been the joint support (by Vita, Teagasc and Wageningen University) of three PhD studies that have relevance to the Green Zone project. These PhDs have a blend of academic and practitioner credentials, and are contributing valuable learning from their research. The PhDs are producing rigorous academic research, in ways that bridge 'research into practice' and research findings should ultimately feed back into improved agronomic practices and into better programme quality for Vita and other associated stakeholders. In the course of the scientific investigative work being done by one of the PhD students (who is also a staff member of the EARI), the presence of bacterial wilt disease in Chench and Dita woredas was diagnosed. The PhD student is now working closely with the project team to put in place remedial measures as part of a significantly adapted programme of work.

While significant data is being collected from the field, there is considerably less learning emanating from the monitoring and tracking of results. This is acknowledged by Vita and the 2014 Annual Report to Irish Aid noted that "the structured learning which arises out of tracking results at outcome level remains a challenge for Vita". A substantial amount of data is being collected, however the data is not being sufficiently analysed and it is therefore not providing the evidence and learning necessary for it to

inform programme design and implementation. This is a real missed opportunity as there is huge potential for a wealth of valuable learning at project level. For any operational agency such as Vita an effective RBM system is crucial for organisational learning and improved learning from project implementation should be central to efforts to strengthen the RBM approach.

Section Five: Governance and Financial Oversight

5.1 Risk

In recent years Vita in Ireland has made efforts to improve its oversight and management of risk. Vita approved a short 'Risk Policy' document in late 2014, which committed the agency to maintaining an organisational risk register and to analysing and managing risk at board, management and country levels. Subsequently, in March 2015, Vita in Ireland produced a detailed 'Risk Assessment' document, in which risks are grouped under three categories: *Strategic and Governance Risks* (including reputational risk and the risk of overstretched capacity – this being intrinsic to an organisation of Vita's size); *Operational Risks* (including those in-country which lie at least partially within Vita's control), and *Environmental Risks* (associated with geopolitics and higher-level exogenous factors).

Accompanying this assessment, an initial attempt has been made to formulate a Risk Register, although the proposed mitigation measures (or 'additional actions' as they are called) are rather tentative and lack details. For example, 'societal [risk] in Ireland' (a vaguely defined eventuality) may be mitigated by the 'partnerships with home-based causes'; while 'staff security in unstable environments' may be mitigated by 'ensuring country managers are sufficiently protected'. According to the register financial risk is to be mitigated by the Audit, Finance and Governance Sub-committee of the Board being required to sign off on any new projects that involve co-financing liability (thereby exercising its oversight responsibility). In reality this does not reflect the full role and duties of the Audit, Finance and Governance Sub-committee who review a broad range of issues relating to risk and financial oversight on a quarterly basis.

At the country level, the monitoring team felt that insufficient attention is given to risk. Certain risks are indeed set out in the annual Business Plan, but this is limited and there is no evidence of mitigation strategies in place at this level. Consequently, there are gaps which mean corrective action is not prioritised or contingency planning does not take place. One gap is the risk of a child protection issue and a clear mitigation measure is that clear child protection policies and procedures need to be in place. A risk that was not anticipated was the delay to the implementation of the Green Zone project arising from delayed approval of the new Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). Had this been identified, then improved planning may have taken place. Similarly the diagnosis of bacterial wilt disease had not been picked up on the radar of any existing risk assessment. While the remedial action being taken by Vita on foot of the unambiguous research evidence of this outbreak is commendable (in the face of initial resistance from both farmers and Ministry officials who were in denial about the major implications of the findings), it serves as a reminder of the potential risks arising from defective seed or plant disease, which could be inadvertently spread as a consequence of Vita's commitment to scaling-up and replication.

While the monitoring team acknowledges that there has been some improvement in relation to risk management, this is largely limited to Vita in Ireland. It is not clear how risk management is effectively integrated into ongoing programme management at country level– while there is a very brief ‘Risk and Risk Management’ section for each country’s Results Framework, the programme level Results Framework does not include any risks and risk is not discussed in the quarterly reports. There is scope for more robust risk management generally, but in particular for much greater rigour regarding the whole area of risk management at country level. A more comprehensive and structured way of addressing risk, involving a broad representation of management from in-country and headquarters is necessary. This should inform ongoing programme management and should be an integral part of a strengthened RBM approach.

5.2 Accountability

Vita is very strong on upwards accountability to donors. Vita provides a high level of reporting to Irish Aid and over the years there have been frank and honest discussions regarding the challenges facing the organisation. Vita also has a high level of horizontal accountability – both the GoE and other bodies, namely research institutions. As is standard requirement in Ethiopia, detailed MoUs are in place with government, and Vita provides reporting at all levels of operation. Vita has also put in place structured agreements underpinned by MoUs with the various bodies with which it has ‘horizontal’ linkages, e.g. Teagasc, Wageningen University (NL), Caritas, SOS Sahel Ethiopia, Farm Africa, the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry. Clarity around these relationships, particularly in relation to roles and responsibilities, is extremely positive.

Downwards accountability to beneficiaries does take place in the form of regular consultation and it was clear from the monitoring visit that there is regular contact and communication between the beneficiaries and the project field staff (which includes Vita and government staff). It would seem that the structured mechanisms to solicit feedback from farmers, communities and partners are confined to government standard procedures and norms, which seem unlikely to yield honest responses. Within the acknowledged constraints of the operating environment, there may be scope for more informal ways of consulting with communities.

There are some clear opportunities for increasing informal dialogue, such as through the community mobilisation work associated with CLTS as well as the engagement with producers and marketing cooperatives. The information that is gathered should feed into the regular data analysis and should then inform project management. As with risk management, accountability is a key tenet of an effective RBM system, and should be looked on as a tool to improve effectiveness and project management. The 2014 Annual report to Irish Aid noted that the planned Partnership Guidelines would also address Vita’s accountability relationship with its local partners and this is to be encouraged.

5.3 Systems

The monitoring team was satisfied that strong systems for finance, procurement and human resources are in place. At HQ level, Vita has produced formal policy statements on Health and Safety and on Child Protection, as well as Audit, Reserves, Fraud and Value for Money. At country level, this is complemented with an Ethiopian Finance Manual and an Ethiopian Human Resources Manual. A key challenge is the gender imbalance amongst staff both in the Vita Dublin office and in the Ethiopia country programme. The Ethiopian Human Resources Manual is distinctly gender-neutral and does not provide any commitments or describe any proactive approaches to address the gender imbalance.

With the recruitment of a Programme Quality Officer in Ireland in 2013, an internal review of systems was subsequently undertaken and an action plan was produced which outlined fourteen key areas for action. This has resulted in improvements in processes focusing on programme quality, such as a monitoring plan, increased support/supervision and capacity building.

Section Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The monitoring team concluded that the Vita Green Zone project is making an important contribution to the livelihoods of farmers in the targeted areas. The project has a very strong technical focus, with an emphasis on innovative agronomic practices and value chain strengthening. The investment that Vita is making in building the capacity of the membership and leaderships of cooperatives is undoubtedly of great long-term value. Through the CLTS, considerable broader development benefits are also felt at community level. Strategic partnerships and a strong evidence base support scale-up and replication. Moving forward, issues for consideration and reflection include the narrow technical focus, the approach to targeting, the scope for cost-recovery approaches, and the role of CLTS. Critical areas that should be addressed as a matter of priority (and highlighted in any future proposal) include the policy framework for child protection and gender, risk management (particularly at country level) and the system in place to support monitoring and the development of a RBM approach. These issues are discussed in the recommendations.

6.2 Recommendations

Strategy and Policy

- ✚ As it approaches an important phase of strategic planning, it is important for Vita to ensure that the new strategies are informed by a wide-ranging and thorough context analysis (beyond the sector-specific technical perspective), in order to provide a solid basis for a broader developmental approach to the country programmes. A broader context analysis will also provide a strong logic of intervention between different project components such as stoves, CLTS and agricultural production.
- ✚ Vita should work with its in-country teams, its partners and its beneficiaries to take a broader view of development, so as to discern how best to situate its niche contribution within the wider development context.

- ✚ As a matter of priority, a Child Protection policy should be developed and in-place at country level. The Child Protection policy that was approved by Vita in November 2014, can inform this work, as well as child protection policies of other INGOs in Ethiopia.
- ✚ New partnership guidelines should be finalised. These guidelines should provide a clear framework and operational guidance for the range of actual and potential partners. They should clarify how, within the strictures of the operating context of Ethiopia (and Eritrea), Vita can work more closely with / build the capacity of civil society, while at the same time maintaining its position of trust with government

Programme Approaches

- ✚ Vita should ensure absolute clarity regarding its targeting criteria and targeting strategies in order to demonstrate a strong poverty focus. The criteria and targeting strategies should articulate how they address different vulnerabilities.
- ✚ In order to facilitate replication and scale-up and to build sustainability, Vita should explore opportunities to incorporate an element of cost-sharing with individual beneficiary households in the provision of assets such as improved seeds, cook stoves and rope pump small-scale irrigation equipment.
- ✚ At the organisational level, Vita should ensure that appropriate policy guidance is in place to inform its approach to gender. Within the Green Zone project, clear strategies are necessary to ensure that targets regarding the participation of women are met. A more strategic approach to gender should also explore how to address and measure issues of empowerment and equity.
- ✚ CLTS should be regarded by Vita and its GoE partner agencies as giving expression to an ethos of social inclusion and as a core project element for community mobilisation and cohesion, running in parallel with and complementary to the technical agronomic aspects .

Results Based Management Systems

- ✚ Vita should intensify its efforts to develop and operationalise an RBM approach. Key to this is the establishment of a computer based monitoring system at country level that facilitates robust data analysis. Headquarters must drive this process and provide clear direction, quality assurance oversight and capacity building for both vita staff and partners.

Governance and Financial Oversight

- ✚ Vita should strengthen its organisational approach to risk management, ensuring that its approach incorporates appropriate mitigation measures. Particular attention should be paid to rectifying the gaps in risk assessment, management and mitigation at country office level. Senior Management and Board should support and lead this process.

- ✚ The stated organisational commitment to gender equity should be translated into concrete commitments and strategies in relevant HR policies and manuals. This is a pre-requisite to addressing (in the medium term) the marked gender imbalance that exists within the ranks of staff at headquarters and field levels.

Irish Aid Programme Grant: Monitoring Visit of Vita in Ethiopia, April 2015

1. Introduction

Irish Aid, the Government's overseas development programme, engages in partnerships with development NGOs in order to further its policy objectives reflected in Ireland's Policy for International Development – *One World, One Future* – as well as the Irish Aid Civil Society Policy (2008). Ireland's policy framework recognises the role of Irish non-governmental organisations in supporting the delivery of basic services and in facilitating vulnerable people to come together and participate in the development of their communities.

Field level monitoring visits are a key element of the monitoring strategy for NGO partners in receipt of Civil Society Fund grants. The findings of these visits help to deepen Irish Aid's understanding of the work of the organisations and inform the direction of any future partnerships.

2. Background

The Civil Society Fund (CSF), which has been in operation since March 2006, is designed to provide funding for small scale development projects of Irish civil society organisations and selected invited international organisations. Its overall objective is to strengthen the capacity and voice of civil society organisations and to promote sustainable development, human rights and social justice. It involves an annual competitive grant round for NGOs engaged in development work in particular priority areas. Funding is allocated for one to three year periods up to a maximum of €200,000 per annum. The application and appraisal process is designed around a set of appraisal standards based on international best practice. Partners are expected to demonstrate a commitment to results and approaches that promote partnership, capacity building and participation.

3. Vita - Funding and Programmes

Vita has been an Irish Aid partner since 2001. Vita evolved from Refugee Trust International which was established in Ireland in 1989 and rebranded as Vita in 2006. Vita supports projects in Ethiopia and Eritrea and its main focus is to tackle household food insecurity through community led sustainable projects that are scalable and can be replicated, with a special focus on women.

In 2008, the organisation received three year block grant funding of €2.275m. In 2012, following appraisal of Vita's programme of work and results frameworks, Irish Aid agreed further two year funding of €700,000. This was subject to certain conditions, including Vita taking steps to strengthen its financial reserves and secure its future

viability. In Eritrea Vita worked on improved stoves and research led agriculture. In Ethiopia, Vita commenced a four year programme of research led agriculture focused on targeting small-scale potato growers for the dissemination of improved potato seed. In 2012, Vita launched the Potato Centre of Excellence and brought together bodies working in Science, Business and Development.

Funding for 2014 and 2015 was approved by Minister of State Costello in July 2014. The grant of €350,000 per annum from the Civil Society Fund was for the continuation of the previous work in Eritrea and Ethiopia. The programme of work is in the areas of:

- The empowering of women to sustain their families and their natural environment;
- The provision of innovative support for farmers to produce more food and become self-reliant; and
- The enabling of local communities & countries to access resources to lead their own development

The key results expected from the project are:

- a) In Eritrea, Vita will continue with its project of dissemination of improved cook stoves as well as forestry planting.
- b) They will also build on their partnership with Teagasc, and the National Agriculture Research Institute to introduce research led agriculture to rural households;
- c) In Ethiopia, Vita will continue to develop the potato centre of excellence and its associated benefits.
- d) Vita will complete a review of its approach on stoves to ensure sustainable local production, marketing and purchase of stoves and 1,000 new stoves will be in place by the end of 2014.

Funding:

Year	Amount	Grant Type
2008 - 2010	€2.275 million	Block Grant
2012 - 2013	€700,000	CSF Funding
2014 -	€350,000	CSF Funding

4. Purpose and Scope of Monitoring Visit

The purpose of the monitoring visit is twofold. Firstly, the monitoring team will assess the extent of Vitas' progress towards expected project outcomes as set out in the Results Framework. Secondly, the monitoring team will assess how the policies, systems and approaches are being applied at field level

The monitoring team will focus on the appraisal criteria from the CSF application form. Particular attention will be paid to the conditions set out for funding. A broad outline of the scope of each area that will be addressed by the monitoring team is set out below.

4.1 Appraisal Criteria

The monitoring visit will examine in particular:

- (a) Evidence that the organisation works from a sound strategic and policy basis
 - The extent to which Vita's stated strategies and policies are implemented in the field to support effective programme implementation.
 - Whether there is evidence of a contribution to aid effectiveness in-country.
 - The nature of Vita's engagement with local partners in the field and what plans are in place to strengthen the scale and nature of these partnerships.
 - The extent to which Vita is strengthening the capacity and voice of civil society.
 - Whether the project is underpinned with relevant and sufficient technical expertise and quality assurance from HQ and in-country.
 - How the project contributes to the objectives of the CSF and the level of coherence with Irish Aid priorities.

- (b) Evidence of Change Achieved (in development outcomes) from Irish Aid funding
 - Whether there is evidence that there has been positive change for specific groups of poor and vulnerable people and the potential for scale up and sustainability of this change.
 - Whether changes at the micro level are / have the potential to influence development processes or policy at the meso/macro level.
 - How Vita views its contribution to the change process at various levels of operation.

- (c) Evidence of a Clear Logic of Intervention in the Proposed Programme of Work
 - The evidence base and contextual analysis that underpins Vita's project in Ethiopia.
 - The targeting strategies to address vulnerable groups and how they will benefit from the intervention.
 - Evidence that priority issues are mainstreamed across the project.
 - Evidence that the project is responsive to the local and national context.
 - Extent of consultation with and participation of the beneficiaries across the project cycle.
 - How Vita uses evidence, research, piloting, innovation, etc., to inform project design and strategy.
 - How Vita addresses the various aspects of project sustainability – benefits, partner capacity, exit strategies, etc.

- (d) Results-Based Management Systems

- The systems in place at country level (national level and project level) to support management for development results and plans for strengthening the RBM approach.
- The baseline data that has been collected and how this is used to demonstrate results.
- The monitoring system in place and evidence of how this can track whether activities are on/off track and trigger appropriate responses.
- How the advocacy is linked to the field work and its contribution to bringing about change.

(e) Governance and Financial Oversight

- The risk management system that is in place at field level to monitor and mitigate a range of risks.
- How Vita manages the risk associated with onward granting to partners.
- How Vita ensures accountability and transparency in project implementation and in relation to its stakeholders.
- What systems and resources are in place to support the project and results based management approach, e.g. financial systems, human resources and logistics.

5. Methodology and Itinerary

At HQ level the assignment will include:

- ✓ preparatory discussions (to agree ToRs, identify relevant documentation and finalise programme/timing for the field work)
- ✓ a review of relevant documentation to inform the visit to the field
- ✓ meetings and/or video/phone conferences with Vita staff from HQ (regarding systems and support between headquarters and Ethiopia, particularly in the areas of policy guidance, programming/planning, quality assurance and oversight)
- ✓ Monitoring Report and Management response will be discussed at annual bi-lateral meeting between Irish Aid and Vita .

The tentative schedule/itinerary at field level is in a subsequent Appendix.

6. Expected Outputs

Within 6-8 weeks of the monitoring visit, a draft report will be completed that will include findings, analyses, key lessons, and recommendations. The report will be shared with Vita Ireland to allow for correction of any factual errors or inaccuracies. Vita Ireland will be expected to prepare a management response to the final report, which will be reviewed, along with the final report, at a meeting between Irish Aid and Vita Ireland.

It should be noted that any correspondence with Irish Aid in relation to the review is subject to the application of Freedom of Information legislation.

7. Project Officer

The monitoring team will comprise consultant, Peter McEvoy, who has been engaged by Irish Aid to lead the monitoring visit, as well as staff from the Irish Aid Civil Society and Development Education Unit, Susan Fraser and Oonagh O'Connor.

8. Reference Documents

Contract between Irish Aid and Vita 2014
Memorandum of Understanding 2014
Letter re Grant 2014
CSF Grant Applications
CSF Grant Appraisals
CSF Grant Results Frameworks
CSF Annual Reports
CSF Grant Correspondence

Vita

Annual Reports to Irish Aid
Applications to Irish Aid
Business Plans
Dublin Office Staff Visits
Engagement with Partners
Ethiopia Presentations
Gender
Governance
Green Zone Project Areas
MoUs
Organograms
Policy Documents
Programme Quality
Programme Strategy
Quarterly Reports
Evaluation
Research
Risk Register

Annex 2: Itinerary and Map of project sites

Irish Aid Monitoring Visit to Vita Ethiopia 20th -24th April 2015

Monday 20th	
Time	Activity
08.30	Arrive Vita office (transport provided by embassy) Meet Staff / Introductions
08.45	Overview of country programme: budget, donor base, various programmes, organogram Overview of Country Strategy and its process / context analysis Partnership approach Risk Management Asfaw Mekuria, country director
09.45	Overview of IA Green Zone programme – strengths, challenges, results for 2014. - Solomon Kebede
10.30	Learning: development focussed research links, examples of lessons learned from project work, dissemination, contribution to policy and practice Results Based Mgt Systems approach (at organisational level) Solomon Kebede, Programme Manager
11:30	Depart to airport (lunch at airport)
14:00	Depart Addis
	Arrive Arba Minch
17:00	Arrive Vita office in Arba Minch and meeting of Vita staff . led by Tsehayu Kassie (Office Head)
17.15	The programme's approach to M&E, working at different levels, targeting, mainstreaming, sustainability, resilience, accountability. – Ermias Guta
18.30	Leave office
19.00	Arrive Paradise Lodge Hotel

Tuesday 21st - Visit at Chench Woreda Project sites	
Time	Activity
07:30 – 09:00	Travel to the project site
09:00 – 12:00	Visiting Doko Yoyra potato farmers' cooperative members, communal seed store Visit 2-3 private potato farmers field and their private seed store

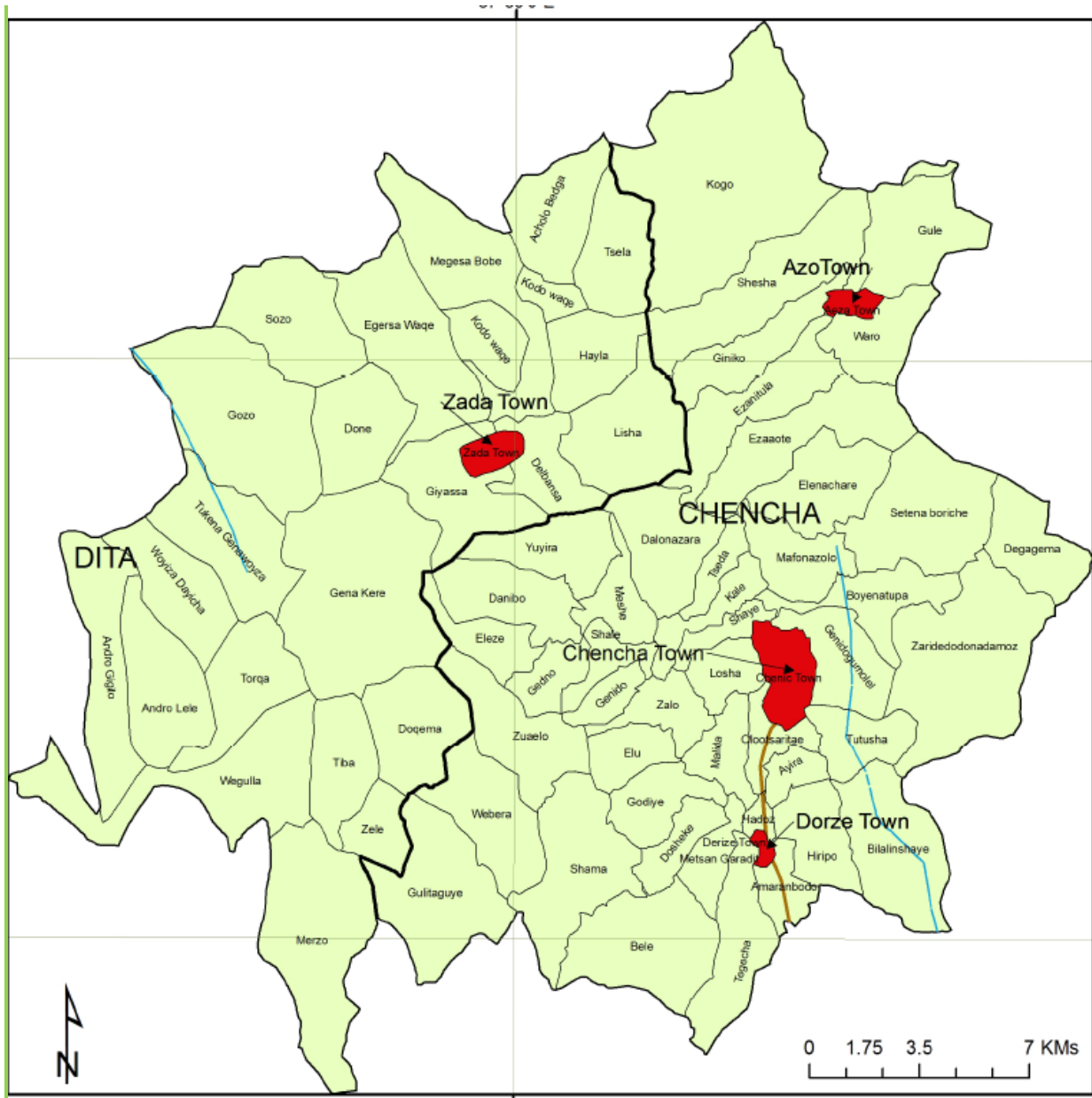
	Visit 2 vegetable producers who are using rope pump to lift Irrigation water
	CLTS Visit Households and communal latrines
12:00	Lunch Break
13.30	Visit 2-3 households who are using improved stove at Gendo Gembela Kebele
14.00	Visit 2-3 households who are using with the improved stove at Chencha Town
14.30	Discussion with the Chencha woreda implementing team in the office of the chief administrator
15.30	Visit the new potato cooperative, the new seed multiplication site, Visit 2-3 farmers in highland maize production
17.00 – 18.30	Travel back to Arba Minch

Weds 22nd – Visit at Dita Woreda Project sites	
Time	Activity
07:30 – 09:15	Travel to the project site
09.15	Visit Kodo Kebele potato farmers' cooperative, new multiplication site, farmers field and their private seed store
10:30	Visit 2-3 households farmers potato field and seed in private seed store
11:30	Discussion with the Dita woreda implementing team
12:30	Lunch Break
13:30	CLTS Visit Households and communal latrines
14:30	Debriefing in the coordination office
15.30	Travel back to Arba Minch
17.15	Meet and Discuss with Ato Tilahun Kebede (Zonal Chief Administrator)/His deputy/ Zonal steering Committee members

Thursday 23rd	
Time	Activity
09.00	Depart Hotel for airport
10.35	Depart Arba Minch
12.45	Arrive Addis

13.30	Meet Brehanu Taye - EU Delegation
15.00	Meet with EIAR (Gebremhedin Woldegiorgis) and PhD student (Abdulwahab)
16.30	Vita Ethiopia Country Office Systems – Finance, admin, HR - Akalu Gebreyes
18.30	Leave Vita office

Friday 24th	
Time	Activity
09.00	Feedback from IA Monitoring Team to Country Office management team
12.00	Working lunch with Aileen O'Donovan, Development Specialist, Irish Embassy Addis
15.00	Meeting with Kate Corcoran, Country Director of Concern Worldwide.
18.00	Overview from Paul Sherlock, Head of Development, Irish Embassy Addis



Legend

- IA Green zone project woredas
- Kebele Boundary
- Towns
- Roads
- Rivers



Annex 3: List of Persons Met

	Name	Designation	Location
	VITA		
1.	John Weakliam	Chief Executive	Dublin
2.	Seamus Crosse	Chair	Dublin
3.	John Gilliland	Programmes Manager	Dublin
4.	John Wallace	Company Secretary	Dublin
5.	Brendan Clerkin	Financial Controller	Dublin
6.	Thomas Caffrey Osvald	Programme Quality	Dublin
7.	Asfaw Mekuria	Vita Ethiopia Country Director	Addis Ababa Vita office
8.	Solomon Kebede	Programme manager	Addis Ababa Vita office
9.	Akalu Gebreyes	Finance and Admin Manager	Addis Ababa Vita office
10.	Tsehayu Kassie	Project Coordinator, Green Zone	Arba Minch Vita office
11.	Tadele Girma	Potato Agronomist	Arba Minch Vita office
12.	Ermias Guta	Planning, M&E officer	Arba Minch Vita office
13.	Yenenesh Gebresilase	PhD candidate, Vita-Teagasc-Wageningen partnership	Arba Minch Vita office
14.	Abaresh Tumuko	Potato beneficiary	Chencha Woreda, Doko kebele
15.	Asnakech Keda	Rope and Washer Pump Beneficiary	Chencha Woreda, Doko kebele
16.	Sisay Bekele	Potato beneficiary	Chencha Woreda, Doko kebele
17.	Banda Orcho	Doko Yoyra Potato Seed Multiplier Cooperative-Chairman	Chencha Woreda, Doko kebele

18.	Abera Alula	Doko Yoyra Potato Seed Multiplier Cooperative-Cashier	Chencha Woreda, Doko kebele
19.	Tesfaye and Birkenesh	Potato beneficiaries	Chencha Woreda, Doko kebele
20.	Asfaw Jarrah	Clean potato seed cooperative chairman	Chench Woreda, Dallo kebele
21.	Gesho Gello	Chief Administrator, Chencha woreda	Chench Woreda, Dallo kebele
22.	Melkamu Tonche	Head of Health Office-Chencha Woreda	Chench Woreda, Dallo kebele
23.	Asres Desta	Chencha woreda agronomist	Chench Woreda, Dallo kebele
24.	Alemayehu Algo	Head of Office of Agriculture-Chencha Woreda	Chench Woreda, Dallo kebele
	Vita Office, Chencha Town		
25.	Lemma Wondimu	Vita Chencha Woreda Project Officer	Vita office, Chencha Town
26.	Mulugeta Jiru	IA Project CLTS Officer	Vita office, Chencha Town
27.	Bahiru Tibebu	Vita Chencha DA	Vita office, Chencha Town
28.	Mebratu Molla	Vita Chencha DA	Vita office, Chencha Town
29.	Dollie Doitse	CLTS- in direct beneficiary	Lisha kebele, Dita Woreda
30.	Mamo Saffa and Chache Ichate	Potato beneficiaries	Lisha kebele, Dita Woreda
31.	Abebech Asene	Health Extension	Lisha kebele, Dita Woreda
32.	Gassa Kolpaye	Kebele Administrator	Lisha kebele, Dita Woreda
33.	Kastro Kere	Kindergarten teacher	Lisha kebele, Dita Woreda
34.	Ayga Agena	Commander in chief (kebele)	Lisha kebele, Dita Woreda
35.	Maze Nigusie	Kebele speaker of house	Lisha kebele, Dita Woreda

36.	Alashe Koisha	Rope and Washer pump beneficiary	Gyasa kebele, Dita Woreda
37.	Ayante Asfaw	Potato beneficiary	Gyasa kebele, Dita Woreda
38.	Oke Bollie	Chief Administrator	Dita Town
39.	Andualem Girma	Agricultural office representative	Dita Town
40.	Getachew Atumo	Advisor to the chief administrator	Dita Town
41.	Aynalem Tadesse	Vita Project Officer	Dita Town
42.	Wolde churko	Vita Dita DA	Dita Town
43.	Terefe Kuso	Vita Dita DA	Dita Town
44.	Tilahun Kebede	Zonal Administrator	Zonal Administrative Centre, Arba Minch
45.	Tassew Chocho	Tourism Head	Zonal Administrative Centre, Arba Minch
46.	Teferi Abate	Finance and Development Head	Zonal Administrative Centre, Arba Minch
47.	Mulugeta Dejene	Gamo Gofa Fruit and Vegetable Cooperative Union – Marketing Officer	GGFCVU Arba Minch Office
48.	Melaku Darcho	GGFCVU- Accountant	GGFCVU Arba Minch Office
49.	Brehanu Taye	Task Manager, Rural Development Section, EU Delegation	EU office, Addis Ababa
50.	Gebre-medhin Woldegiorgis	Senior Potato Researcher, Ethiopian Institute for Agricultural Research, Holeta	Vita office, Addis Ababa
51.	Abdulwahab Abdurahman	PhD candidate, Vita-Teagasc-Wageningen	Vita office, Addis Ababa
52.	Paul Sherlock	Head of Development	Embassy of Ireland, Addis Ababa

53.	Aileen O'Donovan	Development Specialist	Irish Embassy Addis Ababa
54.	Kate Corcoran	Country Director, Concern Worldwide	Concern Worldwide, Addis Ababa