



Ministero degli Affari Esteri  
e della Cooperazione Internazionale

**micro**finanza

# PROGRAMME TO COUNTER IRREGULAR MIGRATION THROUGH THE SUPPORT TO PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT PLASEPRI II SENEGAL - AID 11070

SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION REPORT  
MAY 2025



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***EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME TO COUNTER IRREGULAR MIGRATION THROUGH THE SUPPORT TO PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT - PLASEPRI II (AID 11070).***

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The PLASEPRI II evaluation was entrusted to Microfinanza srl through a direct awarding procedure, pursuant to Article 50 of the Italian Public Contracts Code.

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Design: Microfinanza

## Summary

Programme data sheets .....	4
Acronyms and abbreviations.....	6
<b>1. Summary.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. Summary of the Evaluation Report.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	9
2.2 Scope and objectives of the evaluation .....	9
2.3 Theory of Change.....	12
2.4 Evaluation methods and tools .....	12
2.5 The evaluation matrix.....	12
<b>3. Cross-cutting objectives .....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Human Rights .....	13
3.2 Environmental Sustainability .....	14
3.3 Gender Equality.....	14
<b>4. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>17</b>
5.1 Strategic recommendations .....	17
5.2 Organisational and operational recommendations .....	18

## Programme data sheets

Country	Senegal
Programme title	PLASEPRI
Proposing entity	Ministry of Economy and Finance of Senegal
Execution Agency	AICS
Performing Entities	AICS and Senegal's Ministry of Economy and Finance
Programme approval date	Joint Committee Resolution No. 88 of 3/10/2016; entry into force of the Financial Agreement communicated by CDP 26 September 20218, AICS Dakar Protocol 18/12/2018.
Programme duration	36 months
Programme changes	Budget change request with reallocation of Micro-Venture Capital resources to the SME (60%) and microfinance (40%) credit line - 30 December 2022 Extension of credit utilisation period (limit date extended to 23 September 2023) Reallocation of resources from Micro-Venture Capital to SME Refinancing and Microfinance Lines (as per Steering Committee instructions of 30 June 2021) New request for extension of the credit utilisation period (25 September 2024) Request for second tranche of EUR 4,000,000 (20 September 2024) New request for extension of credit line utilisation (31 December 2025)
Flows	First tranche disbursement 6 March 2019 of EUR 5,000,000 Accreditation second tranche 16 January 2025 of EUR 4,000,000
Evaluation date	December 2024 - April 2025

*Table1 - Data on the PLASEPRI II Programme*

General Objective	Contributing to poverty reduction and socio-economic development in areas with high migration flows.
Impact	Creating employment for young people and women and enhancing resources investors from the Senegalese diaspora in Italy through the opening of credit lines for financing Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
Results	R1 - At least 550 enterprises will benefit from financial services (microcredit, leasing,) for the start-up/consolidation of economic activity. R2 - At least 200 SMEs will benefit from 'Micro-Venture Capital' through the intermediation of companies specialising in micro-venture-capital products R3 - Co-financing of existing guarantee funds (FONGIP, DCA/USAID) to facilitate access to finance by SMEs
Activity categories	Credit line to support 100 SMEs Micro-credit line for financing 450 SMEs Micro-Venture Capital to finance 200 MPis Local financial institutions portfolio guarantee fund Coordination, management and technical assistance MPMI
Priority areas of intervention	The Programme Document foresaw a focus on areas of high migratory pressure (Regions of Saint Louis, Louga, Kaolack, Thiès et Dakar) later the action was extended to the whole country.
Direct beneficiaries	750 MPMI
Main selection criteria	Job creation and retention with focus on young people aged 15-35, women (20% funding targeted at women's businesses), diaspora members (20% funding targeted at the diaspora for investment in the country)
Result Indicators	6,500 new jobs 20% of funding for women 20% of funding for representatives of the Senegalese Diaspora in Italy
SDG	Not identified at project design level

*Table2 - Structure of the PLASEPRI II programme*

Stages of PLASEPRI	FROM	A	EXTENDED	AMMUNITION	CO-FINANCING
PLASEPRI I	2009	2015	2012	24,000,000 EURO	
PLASEPRI II	2018	2021	2025	13,000,000 EURO	7,771,861 EURO (local partner) 13,730,000 EURO (PASPED TF/EU)
<b>Total programme</b>	<b>34,501,861 EURO</b>				
<b>Breakdown of resources by component</b>					
Credit line to support 100 SMEs				7,717,860 EURO	Local Partner 23%
Micro-credit line for financing 450 SMEs				4,725,000 EURO	Italy 14%
Micro venture capital to finance 200 MPis				6,000,000 EURO	17% Italy
Local financial institutions portfolio guarantee fund				2,275,000 EURO	7% Italy
Coordination, management and technical assistance MPMI				13,730,000 EURO	40% EU

Table3 - Financial allocation PLASEPRI II

PLASEPRI route indicators	FROM	AL	AMMUNITION	TARGET	REALIZED
PLASEPRI I	2009	2015	24M EURO		580 enterprises 2,300 new jobs
PASPED			13.7M EURO		
PLASEPRI II	2018	2025	13M EURO		
Employment (consolidated and created)				6.782	4.401
Credit line to support 100 SMEs				100 SMES	32
Micro-credit line for financing 450 SMEs				450 MPMI	502
Micro venture capital to finance 200 MPis				200 MPI	0
Local financial institutions portfolio guarantee fund				1 guarantee fund	Not activated
Coordination, management and technical assistance MPMI				Transversal	

Table4 - Target Indicators and Achievement

## Acronyms and abbreviations

AICS	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
CDP	Cassa Depositi e Prestiti
DCA/USAID	Development Credit Authority / United States Agency for International Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FCFA	Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine
FONGIP	Fonds de Garantie des Investissements Prioritaires
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM / IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MAECI	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
MEC	Mutuelle d'Épargne et de Crédit de l'Association pour le
ADEFAP	Développement des Femmes Avicultrices de Pikine
MEC FECOB	Mutuelle d'Épargne et de Crédit des Femmes de Bargny
MECSYF	Mutuelle d'Épargne et de Crédit de l'Association Synergie Femme
MPMI	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
OECD - DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
PADESS	Senegal Economic and Social Development Support Programme
PASPED	Programme to Support the Private Sector and Job Creation in Senegal
PLASEPRI	Platform to Support the Private Sector and the Valorisation of the Senegalese Diaspora in Italy
PROGRESS	Programme for Social and Solidarity Economy in Senegal
PROMEFI	Project to promote formal and innovative entrepreneurship in Senegal and Gambia
PROVIVES	Green and Social Enterprise Enhancement Programme
PSE	<i>Plan Sénégal Émergent</i>
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SFD	Système financier décentralisé
TOC	Theory of Change
UGP	Programme Management Unit
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
USADF	United States African Development Foundation

## 1. Summary

The independent evaluation of the Programme "PLASEPRI II - Platform to Support the Private Sector and the Valorisation of the Senegalese Diaspora in Italy" analysed the state of the implementation and the results achieved up to December 2024, with the aim of providing useful elements for the Programme's closure and future capitalisation. PLASEPRI II is part of the Italian cooperation strategy aimed at supporting local economic development in Senegal, reducing the structural causes of irregular migration and enhancing the role of the Senegalese diaspora in Italy.

The Programme was implemented in synergy with PASPED (a programme financed by the European Union) and had a total budget of more than €34 million, funded by Italian, Senegalese and European resources. The evaluation only concerns the PLASEPRI II component (€13 million + €7,771,861 co-financing from the Senegalese government). The evaluation followed the OECD-DAC approach, examining relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, also integrating the analysis of the cross-cutting themes of gender equality, environmental sustainability and human rights. The work combined documentary analysis, field mission, interviews and focus groups with beneficiaries and institutional actors.

From the point of view of relevance, PLASEPRI II appears well aligned with the strategic priorities of Italian cooperation and with Senegalese public policies on private sector development and financial inclusion. The intervention clearly responds to the needs of local communities, particularly in territories characterised by high migratory pressure.

In terms of effectiveness, the microfinance component (component 2) produced significant results. More than 500 SMEs were financed through the partner *mutuelles*, with an estimated direct impact of more than 4,400 jobs created and retained, of which 40% were young people. Particularly significant is the figure for women participation: 42.5% of beneficiary enterprises were promoted by women, more than doubling the initial target of 20%. This result confirms the ability of the microfinance institutions involved to effectively reach a segment traditionally excluded from formal credit.

Disaggregated data do not allow for a specific focus on youth entrepreneurial needs, nor the analysis of targeted coaching or training tools aimed at this segment of the population, central to the migration theme.

The more innovative components, such as the Micro-Venture Capital instrument and the guarantee fund for access to credit, were not activated. The non-implementation of these two lines represented a major limitation to the Programme's ability to experiment with advanced financial instruments, capitalise on pilot experiences, and nurture scaling-up processes at the institutional level.

The credit line for SMEs (component 1) also encountered difficulties. Only 32 enterprises were financed compared to the planned 100. The delays in disbursement were partly linked to problems in financial flows - with Senegalese funds blocked for a long time at Locafrique<sup>1</sup> - and partly to financial and operational governance that was not always smooth. Some banks advanced resources with their own funds, others resorted to Italian credit funds, generating misalignments in the use of financing sources.

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<sup>1</sup> Bank identified by the Senegalese MEF and custodian of the PLASEPRI I revolving funds.

In terms of **governance**, the Programme envisaged a decentralised model, with operational delegation to the Senegalese Programme Management Unit (UGP). However, the absence of a continuous technical oversight by AICS - such as the figure of a dedicated programme manager - resulted in a certain discontinuity in the coordination and supervision of activities, with repercussions on the overall management.

As far as **environmental sustainability** is concerned, the absence of explicit references in the project design and implementation is noticeable. The activities financed adhered to general '*do no harm*' criteria, but no instruments were introduced to encourage ecological transition for companies, technical assistance or environmental monitoring. In a global context in which environmental transition is now an unavoidable priority, this weakness represents a limitation and a relevant indication for future programming.

On the **communication** front, despite the absence of a structured and formalised strategy, the Programme was able to effectively reach its targets. In Italy, the information activities aimed at the Senegalese diaspora generated a good level of participation and interest, also thanks to the launch of the "*Investo in Senegal*" call for proposals, activated within the PASPED programme, in synergy with Plasepri. In Senegal, communication was articulated in a series of public events, realised in synergy with the national authorities, and benefited above all from the capillarity of the *mutuelles* networks, which proved to be an effective tool for disseminating information in local communities.

Finally, with regard to **future sustainability**, the prospects appear more solid in the components entrusted to the *mutuelles*, which have demonstrated their ability to integrate PLASEPRI II resources into their ordinary instruments. By contrast, the sustainability of the activities entrusted to the banking system or of the non-activated components remains more uncertain. The progressive appropriation of the Programme by the Senegalese institutions and the visibility obtained through public events and collaborations with the diaspora, however, represent positive signs in view of future capitalisation.

In summary, PLASEPRI II achieved significant results in supporting micro-entrepreneurship and local employment, particularly among women, but encountered significant limitations in the experimentation of innovative tools and in reaching the youth target, as well as in the effective involvement of the diaspora. The lessons that emerged may guide future programmes in the country, promoting more balanced governance, greater attention to accompanying tools, and an integrated vision of local economic development.



## 2. Summary of the Evaluation Report

### 2.1 Introduction

This report constitutes the final product of the independent evaluation process of the PLASEPRI II Programme - Platform to Support the Private Sector and the Valorisation of the Senegalese Diaspora in Italy, promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) and implemented in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Senegal.

The evaluation was carried out between December 2024 and April 2025 by an independent team from the company Microfinanza Srl, commissioned by MAECI, with the aim of providing a critical analysis of the Programme's implementation, the results achieved, the effectiveness of the strategies adopted, and the potential impact and sustainability of the interventions. It is part of the broader framework of learning, accountability and continuous improvement tools of Italian development cooperation initiatives, with particular attention to the nexus between development and migration.

The evaluation is conducted on the basis of the OECD-DAC criteria: **relevance, coherence (internal and external), effectiveness, efficiency, expected impact and sustainability**.

The cross-cutting themes examined include **respect for human rights, environmental sustainability** and the **promotion of gender equality**, in coherence with the priorities of Italian Cooperation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The evaluation work included an initial document analysis phase, followed by a field mission in Senegal in February 2025, aimed at collecting qualitative and quantitative data through interviews with institutional and operational stakeholders, focus groups with beneficiaries, and direct visits to some initiatives supported by the Programme.

The structure of this report follows the methodological framework outlined in the Inception Report (January 2025) and is divided into the following chapters:

- Context and Theory of Change Programme
- Progress and achievements
- Evaluative analysis according to OECD-DAC criteria
- Conclusions and strategic and operational recommendations.

This evaluation aims to offer concrete elements to accompany the final phase of the Programme, but also to guide future interventions in Senegal or similar contexts, promoting entrepreneurship, social and economic inclusion, and sustainable alternatives to irregular migration.

### 2.2 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation was commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) with the intention of having a useful critical analysis and learning tool to guide the final phase of the initiative, as well as to influence possible future thematic or regional actions.

PLASEPRI II is configured as a complex programme, articulated on several financial and institutional components, and implemented in synergy with the **PASPED Programme**, a complementary initiative financed by the European Union, which is also oriented towards combating the root causes of irregular migration through the promotion of employment and

private sector. The transversal objective shared by the two programmes is to strengthen decent employment opportunities in Senegal, particularly for young people and women, by creating favourable conditions for entrepreneurial development in territories with strong migration pressure and by offering concrete alternatives to irregular migration, both internal and international.

The evaluation focuses on the implementation and results achieved by PLASEPRI II until the end of 2024, including the analysis of the potential impact and sustainability of the actions, with reference to the first tranche of the Italian credit (worth € 5M), disbursed in March 2019, the second tranche having been disbursed only in December 2024.

For the purposes of this report, it should be clarified that the term "disbursed" refers exclusively to the disbursement of funds by *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti* (CDP) to the PLASEPRI II Programme, while the term "*utilised or utilisation rate*" is used to indicate the actual transfer and use of resources by the Programme to the partner financial institutions, such as the *Mutuelles* or Banks.

In this regard, the second tranche of financing, although formally disbursed by CDP, has not yet been utilised, as the relevant transfers to the operational counterparties have not been activated.

Consequently, that is mentioned in the report but does not fall within the scope of the evaluation analysis, which focuses exclusively on the resources already used in the period under review.

We are aware of a *comité de conformité* held in February 2025, but whose minutes were not shared by the PMU.

A field mission, carried out in Senegal in February 2025, fed the evaluation process with direct observations, interviews with key public and private stakeholders, and discussions with beneficiaries.

The evaluation is structured according to the established criteria of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) - relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, potential impact and sustainability - to which three cross-cutting axes are added: respect for **human rights**, promotion of **gender equality** and **environmental sustainability**. These axes were considered not as secondary elements, but rather as fundamental dimensions to assess the transformative effectiveness of the intervention and its coherence with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The evaluation is developed through the following criteria:

### **Relevance**

The evaluation examines the extent to which the Programme addresses the priority needs of the target groups - in particular young entrepreneurs, micro and small farmers, vulnerable households and members of the diaspora - by assessing its alignment with the Senegalese socio-economic context and national development strategies. Particular attention is paid to the Programme's capacity to address challenges related to financial inclusion, youth and female unemployment, and the creation of economic opportunities in territories with high migratory pressure.

### **Coherence (internal and external)**

The Programme's internal coherence is assessed in terms of complementarity between its components - SME credit, microfinance, micro-capitalisation, guarantee facility, diaspora investment - and with respect to synergies with PASPED and other Italian Cooperation

interventions. External coherence, on the other hand, analyses the alignment with parallel initiatives promoted by public and private, local and international actors, in order to avoid duplications, fragmentations or inefficiencies, and to strengthen the Programme's systemic impact.

### **Effectiveness**

The analysis of effectiveness focuses on the degree of achievement of intermediate and final objectives by measuring the performance of the main performance indicators (KPIs) foreseen by the Programme. In particular, the evaluation examines the results achieved through funding lines, technical support mechanisms, capacity-building activities and the promotion of diaspora involvement. Factors that facilitated or hindered the achievement of results are investigated in order to identify possible corrective measures to be introduced in the final phase.

### **Efficiency**

The evaluation of efficiency considers the adequacy of the use of the financial, human and material resources made available, assessing the relationship between costs incurred and results obtained. It also examines the quality of management processes, the efficiency of coordination between the parties involved, the decision-making capacity of local partners and the organisation of activities in the field, with the aim of identifying room for improvement in operational management.

### **Expected impact**

Although it cannot definitively measure the long-term impacts of the Programme - given the partial implementation of some activities and the absence of a structured baseline - the evaluation analyses the effects that are already visible and the conditions that could favour the achievement of the expected impacts. In particular, we observe:

- the Programme's capacity to generate employment in areas of high emigration;
- the degree of inclusion of women and young people;
- the effective involvement of the diaspora;
- the strengthening of the local development finance ecosystem;
- the territorial spread of interventions with a view to proximity finance;
- the first results of the economic activities implemented thanks to the funding granted.

### **Sustainability**

The chapter on sustainability considers the Programme's capacity to consolidate the results achieved over time, even after the end of the Italian financing. It assesses the institutional and operational soundness of the actors involved (public institutions, microfinance institutions, SMEs), the economic-financial sustainability of the initiatives supported, the adequacy of the instruments introduced for capacity building, and the capacity to reduce dependence on external financing. In addition, the environmental sustainability of the interventions is examined, in relation to the promotion of responsible production practices compatible with climate change adaptation.

### **Cross-cutting axes of the evaluation**

Finally, the evaluation incorporates three key cross-cutting dimensions into its analysis:

- **Gender equality**, assessing whether and to what extent the Programme promoted women's empowerment and equal access to economic opportunities;
- **Human rights**, examining the impact of the intervention on the most vulnerable groups and the contribution to social inclusion;

- **Environmental sustainability**, by looking at whether the activities financed complied with environmental criteria or favoured innovative environmental approaches.

## 2.3 Theory of Change

The evaluation team elaborated and shared a Theory of Change (ToC), based on the original logical framework of the Programme, useful to represent in a systemic way the causal pathway between activities, results and impacts.

The ToC starts from a context marked by structural fragilities (high youth unemployment, informal economy, poor access to credit, irregular migration). In response, PLASEPRI II mobilises inputs (financial resources, human and technical capital) that translate into key activities: the provision of credit through local financial institutions, the activation of guarantee instruments, technical assistance to enterprises and operators, the involvement of the diaspora and the strengthening of public policies.

These activities generate a series of measurable outputs: number of investments supported, volume of credit disbursed, number of businesses formalised, partnerships activated, beneficiaries reached. In the medium term, these outputs translate into *outcomes*: strengthening the entrepreneurial base, increasing employment, improving access to financial services, strengthening the local ecosystem.

Finally, the Programme aims to have a lasting impact, the creation of stable economic opportunities that reduce migratory pressures and improve the living conditions of the target populations.

The ToC also highlights a number of *enabling factors*: institutional stability, coordination between actors, functioning of financial instruments, effectiveness of technical assistance mechanisms, and the active involvement of the diaspora.

## 2.4 Evaluation methods and tools

The evaluation used a mixed approach, combining:

- Documentary analysis (project, monitoring reports, audits, agreements, minutes and official acts of the management bodies);
- Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (Senegalese institutions, MAECI, AICS, partner banks, MFIs, diaspora associations);
- Focus groups in Senegal and Italy with direct beneficiaries, entrepreneurs and institutional representatives;
- Semi-structured questionnaires addressed to a sample of stakeholders;
- Direct observations gathered during the field mission (February 2025), with visits to organisations and initiatives funded;
- Quantitative analysis of the Programme's financial and performance data.

All tools were set on the basis of the evaluation matrix defined in the Inception Report, with constant reference to the OECD-DAC criteria and the cross-cutting evaluation axes (gender, human rights, environment).

## 2.5 The evaluation matrix

The evaluation was structured around an evaluation designed in the start-up phase, which was the guiding tool for the entire evaluation process, from the collection of information to the analysis of the results. The matrix made it possible to systematise the evaluation

questions, define the dimensions to be investigated and ensure methodological consistency in the use of the OECD-DAC criteria.

For each criterion, one or more guiding questions, articulated in operational sub-questions, were formulated to explore specific aspects of the programme and to gather evidence to articulate answers to the main evaluation questions.

The matrix was used for orientating:

- the critical reading of project technical and financial documents;
- the structuring of data collection tools (interviews, questionnaires, focus groups);
- triangulation of sources and interpretation of results;
- the drafting of conclusions and recommendations.

The means of verification provided in the matrix included primary sources (meetings, interviews, focus groups, direct observations), secondary sources (monitoring reports, project documents, financial reports) and external statistical data. The questions also took into account the cross-cutting themes, such as gender inclusion, respect for human rights and environmental sustainability.

During the course of the evaluation process, the matrix was used flexibly, where necessary, to include emerging themes or specific issues detected during the field mission. It was a pivotal tool to ensure transparency and traceability of the evaluation process.

### **3. Cross-cutting objectives**

#### **3.1 Human Rights**

Although the PLASEPRI II programme does not explicitly refer to a legal framework of human rights, it is substantially consistent with the fundamental principles of the promotion of economic and social rights. Indeed, the intervention falls within the horizon of protecting the right to decent work, economic initiative, financial inclusion and, more generally, improving the living conditions of vulnerable populations.

In this sense, the Programme's strategy, which aims to offer economic opportunities to young people, women, small or micro entrepreneurs and members of the returning diaspora, represents an indirect but tangible form of human rights implementation, with a particular focus on those in situations of economic or social marginality. The emphasis placed on access to credit, the promotion of local entrepreneurship and capacity-building to local financial institutions, contributes to the realisation of the right to economic autonomy and a decorous life, especially in territories with strong migratory pressure.

However, the evaluation found some weaknesses in the systematisation and monitoring of the effective mainstreaming of human rights throughout the Programme's life cycle. In particular, there were no specific indicators or data collection mechanisms in place to provide evidence of the impact of the interventions on the conditions of inclusion, equality or protection of the fundamental rights of the beneficiaries. The qualitative dimension of the expected social changes - e.g. in terms of reducing vulnerabilities or empowering individuals - remained in the background, entrusted by opinions gathered through the focus groups.

In line with the findings, it can be said that PLASEPRI II promotes a substantive vision of human rights through its operational framework and target beneficiaries, but a greater

formalisation of this cross-cutting axis could have strengthened its transformative effectiveness and contributed to the setting up of a more robust accountability framework.

### 3.2 Environmental Sustainability

Despite the growing attention of international cooperation to environmental sustainability issues, the original PLASEPRI II document does not make explicit reference to this dimension, either as a transversal objective or as an operational criterion. Even in the implementation phase, environmental sustainability has not been systematically integrated, neither through technical assistance mechanisms, nor through tools for monitoring or assessing the environmental impacts of the activities financed.

The only measures found can be traced back to generic compliance with exclusion criteria for potentially environmentally damaging projects, similar to the principle of *Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)*. However, this approach remained implicit, lacking clear formalisation or implementation guidelines. In particular, no incentive was provided to favour companies that adopt good environmental practices, nor was financial leverage used to steer beneficiaries towards more sustainable production models.

This shortcoming is particularly relevant in the context of PLASEPRI II, where a significant share of investments have been made in the agriculture and agro-industry sectors. Specifically in these areas, the adoption of sustainable practices - such as agroecology, efficient water management, or the reduction of chemical input use - often requires substantial initial investments, which cannot be sustained without specific support instruments. The absence of reward mechanisms or dedicated funding lines has therefore represented a missed opportunity to promote production models compatible with climate adaptation and environmental protection objectives.

In perspective, the integration of positive environmental criteria, inspired by the *DNSH* principles and supported by rewarding measures and technical assistance, would represent a strategic lever to strengthen the effectiveness and environmental coherence of the Programme, contributing to the ecological transition and the strengthening of the resilience of beneficiary enterprises, in line with the Agenda 2030 and the priorities of the Italian cooperation.

### 3.3 Gender Equality

The promotion of gender equality is a cross-cutting objective of the PLASEPRI II Programme, in coherence with the strategic priorities of the Italian Cooperation and with the 2030 Agenda. This commitment is translated, at the operational level, in the indication of allocating at least 20% of the funds to women-led enterprises. The data collected indicate that this objective has been significantly exceeded, with 42.5% of investments in microfinance (component 2) disbursed to enterprises promoted by women. This result, with a positive delta of +22.5%, confirms the effectiveness of microfinance instruments in reaching women entrepreneurs, especially thanks to the widespread and inclusive action of the *mutuelles*, which are particularly rooted in local contexts.

A particularly positive strategic choice in this regard was the selection of a number of women's *mutuelles* among the financial partners, including MEC ADEFAP (*Mutuelle d'Épargne et de Crédit de l'Association pour le Développement des Femmes Avicultrices de Pikine*), MECSYF (*Mutuelle d'Épargne et de Crédit de l'Association Synergie Femme*) and



MEC FECOB (*Mutuelle d'Épargne et de Crédit des Femmes de Bargny*). Met during the evaluation mission, these institutions stood out for their strong roots in their communities, as well as for their key role in economic and social development and women's empowerment. Their action offers concrete prospects for autonomy and sustainability, which go well beyond the funding received from public or private donors, testifying to the capacity of organised women's networks to become leading actors in local development.

However, at the overall level of PLASEPRI II, the analysis of the women employment impact highlights some structural weaknesses. In component 1 (SMEs), women account for only 13% of the new jobs created and just 3% of the jobs retained, with an even more limited figure in the case of young women. This imbalance indicates a lower presence of women in larger enterprises, particularly in the agro-industrial sectors, where the Programme's main investments are concentrated. Also in terms of entrepreneurial empowerment, no specific tools - such as mentoring, technical training or management support - targeted at female beneficiaries have been activated.

Overall, it can be said that PLASEPRI II achieved good results in promoting access to credit for women, but had a more limited impact on the transformation of gender dynamics in the labour market. Looking ahead, it will be important to combine the financial offer with targeted non-financial services, capable of strengthening the skills of women entrepreneurs, supporting the growth and formalisation phases of their activities, and encouraging more stable and qualified women participation in strategic productive sectors.

#### 4. Conclusions

The evaluation of PLASEPRI II makes it possible to look beyond the Programme's own performance, providing broader considerations on the role of Italian cooperation in the countries of origin of migrations, on the potential of some inclusive financial instruments, and the necessary conditions to ensure sustainability, scalability and impact.

The Programme represents an ambitious attempt to combine local economic development objectives and strategies to counter the root causes of migration, focusing on the valorisation of existing resources: the widespread productive capacities, the adaptability of micro-enterprises, the structure of local finance institutions and the link between diaspora and the country of origin. These elements are confirmed as strategic levers for a cooperation that intends to act not only on emergencies, but on the medium-and long-term processes.

The experience of PLASEPRI II suggests that one of the key conditions for the success of such programmes is the balance between **local ownership and international technical support**. The delegation to the Senegalese counterpart certainly favoured greater rooting, but in the absence of continuous technical guidance by the Italian Cooperation, some innovative components could not be implemented, limiting the experimental scope and the possibility of capitalisation.

This raises questions about the governance structure of **multi-actor programmes**, which will have to evolve towards models that are more flexible but also more demanding in terms of shared accountability.

The evaluation shows that the challenge is twofold: on the one hand institutional, linked to the need to strengthen the management, coordination and regulation capacities of the programme; on the other hand, technical, linked to the identification of solutions that are

truly adapted to the characteristics of the beneficiaries. The failure to set up instruments such as the micro-venture capital shows how complex it is to propose advanced financial formulas - such as equity - if the businesses to be targeted are micro and family businesses, with organisational levels that are not compatible with such logics.

Another relevant lesson concerns the need to **combine finance with structured technical assistance instruments**, capable of increasing the managerial and strategic capacities of local enterprises and financial organisations. The data show that where financial resources have been placed in a solid institutional context (as in the case of *mutuelles*), the effect has been positive and potentially sustainable. However, without guidance, the impacts risk to remain fragmented, episodic and difficult to scale.

Finally, the need to recognise **the environment as a strategic axis**, and not only as an ethical constraint, strongly emerges. In a context like Senegal's, where agricultural and agri-food enterprises represent an important part of the productive ecosystem, the integration of environmental criteria in the financing and project selection mechanisms can no longer be postponed. Sustainability and innovation must become rewarding factors, not mere exclusion clauses.

The conclusions of this evaluation should therefore be read not as a static assessment, but as a learning platform for future planning. The PLASEPRI model has drawn a path, showing potential and limitations. It is now a matter of consolidating what worked, removing the fragilities that emerged and facilitating the transition from one single intervention to a policy, from a project to a framework.



## 5. Recommendations

The recommendations made here are of two orders: the first, more strategic, aim to suggest ways for development in the area of financial inclusion and the promotion of micro and small enterprises; the second, more operational, point to possible solutions for an improvement of PLASEPRI II in its final phase and for similar project initiatives to be identified in the future.

### 5.1 Strategic recommendations

The first set of strategic recommendations focuses on the institutional and financial sustainability of the project and, more specifically, on the measures to be put in place at the end of the programme.

Permanent Fund. Following some interviews conducted during the mission to Senegal, the hypothesis of conveying the revolving resources of PLASEPRI II to the establishment of a permanent fund for refinancing the MFIs/SFD, promoted by the Ministry of Microfinance and Social and Solidarity Economy appears to be of interest.

Non-Financial Services. Due to the multiple evidence that emerged during the evaluation, an additional effort should focus on strengthening the provision of non-financial services to improve the performance of Micro and Small Enterprises. One hypothesis to be explored, in order to make this type of support sustainable over time, could be the co-financing between the microfinance institutions and the public facility.

Equally important is the provision of dedicated technical assistance to the MFIs/SFD to strengthen their portfolio performance on the financial, environmental and social dimensions.

Mutuelles. Special attention should also be provided in the future to the *mutuelles*, which represent in the panorama of microfinance institutions the most territorial structures, dedicated to local economic initiatives. Due to the effectiveness demonstrated during the project and the expected employment impact, the commitment to support these mutualist structures should continue and be strengthened.

Beyond the micro enterprise. The need for job-creation and the production of economic value imply the need to broaden the scope of the action to support small-scale initiatives that are not limited to micro-enterprises. For this reason, in the future definition of the target enterprises, it would be worth to also consider larger economic units capable of reducing the fragilities and informality, typical of the micro-enterprises. For example, promoting some consortia of association between micro-enterprises, production and service cooperatives and mixed enterprises with active participation by the Senegalese diaspora. In particular, as already mentioned, the role of the diaspora should be enhanced, especially for the potential it represents in the mobilisation of savings from remittances, the transfer of know-how and technological innovation, and the opening of new international markets.

Financial Inclusion and the Banking Sector. The insufficient performance of the component 1 - SMEs, should make rethink the mechanisms for the identification of investment projects to be financed by the banking system. What seems to be missing in the current structure of PLASEPRI II is a '*bridging*' mechanism that facilitates the growth of micro-enterprises and guide them towards the banking institutions. A dedicated coaching service for businesses that have achieved good results with the microfinance financing seems essential: this would make the growing path of the small businesses more linear and would open up a potential new market for the commercial banks.

Technical assistance for enterprises. The strengthening of the technical assistance for businesses and investment projects remains a priority in order to capitalise on the effects of the programme. A technical assistance facility should have specific features: on the one hand, focusing on a widespread presence in the territory with decentralised business centres at regional level; and on the other, promoting the development of dedicated platforms, to provide specific technical and scientific expertise to the agro-industrial sector.

A new guarantee scheme for micro and small enterprises. Despite the impossibility of launching a new guarantee instrument for the MSMEs within PLASEPRI II so far, the issue of guarantees nevertheless remains of primary importance for the support of the Senegalese businesses. A reasonable hypothesis could be to use the last period of the project's activity to launch a feasibility study, preparatory to the design of a guarantee scheme that can effectively respond to the specific needs of the Senegalese micro and small enterprises. This study should be able to conduct an in-depth analysis of the financial market conditions in relation to the financing needs of the target enterprises, in light of the current regulatory framework, and identify the most appropriate financial institutions to implement this new risk-management tool. In fact, the real challenge is to minimise the credit risk, particularly for start-ups and innovative enterprises, and not just to spread the risk among different investors.

Cost of funding and interest rate. A specific assessment is recommended regarding the interest rate policy applied to the MFIs/SFD. The explicit objective of reducing the cost of credit to the beneficiary entrepreneurs is clear, but this is applied by imposing a generalised cap on the outgoing interest rates, thus creating obvious discrimination (and sometimes confusion) between the traditional clients of the partner MFI/SFD and the new ones, financed through the PLASEPRI II portfolio.

A simpler solution might be to let the MFIs/SFD set their own rate policy by monitoring only the spread applied between the cost of funding (which is significantly lower than the market) and the exit rate. A further possibility, mentioned earlier, would be to allow financial institutions to use their additional operating margins to strengthen their capacity to provide non-financial services (in particular financial education, business management and market analysis).

## 5.2 Organisational and operational recommendations

The second set of operational recommendations focuses on the effectiveness and efficiency aspects of the project and, specifically, on measures that could be taken immediately.

Ownership. Ensure a structural balance between local ownership and international technical assistance, through a management model that is flexible but based on rigorous mechanisms of shared accountability. The experience of PLASEPRI II shows how excessive delegation, unaccompanied by continuous technical supervision, can limit the implementation of the most innovative components and reduce opportunities for learning and capitalisation. It is therefore recommended that management be structured to ensure stable technical support, able of sustaining local capacities and guaranteeing the full operationalisation of the innovative solutions.

Avoiding duplication. Greater autonomy of the MFIs/SFD in the identification and evaluation of investment projects to be financed seems a good option: this would avoid bureaucratic duplication between the Compliance Committee and the MFIs/SFD own credit committee. Currently, the situation seems somewhat confused, and PLASEPRI II intervenes both in the due verification of the eligibility criteria and in the assessment of creditworthiness. The

recommendation is to avoid interference by the Programme in the relationship with the borrower (who must be considered primarily a client and not a beneficiary). If the financial risk remains with the financial intermediary, the project structure (Compliance Committee) should refrain from substituting itself in the intermediary's credit decision.

Introduce an efficient and structured monitoring system. The project needs a more structured monitoring system, articulated by components, with a well-defined *dashbord* of indicators to provide a real-time '*snapshot*' of the project on the most relevant data such as the overall total disbursed (portfolio *outstanding*), the number of financial institutions with a PLASEPRI financial product underway, the payment delays situation and the portfolio quality, the number of dossiers financed, divided by women, men and age groups, the jobs created and maintained with the cumulative figure of maintained and created.

Strengthening the technical skills of the programme team. The disbursement of the financing lines to the MFIs/SFD requires some guiding measures to improve the management and development of the PLASEPRI II financial products and their integration into the regular MFI/SFD activities. To this end, it is recommended to strengthen the skills of the programme staff, particularly on the following topics: i) design of financial instruments; ii) coaching and mentoring; iii) management systems and decentralised service delivery platforms.

Introducing a job-creation accounting system. Since the primary objective of PLASEPRI II remains the capacity to increase stable and decent employment, the collection and processing of information on the capacity of the financed enterprises to employ workers in a stable manner appears to be a priority. The effort to be devoted is significant, since the issue is often to detect the actual state of the financed enterprises' activities, especially when these are organised in a predominantly informal manner. Orienting periodic field visits towards this type of data collection could therefore be instrumental in the future construction of a real metric on project results and effects. This would also allow future impact analyses to be properly prepared. Specific attention - in the spirit of responding to the initial project approach - should be devoted to diaspora and employment projects involving and mobilising resources from abroad.

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