TechnoServe (TNS) Benin

USDA Cashew Integration & Acceleration Program

(CIAP)

Benin

Monitoring & Evaluation Plan

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Introduction

The Cashew Integration and Acceleration Program (CIAP); in French, *Programme de Cajou Intégré et Accéléré pour la Puissance Economique*) is underpinned by the execution of a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function, within the project's broader, transparent and results-oriented management approach. M&E is critical to both "proving" and "improving," or in USDA's terms – accountability and learning. The M&E function aims to meet fully the needs of the four primary audiences for accountability: donors; beneficiaries; implementing agencies' staff and supporters; and peer agencies and institutions of practice.

TechnoServe and its consortium partner Catholic Relief Services (CRS), in consultation with local project partners, have designed this evaluation plan to: a) efficiently and effectively measure and communicate project impacts and outcomes; b) understand and guide responses to the underlying causes of project success and challenges/shortfalls; and c) extract lessons applicable to future USDA programming and strategies for cashew industry development in Benin and elsewhere. This will be achieved, based in large part on the planned rigorous monitoring of planned activities, inputs and outputs, according to the performance indicators presented in the Project Monitoring Plan (PMP).

The tools and approaches outlined in this Evaluation Plan are consistent with the Office of Capacity Building and Development's (OCBD's) Results Oriented Management (ROM) approach to monitoring and evaluation. TechnoServe's proven approach to assessing impact on farmers and businesses across the value chain will be complemented by CRS's innovative Farmbook software and tablet-based data collection system, which measures growth/change of farmer groups and individual farm returns (see https://farmbookhub.crs.org/Pages/Welcome.aspx).

The CIAP team includes dedicated M&E personnel from both CRS and TechnoServe, responsible for ongoing monitoring and for sharing information throughout the program team and the wider stakeholder community (for staffing details, see Section VII. Evaluation Management, below). TechnoServe and CRS will also work closely with the *Institut National des Recherches Agricoles du Bénin* (INRAB) and the *Faculté des Sciences Agronomiques, Université d'Abomey-Calavi*, on key learning questions related to cashew production and productivity in Benin. With Root Capital as a project partner, we will also be able to build on 2015 impact studies being conducted by Root Capital of two client cashew processors and associated employees and producers using similar techniques..

TechnoServe has allocated funds adequate to pay for all planned monitoring, evaluation and learning activities, equivalent to 7.6% of the total budget (see Attached M&IE Budget Summary).

Project Overview

USDA's Cashew Integration & Acceleration Program (CIAP) is designed to provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to strengthening the cashew nut and related products value chain in Benin.

I. CIAP Objectives/Target Results

The USDA Cashew Integration & Acceleration Project (CIAP) aims to improve returns from the major crop of cashew for smallholder farmers and for Benin's economy as a whole. The project vision is to build a thriving cashew sector where smallholders realize optimum yields and prices for their crop; where farmer investments and improvements are driven by demand from a competitive local processing sector operating within a well-organized value chain; and where maximum local economic value is extracted from the cashew nut and other cashew byproducts.

USDA support through CIAP aims to ensures that local processors will have the financing, managerial capacity and resources to fulfill their potential role as engines of change by investing in their supply chain, through traceability systems, satellite processing and farmer financing. A vibrant local processing sector impels coordination and capacity-building across the value chain, from trade associations to government agencies.

The results are to be expanded trade volumes of processed kernel, increased sales volumes of cashew byproducts, increased productivity and incomes for farmers, job creation on a large scale, maximum value extracted from the cashew crop and increased returns for actors throughout the value chain – all contributing to the sustainability of a vibrant economic system. CIAP will achieve both Food for Progress Strategic Objective 1: Increased Agricultural Productivity; and Strategic Objective 2: Expanded Trade of Agricultural Products (Domestic, Regional and International).

Specifically, the CIAP program is designed to achieve the following high-level results:

- Increasing income from cashew farming for smallholder farmers, by an average of 31%. This will be achieved through:
  a) Increasing yield of raw cashew nut (RCN), through agronomic training and input financing solutions. 49,000 farmers will be trained on agronomic techniques such as pruning, maintenance, harvesting and storage.
  b) Improving quality, through training, financing and storage solutions. Farmers will be taught correct nut handling, quality assessment measures and storage for optimum sales.
  c) Promoting consolidated sales through new and strengthened producer groups and direct market linkages to producers, resulting in price premiums.

- Increasing domestic processing, with local processors being reliable providers of high-quality products to international markets and driving efficiencies across the value chain. To achieve this, TechnoServe will:
  a) Increase domestic processing capacity, by supporting the start-up of new processing enterprises and improved management of existing ones.
  b) Create sustainable linkages to lucrative international markets, with global buyers such as Walmart and Costco Wholesale.
  c) Increase value capture through commercialization of additional byproducts, including cashew apple and cashew nut shell liquid.

- Improving coordination across the value chain through capacity-building for trade associations, chiefly the national producer association, FENAPAB, and the national processing association, CNTC. Improved coordination will support transaction efficiencies, promote private sector investment, and strengthen private-public dialogue and policy formulation.

II. Project Beneficiaries

Over its five years, CIAP will work with 49,000 smallholder cashew producing households and their local producer groups (branches of the national producer association, FENAPAB) in the following Departments and communes:

- Department of Collines: all communes,
- Department of Zou: Djidja commune,
- Department of Borgou: N`Dali, Parakou and Tchaourou communes,
- Department of Donga: Bassila and Djougou communes.

CIAP's work with 20 start-up village level apple cashew processors and one existing juice producer, as well as start-up commercial cashew nurseries will also take place within or in close proximity to the target Departments and communes.

In addition, CIAP will work with 10 factory-size processors (7 existing and 3 start-ups) located near the targeted producing locations listed above.

CIAP's work with financial institutions and national producer and processor associations will be focused where they are headquartered in Cotonou.

Further details of targets, as related to the overall Project Results Framework, are contained in the PMP (attached with this Evaluation Plan).

Following are the main components of the Evaluation Plan.

III. Core Monitoring and Evaluation Methodological Approach

TechnoServe's M&E approach facilitates a continual learning cycle by providing multiple data sources to test hypotheses and, when indicated, make rapid course correction. The strategy is buttressed by the project team's use of Collaborative Learning and Adaptation (CLA) principles to ensure engagement of project participants and to create ongoing feedback loops.

TechnoServe performs rigorous project evaluations that seek to establish project impact and provide lessons learned for future development efforts. The project's evaluation strategy will utilize a mixed methods approach with a quasi-experimental design of repeated cross section of respondents from both participating and non-participating households. Using this methodology, the project will collect data from a representative sample of the beneficiary population and a comparable control population at project baseline and end line. Participant households will be selected randomly from the list of participants at the time of the midterm assessment, ensuring that the sample is spread across the target

geographies proportionate to the number of participants. The sample size will be representative of each value chain at the 95% confidence level[1]. Comparison households will be selected randomly from the communities that were identified for that purpose at the baseline. Households selected and interviewed must meet the minimum selection criteria for project participation.

The project will ensure that evaluators establish key change hypothesis that will inform baseline study data collection, the mid-term evaluation, and the final evaluation. The project will test these hypotehses by comparing the outcomes of the participants to that of the comparison households to demonstrate attribution of any change to the project using a difference in difference statistical approach. This approach accounts for external factors that may have affected both the participant and non-participant households by subtracting the change in key outcomes found in the comparison households from the change found in the participant households.

IV. Baseline Study

TechnoServe will initiate the baseline study once USDA has approved the Evaluation Plan. TechnoServe hopes to be able to schedule the baseline study to be undertaken between November 15 and January 31st, 2015 by an external and specialized evaluation firm. TechnoServe will select the firm on a competitive basis, and will ensure that the selected firm complies with the following requirements:

- Is financially and legally separate from the participant's organization;
- Has staff with demonstrated knowledge, analytical capability, language skills and experience in conducting evaluations of development programs in African agriculture and agribusiness;
- Uses acceptable analytical frameworks and methods to assess results, involving stakeholders and applying statistical analyses;
- Uses local consultants, as appropriate, to conduct data collection and portions of the baseline studies; and,
- Provides a detailed plan for the baseline study, major tasks and specific schedules prior to initiating the studies.

TechnoServe will ensure that the evaluating firm has complete access to all relevant internal and external project documents, key correspondence with OCBD staff, and any other relevant project information that may facilitate the transparent and robust execution of the baseline study. The baseline study will help TechnoServe and OCBD staff optimize the initial allocation of project funding to achieve CIAP results and will be consistent with the following ROM criteria: *Independence, Utility, Transparency, Relevance, Partnerships, Credibility, Rigor and Timeliness*.

The purpose of the baseline study is to:

- Establish benchmarks against which CIAP's progress on each of the project outcomes can be tracked, and
- Inform decision-making about early project implementation planning and execution.

[1]The number of surveys will be sufficient to achieve a 95% confidence level as determined by the variance discovered during quantitative surveys during the baseline assessment. The variance of population determines the number of surveys required in order to achieve statistical significance.

- *Refine metrics*: TechnoServe will coordinate with CIAP and M&E staff to finalize the proposed revised indicators and targets, with a set of compelling, defensible and credible metrics that are practical and relevant in indicating progress toward key outcomes. A final PMP will be submitted to USDA within 90 days of award, and all indicators and indicator targets will be finalized by Month 5 of project implementation and submitted as a revised Attachment E. To the extent that it is possible to do this in accordance with the standard indicators required for USDA compliance, TechnoServe will seek to ensure the metrics also meet the needs of the new evolving standardized performance measurement framework developed by the Sustainable Food Lab in partnership with many leading food and agriculture corporations and other stakeholders, including Root Capital. The framework tracks the impact of their purchases on smallholder farmers (see http://www.sustainablefoodlab.org/performance-measurement-home).

In addition, the baseline study will deepen project staff understanding of the target geographies and strengthen relationships with key stakeholders. Information collection methods will include: literature review; business records review; random surveys of both participants and non-participants; key informant interviews; focus group discussions; and direct observation.

Baseline Study Methodology

The baseline assessment will utilize a mixed methods approach, using quantitative surveys, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Quantitative surveys will be conducted at three levels: 1) farm unit; 2) cooperative/FBGs and 3); cashew processors. In order to allow for comparative analyses across time, the baseline assessment will establish survey groups to capture the impact of program initiatives on different group typologies, and for comparison between project participants and non-participants. Likely survey cohorts will include independent farmers, farmers in formal cooperatives, groups in different target geographies, farm units with less than two hectares and farm units with more than two hectares.

Qualitative data will be collected through focus group discussions with farmers in the target geographic areas to support the quantitative data by exploring the factors that affect their use of different agricultural practices and productivity. Key informant interviews will be conducted with producers, producer groups, aggregators, cashew and byproduct processors, and their employees, in addition to government agencies, exporters, and input suppliers.

Baseline survey data will be collected primarily through contracted local enumerators, under the selected firm's direct oversight. Enumerators will be carefully selected, with sensitivity to gender and ethnicity/language, and appropriately trained. All instruments (e.g. questionnaires, other survey tools, discussion guides) will be field-tested and revised before adoption for use. Baseline Status Reports will be produced.

Survey instruments and methods of data collection will be customized per beneficiary group. Necessary baseline data for all relevant PMP indicators will be collected, as will higher-level data that will assist in determining project impact particularly in the course of the midterm and final evaluations. Given key research questions described in the mid-term and final evaluation sections, the baseline study should collect data on the following variables (not exhaustive), disaggregated by gender, age, years of experience, and location:

Farmers

- Farm size, cashew cultivation area, and tree densities;
- Productivity (yields per hectare);
- Product prices (real);
- FTE paid and non-paid employees;
- Access to and application of inputs;
- Costs of production;
- Aggregation and commercialization strategies;
- Access to and utilization of credit, including participation in Savings and Internal Lending Communities;

Farmer Groups/Cooperatives

- Membership size;
- Membership fees and collection rates;
- Offering of membership services, including aggregation;
- Engagement in value-adding activities;
- Organizational and financial management systems.
- Access to and utilization of credit.

Processors

- Installed processing capacity;
- Utilization of new processing technology;
- Capacity utilization rate;
- Finished product prices;
- Sales volume by product segment;
- Production costs and profitability;
- Adherence to project-promoted quality standards;
- Quality certifications;
- FTE employees;
- Access to buyers and export markets (number of buyers and/or number of export markets reached).

Government

- Trade promotion activities;
- Business enabling (or hindering) policies and regulations.

The baseline study will be conducted during Months 2 through 4 of project implementation, with the final PMP submitted by the end of Month 3 per USDA guidance.

Baseline Study Audience and Dissemination

The main audiences for this baseline study are TechnoServe's Benin and global leadership teams, USDA, CRS, and other USG agencies, and local government and program partners. With USDA approval, TechnoServe intends to disseminate baseline study findings through: 1) direct email to key project stakeholders (local government, program partners, etc.); 2) posting of study findings on the

TechnoServe website; and 3); an in-country presentation of study results with key stakeholders, including a question and answer session.

V. Midterm Evaluation

TechnoServe will facilitate an independent external midterm evaluation of CIAP over four months from June to September 2018, in order to capture data from the third cashew season.[2] The midterm evaluation is primarily intended as an internal management tool to assess project progress to date and identify needed course corrections, thereby guiding project management to achieving project objectives and the most effective use of project funding. The primary audience for this evaluation includes: project management and TechnoServe, USDA, USAID and other U.S. government agencies.

If the baseline evaluation is completely to the satisfaction of TechnoServe, the same external evaluation firm who conducted the baseline evaluation will be hired to conduct the midterm evaluation. In the event that TechnoServe and USDA determine that a different firm should be selected to conduct the midterm, TechnoServe will again conduct a competitive process to select the external firm.

TechnoServe will ensure that the evaluating agency has complete access to all internal and external project reports, including performance reports, M&E databases, monetization records, key correspondence with OCBD staff, and any other relevant project information that may facilitate the transparent and robust execution of the evaluation. The Midterm Evaluation will help TechnoServe and OCBD staff optimize the allocation of project funding to achieve CIAP results through the remaining implementation period, and will be consistent with the following criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability.[3]

TechnoServe will work closely with OCBD staff during the drafting of the Midterm Evaluation Terms of Reference, and will ensure that the evaluating agency interviews relevant OCBD staff prior to initiating field work, after preliminary conclusions are reached, and upon submission of the full evaluation report for OCBD review and comment. TechnoServe and CRS will incorporate findings and conclusions from the midterm evaluation to refine and, if necessary, adjust project activities to affect mid-course corrections required to achieve project goals and objectives, working with FAS staff as appropriate.

Midterm Evaluation Methods

The midterm evaluation will utilize a mixed methods approach with a quasi-experimental design of repeated cross section of respondents from both participating and non-participating households. Quantitative data will be collected through household surveys of baseline producers to assess their current agricultural and post-harvest practices, crop productivity, use of inputs, use of financial services, and exposure to project activities.

[2] TechnoServe will request FAS for these dates which occur after the midpoint (March 1, 2018) because of the importance of including data from the third cashew season.
[3] Listed according to sequencing included in the FAD-OCBD Monitoring and Evaluation Policy dated 5-6-2013.

Participant households will be selected randomly from the list of participants at the time of the midterm assessment, ensuring that the sample is spread across the target geographies proportionate to the number of participants. The sample size will be representative of each value chain at the 95% confidence level[4]. Comparison households will be selected randomly from the communities that were identified for that purpose at the baseline. Households selected and interviewed must meet the minimum selection criteria for project participation.

The project will compare the outcomes of the participants to that of the comparison households to demonstrate attribution of any change to the project using a difference in difference statistical approach. This approach accounts for external factors that may have affected both the participant and non-participant households by subtracting the change in key outcomes found in the comparison households from the change found in the participant household. However, the comparison households are likely to be different from the participant households. To account for this, the evaluation will add a regression to the difference of differences approach to control for key observable characteristics of the households.

In addition to the primary quantitative data collection, the midterm will also use direct observations from visits to program sites, monitoring data and crop production survey data collected twice a year at planting and at harvest from a sample of participant farmer households. The monitoring and crop production data collection events will be led by the project M&E Specialist and supported by the M&E Assistants.

Qualitative data will be collected as part of an outcome mapping exercise through focus group discussions with farmers in the target geographies to understand their participation in the project, factors that influenced their change in agricultural and post-harvest techniques, and use of financial services. Key informant interviews will be conducted with processors (including satellite processors, cashew apple processors, and larger cashew processors), producer group leaders and input suppliers to document changes that have occurred since participating in the project; intermediaries and exporters; and with government officials and local leaders to understand their engagement in the project and feedback on project improvement.

The midterm will also be informed by a program document review, including the baseline report, program work plan, and donor reports.

- Key research methods will include: Review of primary sources, e.g. planning documents, program documents, reports, annual monitoring surveys, other monitoring records, and baseline data,
- Key Informant Interviews,
- Focus groups,
- Beneficiary interviews,
- Review of secondary sources

[4]The number of surveys will be sufficient to achieve a 95% confidence level as determined by the variance discovered during quantitative surveys during the baseline assessment. The variance of population determines the number of surveys required in order to achieve statistical significance.

Upon evaluation start-up, CIAP's Chief of Party and M&E program staff will support the contractor to review program documentation and other relevant information and develop the evaluation work plan based on the TOR. A list of reference material that will be sent to the contractor in advance of field work includes the following:

- Project documents
- Baseline study report
- Annual monitoring surveys
- Semi-annual M&E report(s)
- Q&A or Interviews with key project staff

Key Midterm Evaluation questions

Relevance

- Do the results framework, assumptions, program design and project activities meet the needs of the participants and local conditions?
- How well aligned is the program strategy and activities with government strategies and with USDA and US. Government's development goals, objectives and strategies?

Effectiveness

- What internal and external factors have influenced the ability of the project to meet expected results and targets?
- To what extent are the program targets and outcomes likely to be achieved by the end of the project?
- What key successes should be replicated or key improvements should be made to the implementation to maximize the results?

Efficiency

- Were the resources and activities provided by the program carried out in a timely manner and with effective use of resources?
- How well has the project been managed and M&E data used to make programmatic decisions?

Impact

- What impacts are the project activities having on the program participants, both positive and negative, especially in relation to the expected results and strategic objectives?
    - How has project implementation affected the uptake of improved agricultural techniques and post-harvest handling?
    - How has the use of improved agricultural techniques affected crop yield?
    - How have improved yield and market access affected farmer incomes?
    - How has training and infrastructure for post-harvest handling affected post production losses and improved quality of the product?
    - How have producer group training affected capacity of the groups?

Sustainability

- Which project activities and benefits likely to be sustained or not sustained past the project lifespan, why?

- Which project activities and benefits likely to be sustained or not sustained past the project lifespan, why?

The Midterm Evaluation will cover months 3 through 30 of the program.

Midterm Evaluation Audience

The main audiences for this midterm evaluation are TechnoServe's Benin and global leadership teams, the USDA, CRS and other USG agencies, and local government and program partners. This evaluation is intended to measure progress against outcome indicators and address issues regarding efficiency of resource use and quality of implementation. With USDA approval, TechnoServe intends to disseminate Midterm Evaluation (MTE) findings through: 1) direct email to key project stakeholders (local government, program partners, etc.); 2) posting of MTE findings on the TechnoServe website; and 3); an in-country presentation of MTE findings with key stakeholders, including a question and answer session.

VI. Final Evaluation

TechnoServe will commission a final evaluation of CIAP to be completed in its final quarter, according to the same selection criteria and evaluation characteristics as the midterm evaluation. The key purpose of the final evaluation will be to assess project impact, achievement of anticipated results as articulated in the project design, its results framework and PMP, and to understand the prospects for project achievements to be sustained. To achieve this, the final evaluation will consist of a range of activities and analyses, including document review, participant surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews. Particular emphasis will be given to ensuring that the voice of female project participants is reflected in the final evaluation. The external evaluation agency will produce a crisp, incisive final report (with appropriate appendices) that provides an independent assessment of the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

Final Evaluation Methods

- The final evaluation will utilize the same mixed methods approach with a quasi-experimental design and difference and difference regression analysis as the midterm, described above. These methods will utilize data collected during the baseline survey and mid-term evaluation, including data collected from control groups and non-participants. The number of surveys will be sufficient to achieve a 95% confidence level as determined by the variance discovered during quantitative surveys during the baseline assessment. The variance of population determines the number of surveys required in order to achieve statistical significance. A summary of key research methods includes: Review of primary sources: planning documents, program documents and reports, annual monitoring surveys, other monitoring records, baseline data, midterm evaluation, etc.
- Key informant interviews,
- Focus groups,
- Beneficiary stories, etc.,
- Review of secondary sources

Upon evaluation start-up, CIAP's Chief of Party and M&E program staff will support the contractor to review program documentation and other relevant information and develop the evaluation work plan. A list of reference material that will be sent to the contractor in advance of field work includes the following:

- Project documents
- Baseline study report
- Midterm evaluation
- Semi-annual M&E report(s)
- Q&A or Interviews with key project staff

Key Final Evaluation questions

Project design

- What recommendations emerge from this project for USDA, TechnoServe and CRS staff, partners and key stakeholders for the design and support of similar future projects?
- How effective was the midterm evaluation in reviewing basic design issues and identifying needed revisions?
- How effectively did the project management and partners respond to the midterm evaluation findings?

Impact

- Who were the intended direct project beneficiaries? Were they effectively targeted and engaged?
- What were the key changes observed in the targeted beneficiaries' behaviors, both intended and unintended?
- What were the key changes observed in the cashew value chain and market system, including in the nature of the relationships between input suppliers, producers, producer groups, processors, exporters and buyers? To what extent can these changes be clearly attributed to project actions?
- What, if any, were the negative consequences? How might they have been avoided?

Implementation

- *Effectiveness*
  - To what extent did the project reach its stated objectives and targets?
  - What accounts for any significant shortfalls of planned achievements?
  - How effectively did the project use its monitoring system to track progress against objectives during the project and to inform management decisions?
  - How well did project management anticipate problems? How creative and flexible was the project in adjusting its strategies and tactics in reaction to changing contexts?
- *Efficiency*
  - How was efficiency monitored during implementation?
  - To what extent were project resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, human resource) economically converted into project outputs? How does this compare to the efficiency

and cost-effectiveness of other similar capacity building and market development efforts?

Sustainability

- To what extent did the project mobilize interest of investors and other stakeholders, and undertake initiatives that will specifically contribute to sustainability (of financial and social impacts, service delivery, cashew industry organization, etc.)?
- To what extent will project benefits likely endure after completion of the project? What is the evidence for this?
- To what extent has the project developed local capacities (technical, financial, etc.) for the activities and services provided or supported by the project to be sustained? What is the evidence for this?
- What broader lessons can be drawn in regard to:
    - The role of the private sector in catalyzing industry development?
    - The sustainability of this type of value chain development approach?

Project management

- Were work plans, project reports and financial reports utilized effectively as management tools?
- Were the right people in the right jobs? Were they appropriately supported, both from above and below? Was there low staff turnover?
- Were adequate activities and events held to engage the required range of stakeholders? Were they used effectively? How did project management respond?
- What was the value and relevance of CIAP's special studies and learning research, and the efficacy of its learning events?

TechnoServe and CRS will ensure that findings and conclusions of the final evaluation are structured in such a way as to be helpful in the design and implementation of ongoing and future Food for Progress projects. The final evaluation will be conducted during Months 54 to 59 of project implementation.

Final Evaluation Audience

The main audiences for the final evaluation are TechnoServe's Benin and global leadership teams, the USDA, CRS and other USG agencies, and local government and program partners. With USDA approval, TechnoServe intends to disseminate final evaluation findings through: 1) direct email to key project stakeholders (local government, program partners, etc.); 2) posting of final evaluation findings on the TechnoServe website; and 3); an in-country presentation of final evaluation findings with key stakeholders, including a question and answer session.

VII. Special Studies

TechnoServe and CRS will host a learning agenda stakeholders meeting during the project's first quarter to identify key research questions relevant to the improvement of the Benin cashew sector. Participants will include producer representatives, processors, appropriate government agencies, research partners

and industry stakeholders (e.g. industry buyers) to discuss research needs and to finalize and prioritize topics within CIAP's learning research agenda.

Based upon the consensus learning agenda that emerges, TechnoServe and CRS will commission at least one operational research study per year through Year 5. The purpose of operational research studies is to investigate critical market research and technical issues that fall outside the scope of project evaluations to inform project implementation. Topics may include market studies related to the processing of cashew apple, improved value chain linkages, employment generation potential of improved cashew production and processing, identification and penetration strategies for new markets, quality and food safety standards and training curricula, and efficacy of agronomic technical assistance delivery models, among others. TechnoServe and CRS will competitively select research organizations (such as international and local universities, local consultants, international consultants, industry bodies or other NGOs) to conduct the special studies with close collaboration with project partners, beneficiaries and local research institutions. Final copies of special studies will be shared with USDA OCBD staff.

VIII. Evaluation Management

TechnoServe and CRS global M&E teams will support in-country CIAP M&E staff to install an M&E system within the first month of project initiation, and will ensure that M&E activities, surveys and learning research are rigorously executed. The in-country staff will be led by the CIAP M&E Manager, reporting to the CIAP Chief of Party. The M&E Manager will be a seasoned program quality professional with experience designing and installing data collection systems, ensuring data quality and accuracy, and identifying potential areas for program improvement based upon real-time analysis of monitoring data and evaluation findings.

Under the M&E Manager will be four dedicated full-time M&E staff; working as a well-coordinated team, each will bear lead responsibility for all monitoring, evaluation and learning activities in one of CIAP's 5 main activity areas: 1) processing efficiency; 2) marketing and sales; 3) agronomic techniques and technologies; 4) SILC and access to finance; and 5) cross-cutting issues such as gender, trading relationships and inclusive business models. Data collection will occur both in real-time (volume and price data per purchase contracts) and semi-annually (e.g. for processor surveys); findings will be reported semi-annually per the CIAP Performance Monitoring Plan.

The final approved Monitoring & Evaluation Plan will be reviewed regularly. The M&E Manager will work with the Chief of Party to conduct internal semi-annual reviews of M&E systems, including data collection and reporting techniques, robustness of M&E approaches, appropriateness of proposed activity and results indicators, and to facilitate periodic revisions to the CIAP M&E system to improve M&E performance as necessary. All such revisions, as well as modifications emerging from the midterm evaluation, shall be based on receipt of necessary approvals from USDA.

The M&E team will also lead the development of key learning questions in collaboration with project beneficiaries, research partners (INRAB and FSA-UAC), processor and producer associations, the U.S. Agricultural Attaché in Benin, and OCBD staff. TechnoServe has specifically allocated project funds for the design, implementation and dissemination of learning research activities and findings. Too often learning research is executed as a discrete activity not integrated with project activities or development challenges faced by project partners and beneficiaries.

TechnoServe and CRS will leverage their extensive experience in action research and participation in private-sector and development learning alliances to ensure that learning research is meaningful, context-specific and actionable. CIAP's five-year implementation timeline will create unique opportunities for interactions with parallel evaluative initiatives, such as the one being conducted by Root Capital, which plans to have a follow-up phase in late 2017/early 2018. It will also allow for multi-year research opportunities on topics such as cashew variety testing, which are less feasible under shorter-term projects.

TechnoServe and CRS will ensure that learning research findings, project success factors and critical lessons learned are disseminated and discussed locally, regionally and across the global cashew sector. Project findings will be shared through industry platforms, such as the African Cashew Alliance. The project will also sponsor learning events in the second and fourth year of the CIAP project that can help to move the Benin industry forward. Likely participants will include other development agencies working in the cashew sector; OCBD and other donor organizations' staff; international buyers, such as CIAP partners Walmart and Costco; research partners; local government agencies; and processors and producers, as well as their respective organizations. Research findings, M&E reports and conclusions from learning events will be available for public consumption (with OCBD staff approval) on the CIAP project website.