
Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme for the Republic of Türkiye

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Action: The Executive Board is invited to review the comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme for the Republic of Türkiye.

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Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme for the Republic of Türkiye

I. General comments

1. In 2023, the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) conducted its second country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) in the Republic of Türkiye, covering the country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) 2016–2021. The evaluation reviewed four projects – two completed and two ongoing – with a total estimated cost of US\$233.2 million.
2. During the evaluation period (2015–2022), Türkiye experienced significant political and economic volatility, as well as natural disasters, including devastating earthquakes in the south-east in February 2023. Despite these challenges, Türkiye remained an upper-middle-income country, marked by significant regional disparities and high rural poverty in upland areas. IFAD’s strategy and support during this period were aligned with national policies, including the Eleventh Development Plan (2019–2023). IFAD’s interventions focused on remote upland and mountainous regions, targeting economically active smallholders, women, youth and cooperatives. Key achievements included improved agricultural productivity, increased resilience to climate shocks through natural resource management, and higher household incomes – particularly from livestock and greenhouse activities. However, weaknesses were identified in knowledge management, which lacked a systematic approach to using lessons learned for decision-making, and in South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), where opportunities for strategic partnerships and learning exchanges remained underexploited.
3. The CSPE made four recommendations, which were either fully or partially agreed upon at the completion point, signed by IFAD and the Government of Türkiye in 2024: (1) further prioritize, in the next strategy, the resilience of rural livelihoods in the mountain areas of Türkiye in an integrated manner by deploying innovative approaches that build on existing country potential in value chain segments (agreed); (2) leverage the strategic partnership between IFAD and the Government beyond portfolio oversight to foster engagement on policy matters and effective knowledge management for greater scaling up of results (partially agreed); (3) improve the inclusiveness of the country programme towards poor and vulnerable rural women, young men and young women (agreed); and (4) strengthen the programmatic approach in the delivery of IFAD’s support and foster the learning culture to address persistent implementation challenges (agreed).
4. The new COSOP for Türkiye (2025–2030) aims “to promote sustainable rural transformation and address regional disparities by strengthening ecosystems and agrifood systems, increasing incomes, enhancing resilience and reducing poverty among targeted rural populations”. To achieve this goal, the COSOP outlines three strategic objectives (SOs): (i) strengthen the governance of natural resources and ecosystems for more efficient, resilient and sustainable management; (ii) foster sustainable agrifood systems (by promoting sustainable practices and high-quality value chains with a focus on regional branding); and (iii) diversify economic opportunities that contribute to the socioeconomic development and empowerment of women and youth in rural areas, ensuring the inclusion of those left behind. These objectives will guide IFAD’s investments as Türkiye prepares for graduation from IFAD borrowing.
5. The new COSOP for Türkiye explicitly references and integrates the CSPE recommendations into its SOs and overall goal. It addresses recommendation 1 by

establishing a resilience framework within its theory of change, emphasizing the sustainable governance of natural resources and ecosystems, and fostering sustainable agrifood systems. In alignment with recommendation 2, the COSOP emphasizes strengthening knowledge management and scaling up through strategic partnerships and SSTC. Furthermore, the COSOP specifically targets the most vulnerable segments of the rural population, including women and youth, aligning with recommendation 3, through its third SO, which aims to diversify economic opportunities and promote inclusive socioeconomic development. Lastly, addressing recommendation 4, the COSOP commits to enhancing monitoring and evaluation systems, ensuring robust outcome tracking, and placing greater emphasis on institutional capacity-building to address previously identified implementation challenges.

II. Specific comments

6. While the COSOP shows strong alignment with the CSPE recommendations, there are areas that could be improved.
7. **Scope of interventions.** The theory of change highlights key challenges to be addressed through interventions, including land fragmentation, climate vulnerability, water scarcity, ecosystem degradation, limited productivity and restricted market access. However, some challenges have received less explicit attention within the theory of change and Results Management Framework (RMF). Informality in rural employment arrangements, for example, is indirectly addressed through employment generation activities, yet the COSOP does not comprehensively detail specific measures for tackling informality. Similarly, while the importance of high-quality value chains is acknowledged, specific strategies related to poor hygiene and safety standards, as well as inadequate branding, are given limited attention. Additionally, although technology adoption is frequently emphasized, specific interventions to promote mechanization and broader technology use, particularly those that could attract youth to agriculture, are not clearly articulated. Consequently, these areas would benefit from more detailed treatment in future operational documents or project designs under the COSOP.
8. **Better-off farmers.** The CSPE found that projects in Türkiye often favoured better-off farmers, who were directly targeted as demonstration cases by project staff. Outreach to poorer individuals was less effective, especially for activities requiring participants to have productive assets. The CSPE also found that the value chain development approach mainly benefited individuals already in possession of such assets, even under the matching grants programme – though some exceptions were later made with full grants to poor farmers. The new COSOP adopts a multifaceted approach to address the inclusion of better-off individuals while improving outreach to poorer populations and smallholder farmers. The COSOP includes geographical, self and direct targeting to reach poor and vulnerable groups, especially women and youth in remote, disaster-prone areas.
9. **Outreach to poor farmers.** Using the “at risk of poverty or social exclusion” (AROPE) rate, the new COSOP aims to ensure that targeting effectively reaches the most vulnerable individuals. It is primarily used for geographical targeting, helping IFAD and its partners identify and prioritize districts with elevated levels of poverty and exclusion. In addition to geographical targeting, the COSOP includes complementary direct and self-targeting mechanisms. Direct targeting ensures that specific, eligible households in districts with high AROPE rates are actively included in project activities. Meanwhile, self-targeting involves project components – such as training programmes or public works – that are designed to naturally attract and benefit lower-income or marginalized participants.
10. This targeting approach outlined in the new COSOP is intended to ensure that those with the greatest development needs are supported, while also leveraging the capacity of better-off actors to contribute to development. However, the RMF

(appendix I), as currently designed, does not include indicators to assess the extent to which this approach is effective. Including metrics to assess the distribution of participation and results among better-off and poorer individuals is important to ensure that development efforts do not disproportionately benefit those who are already advantaged, as was observed in previous projects in Türkiye, and to verify that targeting strategies are effectively reaching and supporting the most vulnerable populations as intended.

11. **Knowledge management.** The CSPE identified weaknesses in the monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. In response, the new Türkiye COSOP sets out a more intentional approach to generating, sharing and applying knowledge to support rural transformation. This includes lesson-sharing through project exchanges, SSTC and partnerships with research institutions. Formal collaborations with local think tanks and academic bodies are expected to enhance structured learning. The COSOP also introduces the sustainable innovation and cooperation platform, designed to foster cross-sectoral collaboration and support evidence-based policymaking.
12. The COSOP's RMF provides the foundation of its learning system and is aligned with the three SOs. Data from IFAD-financed projects are intended to inform continuous reviews and self-evaluations, supporting adaptive management and contributing to policy dialogue. The COSOP also includes a knowledge management strategy, featuring tailored training for project and government staff, partnerships with research institutions and the use of digital innovations through information and communications technologies for development (ICT4D) to enhance data quality, improve access to information and support precision agriculture. However, the RMF lacks clear guidance on the use of disaggregated data by sex. Similarly, age disaggregation – particularly for youth-related indicators – is insufficiently defined. To strengthen the robustness of the RMF, the COSOP would benefit from more explicit provisions on disaggregated data collection and use.
13. **Gender transformative approach.** The CSPE found that projects in the Türkiye portfolio recognized the root causes of gender inequality and prevailing gender norms but primarily adapted to these norms instead of challenging them. The COSOP explicitly included a transformative shift in gender dynamics and youth empowerment towards a more equitable society as a co-benefit of SO3 (Diversify economic opportunities that contribute to the socioeconomic development and empowerment of women and youth in rural areas, ensuring inclusion of those left behind). However, the COSOP provides limited detail on how this transformative change is to be achieved. The theory of change for SO3 focuses mainly on enterprise training and access to financial services to support off-farm economic activities and increase incomes. While important, this approach does not directly address the deeper, systemic causes of gender and social inequalities, nor does it engage with the role of men and broader systems in enabling transformative change. Moreover, practical strategies to challenge entrenched norms and empower women beyond their economic roles remain underdeveloped.
14. **Policy engagement.** The CSPE found that IFAD's operations during the evaluation period did not lead to any significant or direct policy outcomes. It also noted that IFAD's limited presence in Ankara constrained opportunities for both formal and informal engagement. At the same time, the CSPE identified policy engagement as a key area for improvement and recommended fostering policy engagement and strengthening knowledge management to support the scaling up of results. The new COSOP acknowledges these limitations and outlines a plan to address them, explicitly highlighting policy engagement as a strategic priority. It includes a knowledge management strategy aimed at supporting evidence-based policymaking and proposes collaboration with research institutions to capture lessons and inform policy. In addition, the COSOP identifies clear thematic areas for policy engagement, including watershed planning, guidelines for youth and women's

empowerment, rural youth retention and inclusive contract farming. These focus areas are well aligned with the CSPE recommendations.

15. Despite the positive orientations, the suggested approach to policy engagement remains relatively cautious. The COSOP describes its engagement as supportive rather than enabling, reflecting a limited shift in positioning on policy engagement, consistent with the partial agreement to the related CSPE recommendation. Furthermore, the COSOP addresses the lack of IFAD presence in Ankara only indirectly, placing emphasis on stronger engagement with provincial and national institutions. As a result, the COSOP's country-level policy engagement agenda may face challenges in achieving its stated ambitions.

III. Final comments

16. The new COSOP for Türkiye shows strong alignment with all four CSPE recommendations. It integrates a resilience framework within its theory of change, strengthens its focus on knowledge management and scaling up, and emphasizes inclusive targeting of women, youth and vulnerable groups. Its SOs – covering ecosystem governance, sustainable agrifood systems and socioeconomic empowerment – are well aligned with Türkiye's evolving rural development needs and its pathway towards graduation from IFAD financing.
17. While the new COSOP demonstrates commendable alignment with the CSPE's four key recommendations, several areas merit further consideration. These include the targeting approach, which could benefit from clearer mechanisms and indicators to ensure equitable access and benefit-sharing with poorer households; the lack of explicit guidance on gathering and using sex- and age-disaggregated data; and the absence of a clear strategy for addressing the deeper structural causes of gender inequality. Similarly, the COSOP's intended supportive role in policy engagement, combined with IFAD's limited presence in Ankara, may constrain its ability to enable the emergence of policies favourable to smallholder farming in Türkiye.
18. Addressing these constraints remains critical to enhancing the overall effectiveness of the COSOP, particularly as the country enters graduation discussions with IFAD.