
Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme 2026–2033 for the Republic of India

Document: EB 2025/OR/25/Add.1

Date: 20 November 2025

Distribution: Public

Original: English

FOR: REVIEW

Action: The Executive Board is invited to review the comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme 2026–2033 for the Republic of India.

Technical questions:

Indran A. Naidoo

Director

Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

e-mail: i.naidoo@ifad.org

Kouessi Maximin Kodjo

Lead Evaluation Officer

Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

e-mail: k.kodjo@ifad.org

Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme 2026–2033 for the Republic of India

I. General comments

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) completed its third country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for India in 2023 and presented the report to the 127th session of the Evaluation Committee on 31 October 2024, where the findings and recommendations were discussed with Committee members and Management. The CSPE covers the period 2016–2022 and reviewed the country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) 2018–2024, including 13 projects for a total cost of US\$2.46 billion, with IFAD financing of US\$737 million. It also reviewed non-lending activities (knowledge management, partnership-building and policy engagement) and grant-funded activities.
2. The evaluation found that community mobilization was a strength, which had supported social empowerment as well as remunerative and resilient production systems and livelihoods. The self-help group (SHG) model was the basis of eight projects and has been scaled up nationally. Rural poverty impacts were apparent, but weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation made these difficult to verify. Efficiency issues identified in the previous 2016 country programme evaluation were still mostly unresolved at the time that the CSPE was carried out in 2023. These included overruns, delays and staff turnover. Two fully designed projects failed to materialize as they were not processed further by the Government, and there were significant partial loan cancellations in another two projects (and in the meantime, since the CSPE, in a third). Weaknesses in partnership-building with the private sector have limited smallholder market linkages. While there were some strong interventions in natural resource management, a more integrated approach was needed, as well as more attention to climate-smart agriculture and environmental safeguards.
3. The CSPE found that there has been progress in women's participation, voice and access, and significant advances in gender transformative approaches in two projects. However, these activities were not implemented in all projects of the portfolio, and more efforts to address structural inequalities are needed. Convergence with government programmes and working with local governance institutions has led to very successful institutional impacts, particularly in the portfolio's areas of strength, such as work with SHGs, women and tribal groups.
4. The CSPE made six key recommendations to guide the new COSOP: (i) clearly establish IFAD's added value, to be supported by multipronged strategies based on the profiles of target groups, partners' capacities and the types of development challenges to be addressed; (ii) emphasize the promotion of effective monitoring, feeding into knowledge management and innovation to scale up all aspects of the country strategy and programme; (iii) ensure adequate attention, investment and capacities in social capital building to strengthen grassroots organizations; (iv) strengthen market and business orientation in interventions designed to increase small-scale producers' access to markets; (v) strengthen more integrated care and consideration of environment and natural resource management and climate resilience; and (vi) ensure higher prioritization and specific measures to increase efficiency. The agreement at completion point concurred with all of the CSPE recommendations.
5. India's new COSOP (2026–2033) aims to align closely to the Government's plans for comprehensive rural prosperity, inclusivity, resilience and innovation, within its overall goal to transform India into a developed country by

2047 (Viksit Bharat@2047). The COSOP pursues two strategic objectives: (i) social, economic and climatic resilience of rural communities is enhanced in line with India's commitment towards poverty-free villages; and (ii) enhanced performance, visibility, and scalability of interventions through strengthened knowledge systems.

6. The new COSOP acknowledges the CSPE recommendations in its lessons learned section and closely reflects these in the strategic objectives.

II. Specific comments

7. **Targeting.** The targeting strategy combines: (i) geographic targeting of poorer and climate-vulnerable and Himalayan states; (ii) poverty targeting, focusing on smallholders, landless people, women-headed households, youth and persons with disabilities; and (iii) social targeting, focusing on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This is in line with the CSPE's recommendations as well as the Government's focus on inclusion. It will be important that the geographical spread of projects is not too wide, and that a common thread can be identified, enabling better management by the IFAD Country Office (ICO).
8. **Effective monitoring and knowledge management.** The COSOP places strong emphasis on strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning practices (including using the geographic information system where possible), in line with the CSPE recommendation. This would ensure the collection of adequate information on project results and impacts, and permit earlier intervention if weaknesses are identified. Improved knowledge management will contribute to South-South and Triangular Cooperation and facilitate the interest of the Government in sharing its expertise internationally. The challenge is to establish national and local-led systems that do not rely on stretched ICO capacities.
9. **Gender and inclusion.** Youth and persons with disabilities appear to receive more focus in this COSOP, particularly via support for enterprises and off-farm jobs. There are clear inclusion targets within some output indicators. For example in terms of receipt of project services, there is a target of 60 per cent for women, 20 per cent for youth, 15 per cent for Indigenous Peoples and 3 per cent for persons with disabilities. Application of the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index to projects is a positive step, though not described in detail in the COSOP and only mentioned once in the results framework. It will be important to share the gender transformative actions of some projects (such as Nav Tejaswini) with the other projects. Social capital building of inclusive grassroots and producer organizations is important to ensure development of a shared vision by members and avoid elite capture. SHG performance in the older projects was better, but weaker in the newer projects because supporting people with a lower level of literacy, particularly vulnerable tribal groups, was more challenging. In addition, projects need to move to focusing on outcomes of capacity-building of grassroots organizations, rather than only on outputs.
10. **Access to markets.** Focusing on inclusive value chains, particularly via work with cooperatives, is a continuation of previous approaches. However, it should be recognized that geographical isolation and the limited capacities of subsistence communities limit the possibilities of market-led production. Linking groups within these projects will continue to need strong efforts. In this regard, the COSOP promotes innovative partnership models, such as the cooperative-public-private partnership model. This will require considerable work, given the focus to date of state governments on provision of services to smallholder farmers by government bodies.
11. **Natural resource management and climate change (NRM/CC).** The CSPE concluded that NRM/CC interventions were not sufficiently integrated, and potentially even causing environmental damage. IFAD's Social, Environmental and

Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP) have not been consistently implemented. Natural resource management plans were prepared but not always used by communities. Most of the projects include soil and water management activities; however, the CSPE noted that water use efficiency was not usually considered. Therefore, it is important and appropriate that the COSOP emphasizes improvements in water use efficiency and integrated water resource management, and the use of new digital technologies and improved early warning systems to combat climate change and disasters. In addition, the ICO is committing to compliance with SECAP standards.

12. **Efficiency.** Financial management was identified in repeated country evaluations, including the last CSPE, as a substantial risk. The COSOP outlines measures to address this. Many projects are in a second phase, giving more opportunity to reinforce the progress made in the first, and to improve their operational efficiency. Planning one new project (the second phase of a cofinancing project with the Asian Development Bank), as well as moving to a second phase of the Fostering Climate-Resilient Upland Farming Systems in the Northeast Project, will limit the pressure on the ICO.
13. The COSOP notes that it will explore various financing options – including the possibility of non-sovereign operations – as well as seek grant financing from the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility and other financiers. This is important in order to permit IFAD to demonstrate its value added in capacity-building, knowledge management and partnership-building, as the economic position of India improves and the country potentially moves to upper-middle-income status within a decade.

III. Final comments

14. IOE appreciates that the COSOP aligns well with CSPE recommendations and national development goals. IOE remains available for any clarification and support required.