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Enabling poor rural people
to overcome poverty

IOE Comments on the IFAD Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

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For: Review

IOE Comments on the IFAD Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

1. IOE welcomes the IFAD Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and supports the broad directions proposed in this document, which are overall in line with the findings and recommendations of the corporate-level evaluation of IFAD's performance with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment conducted in December 2010. Indeed, the preparation of the policy itself was a recommendation made by the evaluation.
2. Generally, this is a well-prepared and comprehensive document. The policy is well linked to the IFAD Strategic Framework 2011-2015. It is formulated within a logically coherent framework that clearly defines the policy's goal, purpose, strategic objectives, action areas and expected outputs. The results framework, implementation plan and related accountability framework are clearly laid out. The premises of the policy are generally consistent with the recent *World Development Report* (WDR) 2012 and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) report, *State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011*. IOE considers opportune the proposed creation of a high-level task force to review implementation progress and report annually to the Executive Board. As such, the policy provides an adequate response to the 2010 evaluation finding regarding the past "fragmented nature of IFAD's strategic approach to gender equality".
3. The policy's three strategic objectives are a slightly reworded, but clearer, version of those formulated in IFAD's 2003-2006 Gender Plan of Action. Progress towards the objectives is now measurable thanks to some adjustments to the Results and Impact Management System (RIMS) indicators. As a consequence, the policy provides clearer guidance for project design, monitoring and evaluation, supervision and completion reports compared with previous efforts.
4. IOE notes that the policy is long. The context section, in particular, is unnecessarily lengthy. While the overview is detailed and well written, it lies somewhere between a description and a policy rationale. It lacks references to the rapid modernization of agriculture currently threatening marginal subsistence production, and as a consequence women; the impact of improved education and migration patterns; and the gender implications of fluctuating food prices.
5. Similarly, the policy would have benefited from greater attention to the forces unleashed by trade openness, technological change and diffusion and increased access to information, as these have removed some of the constraints on achieving gender equality. In this scenario, however, not everyone has benefited: women, for whom existing constraints are most binding, are often left behind (WDR 2012) by progress. Examples from agriculture abound. Lower education levels among women producers mean that they experience more difficulties than their male counterparts in complying with the output standards that determine access to the non-traditional high-value export sector. Gender differences in caregiving responsibilities prevent women (particularly young job seekers) from seizing new agricultural wage opportunities in the export sector. Women's weaker access to land and productive inputs constrains their capacity to benefit from trade openness. Dealing directly with the implications of these changes would have increased the value of the policy.
6. The evaluation conducted in 2010 found that IFAD's performance in achieving its corporate objectives was just "moderately satisfactory" and that performance in achieving the third strategic objective (easing of workload and access to basic infrastructure and services) was moderately unsatisfactory. The evaluation called for greater effort to improve performance overall, with special emphasis on the third objective, where more effective strategic and operational partnerships with aid agencies were needed. In its current form, the section on IFAD experience does not

admit that there is “room for improvement” or need for additional effort. Furthermore, it does not indicate where and why rural gender inequalities have persisted in IFAD interventions, nor does it draw salient lessons from experience to guide IFAD on how to improve. As such, IOE finds that the document’s analysis of IFAD experience does not fully reflect the findings of the evaluation and reality on the ground.

7. One of the findings of the evaluation was that performance management systems lacked the staff incentives and accountability needed to promote gender equality. The idea of incentives (positive and negative) for CPMs, directors or PMD staff has not been sufficiently addressed in the policy. There is no provision under action area 5 (resources, monitoring and professional accountability [paragraphs 58-61]) or in the accountability framework (annex V) for applying the policy to the work planning and performance evaluation of relevant staff.
8. IOE observes that the costs of policy implementation have not been included. As with any other policy, an indication of the resources needed for implementation, the source of financing and the opportunity cost involved would be useful.
9. IOE commends the effort that has gone into developing indicators for the policy (table 1, page 12) but notes that clarification may be needed on its coherence with existing corporate policies and documents (e.g. guidelines for quality enhancement and quality assurance, country strategic opportunities programmes, project status reports and supervision and completion reports).
10. The policy states that “IFAD will ensure that gender-focused poverty and livelihoods analysis continues to inform project design, guide the identification of specific gender equality results and ensure that the project ‘does no harm’” (paragraph 42). IOE finds this formulation puzzling and recommends that IFAD aim higher than merely ensuring that no harm is done.
11. The evaluation of gender equality and women’s empowerment recommended re-galvanizing the gender thematic group and governing the group through clear incentives and an accountability framework. The policy mentions that gender focal points will be recast and that the thematic group on gender will provide technical support to the high-level task force. The policy would have benefited from a more detailed description of what investments IFAD will make, human as well as financial, and what other measures will be taken to strengthen the gender architecture in IFAD, including the exact role of the gender desk in the Policy and Technical Advisory Division.
12. The policy emphasizes that attention to gender equality and women’s empowerment must be reflected in project staffing and implementation arrangements (paragraph 44) but refrains from explaining how this will be translated into action. IOE notes that project field staffing may not always be under IFAD’s control.
13. IFAD’s operational model has undergone significant changes over the past ten years, most notably with the introduction of country presence, decentralization of country programme managers and direct supervision. A strong reason for these changes was the need to reduce the distance between IFAD and its partners, particularly the rural poor, and enable the Fund to better achieve its objectives. It is not clear why the policy did not build these changes into its implementation strategy or map out the role that the new architecture can play in facilitating policy implementation.
14. Paragraph 5 of the policy states that its approach and indicators will be further developed and tuned to local and regional priorities and realities on the ground. However, IOE notes that the results framework indicator (in table 1, page 12) to measure progress on the third strategic objective of reducing the workload of rural women and promoting balance is inadequate. As it stands, the indicator measures

improvements in social infrastructure: number of drinking or multiple-use water systems constructed or rehabilitated. Reduction in fuel gathering due to improved stoves or reduced cooking time and more efficient agricultural and agroprocessing tools may constitute other potential indicators for RIMS level 1. In the same vein, IOE observes that it will be important to clarify how the budget allocations referred to under indicator 1.1 will be measured (Increase in the proportion of loans and grants with a gender-specific objective supported by clear budget locations [paragraph 42]).