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Enabling poor rural people
to overcome poverty

IFAD Partnership Strategy – Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

Note to Executive Board representatives

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For: Review

IFAD Partnership Strategy – Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

1. In accordance with the IFAD Evaluation Policy,¹ the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) hereby provides its comments on the IFAD Partnership Strategy for consideration by the Evaluation Committee and the Executive Board.
2. IOE welcomes IFAD's first partnership strategy and supports the broad directions contained therein. The strategy will help clarify and deepen IFAD's engagement with different types of partners, and thus strengthen the capacity to fulfil its mandate. IOE commends IFAD Management for building the strategy on the past experience of both the organization and peers and its use of a specific benchmarking study.
3. The strategy offers a definition of partnership and has an overall logical structure. The analysis undertaken of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT) provides the strategy with a sound basis. The strategy has a clearly spelled-out approach, and on the whole, a solid results framework. IOE agrees with the strategy's central statement: that partnerships are not an end in themselves but a means to an end.
4. IOE raises some points about the strategy for consideration by Management and the governing bodies. These are summarized below.
5. **The need to cost the implementation of the strategy.** The document does not include a tangible analysis of the costs of implementing this important corporate strategy. Without an indication of costs, the strategy risks not being implemented in an effective and timely manner. Actions that have resource implications include the upgrading of IFAD staff capacity and skills – both within the Partnership and Resource Mobilization Office and throughout the organization – and enhancing communication activities related to partnership. While arguably difficult to quantify, priority should be given to providing some indication of costs, based on plausible assumptions, to allow these to be transparently factored into the Fund's annual administrative budget.
6. **Definition of partnership too broad.** Definitions of partnership are wide-ranging: the recently established Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation is one example of what constitutes a partnership, and forms a cornerstone of the Busan Aid Effectiveness Agenda. IFAD's definition is very broad; it includes not only what partnership is (collaborative relationships between institutional actors that combine their complementary strengths and resources and work to achieve a common goal or undertake specific tasks), but also a qualitative aspect: i.e. how partnership should work ("in a transparent, equitable and mutually beneficial way...[that allows partners]...to share the risks, responsibilities, resources and benefits of that collaboration and learn from it through regular monitoring and review). The "how" of the definition could be addressed separately for more clarity, and be included in the assessment of what constitutes a good partnership.
7. A key aspect of the Paris Declaration is also missing: division of labour. The strategy document recognizes the increasing complexity of the aid architecture and of collaborative arrangements and partnerships. One key way to address this, and also contribute to delineating more sharply IFAD's value added, is to ensure that in each partnership, the division of labour among partners is clear.
8. **The diverse nature of partnerships.** The strategy rightly identifies a wide range of highly diverse partners. There is a significant difference between a partnership with a Member State, a farmers' organization and a multinational company.

¹ See paragraphs 11 and 31(i) of the revised IFAD Evaluation Policy (EC 2011/66/W.P.8).

However the strategy needs to state what implications these different partner typologies have for selection criteria, partnership content, processes for partnership agreements and management, exit strategies, degree of formality and type of legal agreement.

9. Similarly, the strategy does not discuss specific partnerships of particular importance for IFAD. For example, the strategy should explicitly propose – on a priority basis – a coherent approach for strengthening cooperation with the multilateral development banks (MDBs) at both the corporate and the country level. This is critical for ensuring IFAD’s scaling-up agenda and making a wider impact on rural poverty reduction. Partnership with MDBs is essential also in policy dialogue, staff exchange, knowledge management, South-South cooperation and country presence, in addition to the cofinancing of individual operations.
10. Special attention needs also to be given to partnership with the other United Nations Rome-based agencies, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP). This would enhance results on the ground and ensure greater efficiency in furthering their broadly common mandate of achieving better livelihoods, nutrition and incomes by promoting more sustainable agriculture and food security.
11. **Results measurement framework.** The strategy does not focus on the planned results of the partnerships – a major weakness given the clear statement that partnerships are not an end but a means to an end. Rather than capture outcomes and impact, the framework measures, inter alia, the number of partnerships (aligned with priorities), partner satisfaction and resources mobilized. Capturing the specific outcome of each partnership would strengthen the assessment of the utility of these partnership and their contribution to IFAD’s strategic priorities. The framework also lacks baseline values or targets against which progress can be reported; and it is not linked explicitly with performance indicators of other internal systems for monitoring performance. It is important that IFAD’s various results measurement tools and systems are consistent and that existing data is used to the extent possible in new strategies and policies.
12. **Incentives and accountability.** As mentioned earlier, IOE commends the use of a SWOT analysis, but proposes including the issues of incentives for IFAD staff as well as for the staff of other organizations and the question of division of labour. IOE also suggests clarifying how the establishment of a central partnership unit is a strength, in combination with the “diffused responsibility across the organization” i.e. more decentralized management. If an accountability matrix accompanied the results framework, this issue might be clearer.
13. **Risks.** The document would also gain from more clarity on what risks are posed by partnerships. These could include reputational risks – if IFAD partners with a large private-sector company that is subsequently implicated in a corruption scandal for example; financial risks – whereby a bilateral agency for political reasons chooses to withdraw from a country where IFAD has ongoing projects; or risk of conflicts between one or more partners – for example between farmers’ organizations and a large private-sector partner.
14. **Capacity of partners.** A key issue emerging from IOE evaluations but not dealt with in the strategy is partner capacity. The corporate-level evaluation on innovation and scaling-up capacity (2010) concluded that one major constraint on the success and impact of innovation and scaling up is the lack of sufficient capacity and commitment among IFAD’s partners. Thus assessing, addressing and strengthening partner capacity should also be a central part of the strategy.