

Document: EB 2014/113/R.6
Agenda: 5(a)(ii)
Date: 11 December 2014
Distribution: Public
Original: English

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Investing in rural people

Report of the Chairperson on the eighty-sixth session of the Evaluation Committee

Note to Executive Board representatives

Focal points:

Technical questions:

Oscar A. Garcia
Director
Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2274
e-mail: o.garcia@ifad.org

Dispatch of documentation:

Deirdre McGrenra
Head, Governing Bodies Office
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2374
e-mail: gb_office@ifad.org

Executive Board — 113th Session
Rome, 15-16 December 2014

For: Review

Report of the Chairperson on the eighty-sixth session of the Evaluation Committee

1. This report covers the deliberations of the Evaluation Committee during its eighty-sixth session held on 27 November 2014. Committee members attended the session from Angola, Finland, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, the Netherlands and Norway. Observers were present from China. The Committee was joined by the Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department (PMD); the Associate Vice-President, Strategy and Knowledge Department (SKD); the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); the Head, Governing Bodies Office, Office of the Secretary of IFAD (SEC); and other IFAD staff. His Excellency Mr Antolín Ayaviri Gómez, Ambassador of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to Italy; and Mr Rui Li, Deputy Director, International Financial Institution Division IV, Department of International Economic and Financial Cooperation, Ministry of Finance of China joined the deliberations for the country programme evaluations for their respective countries.

Adoption of the agenda

2. The provisional agenda contained the following items: (i) opening of the session; (ii) adoption of the agenda; (iii) minutes of the eighty-fifth session of the Evaluation Committee; (iv) Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI); (v) Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE); (vi) Country programme evaluation for the People's Republic of China; (vii) Country programme evaluation for the Plurinational State of Bolivia; (viii) Provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2015; (ix) Procedure regarding drafting and approval of records of Evaluation Committee sessions; and (x) other business.
3. **The agenda contained in document EC 2014/86/W.P.1 was adopted without further amendment.**

Minutes of the eighty-fifth session of the Evaluation Committee

4. The Committee reviewed the minutes of the eighty-fifth session of the Evaluation Committee, as contained in document EC 2014/86/W.P.2.
5. While recognizing the need for a flexible grant policy, as reflected in paragraph 27, one member requested that the text "Committee members emphasized..." be modified to read "*Some* Committee members emphasized...", to indicate the member's concern regarding IFAD's role in providing support in emergency situations. Management provided clarification regarding the organizations that would be supported through the grant policy: these would be largely organizations of marginalized groups, indigenous peoples and smallholder farmers, which IFAD aimed to support in order to ensure that they contributed to policy processes.
6. **The minutes were approved, inclusive of the requested amendment to paragraph 27.**

Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI) and Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE)

7. The Committee considered the ARRI (document EC 2014/86/W.P.3), the RIDE (EC 2014/86/W.P.4) and the respective comments from Management and IOE as contained in the addenda to the reports, as a single agenda item.
8. Members underlined the excellent quality of the 2014 ARRI, noting that IFAD is one of the very few development organizations that produces such an annual report. Members also emphasized the importance of the ARRI as an instrument for promoting accountability and learning and thanked Management for the frank nature of the comments provided.
9. With respect to the **ARRI**, members welcomed the new format of the document, the inclusion of information on projects deemed not to be performing at a satisfactory level, and the reporting by year of completion. They agreed with most

of the recommendations put forward by IOE in the document, including the focus on sustainability as the learning theme for 2015, the use of independent evaluation ratings only for reporting against the indicators contained in IFAD's Results Measurement Framework (RMF), and the need for Management to undertake completion reviews of country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs). Members noted that IOE should not be obliged to provide **cost-neutral recommendations**. It would be up to Management and the Executive Board to take cost implications into account moving forward.

10. Members also welcomed the **RIDE** and underlined the high quality of the report specifically noting improvements in terms of replication and scaling up. Members recognized the achievements made by the institution in reaching, and in some cases, surpassing a number of indicators of the RMF for the Ninth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD9). They also expressed appreciation for and agreed with the comments provided by IOE, including the need for the RIDE to include a dedicated section on how IOE comments on the previous edition had been addressed.
11. In terms of including a section in future versions of the RIDE on the challenges and risks being faced, it was Management's view that the document already presented quite a comprehensive picture of achievements, challenges and areas requiring increased efforts. Management reiterated its commitment to responding to the recommendations of the ARRI through the President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA). IOE suggested that its recommendations on the RIDE should also be covered in the PRISMA, to which Management agreed.
12. Members noted the fact that **sustainability** and **efficiency** continued to be areas warranting further improvement. One member also requested that underlying issues such as project design and management, gender sensitivity and local context, be studied with respect to their relevance to long-term sustainability.
13. Members expressed support for the recommendation that **COSOP completion reviews** be undertaken at the end of each COSOP cycle. Management indicated that both the annual COSOP reviews currently being undertaken and the project completion reports served this purpose.
14. The importance of **decentralization** was highlighted and Management was called upon to continue with the approach in a gradual manner and in accordance with the guidance provided by the Executive Board.
15. With respect to the recommendation that only **independent evaluation indicators** only be used to report against the RMF, Management pointed out that maintaining two sets of indicators and two separate reports provided more information, promoted learning and accountability of staff and strengthened the role and independence of IOE. One member said that the use of two sets of data (i.e. independent evaluation data and self-evaluation data) for a number of indicators was causing confusion in reporting on the performance of IFAD operations. IOE observed that independent evaluation indicators could only be used with respect to level 2 and level 4 in the RMF. A number of members urged Management to maintain the **indicator on relevance** in the RMF, as they deemed it essential. One member suggested including a new RMF indicator on project management; Management agreed with this suggestion.
16. On the issue of the use of **client surveys** for reporting on certain indicators (in level 4) in the RIDE, IOE indicated that such surveys were based only on perceptions and uncertain quality assurance, as they were administered from IFAD headquarters using questionnaires shared electronically with partners in developing Member States. Management countered that it considered the results of the surveys to be robust and necessary to ensure the required checks and balances.

17. Addressing the notable **differences between the findings of IOE evaluations and self-evaluations**, which could be chalked up to sampling errors or timing differences, Management proposed that paired comparisons could be undertaken to highlight exactly where these differences arise. Timing differences were also cited as a possible influence on results for achievement of impact on rural poverty; however targets for underlying factors such as efficiency, effectiveness and innovation had not been reached. IOE suggested that a technical seminar to explain its evaluation methodologies be organized for Committee members in early 2015.
18. Members underscored the need to address performance in the area of **non-lending activities**, including through improved knowledge management, and the area of **environmental impact**. Management indicated that the SKD was working towards generating knowledge products to capture lessons learned from reviews of COSOPs and supervision reports. Additional resources would be required to ensure the success of such endeavours. In response to a member's query, IOE suggested that IFAD include "knowledge management" as a new indicator in the IFAD10 RMF, as a way of ensuring greater attention to the topic in the future.
19. With regard to environmental impact, it was noted that a number of measures to improve performance had already been implemented. Members supported the planned IOE synthesis report in this regard and it was strongly recommended that all evaluation synthesis reports include both recommendations and a Management response.
20. Further clarification was provided on the need to review the **ARRI database** to ensure its robustness and to allow for correlation of information and related analyses. In addition, IOE clarified that while the **data used by Management** were also available publicly in performance reports, it recommended that the raw data (i.e. the downloadable Excel file) also be made available in the public domain, as was already the case with the ARRI database. Management indicated that the annual regional portfolio reviews were publicly available and contained full sets of portfolio data and ratings by project. With respect to the raw project data in PMD reports, data were available and downloadable in PDF format.
21. On **project management**, the need for a compendium of good practices related to project management was observed. Management noted that while **project implementation units** generally had a positive impact on project effectiveness, their establishment was entirely the decision of the government and, similar to **government performance**, was not within IFAD's sphere of influence. With respect to rating government performance, Management expressed the opinion that it should not be placed in the position of judging the performance of a sovereign state. IOE indicated that it did not evaluate government performance in general, but only the agriculture sector within the context of IFAD operations. IOE also underlined that assessing government performance was consistent with the evaluation methodologies used in other international financial institutions, and important in identifying areas of weak performance affecting the outcomes of IFAD operations.
22. A member recalled the importance of project design for successful outcomes and called upon IOE to bear this in mind also in the design of future evaluations and in the development of the revised Evaluation Manual.
23. A member indicated that documents often contained the proviso that **middle-income countries** were too large a group to be treated homogeneously and suggested disaggregating the group into segments on which specific observations could be made.
24. In response to queries regarding the **translation of documentation** presented to the Evaluation Committee, members were reminded of the word limits approved by

the Executive Board as a cost-efficiency measure to achieve the IFAD9 target reduction in the cluster 4 budget. Members observed that authors should avoid treating appendices as part of the main body of documents and requested that this principle be applied with greater consistency throughout all documentation. Mindful of the need to ensure provision of all necessary information in the official languages of the Fund, the Secretariat would work with document originators to this end.

Country programme evaluation for the People's Republic of China

25. **The Committee noted the Country programme evaluation for the People's Republic of China, as contained in document EC 2014/86/W.P.5.**
26. Members congratulated IOE on the quality of its evaluation and Management on the positive results. The representative of the Ministry of Finance of China underlined his Government's deep appreciation for the excellent evaluation report and expressed their agreement with the recommendations contained therein.
27. It was noted that the positive results were attributable to both IFAD and the Government of China, the former for the efforts in project design and the early establishment of a country office in China, and the latter for its focus on project implementation and achievement of targets. It was agreed, however, that further attention should be dedicated to achieving positive results in qualitative indicators such as human and social capital empowerment as well as non-lending activities.
28. On the **timing of the country programme evaluation (CPE)**, Members were advised that while this was the first CPE undertaken in China, a number of project-level thematic evaluations had been carried out in the country over the past decade. Moreover, the Asia and the Pacific Division noted that they had undertaken a country programme review for China in 2010. The results of the current CPE would feed into the new COSOP under preparation.
29. With respect to **targeting** and the need to focus on the poorest of the poor, Management indicated that the regions in which IFAD operated had been identified by China's Rural Poverty Development Strategy for 2011-2020 and that poverty assessments were conducted at both the provincial and the village levels to ensure targeting of the poorest of the poor. On a related note, Management agreed that **rural-urban migration** could be an issue and that the aim of IFAD's operations was to combat this trend by improving the prospects for potential migrants in the rural areas.
30. Some members noted the need for more information on **gender** mainstreaming and gender-responsive systems. IOE advised that the CPE team included a dedicated gender specialist who had produced a detailed working paper on the topic (as listed in the report), and that the in-depth analysis carried out had probably not been adequately reflected in the final report.
31. Given the potential for the scaling-up of projects in China, greater efforts were called for in this area, as well as in the areas of **knowledge management and South-South Cooperation**. The pursuit of **strategic partnerships** with other multilateral and bilateral partners, taking into account the specific country context, was also encouraged. The issue of **technical assistance** was also raised and, noting the proportion of funding provided to China, additional information on IFAD lending to sub-Saharan Africa was provided bilaterally at the request of one Committee member.
32. As recommended by the CPE, Management clarified its intention to outpost the country programme manager for China and to further strengthen the China country office by considering outposting staff specializing, for example, in the field of procurement, with a view to providing backstopping support both to the China portfolio and to other portfolios in the region.

Country programme evaluation for the Plurinational State of Bolivia

33. **The Committee noted the Country programme evaluation for the Plurinational State of Bolivia, as contained in document EC 2014/86/W.P.6.**
34. Members appreciated the positive **results** identified in the evaluation, especially in the area of human and social capital development, inter alia, achieved by providing capacity-building, promoting knowledge transfer by local people, upholding the rights and role of the beneficiaries, etc. and noted the specific **weaknesses identified in the portfolio**, including the wide geographic coverage of the portfolio, weak knowledge management and policy dialogue, and the lack of sustainability of interventions.
35. The Ambassador of the Plurinational State of Bolivia highlighted the strong relationship between his country and IFAD and expressed satisfaction with the operations being jointly carried out. The Government reiterated the need for a new commitment to further enhance the portfolio in collaboration with the ministries dedicated to rural areas and poverty eradication, and other United Nations agencies.
36. The Committee noted that efforts were needed with respect to the **monitoring and evaluation** systems, in particular with respect to **gender data** and outcome-level data on the impact of the portfolio in terms of gender. Management indicated that outcome-level information was being enhanced throughout IFAD's portfolio through expanded publication of ex ante and ex post economic analyses.
37. **The Committee emphasized enhanced collaboration** both with partners such as the Rome-based agencies, and with national Government. While the evaluation found partnership with the Government to be fairly strong, it suggested further improvements in terms of the timing of project approvals and encouraged ownership through increased involvement in project design by IFAD.
38. The Committee noted that an intervention from headquarters to deal with the **poor performance of the portfolio** could have taken place much earlier, thereby ensuring better implementation of the project. Management indicated that portfolio size and the requisite resources and capacity were important factors in determining project quality and steps had been taken to address the performance issues, including through the opening of a country office.
39. The issue of translation of documentation was reiterated as the main report of the CPE had been provided in Spanish only. IOE agreed to work with SEC to ensure inclusion of all important issues in the main text of the document, which would be translated for presentation to the Committee.

Provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2015

40. **The Committee reviewed document EC 2014/86/W.P.7, containing the provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2015.**
41. Given that new members of the Evaluation Committee would be appointed at the Executive Board in April 2015, who would like to have a say in next year's agenda, the Committee approved the provisional agenda for planning purposes with the understanding that the new Committee could exercise its right to change the agenda in the course of the year, as deemed appropriate.
42. **The agenda was approved without further amendment.**
43. A member subsequently requested a discussion on the functioning of the Committee and its relevance to the organization. It was decided that could be discussed among members at a later date.

Procedure regarding drafting and approval of records of Evaluation Committee sessions

44. Following up on discussions at its eighty-fifth session, the Committee considered the proposed procedure regarding drafting and approval of records of Evaluation Committee sessions as outlined in document EC 2014/86/W.P.8.
45. In answer to concerns regarding the consultation process for the **report of the Chairperson** to the Executive Board, the Chairperson proposed that the last sentence of paragraph 9 regarding the Chairperson's report be amended to read: "The Chairperson shall, under normal circumstances, circulate this report to other Committee members prior to its submission." The proposal was accepted by the Committee.
46. It was agreed that every effort would be made to circulate records to members within one week of the conclusion of Evaluation Committee sessions. In cases where corrections to the minutes were proposed, these would be circulated to members in a timely manner and submitted to the subsequent session of the Evaluation Committee for approval.
47. **The Committee approved the new procedures for the drafting and approval of Evaluation Committee records, as amended. A revised version of the document would be posted on the Member States Interactive Platform.**
48. The Committee then discussed the issue of access to verbatim records of Evaluation Committee sessions. Some members wished to have access to these records to ensure that Committee minutes were complete and/or to enhance transparency. The General Counsel stated that the primary purpose of the verbatim records was to assist the Office of the Secretary in drafting the minutes. Furthermore, too liberal an approach to the provision of verbatim records to members carried certain risks regarding the privileged nature of discussions during Committee sessions. Lastly, the General Counsel indicated that, should members wish to change the procedure, it would be advisable to elevate this issue to the institutional level. In the absence of a consensus position by all Committee members, it was agreed to continue discussions informally.

Other business

49. No items were discussed under other business.