

Document: EB 2015/115/R.21  
Agenda: 10(a)  
Date: 18 August 2015  
Distribution: Public  
Original: English

E



## Report on the 2015 country visit of the IFAD Executive Board

### Note to Executive Board representatives

#### Focal points:

#### Technical questions:

Executive Board country visit participants,  
through Ra it Pertev  
Secretary of IFAD  
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2254  
e-mail: r.pertev@ifad.org

#### Dispatch of documentation:

Alessandra Zusi Bergés  
Officer-in-charge  
Governing Bodies Office  
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2092  
e-mail: gb\_office@ifad.org

Executive Board — 115<sup>th</sup> Session  
Rome, 15-16 September 2015

---

For: Review

## Report on the 2015 country visit of the IFAD Executive Board

1. The Executive Board's annual country visit took place in the Kingdom of Morocco from 18 to 22 May 2015.<sup>1</sup>
2. Overview of the field visit. Two days of visits to project sites gave Board members an opportunity to see IFAD-supported activities on the ground and observe the tangible benefits that these are generating. Board members visited rural communities in Al-Haouz Province. Mostly located in mountain areas, these communities are implementing IFAD-supported activities with great success. The visit focused on the Agricultural Value Chain Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz Province.<sup>2</sup> The Board also visited the Rural Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz Province, which closed in 2011.<sup>3</sup> The Board observed the achievements of phase I and the work of the follow-up project to complement and consolidate those achievements. Presentations by beneficiaries and the project teams allowed Board members to follow the projects in each stage of their development. Members also met and spoke with beneficiaries, project staff, government officials (both central and local) and development partners.
3. Overall, the project activities demonstrated a strong emphasis on gender and young people and the crucial part that they play in family farming and other production systems. Several associations linked to agricultural value chain production were visited (including young people's and women's cooperatives). Board members noted that women were participating actively in value chains. At one project site members were interested to learn that a borehole had been sunk, with IFAD support, saving valuable time for women and allowing them to undertake productive activities.
4. Members were impressed by the beneficiaries' ownership of the various projects. The participatory approaches promoted by IFAD have helped develop civil society in the area, resulting in better sustainability and maintenance of assets. These approaches are being scaled up by the Government. IFAD's operations in the province are closely aligned with the Government's Plan Maroc Vert and the Fund's strategic objectives in that they are focused on improving the livelihoods, incomes and food security of poor rural people.
5. Members felt that IFAD's implementation approach seemed labour-intensive in terms of community support, but its uptake by the Government for replication on a larger scale indicated that it is cost-effective, given the specific needs of communities in mountain zones. Board members recommend exploring the issue of cost-effectiveness of small-scale, labour-intensive community-supported projects, in order to draw lessons for replication and scaling up in similar contexts.
6. Members observed activities ranging from the planting of olive and apple trees to the construction of small-scale irrigation schemes, drinking water supply systems, rural infrastructure and agricultural processing units. They also saw interesting innovations, such as extension services for small farmers – provided by public and private technical teams or équipes-métier – which promote best practices in the production and commercial aspects of the value chain. IFAD's promotion of entrepreneurship through the creation of local expertise was in evidence, as was its holistic approach to production, encompassing all aspects from labelling, food safety and waste minimization to marketing, accounting and reinvestment. Access to markets and microfinance – IFAD's area of expertise – is receiving special

<sup>1</sup> Executive Board members participating in the field trip were Canada, China, Dominican Republic, Egypt, France, Indonesia, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Switzerland, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

<sup>2</sup> IFAD ordinary term loan of US\$6.4 million and with overall project costs of US\$9.13 million.

<sup>3</sup> IFAD intermediary term loan of US\$18 million and with overall project costs of US\$30 million.

- emphasis. It was observed that the marketing of products in the project value chains needs to improve, and that this will require additional training and support.
7. IFAD's commitment to reducing climate change vulnerability is visible in its tailoring of the project to specific arid mountainous conditions, for example by investing in hydro-agricultural schemes and infrastructure and promoting water conservation practices. Board members would like to know more about the grant provided under the Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP) and how – in the context of Morocco – it has made a difference in project design. Although the ASAP grant was not used in the projects visited by Board members but rather to support the recently approved Rural Development Programme in the Mountain Zones - Phase I, this latter intervention could also serve as a good example of the added value of ASAP support in a middle-income country.
  8. Board members met with the Governor of Al-Haouz Province who stated that as a result of IFAD's approach, local communities had evolved from being recipients of assistance into fully responsible project partners. On the recommendation of the Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries, members visited an innovative Government-supported project. The initiative integrates research and development to promote cactus production and zero waste processing in the contiguous province of Rehamna. There is scope for IFAD to link the smallholder producers it supports in Al-Haouz with this initiative through contractual farming.
  9. Board members were received with great hospitality by the communities they visited. Community members expressed immense gratitude for IFAD's valuable support, which they said had changed their lives and brought about societal change. Similarly, Board members were warmly welcomed by government officials at all levels. The overall impression was one of great appreciation for IFAD's work.
  10. Rabat. Board members travelled to Rabat to meet with the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries and the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. Members were struck by the excellent relationship between IFAD's staff and government officials, which was all the more remarkable given the lack of an IFAD country office (ICO) (to be opened in 2015).
  11. The meeting with the Secretary-General included all IFAD project directors, and regional and provincial directors. The Secretary-General stated that IFAD-supported projects had brought about concrete changes in rural people's lives. He spoke about the long-standing partnership between Morocco and IFAD and gave an overview of the Plan Maroc Vert, noting that it had been directly informed by the success of IFAD-supported projects in the country.
  12. Members learned of the Government's plans to increase the focus on development interventions, the reforms undertaken in the agricultural sector, and the rapid change under way in Moroccan farming. Also discussed was IFAD's important role in supporting the Government in designing development strategies for the country's mountain zones. Given the challenging context for women, Board members felt that in order to sustain the progress achieved in gender equality, IFAD should pay particular attention to capacity-building and the governance of the collective action mechanisms on which women rely.
  13. The Al-Haouz project and other IFAD-supported operations are considered highly successful and have inspired the Government to adopt similar strategies. The Government views the Al-Haouz project as a "testing lab" and therefore an influential tool for the agricultural sector. Discussions also touched on the potential for expanding productivity through continued technical support from the Government, international financial institutions such as IFAD, and South-South Cooperation.
  14. The discussions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs centred on the Government's strategies to develop all economic and social sectors and highlighted the country's commitment to making the partnership with IFAD an exemplary one. The opening

of an ICO in Rabat will further nurture this relationship, marking a milestone in the long-standing partnership between IFAD and the Government.

15. It was clear from the discussions that agriculture is a top government priority. A sustainable development strategy for the country's mountain areas is near completion. IFAD could make a valuable contribution to the strategy in terms of its experience in project design, intervention style, capacity-building and best practices. The Government – particularly the new directorate for rural and mountain zones – could put this experience and knowledge to good use in strategy and policy design. Ministers and officials indicated the need for IFAD's assistance to link smallholders – particularly women – to the Government's development programmes to ensure that they are not left behind in the development process.
16. Moroccan partners invited IFAD to seriously consider undertaking a joint initiative with other United Nations agencies and the Government of Morocco to provide support and capacity-building in other countries of mutual interest, through South-South and Triangular Cooperation.
17. Board members met with the permanent representative of the United Nations system in Morocco and members of the United Nations Country Team. The Board was pleased to note the clear value of close interagency collaboration. The joint management by IFAD and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) of the Global Environment Facility project in the eastern region was singled out as an example of successful interagency collaboration. United Nations agencies were enthusiastic about the opening of an IFAD country office on the premises of the United Nations Development Programme. Several representatives of United Nations agencies who had not yet worked with IFAD expressed their interest in doing so. It is expected that the ICO will also strengthen IFAD's role in the donor community and its partnership with civil society.
18. Challenges. Board members would appreciate learning about the challenges faced by IFAD in its operations in Morocco. Other agencies cited the Government's "grand schemes but shifting priorities"; the implementation of many pilot projects but with little scaling up; and a multitude of government sectoral plans (55 in all) leading to duplication and lack of coherence across sectors.
19. Assessing project sustainability is also a challenge. While strong local ownership is evident, the projects are small-scale. Longer-term commitment and adequate skills and resources are needed for sustainability and scaling up.
20. Some Board members questioned whether IFAD should be involved in such labour-intensive efforts in remote areas with a small number of beneficiaries. We all recognize that that an equity-based approach is important for sustainable and inclusive development. It would be helpful for IFAD to document the cost-effectiveness of its interventions, especially in remote areas. Findings from the recent Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE)-led project performance assessment of the Rural Development Project rated project relevance and effectiveness as satisfactory and efficiency as moderately satisfactory.
21. Recommendations. The following recommendations are made for future country visits: (i) allocate time for joint reflection among Board members, Management and IOE at the beginning and/or end of each day, in order to better understand project successes and challenges with regard to sustainability, cost-effectiveness, scale, governance, etc.; (ii) ensure adequate time for interaction with beneficiaries to gain an insight into their experiences, and to enhance downward accountability; and (iii) link country visits to recent country programme evaluations to enhance the contribution of Board members to the preparation of country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs), and give them a broader understanding of linkages between a COSOP and the projects in a given country.
22. Conclusions. Morocco is clearly committed to rural poverty reduction and greatly values IFAD's partnership. IFAD's Al-Haouz project is seen as a role model in the country – if not the region. Under its ambitious National Initiative for Human

Development and Plan Maroc Vert, Morocco has achieved remarkable results in poverty alleviation. IFAD plays an important role in ensuring that smallholders and landless farmers, including rural women and unemployed young people, remain at the centre stage of development. This strategic orientation is fully in line with the second pillar of Plan Maroc Vert, which reflects the Government's strategy and its dedication to smallholder agriculture and value chain development. IFAD's work has gained even greater importance in light of the five-year extension of the COSOP (from 2015 to 2020), which will open up more opportunities for Morocco's smallholder farmers to improve their incomes and livelihoods.

23. On a final note, the visit brought to the fore the strong partnership between the Government of Morocco and IFAD, and the importance of close collaboration between national governments and international institutions. Country visits have an important role to play from a governance perspective, as they enable the Board to gain valuable first-hand knowledge while strengthening institutional ties between governments and IFAD. Overall, the trip served to strengthen dialogue and communication among Board members, IFAD Management and IOE.
24. Acknowledgements. We would like to express our deepest gratitude for this interesting and useful country visit. In particular, we thank IFAD Management for the outstanding way it was organized, and the project staff in Morocco for their guidance and readiness to share their insights with us. We thank IOE's Director for joining us on the trip, which provided a great opportunity to enhance learning from evaluation. Our thanks also go to government officials for their time and willingness to share their views on the partnership with IFAD. Last but not least, we would like to thank all the rural women and men we met for their wonderful and unforgettable hospitality.

Terms of reference  
2015 Annual Country Visit of the Executive Board  
Kingdom of Morocco, 18-22 May 2015

1. In line with the new procedure approved at its session in December 2012, the Executive Board has decided to undertake its 2015 country visit to the Kingdom of Morocco.
2. The visit is intended as an opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding of IFAD's work in the field, including the challenges and constraints faced by IFAD supported operations. The visit will allow Board members to witness IFAD's work on the ground, and observe at first hand the opportunities and challenges that IFAD faces in carrying out its mandate.

#### Objectives

3. The main objectives of this country visit are to: (i) visit projects cofinanced by IFAD and the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco to raise Board members' awareness of activities on the ground and allow them to meet clients and stakeholders; (ii) promote dialogue with government officials regarding, among other themes, IFAD's role in the Kingdom of Morocco and the issues encountered in strengthening partnerships on the ground; (iii) gain insights into lessons emerging from IOE evaluations of IFAD-supported operations in the country to provide Board members with a more comprehensive perspective of the country situation and the challenges faced by IFAD operations; and (iv) enable Board members to provide informed guidance on strategic and operational matters to the rest of Executive Board to enhance their critical oversight and strategic role.
4. The programme for the 2015 country visit has two parts:
  - (a) Part one will include visits to IFAD-supported operations in the Al-Haouz Province. During the field visits, the Board members will have an opportunity to hold discussions with beneficiaries, farmers' organizations, cooperatives, private-sector representatives and local government authorities.
  - (b) Part two will entail discussions with high-level government authorities at the national level and development partners.
5. At the central level, Board members will meet with the Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries, who is the IFAD Governor. In addition, they will have meetings with the Ministers for Economy and Finance, and for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, to discuss the Government's vision and framework for IFAD activities for the coming years. Members will also hold discussions with selected multilateral aid agencies such as the United Nations Country Team and other development partners who are members of the Agricultural Working Group on how to promote effective synergies and/or scaling up of the successful models supported by IFAD over the last 20 years.
6. The Executive Board will report on the country visit at the 2015 September session and will share its findings; it will also provide IFAD Management with recommendations for future field visits.

Annual Country Visit of the  
Executive Board to the Kingdom of Morocco  
18 – 22 May 2015  
Programme

<b>Day 1: Sunday, 17 May 2015</b>	
18:00	Departure from Rome for Marrakech
22:00	Welcome of Executive Board Members at Marrakech airport and transfer to the hotel (Le Meridien N’Fis)  Welcome tea at the hotel
<b>Day 2: Monday, 18 May 2015</b>	
8:30	Briefing at the hotel
9:00	Agricultural Value Chain Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz Province Departure for Tahannaout (Al Haouz Province, 32 km from Marrakech) by minibus
9:45	Meeting with the Governor of Al Haouz Province
10:15	Meeting with provincial platform of Al Haouz associations and presentation of the project: Exchange of views with platform president and presentation on IFAD-supported projects in Al-Haouz Province
11:30	Departure for Asni (25 km) by minibus
12:00	Asni rural municipality: Visit to the Walnut House Capitalizing on achievements under the Rural Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz Province; Testimonials by local associations and cooperatives and presentation of local products
12:45 – 13:00	Coffee break
13:00	Departure for Talat N’Yacoub (40 km) by minibus

<b>Day 2: Monday, 18 May 2015 (cont'd)</b>	
14:00	Visits to Douar Azal and Assoul: Drinking water supply and small-scale irrigation and roads
14.45	<p>Visit to Douar Tassoukt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit to farmer field school established in collaboration with the National Agricultural Advisory Office</li> <li>• Visit to apple orchard extension site</li> <li>• Visit to rehabilitated apple orchard and demonstration of organic treatment of apple trees</li> <li>• Discussions with specialized team</li> </ul>
15.15	Lunch offered by local group
17:00	Departure for Marrakech
19:00	Arrival in Marrakech and free evening
<b>Day 3: Tuesday, 19 May 2015</b>	
	Agricultural Value Chain Development Project in the Mountain Zones of Al-Haouz Province (cont'd)
8:30	Departure for Amizmiz (45 km from Marrakech) by minibus
9:30	<p>Site 1: Sidi Badhaj rural municipality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with Ouled M'taa project team</li> <li>• Visit to a rehabilitated olive plantation in Sidi Badhaj</li> <li>• Meeting with National Sheep and Goat Association breeder groups in Ouled M'taa</li> </ul>
10:00	Coffee break
10:15	Departure for Amaghrass (15 km) by minibus
10:35 - 12:15	<p>Site 2: Amaghrass rural municipality: Meet with Zaouia cooperative and discussions with Tamounte women's specialized team</p> <p>Site 2: Amaghrass rural municipality: Visit to the Agrisiwak olive pressing centre and meet with cooperative members</p>
12:45	Lunch offered by local group
14:15	Departure for Rehamna
15:15	Visit to cactus growing area of Jbilette and meetings with facilitation unit
17:00	Departure for Marrakech
17:30	Arrival in Marrakech
20:30	Dinner hosted by Khalida Bouzar, Director, Near East, North Africa and Europe Division



**Day 4: Wednesday, 20 May 2015**

9:00	Departure for Rabat by minibus
13:00	Arrival to Rabat and transfer to the hotel (Le Tour Hassan Palace) Welcome tea
13:30 – 14:30	Break for lunch – down time for participants
15:00	Meeting with H.E. Mohamed Sadiki, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries
16:30 - 18:30	Meeting with project directors (project presentations)
18:30	Return to the hotel
20:30	Dinner hosted by H.E. Aziz Akhannouch, Minister for Agriculture and Maritime Fisheries

**Day 5: Thursday, 21 May 2015**

10:30	Meeting with the Permanent Representative of the United Nations System in Morocco and members of the United Nations Country team
12:30	Meeting with H.E. Mbarka Bouaida, Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
18:00 – 19:00	Wrap-up meeting with Khalida Bouzar, Director, Near East, North Africa and Europe Division and Ra it Pertev, Secretary of IFAD
20:30	Farewell Dinner hosted by Ra it Pertev, Secretary of IFAD

**Day 6: Friday, 22 May 2015**

13:00	Departure from Casablanca to Rome
-------	-----------------------------------