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Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme for the Federal Republic of Nigeria

Note to Executive Board representatives

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For: Review

Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme for the Federal Republic of Nigeria

General comments

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) welcomes the new results-based country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) for the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which it finds to be overall a well-prepared country strategy. The COSOP was developed by IFAD and the Government, drawing on the findings and recommendations of the 2015 country programme evaluation (CPE) and the corresponding agreement at completion point (ACP), signed in June 2016.
2. The COSOP is a concise and clear document. It recognizes the opportunities and challenges for IFAD's portfolio in Nigeria and takes into account a number of lessons from past cooperation between IFAD and the Government.
3. Overall, IOE is satisfied that the CPE recommendations were swiftly adopted through the ACP and that the ACP was followed in the preparation of the COSOP. IOE supports the broad strategic directions contained in the COSOP, which partially correspond to the five recommendations of the 2015 CPE, but notes that it omits some elements and that some areas deserve greater attention.
4. While CPE recommendations are extensively referenced in section II of the COSOP, overall, however, the COSOP provides little analysis or strategic direction beyond the CPE recommendations or the discussions held at the CPE national roundtable (NRT) workshop of April 2016. It therefore remains unclear if the CPE lessons were indeed fully internalized within the COSOP and if key issues affecting the performance of the Nigeria portfolio are likely to be resolved in the upcoming COSOP period.
5. The second part of this note identifies specific aspects of the recommendations included in the ACP (and CPE) that were not adequately taken into account in the COSOP.

Specific comments

6. Geographic coverage, focus and overlap. The CPE commented that the broad multiregion coverage (i) created gaps and prevented synergies between the programmes and (ii) led to IFAD's resources and influence being thinly stretched. The CPE thus recommended (a) focusing on fewer states that are fully committed and (b) creating smaller and more homogenous programme units. While the selection of those states would require the adoption of a transparent mechanism and clear criteria for selection, IFAD in addition should adopt strategies to raise attention and sustain commitment from state governors. The COSOP document includes a commitment to select states using the criteria proposed by the CPE. It does not, however, include any indication of what the mechanism for selection (in partnership with the Government) would be, or if any analysis of existing levels of commitments had yet been conducted. Furthermore, it remains unclear if the new selection process, if followed, will result in increased geographic focus and smaller programme units. The concept notes (for additional financing for the Value Chain Development Programme and for the Rural Agribusiness Sector Enhancement Programme) attached to this COSOP suggest that the programme stretch will not be significantly reduced under the new COSOP. The Rural Agribusiness Sector Enhancement Programme will work in five out of the ten southern states, but the concept note does not comment on how these will be selected and if any geographical overlap is intended with the ongoing Value Chain Development Programme or Rural Finance Institution-Building Programme.

7. Monitoring and evaluation, knowledge management and the role of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD). The CPE provides extensive diagnosis of weak monitoring and evaluation (M&E) within the country programme, and the need to strengthen the central M&E function within FMARD was a key issue for discussion at the CPE NRT in April 2016. Nevertheless, beyond its general statements of commitment to strengthening M&E, the document fails to include any differentiated strategies to address the multiple issues in M&E performance (e.g. poorly designed impact studies, inconsistent data sets, lack of credible poverty data and/or poverty analysis). While it is commendable that the COSOP emphasizes the link between knowledge management and M&E, the strategy hinges on a newly created extension department within FMARD, with which IFAD has no prior experience cooperating, and a national extension policy yet to be developed. A further shortcoming of the COSOP is that the stakeholder analysis in the annex does not include a systematic review of the FMARD organizational set-up and departments, including how functions for M&E and knowledge management are integrated into the FMARD structure.
8. Policy engagement. Section IV, part C, on policy engagement, does not consider the need for consistent engagement with policy processes and decision makers at the federal and state levels. The CPE highlighted the need to build partnerships and raise awareness and buy-in among state governors to ensure state-level commitment in ongoing and new projects (quoted as CPE lesson). The COSOP mentions that this would be dealt with during annual visits; this would clearly be insufficient, given the enormous challenges facing some of the partner states. The COSOP does not elaborate what the strategy for decentralized policy engagement will be or if additional resources (such as the role of a programme officer proposed in the ACP) will be used in this regard.
9. Gender analysis and targeting. The CPE, in a manner similar to the project performance assessment of the Community-based Agricultural and Rural Development Programme, highlighted the need for a better understanding of gender issues within the vastly heterogeneous context of Nigeria and to adopt improved strategies for targeting women within their specific social and cultural contexts. The CPE recommended that resources should be committed to analyse gender as a cross-cutting issue within the country programme and in partnership with the Government and other development partners. The COSOP provides no indication whether such analysis has been conducted or is under preparation. Furthermore, it is a missed opportunity that concrete lessons from the Gender Action Learning System¹ pilot have not been integrated or shared with relevant partners in preparation for the new COSOP. In addition, the COSOP results frame does not include any gender-related indicators or activities.

Final remarks

10. With the above qualifications, IOE wishes to reiterate its overall appreciation of the document and the efforts made to follow up on the 2015 CPE recommendations and ACP.

¹ A household methodology to address gender inequality and power differentials across value chains, piloted under the Rural Finance Institution-Building Programme.