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Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the Country Strategic Opportunities Programme for Burkina Faso

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For: Review

Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the Country Strategic Opportunities Programme for Burkina Faso

I. General comments

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) conducted the first country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for Burkina Faso in 2018, covering the period 2007 to 2018. According to established practice, an agreement at completion point was signed in December 2018 and attached to the new country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP).
2. Lessons learned from the CSPE were incorporated in preparing the COSOP, which built upon IFAD strengths as identified for Burkina Faso, i.e.: (a) promotion of agricultural practices contributing to better management of production resources, as by addressing soil fertility, erosion and water availability, and thereby reducing the vulnerability of these resources; (b) supporting rural enterprise development using institutional mechanisms such as rural entrepreneurship resources centres and access to matching grants; and (c) supporting and promoting farmers and apex organizations to enhance their effectiveness in performing their service provider role and participating in policy dialogue on smallholder agriculture.
3. The following objectives are proposed for this second COSOP for Burkina Faso. They are translated into two and four outcomes, respectively.
 - (SO1) Strengthen the resilience of vulnerable rural populations to food and nutrition insecurity and climate change.
 - (SO2) Improve the performance of key agricultural value chains that create employment and wealth for rural populations and respect the principles of sustainable natural resource management.
4. The COSOP follows up on recommendations made by the CSPE in relation to: (a) limiting the number of intervention areas, and setting up an effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system to measure both results and intermediate changes, and to generate lessons learned; (b) taking the value chain approach further by improving targeting (using pro-poor commodities) and effective access by actors (including poor groups) to support and services, including rural finance; (c) stepping up and expanding actions for sustainable management of natural resources, aligned with better adaptation to climate change; (d) improving IFAD engagement in policy dialogue to ensure sustainable and secure access by rural poor people to productive resources; and (e) developing and implementing an operational plan for knowledge management and systematic learning within the portfolio and for the agricultural sector as a whole.
5. The section below outlines how these CSPE recommendations were taken into account in formulating the new COSOP.

II. Specific comments

6. Intervention areas. The portfolio interventions under this COSOP will be implemented in the same regions currently covered by ongoing projects, in order to build on IFAD's achievements and strengthen its effectiveness and impact in Burkina Faso. One additional region will be added, bringing to seven the total number of regions targeted by the COSOP. If this geographical coverage remains unchanged, the dispersion of efforts will be moderate for the COSOP period 2019-2024, compared to the previous COSOP for which it was high.
7. Value chain development. The main points of the second CSPE recommendation are explicitly addressed under SO2, with the following outcomes: "(i) improved

non-financial services are available for smallholders, specifically women and youth; (ii) linkages to input and output markets are enhanced in key agricultural value chains; (iii) organization of stakeholders in farmers' organizations is enhanced; (iv) viable RMEs and jobs are promoted; and (v) access to customized financial services is improved".

8. Management of natural resources and adaptation to climate change. This point is addressed under SO1 with one outcome: "rural households adopt improved and sustainable technologies (including natural resource management) that increase productivity and ensure resilience to climate change". However, given the importance of climate change in the context of Burkina Faso, as indicated in the Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP) background paper (see appendix IV), this aspect could have one specific outcome. Moreover, the possibility of expanding actions to other natural resources such as forests and pasture was not explicitly addressed.
9. Engagement in policy dialogue. The COSOP proposes key actions required in order to: (a) enhance the participation of farmers (through their apex organizations) in policy dialogue; (b) improve knowledge management for sector policy and strategy development; and (c) improve policy development through IFAD's active participation in the rural sector working groups overall.
10. Hence, capacity-building actions are planned to strengthen and improve: technical and institutional capabilities of key stakeholders (e.g. farmers' and apex organizations, NGOs, rural entrepreneurs); fiduciary and procurement management (project staff and implementing agencies); and M&E capabilities (project and ministry staff). The latter point is in line with the CSPE findings, which highlighted weak capacities among rural development stakeholders in terms of monitoring and evaluating outcome results.
11. Knowledge management and learning. As recommended by the CSPE, an action plan for knowledge management will be prepared and implemented in synergy with other partners. The focus will be on four thematic areas: targeting of smallholder farmers, value chain development, promotion of rural enterprises and natural resource management.
12. With regard to M&E, the COSOP developed a results management framework that includes two indicators to measure achievement of the COSOP overall goal. It should be noted that the second indicator ("to reach at least 50 per cent women and 30 per cent youth") reflects only outreach, not a change. This could be improved by specifying expected changes for women and youth. Moreover, the COSOP M&E plan could be further improved by showing: (a) its linkage with the M&E system for the agriculture sector, e.g. contribution to the strategic goal and objectives of the National Policy on Food and Nutritional Security; and (b) how to bring about systematic learning within the portfolio and the sector.
13. Finally, it should be noted that, although a theory of change is described (paragraph 33), no corresponding figure is provided in the document.

III. Final remarks

14. Overall, IOE acknowledges the efforts made to address the CSPE recommendations in the COSOP. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement and IOE remains available to help, if needed.