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## Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the Country Strategic Opportunities Programme for the Republic of The Gambia

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For: Review

# Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the Country Strategic Opportunities Programme for the Republic of The Gambia

## I. General comments

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) undertook a country programme evaluation (CPE) for the Republic of The Gambia covering the period 2004-2014. The CPE made five recommendations: (i) develop a new country strategy, clearly reflecting on IFAD's niche and comparative advantage; (ii) strengthen project management performance and oversight for effective and efficient delivery mechanisms in the Government for sustainable results and impact; (iii) establish strong and comprehensive partnerships; (iv) improve sustainability of benefits generated from investments; and (v) strengthen gender equality and women's and young people's empowerment.
2. The agreement at completion point (ACP) for the CPE was signed in June 2016. In accordance with established practice, the ACP is attached as an appendix to the new country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) for 2019-2024.
3. IOE welcomes the decision to prepare a new COSOP for The Gambia given the long-term absence of a formalized country-level strategy document after the 2003 COSOP. According to the ACP, specifically in relation to the first recommendation, a country strategy note was to be presented to the Executive Board in September 2017. Hence, IOE considers the preparation of the new COSOP as a delayed but upgraded follow-up.
4. Overall, the COSOP presents a good analysis of the country context, including the assessment of fragility, and the challenges and opportunities for rural and agricultural development. The COSOP puts women and youth at the centre, which is in line with the CPE recommendations. The approach and interventions for gender and youth mainstreaming (paragraph 22) appear to be generally relevant for outreach to women and youth. Some of the lessons learned (paragraph 16) resonate with the CPE findings (for example, the importance of beneficiary ownership and targeting). Capacity-building initiatives related to monitoring and evaluation (paragraphs 38-39), e.g. through PRiME, correspond to the second recommendation of the CPE. It is further noted that the COSOP responds to the third recommendation on partnerships, by referring to the agriculture sector working group and various stakeholders, including civil society organizations, farmers' organizations, chambers of commerce and the Rome-based agencies (paragraphs 33-35).
5. At the same time, there were some issues that could have been better reflected upon or received more attention, as noted below.

## II. Specific comments

6. Poverty analysis and targeting strategy. The CPE recommended that a poverty targeting strategy be developed on the basis of an in-depth analysis. Although this is also included in the COSOP as one of the lessons learned, it is not evident how it has been incorporated into the new country programme. In addition to providing an analysis by gender and age, the document could have presented a differentiated analysis on livelihoods, challenges and opportunities for the rural poor in different areas of the country and for different groups, to serve as a solid basis for a targeting strategy at country programme level and in project design. The COSOP provides little strategic guidance on the issue of geographic focus. It indicates the intention of working mainly in four regions (out of five in the country), thus still

including a large part of the country, even though some factors for consideration are mentioned (e.g. high poverty levels, opportunities to improve tidal irrigation rice productivity, market opportunities for horticulture value chain, and climate resilience imperatives).

7. Lessons from experience. The lesson section could have been more clearly anchored to experience. Some issues were not incorporated: for example, although rural microfinance had been a key element of the portfolio as reflected in the CPE, the COSOP hardly refers to the previous investment in this area and this agenda seems to have disappeared. IOE considers it important to reflect on the experience of IFAD's long-term engagement with the rural finance agenda and partners (e.g. VISACAs, V-APEX, Central Bank) and to provide the rationale for withdrawing from the subsector.
8. Similarly, the document is largely silent on lessons from livestock development support. Given that this was another main area of intervention (e.g. the Livestock and Horticulture Development Project), there could have been some discussion on experience and lessons in this regard and on the rationale for focusing on rice and horticulture.
9. Strategic objectives and theory of change. The two strategic objectives in the COSOP are presented as follows: (i) enhance the productivity and resilience of family farms through sustainable management of natural resources and adaptation to climate change, with a focus on youth and gender impacts; and (ii) improve the management capacity and inclusiveness of professional farmers' organizations/cooperatives, and enhance farmers' access to communal assets, markets and profitable agricultural value chains. These are considered relevant, although the strategic objectives could have been more clearly grounded on experience and lessons (see paragraphs above). The theory of change, mentioned after the strategic objectives (paragraph 21), seems to be missing.
10. Sustainability of benefits. The CPE noted the weaknesses in sustainability of benefits in general (related to the fourth recommendation), including the maintenance of infrastructure. The CPE discussed this issue in connection with beneficiary engagement and ownership, their capacity and organizations, quality of works, as well as the Government's role regarding some major infrastructure as public goods. In the COSOP, this topic is partially mentioned in the lessons section and reflected in the second strategic objective, but it will be important to have more elaboration and a differentiated strategy for the various types, nature and scale of infrastructure works.

### III. Final remarks

11. IOE acknowledges the efforts made in the COSOP preparation, including the process involving different stakeholders as reflected in appendix VII. It also appreciates the attention to the CPE recommendations. The good analysis of the overall country context could have been complemented by a more comprehensive and critical account of experience and lessons and more careful reflection on the targeting strategy.