

Document: EB 2019/127/R.20/Add.1
Agenda: 8(b)(iii)(a)
Date: 30 July 2019
Distribution: Public
Original: English

E



Investing in rural people

Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the Country Strategic Opportunities Programme for the Republic of Cameroon

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

Michael Carbon
Senior Evaluation Officer
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2935
e-mail: m.carbon@ifad.org

Dispatch of documentation:

Deirdre McGrenra
Chief
Institutional Governance and
Member Relations
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2374
e-mail: gb@ifad.org

Executive Board — 127th Session
Rome, 10-12 September 2019

For: Review

Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the Country Strategic Opportunities Programme for the Republic of Cameroon

I. General comments

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) conducted the first country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the Republic of Cameroon in 2017, covering the period from 2007 to April 2017. The agreement at completion point for the CSPE has been attached as an appendix to the new country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) for 2019-2024.
2. The CSPE concluded that the country programme employed rural development approaches focusing on farmers' organizations, value chains, rural finance and youth entrepreneurship, that were well aligned with IFAD and government policies and strategies. The project portfolio achieved good results in terms of increasing agricultural productivity and developing off-farm income-generating activities, with a likely positive impact on beneficiary households' income and food security. The country programme also improved the ability of farmers' organizations to offer services to their members and developed rural socio-economic infrastructure, contributing to an improvement in the human and social capital of beneficiary populations.
3. However, projects were very ambitious in terms of expected outcomes, quantitative targets and geographic coverage considering the limited capacity of the Government and public services. Measures to ensure better management of interventions were inadequate. Portfolio efficiency was compromised by excessive operating costs, imprudent financial management, lengthy procedures, high turnover among key project staff and expenditures that did not always directly contribute to meeting project objectives. The poorest and most vulnerable rural populations – to whom the country strategies and project design were targeted – were not sufficiently reached by project interventions in practice.
4. The CSPE made recommendations to: (i) continue to support farmers' organizations and the development of rural youth entrepreneurship while promoting rural poor people's access to appropriate financial services; (ii) ensure the inclusion of very poor and vulnerable rural populations in the country programme in order to combat inequalities by improving the interventions' geographic and social targeting; (iii) ensure that financing rapidly and fully reaches target populations, accelerating the launch and implementation of interventions, and containing operating costs; and (iv) improve project performance and the scaling up of approaches and results through stronger government leadership in rural-sector coordination, more strategic partnerships and better project monitoring and evaluation.
5. The new COSOP for Cameroon integrates these CSPE recommendations. Through the second phases of the two main IFAD-funded projects, the strategy seeks to continue supporting rural youth entrepreneurship, with an emphasis on financial service provision. Greater efforts will be made to target the most vulnerable population groups, especially poor rural women and youth, while avoiding elite capture. IFAD will also support the Government in taking a more prominent leadership role in rural sector coordination. Furthermore, the COSOP foresees stronger collaboration between the Rome-based agencies (RBA) in Cameroon, building on a joint assessment of RBA collaboration in Cameroon conducted jointly by IOE and the evaluation offices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme.

6. IOE particularly welcomes the strong commitment of IFAD and the Government to improve project efficiency and fiduciary management as recommended by the CSPE. IFAD and the Government plan to fulfil this commitment by strengthening government fiduciary oversight, creating an internal audit function to improve internal controls and bolstering the IFAD Country Office with a full-time financial management expert to support project implementation.

II. Specific comments

7. The CSPE considered that the geographic scope of the IFAD country programme, covering seven out of the country's ten regions, was too large to ensure complementarities between projects, especially in view of the Government's limited management and supervision capacity. The CSPE also found that it there was less justification for IFAD to intervene in the South, Littoral and Centre Regions than in other areas since these have lower levels of poverty. While these regions have relatively greater agricultural value chain development potential and a slightly larger youth population due to immigration from less favourable regions, investing in these regions takes attention and resources away from less favourable parts of the country, from where rural youth are emigrating.
8. The CSPE recommended maintaining support to farmers' organizations as a main thrust of the country strategy since these organizations play a critical role in service provision and in ensuring that the needs and interests of smallholder farmers are considered by the Government and private-sector actors. While support to farmers' organizations and agricultural cooperatives is alluded to in various places in the new COSOP, it could have been more prominent in the COSOP strategic objectives.
9. The proposed results management framework in appendix I links the COSOP strategic objectives to national goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. It provides useful outcome and milestone indicators, which are linked to direct, quantifiable outputs from project interventions. However, the framework presents the same generic list of lending and non-lending activities to support the achievement of each of the three strategic objectives. It would have been useful to make a clearer distinction among which activities would support each specific objective.

III. Final remarks

10. IOE appreciates that the new COSOP for the Republic of Cameroon addresses the main recommendations of the CSPE regarding the programme's strategic thrusts, social targeting, fiduciary management, government leadership and RBA collaboration. One remaining issue of concern is the large geographic spread of the country programme.