

Document: EB 2019/127/R.21/Add.1
Agenda: 8(b)(iii)(b)
Date: 30 July 2019
Distribution: Public
Original: English

E



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

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

Kouessi Maximin Kodjo
Lead Evaluation Officer
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2249
e-mail: k.kodjo@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 Democratic Republic of the Congo

I. Background

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) conducted the first country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2016, covering the period from 2003 to 2015. 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 IFAD country programme intervened in a particularly challenging post-conflict context of fragility characterized by extreme rural poverty, limited management capacities among project teams, weak government services, degraded economic and social infrastructure, low levels of private investment and in some places recurrent violence. In light of this, the evaluation deemed the project design to be overly complex, the quantitative objectives unrealistic and the technical assistance insufficient. Although the country strategy and project objectives were well aligned with national policies and strategies and relevant to the needs of rural poor people, the targeting of interventions was inadequate. IFAD's portfolio was highly dispersed throughout the country and some projects covered overly vast and diverse expanses of territory. Social targeting, based mainly on self-targeting through supported producers' organizations, was inadequate and carried the risk of elite capture and of excluding vulnerable people.
3. Nonetheless, the country programme had a considerable short-term impact on agricultural productivity, food security and household incomes thanks to the strategic decision to focus on rapid-impact interventions, such as agricultural extension combined with the distribution of inputs and farming tools. The rehabilitation of the socio-economic infrastructure had an immediate impact on people's access to education and health care. The programme also obtained promising results in strengthening producers' organizations. However, rural poverty impact was limited by a lack of efficiency and effectiveness of projects and non-lending activities, despite IFAD's considerable project supervision efforts. Although the IFAD Country Office was strengthened, its operating resources and capacity for fiduciary management support remained limited.
4. Government resources made available to agricultural and rural development were also limited, constraining the capacity of public institutions in supporting project implementation. IFAD's advocacy in favour of an increase in government budget allocation to the agricultural sector was unsuccessful. In addition, the partnerships established with other donors to cofinance the country programme, particularly in order to create synergies and achieve greater impact on roads, health care and education infrastructure, did not progress in a significant way.
5. The CSPE recommended: (i) adjusting and strengthening the institutional structure of the country programme; (ii) strengthening the country programme's strategic relevance and impact; (iii) making the project portfolio more effective and efficient; and (iv) improving the relevance and effectiveness of non-lending activities.

II. IOE comments

6. IOE had an opportunity to comment on the first draft of the COSOP in May 2019 and appreciates that most of the comments made have been considered in the revised version. For example, the strategic objectives have been sharpened, indicators and targets in the results management framework have been adjusted, and the strategy integrates the context of fragility more fully.

7. Project management and efficiency. Several structural changes recommended by the CSPE were already implemented in the country programme prior to this new COSOP. These include closing the IFAD liaison office, increasing the involvement of the Ministry of Finance in fiduciary supervision and strengthening the IFAD Country Office in Kinshasa. The COSOP foresees other recommended improvements in the near future, such as joint annual portfolio reviews, stronger involvement of provincial authorities in portfolio steering and monitoring, and more focused and flexible project design. The third strategic objective of the new COSOP specifically aims at improving the government's project delivery capacity.
8. Targeting. The new COSOP also describes how improved geographic and social targeting of interventions will be carried out in practice. Future interventions will continue in the provinces where current projects are underway, with the possibility of expanding into neighbouring provinces. A combination of complementary social targeting mechanisms is proposed to ensure better inclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in project interventions and benefits.
9. Nonetheless, IOE cautions against too rapid an expansion of project intervention areas considering the limited local management capacity and very high transport costs. Furthermore, since producers' organizations and support to value chains will remain the projects' main entry points, it will be important to include appropriate mechanisms for ensuring the inclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable households in future projects, and avoiding elite capture. Increased transparency and stronger citizen engagement in planning, monitoring and evaluation, and the development of complaint-handling mechanisms as foreseen in the new COSOP, will be very important in this regard. Also, while the new COSOP indicates that special efforts will be made to reach people with disabilities, indigenous peoples and displaced persons, future project designs will need to elaborate on how this very challenging commitment will be fulfilled in practice.
10. Fragility context analysis. IOE appreciates the discussion of the country's fragility context in a dedicated fragility assessment note, included as an appendix to the COSOP and summarized in the main document. This analysis provides insights into the causes of fragility and how they are linked to rural poverty and poor performance of the agricultural sector. The fragility and poverty analysis should be deepened and made more region-specific during the design of new projects, as recommended by the CSPE.
11. Innovation and scaling up. The new COSOP proposes three innovations to be promoted by the country programme. The first, building nutrition-sensitive value chains by setting up agrifood partnerships involving smallholder farmers, producers' organizations and other market participants, appears truly innovative. However, the scaling-up strategy in the COSOP could have been better developed.

III. Final remarks

12. IOE appreciates that the new COSOP for the Democratic Republic of the Congo addresses the main recommendations of the CSPE to improve portfolio management and monitoring. Some issues will require deeper analysis during future project design, such as the specific fragility context of the intervention area and how to ensure inclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in producers' organizations and value chains in practical terms.