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## Report on the 2019 Country Visit of the IFAD Executive Board to the Republic of Cameroon

### Note to Executive Board representatives

#### Focal points:

#### Technical questions:

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For: Information

## Report on the 2019 Country visit of the IFAD Executive Board to the Republic of Cameroon

1. Proceedings. A 12-member delegation of the IFAD Executive Board – representing Angola, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Egypt, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Luxembourg and Nigeria – headed by His Excellency Hisham Mohamed Badr, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to IFAD, visited Cameroon from 20 to 26 July 2019 in order to observe the country programme's achievements and enhance their knowledge and understanding of IFAD's work in the field.
2. The delegation was accompanied by: Donal Brown, Associate Vice-President of IFAD's Programme Management Department; Oscar Garcia, Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); Atsuko Hirose, the Secretary of IFAD; Lisandro Martin, Director of IFAD's West and Central Africa Division; Ronald Hartman, Director of the Global Engagement, Partnership and Resource Mobilization Division; Stefania Lenoci, Advisor to the President; and IFAD's Cameroon country team headed by Bernard Hien, Director of the subregional hub for Central Africa.
3. The visit started on Monday 22 July with an introductory workshop that revisited IFAD's cooperation and the findings of the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) 2007-2017, prior to assessing the implementation status of IOE recommendations. That afternoon, the delegation, accompanied by the Cameroon Governor to IFAD, Her Excellency Clementine Ananga Messina, visited an exhibition by youth beneficiaries and began a tour across the country's Littoral, West and Central regions to engage with beneficiaries of the Aquaculture Entrepreneurship Promotion Project (PPEA), the Rural Microfinance Development Support Project (PADMIR), the Commodity Value-Chain Development Support Project (PADFA) and the Youth Agropastoral Entrepreneurship Promotion Programme (PEA Jeunes).
4. On 25 July, the delegation met with other donors, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and representatives from the Rome-based agencies (RBAs) to gain further insights into the challenges and operational context of international development in Cameroon.
5. On Friday 26 July, the delegation was received by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cameroon, His Excellency Joseph Dion Ngute. A debriefing at the Ministry of External Relations afterwards provided an opportunity to reiterate IFAD's commitment to rural transformation in Cameroon. The trip ended on Friday evening with great satisfaction from Executive Board representatives.
6. Conclusion and recommendations.
  - In Cameroon, there is a long-standing partnership between the Government and IFAD. The Fund's engagement in the country dates back to 1981 and has involved 11 operations totalling over US\$400 million, including a US\$200 million contribution from IFAD.
  - The country visit provided an opportunity for Board representatives to understand the situation on the ground first-hand and the challenges faced by the implementing agencies, local communities and the Government.
  - Responding to the concerns raised by the Evaluation Committee in June 2018 about the performance of the country programme, mission delegates confirmed that implementation of recommendations from the CSPE for 2007-2017 is on track. As a result of improved performance, the country allocation doubled from US\$23 million during the Tenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD10) to US\$47 million in IFAD11. The Government was encouraged to sustain its ongoing efforts and avoid setbacks due to poor performance.

- The new country strategic opportunities programme 2019-2024 was found to be of good quality and will be an opportunity to start fresh and change the perspective of the country portfolio. The Board representatives welcomed the increased focus on gender equality and women's empowerment, and highlighted the importance of appointing a gender specialist to address the challenges identified in the CSPE.
  - Given the debt issue with regard to borrowing ceilings established by the International Monetary Fund, participants in the mission was pleased to note that IFAD's resources are still highly concessional. They agreed with the proposal for additional financing for PEA Jeunes and a second phase of PADFA, and encouraged the Government to confirm them.
  - Mission participants saw the potential for scaling up the results achieved by the rice, onion, aquaculture and youth entrepreneurship projects. Bringing these results to scale will require Government funding and IFAD remains available to invest in scaling up.
  - With poverty and hunger rising, the region is off-track to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2. The delegation therefore encouraged Cameroon, as the lead IFAD Member State for the region, to demonstrate leadership by increasing its financial contribution to IFAD12, which begins in February 2020.
7. The following recommendations were made to strengthen the performance of the country portfolio:
- The Government should enhance national ownership of the country programme, including effective oversight of project management and timely disbursement of counterpart funds.
  - The Government should accelerate the revamping of the rural sector coordination platform, with support from IFAD and the German Agency for International Cooperation.
  - The Government should minimize the time lag between signing financing agreements and project start up.
  - IFAD should make use of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) for upgrading technologies used in the projects.
8. Overview of the field visits. Field visits were undertaken from 22 to 25 July 2019.
- (i) Visit to Douala aquaculture station. Board representatives observed that the aquaculture station is well managed, from egg production to rearing of fingerlings and distribution to farmers. Presently, 200,000 fingerlings are produced per day at the station. Representatives observed that there is a need to upgrade technology in order to increase daily production further.
  - (ii) Visit to Agro World Group cage aquaculture site in the Pumba River. In this very useful project, different varieties of fish are grown in cages within the flowing river. Board representatives believed that these fish are vulnerable to natural disasters like floods, pollution and diseases. They suggested that a disaster risk-proof component be included in the project so that the farmers could be insured for any losses due to natural disasters. It was reported that the project had created employment in the community and provided opportunities for families to teach fishing to their children.
  - (iii) Visit to beneficiaries of PEA Jeunes at Bonabéri. Here, Board representatives observed a young entrepreneur rearing poultry, smoking the meat, storing it in refrigerators and marketing it. The representatives observed the need to insure beneficiaries against loss due to calamities and

diseases. They also noted the need to scale up entrepreneurship programmes such as this in order to motivate youth.

- (iv) Visit to exhibition of incubators. Board representatives visited an exhibition by entrepreneurs supported by IFAD projects. Activities included production of crops such as rice, onions, pineapples, maize, plantains and peppers. Animal production systems included pigs, poultry, small ruminants and non-conventional livestock. They also included related activities like input supply, processing, value enhancement and marketing, rural industries, servicing and maintenance of equipment. While the young entrepreneurs involved in the projects were very enthusiastic, Board representatives observed a need to upgrade the technology in order to improve productivity and efficiency – especially in the processing of fruits and food products.
- (v) Visit to Penja pepper geographical indication area. This pepper geographical indication area cooperative group includes approximately 170 farmers who have been successful in growing, processing and marketing peppers. The cooperative is registered for the geographical indication area. Since receiving the certification of geographical indication, the price of its peppers has increased remarkably, which has boosted revenue for member farmers. Board representatives were highly satisfied with this project and suggested that it be scaled up further.
- (vi) Visit to plantain nursery business. A women entrepreneur has set up banana plant production centre, which is highly successful. This project can be showcased to motivate other youth and scale up similar efforts.
- (vii) Visit to farm plots and working session with a rice growers cooperative of the Koutaba district in Ngoundoup (supported by PADFA).
- (viii) Visit to farm plots and working session with Board of Directors of the Rice Growers Cooperative of Tonga (supported by PADFA). Board representatives observed the transplantation of rice by cooperative members on village land; a power tiller was used for puddling the land for rice transplantation. The project director informed the Board representatives that production used to be 2 tons per hectare; however following the introduction of improved varieties, line transplantation and improved agronomic practices, production has increased to 6 tons. Approximately 60 per cent of the rice produced on this farm will be consumed by beneficiaries in the village and the remaining 40 per cent will be sold in the market. Villagers in both sites were happy to have improved food security and obtain enough profits to send their children to school. In addition, several women reported that their workloads are now more balanced and household chores are more equally distributed within the family. Rice-processing machines were observed and it was felt that there is a scope for improving the processing technology. Board representatives observed the need for mechanizing large-scale farming and agricultural inputs (e.g. fertilizer and pesticides), which will improve productivity further. There is also need to train farmers in better agronomic practices through SSTC.
- (ix) Meeting with local officials and beneficiaries from Camccul Microfinance Network (supported by PADMIR). Board representatives were heartened to see a presentation made by the beneficiaries of this microfinance network. Thanks to financing from Camccul, beneficiaries could invest in their farm lands, thereby increasing cocoa and maize production, and increasing profits, which ultimately improve their quality of life. The fact that more than 90 per cent of microfinancing had been recovered is a very good sign. However, Board representatives saw the need to link this microfinance network to commercial banks.

- (x) Visit to farm plots and a working session with young people involved in the gardening belt in Bafia (supported by PEA Jeunes). In this area, youth are trained on a demonstration plot in production methods and technologies for up to two years. These youth gain self-confidence and professional skills through producing crops in individually allocated plots (500 m<sup>2</sup> per person) within the training centre. Board representatives were impressed with the presentation of an agroentrepreneur who is a mother of six. She reported being empowered by training and related support from PEA Jeunes, and now employs several permanent employees in addition to family labour, including her husband. The representatives were also highly satisfied with the support provided to young women with children, and persons with disabilities. The trainees belong to an agricultural cooperative, which is active in marketing their products, including through contracts with large hotels in Yaoundé. However, Board representatives observed that this enterprise needs to be sustained through proper training and financial support.
9. Board representatives were received with great hospitality by the beneficiary communities they visited. Community members expressed gratitude for IFAD's valuable support in improving their livelihoods and social status – especially women. In addition, Board representatives had a detailed discussion with United Nations Resident Coordinator in Cameroon, other members of the United Nations country team and partners such as the World Food Programme. The representatives were pleased to note the collaboration between the three RBAs and other United Nations agencies at the country level.
10. Challenges.
- (i) There is a need to strengthen the road network in rural areas. Since IFAD has limited funds, the Government may approach the World Bank, African Development Bank or other financiers for infrastructure support.
  - (ii) Agriculture is a top priority in the country and there is huge potential if modernization of agriculture takes place.
  - (iii) The country's population is young and growing: 78 per cent is under 34 years old. While youth need jobs and education, demographic dividends may be harnessed through proper planning.
  - (iv) While establishing a startup depends on the ideas of individuals, scaling up is needed to achieve structural impact.
11. IFAD's capacity in policy management. The country visit confirmed the importance of close cooperation and a strong partnership among the Government, IFAD and local communities. IFAD needs to continue its support for Government capacity-building in coordination and oversight of projects.
12. Acknowledgments. The Board representatives who participated in the country visit would like to express their deepest appreciation to all those who contributed to organizing the visit. Senior Management deserves greater appreciation. Representatives appreciated the dynamic leadership of His Excellency Hisham Mohamed Badr, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to IFAD, in guiding the group and keeping it cohesive. Representatives' deepest appreciation is also extended to Lisandro Martin, Director of IFAD's West and Central Africa Division, the country director and the entire country-level team for making logistical arrangements for this historic visit. Finally, Board representatives would like to express their gratitude for the warm hospitality extended by the Government of Cameroon and to the people of Cameroon, especially all those who actively participated in the visit and related discussions.