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Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the IFAD Partnership Framework

Note to Executive Board representatives

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Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the IFAD Partnership Framework

I. General comments

1. IFAD has designed a partnership framework to support the objectives and theory of change of the Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD11) and beyond within the context of the IFAD Strategic Framework 2016-2025. It builds on the IFAD11 leveraging partnerships paper,¹ the 2018 evaluation synthesis report (ESR) on partnerships by the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE)² and accumulated experience since the previous IFAD Partnership Strategy in 2012.
2. It is a challenge to capture the multitude of partners and types of partnerships within one document. Partnerships are highly context and situation specific, and they often develop in unpredictable ways. This document represents a commendable effort to provide a comprehensive framework for partnership diagnosis, promotion and monitoring.
3. The document is comprehensive, conceptually strong and well presented. In addition to a theory of change and general guidance on: business processes; partnership instruments and tools; and monitoring and reporting, it includes an action plan in an appendix along with guidance on monitoring and evaluation (M&E), IFAD11 commitments, country strategic opportunities programme design and other issues.
4. The framework builds on the findings of the ESR on partnerships (2018). It focuses on: the need to differentiate between partnerships at the global, regional and country levels, and the demand for specific partnerships in countries with fragile situations and middle-income countries. The theory of change is clear and the conceptualization of business processes is useful. The recommendations from the ESR are addressed in detail in appendix I.
5. In line with the recommendations from the ESR, the framework stresses the importance of partnership objectives and results. Overall, it is a strong and useful document, although it could have been more explicit with regard to challenges at the operational and organizational levels, as explained below.

II. Specific comments

6. Partnerships in projects and programmes (paragraph 37). The document is vague on this issue and it does not acknowledge the challenges inherent in building partnerships in projects and programmes. The opportunity-driven and often fluid nature of partnerships should be taken into consideration. The diverse needs for partnership are always changing along with partnerships themselves as programmes and projects evolve and partners move in and out. As the document rightly points out, programmes and projects need to be more strategic in their approach to partnership-building. However this will require some flexibility in monitoring and reporting requirements. Regular stocktaking, adaptation and learning are integral parts of developing effective partnerships.
7. Grants (paragraph 39). The document highlights the important role of grants for partnership development. But it does not recognize that grants are often not as effective for partnership-building if they are implemented as stand-alone projects that are insufficiently linked to lending portfolios or other ongoing initiatives. The responsibilities for grant management rest in different parts of the organization, but not usually at the regional or country level, as pointed out by the ESR and other IOE evaluations (e.g. the 2014 Corporate-level evaluation on the IFAD Policy

¹ See IFAD11/3/R.5, IFAD11: Leveraging partnerships for country-level impact and global engagement.

² See EC 2018/100/W.P.5: ESR on Building Partnerships for Enhanced Development Effectiveness – A Review of Country-level Experiences and Results.

for Grant Financing). This is an important constraint to partnership-building that should have been addressed.

8. Global engagement (paragraph 43). The document envisages a key role for the new Global Engagement, Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Division (GPR) in strengthening global partnerships. However, it does not acknowledge the important role that IFAD's technical advisory divisions – now within the Sustainable Production, Markets and Institutions Division (PMI) play in global partnerships. For example, the 2019 ESR on Inclusive Financial Services for the Rural Poor highlighted the achievements of the rural finance team (within PMI) in networking with key actors for learning and knowledge-sharing on innovative approaches within the financial sector. As a comprehensive framework, the document should have addressed the need for IFAD to nurture specialized technical networks and integrate the responsibility for partnership-building across the organization. In a similar vein, the action plan included in appendix II presents the responsibilities for implementation in a highly centralized manner – primarily residing with GPR and Operational Policy and Results Division. The action plan should have presented a more decentralized approach to partnership development in line with IFAD's ongoing reforms.
9. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Appendix IV presents the framework for partnership M&E. This framework draws from existing M&E systems, which is a reasonable and efficient approach. It is positive to note that IOE evaluations are part of the integrated M&E system on partnerships; indeed, evaluation of partnership-building is an important aspect of any country strategy and programme evaluation. Partnerships will largely be monitored through the IFAD11 Results Management Framework indicators, which depend on project reporting and partner surveys. In addition, the framework proposes brief annual summary notes on partnering at the country, regional and global levels. The overall approach seems sensible but ambitious, and the implications with regard to required resources are not explained. In line with the comments in paragraph 6 above, IOE encourages a more decentralized and learning-oriented approach to monitoring partnerships.

III. Final remarks

10. IOE appreciates the IFAD Partnership Framework as a comprehensive and well-presented document. It provides much needed conceptual guidance, which may be helpful for IFAD in building more effective partnerships for enhanced development outcomes and impact.