

Document: EB 2021/132/R.20/Add.1  
Agenda: 12(b)(ii)(a)  
Date: 25 March 2021  
Distribution: Public  
Original: English

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## **Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme for the Republic of Uganda**

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Executive Board — 132<sup>nd</sup> Session  
Rome, 19-21 April 2021

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**For: Review**

## I. General comments

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) conducted the second country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the Republic of Uganda, covering the period from 2013 to 2020.
2. The CSPE made five recommendations: (i) expand IFAD's effective value chain approach to other commodities with greater beneficiary outreach potential; (ii) mainstream climate change more extensively with direct approaches in the new country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP); (iii) deliver more transformative approaches and interventions tailored to the specific needs of women and youths; (iv) develop a non-lending strategy that systematizes knowledge management (KM), partnerships and country policy engagement and provide the necessary resources for its implementation; and (v) strengthen monitoring and evaluation (M&E), reporting and financial management to bolster governance and anticorruption measures and improve the assessment of results, especially at impact level.
3. Overall, the new COSOP (2021-2027) addressed the CSPE recommendations, upon which the agreement at completion point (ACP) mainly agreed. The ACP was signed in February 2021 and is attached as an appendix to the COSOP. Certain details of recommendations 4 and 5 were not included and are discussed under "specific comments" (paras 7-12).
4. The COSOP presents a succinct analysis of the country context, outlining the key issues and government policies and institutions in the agricultural sector. The lessons learned draw heavily on the CSPE findings, reflecting both the strengths and the weaknesses of the lending portfolio and non-lending activities, and the strategic direction of the country programme. Based on these findings, IOE agrees with the COSOP that IFAD's comparative advantage in Uganda lies in: (i) supporting inclusive smallholder value chain development; (ii) enabling social inclusion and empowerment through household methodologies; and (iii) facilitating private sector participation in the country portfolio. IOE also welcomes the continued focus on the poorest northern and eastern areas with food insecurity and poor nutrition, which are suited to the commodity value chains selected for development (livestock and aquaculture).
5. The three country strategic objectives are highly relevant to the priorities of the Government for the agricultural sector and IFAD's own strategic objectives and principles of engagement. They also reflect CSPE recommendations 1, 2 and 3 on value chains, climate change and transformative approaches focusing on women and youth.
6. At the same time, the country programme has certain issues that will require attention. Notably, the COSOP does not address some aspects of CSPE recommendations 4 and 5, which therefore may need to be monitored during its implementation.

## II. Specific comments

7. **Targeting performance.** The new COSOP refers to a number of different target groups: poor smallholder households with the potential to engage in economic activities; women and youth interested in engaging in productive enterprises; rural groups; and small- and medium-scale value chain players. In addition, the new country programme will devote attention to the inclusion of the most vulnerable target populations, including women, youth and persons with disabilities, according to the third strategic objective.
8. Given the new COSOP's diverse sub-target groups, the United Nations commitment to leave no one behind and the risk of elite capture in development projects, the monitoring of targeting performance is paramount. However, the CSPE found that

the monitoring of the outreach and benefits to sub-target groups was weak in closed and ongoing projects. Consequently, it was difficult to assess outcomes and impact on each group. Moving forward, IOE emphasizes the importance of regular and reliable monitoring, analysis and reporting of project outreach and benefits to these different groups throughout the life of the projects.

9. **Monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management.** The new COSOP acknowledges the weak M&E systems in the country programme and explains how IFAD and the Government will address this. The IFAD country team will also prepare a country-level KM strategy, in addition to project-specific KM plans, to ensure a consistent learning approach. However, IOE highlights the challenging task of filling in the gaps in KM, and especially in M&E, as identified by the CSPE. Although the KM officer in the Nairobi Regional Hub will support IFAD Country Office (ICO) staff, the incumbent is also responsible for other countries in the region.
10. The CSPE also found that other divisions (the Research and Impact Assessment Division; Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion Division; and Sustainable Production, Markets and Institutions Division) need to be more involved in the KM process to support non-lending objectives by leveraging financial and human resources from IFAD headquarters as well as at the Regional Hub. Without the CSPE-recommended KM/M&E officer in the ICO, IOE highlights the need for the country KM strategy to be practical and cognizant of the technical gaps, as well as the resourcing and coordination issues at different levels (country, regional and headquarters).
11. **Partnership-building and country-level policy engagement.** The new COSOP's ambitions to achieve policy influence and build partnerships are similar to those in the previous COSOP (2013). In addition to relying on project funds, the new COSOP states that resources for non-lending activities will come from grants and funds available under the IFAD South-South and Triangular Cooperation framework. While this is a step in the right direction, these resources appear uncertain.
12. Moreover, the plan to keep the country director in the Regional Hub in Nairobi, rather than in Uganda as recommended by the CSPE, is a significant limitation. Without the country director in Uganda, the overstretched ICO staff are restricted in their ability to cultivate strategic partnerships and influence government policies. IOE therefore reiterates the critical need for IFAD headquarters and the Regional Hub to support the country team in non-lending activities and reconsider the location of the country director position in case IFAD revises its decentralization strategy.

### III. Final remarks

13. IOE appreciates that the new COSOP builds on the findings of the CSPE and fully responds to the recommendations on value chains, climate change and the empowerment of women and youth. IOE also acknowledges the intention to introduce a country programme approach through the new country programme KM strategy and better integration of non-lending activities to achieve the strategic objectives. However, sufficient resources to undertake these non-lending activities will be required and the ICO will need to proactively ensure coordination with, and support from, the Regional Hub and headquarters.