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

Note to Executive Board representatives

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For: Review

I. General comments

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) undertook a country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) in the Republic of the Sudan covering the period 2009-2018. The objectives of the CSPE were to assess the results and performance of the IFAD country programme and to generate findings and recommendations to guide the partnership between IFAD and the Government in the future. The CSPE findings and recommendations were presented and discussed with IFAD and the Government at a virtual workshop organized in June 2020.
2. The CSPE found that the portfolio had achieved successes in some key areas, including crop and livestock production and natural resource management, while also generating remarkable impact in terms of human and social capital, empowerment of rural communities and women. Importantly, the portfolio contributed towards reducing conflicts around natural resources by strengthening and promoting community-level institutions and dispute resolution mechanisms. Conversely, the sustainability of benefits was mixed: positive in certain areas (e.g. community-level infrastructure and institutions), but less so for aspects that require government resources and commitment (e.g. large-scale infrastructure). Furthermore, the evaluation found that IFAD could have fostered stronger partnerships and invested greater efforts in knowledge management and analytical work to capitalize on the results achieved and contribute to their scaling up.
3. The evaluation made the following recommendations:
 - (i) Identify opportunities for partnerships and cofinancing to scale up achievements, including: cofinancing for integrated programmes (e.g. in light of the need for basic infrastructure such as water and roads); stronger partnerships with non-state actors and development agencies; and refocusing attention on institutional and policy influence to promote inclusive finance;
 - (ii) Ensure an inclusive and differentiated targeting strategy, with greater attention to more effectively engaging pastoral communities and vulnerable households;
 - (iii) Support the institutional capacity development of key government counterpart agencies at local and state levels, while building stronger links with IFAD-financed projects;
 - (iv) Better articulate the theory of change in country and project strategies that underlines the expected poverty impact, namely, reduced food insecurity and malnutrition, and reduced poverty;
 - (v) Strengthen the knowledge management platform for IFAD-financed projects; and
 - (vi) Strengthen IFAD's capacity to be better engaged in project supervision and reviews, knowledge management, coordination across strategic partnerships and policy dialogue (including human resource and technical support and upgrading of non-lending activities).
4. The agreement at completion point for the CSPE was signed by IFAD and the Government and is included as appendix VI of the new country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP).
5. The preparation of a new COSOP for 2021-2027 is opportune also given the new political context. The new COSOP contains some good context analysis, in particular, in the background study for the Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (appendix IV). On the other hand, IOE finds that, in some places, the COSOP could have better reflected the CSPE findings, conclusions and recommendations, and better capitalized upon IFAD's experience and achievements as acknowledged in the CSPE. For example, the description of IFAD's comparative

advantage (para. 20) does not adequately capture IFAD's strengths in the country (e.g. natural resource management and governance, improved crop and livestock production, community development and women's empowerment), while IFAD's support for value chain development is relatively recent.

6. IOE acknowledges that the format of the COSOP document makes it difficult to elaborate on certain aspects. Some specific comments are provided below for consideration in the COSOP's operationalization, as well as project design and implementation.

II. Specific comments

7. **Targeting strategy (para. 22).** The "specific challenges to reach mobile pastoralists" are noted here, but it would have been useful to provide some principles and minimum strategic considerations on how such challenges may be addressed. This relates to the CSPE recommendation (ii) (para. 3 above), which was based on the finding that lessons from earlier projects on the engagement with pastoral communities had not been adequately taken up in an ongoing project at the time of the evaluation. Similarly, the strategy to reach and empower women – an area in which IFAD has substantial experience – is not explicitly discussed in this section. It will be important to elaborate tailored and differentiated targeting approaches based on a sound diagnostic analysis in project designs.
8. **Strategic objectives, COSOP results management framework.** The strategic objectives (paras. 24-25) are relevant at a broad level, but the first strategic objective¹ could have been better unpacked, with a clear articulation of pathways and linkages between the different elements of the country programme. Similarly, the strategic objectives do not adequately capture the substantial investment in natural resource management and governance in the latest ongoing project, which is linked to climate change but relates to other issues as well. More careful reflection and refinement of the indicators in the COSOP results management framework may be considered, in terms of their linkage to the corresponding strategic objectives; and clarity and feasibility as to how they can be realistically measured (e.g. "access to nutrient-rich food and improved nutritional methods", "60 per cent persons reporting reduction in dispute over use of land and natural resources").
9. **Capacity-building (para. 31).** The proposal for capacity-building includes capacitate the public sector to develop policies, regulatory frameworks and project monitoring and evaluation in favour of relevant staff at the ministries in charge of agriculture, animal and fishing resources and economy. This is related to the CSPE recommendation (iii) on institutional strengthening in the counterpart government agencies beyond the project teams, while developing better institutional links in projects, with a long-term vision and for sustainability. The description in the COSOP is rather broad and general. Specific consideration of where and for what there could be concrete entry points would have been useful.
10. **Strategic partnerships.** Paragraph 38 and appendix VIII present a rather long list of proposed partners, but the following could have been reflected: potential collaboration with non-state actors, with regard to CSPE recommendation (i); and the opportunity for strategic partnerships around natural resource management and governance (e.g. the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Environment Programme), which is an area in which

¹ "Strengthen the resilience of vulnerable rural populations and their production systems to food and nutrition insecurity and climate change, with emphasis on good agricultural practices and village-based rural infrastructure such as rural roads and irrigation". It also noted the expected outcomes as follows: "(i) rural households adopt climate smart agriculture; and (ii) rural households have access to nutrient-rich food and improved nutritional methods".

IFAD has substantial experience and is strongly featured in the latest ongoing project.

III. Final remarks

11. IOE reiterates its appreciation for the extensive collaboration accorded by IFAD and the Government for the CSPE and for the efforts made in preparing the COSOP.