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Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the Country Strategic Opportunities Programme for the Kingdom of Morocco

Note to Executive Board representatives

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General comments

1. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) conducted the second country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for Morocco, covering the period 2008 to 2020. The first was carried out in 2007.
2. Overall, the politico-economic and institutional contexts that prevailed during the reviewed period were favourable for rural development interventions. The Green Morocco Plan was the main strategic framework guiding rural development interventions during the period, creating several funding opportunities. IFAD's engagement in the country fell under pillar II of the plan, which calls for support to small-scale family farming in shifting towards entrepreneurial activities. The National Strategy on Rural and Mountain Zone Development – which targeted mountain areas – also guided IFAD actions.
3. The CSPE highlighted positive achievements in terms of agricultural productivity and production, natural resource management and adaptation to climate change, leading to many agricultural innovations. Satisfactory results relate to: (i) basic rural infrastructure; (ii) increased agricultural productivity; and (iii) better management of natural resources. Support was provided for the development of value chains in the mountain areas (tree crops, sheep- and goat-raising, beekeeping, aromatic and medicinal plants), while maintaining integrated development. However, mixed results were achieved in relation to diversifying income sources, women's empowerment and rural youth employment.
4. The CSPE highlighted key challenges that limited performance. They relate to: the sustainability of benefits (technical maintenance of infrastructure, support for farmers' groups and value addition units, efficacy of rural organizations and their apex); knowledge management (documentation and sharing of experiences for effective capitalization, as well as monitoring and evaluation); access by producers to markets through win-win partnerships with the private sector; and relatively low rates of disbursement.
5. The CSPE made six recommendations, all of which were accepted: (1) in line with the priorities of the new Green Generation strategy, establish new strategic guidelines for IFAD's programme in Morocco, which should be pursued in disadvantaged rural areas; (2) continue to pursue actions targeted to women and youth, and ensure effective scaling up of initiatives around occupational teams as part of the new Green Generation strategy, in line with human capital promotion; (3) pursue the promotion of key value chains to complement territorial development initiatives; (4) step up actions to promote human and social capital in disadvantaged areas and provide further strengthening for grass-roots organizations to make them more effective; (5) develop and implement an operational knowledge management (KM) plan for the country programme to facilitate better capitalization and consolidation of benefits, not only for the projects in the portfolio but also interventions in the disadvantaged rural areas; and (6) strengthen support for the country programme management team for better engagement in dialogue on agricultural policy, especially in the context of the new Green Generation strategy.
6. Overall, the country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) 2022-2027 – which has three strategic objectives, four strategic axes and three cross-cutting themes – is sufficiently results-oriented and focused on key challenges, and covers most (if not all) the CSPE recommendations. The ultimate purpose is to enhance development effectiveness and support rural transformation in the mountain zones through IFAD support.

Specific comments

7. IOE acknowledges that the new COSOP explicitly addresses the main recommendation points in its strategic objectives (SOs). These relate to: the sustainability of

production systems (recommendation 1 in SO1); the development of human and social capital (recommendation 4 in SO1); the inclusiveness of women and youth (recommendation 2 in SO1); and the promotion of the value chain approach with pro-poor commodities (recommendation 3 in SO2).

8. **Gender, youth and producers' organizations.** The development of producers' organizations that include women and youth is foreseen under SO1. Additional activities are planned specifically in relation to youth entrepreneurship. While youth represents both girls and boys, it would have been better also to identify specific actions in support of women's empowerment, as their role is critical for sustainable livelihoods in the targeted areas. However, gender equality is one of the four cross-cutting themes that the COSOP will address through interventions.
9. **Inclusive value chains.** SO2 addressed key functions upstream and downstream in value chains, including: effective production systems, strengthening the role of producers' organizations and their apex, enabling inclusive access to financial services and developing partnerships for sustained access of smallholders to markets. However, the COSOP could have identified more concrete measures to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of value addition units (linked to producers' organizations). This is of great importance: the CSPE found that many of the value addition units and cooperatives created were still weak in economic and institutional terms.
10. **Natural resources management.** Aligned with the CSPE recommendation on the sustainability of production systems, SO3 foresees diverse actions for enhancing the sustainable management of natural resources and their resilience to climate change, through the promotion of climate-smart agricultural practices, including green technical innovations.
11. **Knowledge management and policy engagement.** The CSPE identified KM and policy engagement as needing improvement in terms of a systematic documentation of positive experiences and IFAD's proactivity in policy-related activities. The CSPE recommendation to that effect has been addressed in the proposed COSOP interventions. Three themes have been identified in the COSOP document for policy engagement activities. Similarly, the COSOP foresees the development and implementation of an operational action plan on KM, which will be supported by an appropriate communication and visibility plan. However, the source of financing for the non-lending activities has not yet been identified, nor has the extent to which the capability of the country team will be further strengthened to deliver on the policy themes identified by the COSOP. IOE suggests clarifying further these two latter points.
12. **Scaling up.** Improving performance on the scaling up of results, as reflected in CSPE recommendations 1 and 2, is also a key point to address. It relates to the necessity to identify mechanisms and approaches to effectively scale up proven innovations that contribute to better performance of family farming in the mountain areas. On a positive note, the COSOP mentions that this aspect will be taken into account and approaches identified with the development of the operational KM action plan. This will be relevant and useful in an enabling context where IFAD-financed projects are embedded within deconcentrated government institutions.

Final remarks

13. IOE appreciates that the new COSOP for the Kingdom of Morocco really builds on the findings of the CSPE and addresses its recommendations, as presented above. IOE suggests taking into account comments made in relation to value chains (valorization units) and non-lending activities (resource availability). Moreover, deeper analyses should be carried out on key aspects (e.g. women's empowerment, youth vulnerability), when designing future interventions.