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

Note to Executive Board representatives

Focal points:

Technical questions:

Indran A. Naidoo
Director
Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2274
e-mail: i.naidoo@ifad.org

Monica Lomena-Gelis
Senior Evaluation Officer
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2923
e-mail: m.lomena-gelis@ifad.org

Dispatch of documentation:

Deirdre Mc Grenra
Chief
Institutional Governance and
Member Relations
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2374
e-mail: gb@ifad.org

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For: Review

I. General comments

1. In 2020, the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) conducted the first country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for Burundi, covering the period 2009 to 2020. It analysed a portfolio of ten investment projects (US\$567 million), eight grants (US\$9 million), as well as the non-lending activities related to partnership-building, knowledge management and policy dialogue.
2. Overall, despite a context characterized by fragile conditions, the IFAD programme in Burundi showed remarkable resilience. All strategic risks identified in the two country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) under evaluation materialized. Nevertheless, the performance of the programme was not severely affected. The community participatory approach used, the professionalism and continuity over the years of project personnel, and the sustained engagement by central Government were identified as key mitigating factors.
3. The CSPE highlighted the positive achievements in terms of the expansion of productive infrastructure and improvement of access to inputs, leading to productivity increases in various value chains. Satisfactory results were found in relation to: (i) marshland development and irrigation; (ii) community livestock solidarity chains; (iii) processing infrastructure (e.g. milk collection units and rice hullers). Promising results, albeit with limited outreach, were also noted in relation to food security and nutrition for the most vulnerable (nutritional rehabilitation centres). The evaluation also identified interesting results in increasing women's economic empowerment, but noted the need for further support to give women an equal voice and greater influence in rural organizations and achieve a more balanced workload between women and men.
4. The CSPE highlighted key challenges that limited performance. They relate to: (i) constraints undermining the sustainability of benefits (gaps in technical maintenance of infrastructure and management of user associations); (ii) lack of regulatory and financial frameworks for maintenance; (iii) lack of a systemic vision of investments in value chains; (iv) targeting strategies too focused on those with access to land; (v) limitations in the implementation of integrated watershed management; and (vi) knowledge management too focused on communication, with limited contribution to policy dialogue.
5. The CSPE made six recommendations, which were all accepted. They are: (1) complete the transition towards the programme approach and consolidate IFAD's comparative advantage in Burundi; (2) consolidate the holistic pro-poor value chains approach; (3) prioritize strategies and actions to reduce pressure on land and facilitate access to assets for the most vulnerable people; (4) continue to strengthen regulatory and financial provisions to ensure sustainability of gains; (5) strengthen actions to develop climate change resilience among people and infrastructure; and (6) continue and scale up interventions to improve the food and nutritional security of beneficiaries.
6. Overall, the new COSOP 2022-2027 has three strategic objectives (SOs) focused on key challenges, which cover most (if not all) of the CSPE recommendations. The ultimate goal is to reduce poverty and fragility affecting smallholder rural producers through sustainable improvements in their incomes, food security, nutrition and socio-ecological resilience.

II. Specific comments

7. IOE acknowledges the fact that the COSOP 2022-2027 explicitly addresses the main recommendation points in its SOs. These relate to the holistic approach of pro-poor value chains (recommendation 2 – in SO1) and, indirectly, the support to the most vulnerable groups to have access to assets (recommendation 3 – in SO2). The continued implementation of a programme approach (recommendation 1) is also given particular attention. Further information would be needed about how

other aspects of the recommendations will be addressed and implemented during the programme cycle.

8. **Overall targeting strategy of the programme.** The monitoring and evaluation system proposed in the COSOP (para. 58) refers to assessing results for targeted groups disaggregated by gender, age and vulnerability (including the *Batwa* people). Nevertheless, the results management framework (appendix I) includes targets and indicators only for women and youth, without considering other identity dimensions mentioned in the Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP) study (appendix IV): indigenous groups, persons with disabilities, internally displaced people and refugees.
9. **Strengthen actions to develop climate change resilience among people and infrastructure.** Recommendation 5 of the CSPE suggested the use of regional environmental and social evaluations to identify the cumulative environmental and social impacts of projects funded in the same watershed. Nevertheless, the COSOP (in the SECAP study) continues to propose the use of environmental and social management frameworks at project level.¹ It is important to conduct wider studies to go beyond the assessment of individual investments, and include all hydrological sub-basins and wetlands, even if the individual works funded by each IFAD project are below the IFAD SECAP thresholds.² Moreover, further discussion is needed about the nature, cost and effectiveness of the measures (infrastructure design and realization) to ensure climate resilience of works related to marshlands and watershed development.
10. **Ensuring the sustainability of previous and future investments.** In relation to recommendation 4, the COSOP does not detail which regulatory and financial provisions or legal and institutional mechanisms will be put in place to ensure the transfer of infrastructure to operators who can keep them running on a long-term basis. The results management framework only mentions the additional hectares of marshlands to be developed and maintained without explaining which approaches would be introduced to ensure sustainability, building on the past challenges and best practices in certain provinces identified by the CSPE.
11. **Scale up interventions to improve food and nutritional security.** Recommendation 6 is addressed in SO1 and indirectly in the lessons learned section of the COSOP, when it mentions the success of nutritional home learning centres, which combine microprojects for adults with nutrition education to promote behavioural change. However, it is not clear from the COSOP the type of approach that will be used to scale up activities piloted by previous projects, or how partnerships and synergies will be built with other actors operating in this sector, for instance, in water and sanitation infrastructure and health care.

III. Final remarks

12. IOE appreciates that the new COSOP for Burundi builds on the findings of the CSPE and addresses some of its recommendations, as presented above. IOE recommends paying attention to the sustainability of investments, targeting the most vulnerable groups, assessing and mitigating the cumulative environmental and social impacts of irrigation infrastructure and scaling up food security and nutrition support.

¹ Regional-level assessments make it possible to examine the cumulative risks and impacts of several activities in a geographical region (in project areas) and to better address the gaps regarding the legal and institutional aspects.

² IFAD's SECAP guidelines consider a project as category B rather than A (higher environmental and social impacts) if it includes irrigation schemes of less than 100 ha, rural roads of less than 10 km, no activities crossing an important river or close to ecologically sensitive areas.