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Minutes of the 116th Session of the Evaluation Committee

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Executive Board — 135th Session
Rome, 25-27 April 2022

For: **Information**

Minutes of the 116th Session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 116th session – held virtually on 17 March 2022 – are reflected in the present minutes.
2. Once approved by the Committee, the minutes will be shared with the Executive Board for information.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the session

3. The session was attended by Committee members for Cameroon, France, Indonesia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Mexico and the Netherlands. Observers were present from Angola, Canada, China, Dominican Republic, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The session was also attended by the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); the Deputy Director, IOE; the Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department; the Associate Vice-President, Strategy and Knowledge Department; the Director, Operational Policy and Results Division; the Director, Research and Impact Assessment Division; the Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.
4. The Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Burundi to IFAD, Her Excellency Espérance Ndayizeye; Ms Christine Niragira, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Budget and Privatization; and Mr Emile Butoyi, First Counsellor, Alternate Permanent Representative of the Republic of Burundi to the United Nations Agencies in Rome participated in the Committee's deliberations on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for Burundi. The Ambassador and Permanent Representative-designate of the Kingdom of Eswatini to the United Nations agencies in Rome, His Excellency Vuyile Dlamini; Mr Howard Mbuyisa, Senior Agriculture Economist, Ministry of Agriculture; and Ms Philomena Bawelile Simelane, Adviser, Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Eswatini participated in the Committee's deliberations on the CSPE for Eswatini. Their presence ensured that the deliberations benefited from their Governments' perspectives on the respective evaluations.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2022/116/W.P.1 + Add.1)

5. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2022/116/W.P.1, noting the inclusion under the agenda item "other business" of a brief update on: (i) the new date proposed for the October session of the Evaluation Committee; (ii) the revisions to the Thematic Evaluation of IFAD's Support for Smallholder Farmers' Adaptation to Climate Change and Management's response thereto; and (iii) the election of the new Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee.

Agenda item 3: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Republic of Burundi (EC 2022/116/W.P.2)

Key messages:

- Members highlighted the importance of ensuring the maintenance and sustainability of water infrastructure and watershed management approaches, calling for concrete actions to be taken with respect to water management and sanitation.
- IFAD was called upon to strengthen its engagement with other development partners in country.
- In order to link the findings of country programme evaluations with new country strategies, both documents should be reviewed in tandem when possible.

6. The Evaluation Committee welcomed this first CSPE for Burundi, covering the period from 2009 to 2020, together with the agreement at completion point signed by the Government and IFAD Management, as contained in document EC 2022/116/W.P.2. Committee members commended the high quality of the evaluation, particularly considering the challenges presented by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.
7. Members took note of the statement delivered on behalf of the Government of Burundi by Her Excellency Espérance Ndayizeye, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to IFAD.
8. Members commended the contribution of IFAD's projects to climate change adaptation in the country through watershed management, but emphasized the need to ensure the availability of quality data on their environmental and social impact. In particular, members highlighted the need to take concrete action to ensure the sustainability of watershed management approaches and maintenance of irrigation infrastructure, as well as the need to diversify cultivation to include more high-value crops, e.g. horticulture.
9. IFAD was called upon to engage more with other development partners in the country, and to explore ways to revive the national agriculture and rural development working group, which had been dormant since 2015. The good performance of the decentralized government was welcomed, as was the positive impact on gender equality, reflected in the empowerment of women through improved access to productive assets. Specific actions should be considered to reinforce value chains downstream. Also, adopting a nutrition lens could facilitate focusing on both rural food consumers and rural food producers in equal measure, thus countering the natural bias to focus primarily on land owners.
10. Both IOE and Management referred to the Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP) guidelines and other tools being implemented to address issues raised around watershed management. IOE also noted how, in recent projects, IFAD was doing more to ensure the sustainability of water user associations, the maintenance of irrigation schemes and the diversification to higher value crops; however it was still using project-level environmental and social assessments instead of a geographically wider analysis, as stated in recommendation 5.
11. Management agreed that it would be beneficial for the Evaluation Committee to link its review of CSPEs with new country strategies, adding that it would consider, together with IOE, how best to move forward on this. Meanwhile, Management confirmed that the evaluation's findings had already been taken on board in the new country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) to be presented at the upcoming Board. Funds were being leveraged from the Green Climate Fund to address land and watershed management, and the new investment portfolio included a strong component on capacity-building of the country team, programme delivery teams and local government staff, including in the area of watershed management. Greater emphasis would be placed on engaging with development partners in country and efforts undertaken to revive the national agriculture and rural development working group. To sharpen the focus of its country programme and improve supervision and follow-up, Management had consolidated the Burundi portfolio, shifting from seven active projects in 2019 to five in 2022, and planned to further reduce the portfolio to three operations in the near future.
12. **Agenda item 4: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Kingdom of Eswatini (EC 2022/116/W.P.3 + Add.1)**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee looked forward to seeing the findings of the CSPE integrated into the new COSOP. |
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13. The Evaluation Committee welcomed this first CSPE for Eswatini, covering the period from 2000 to 2021, as contained in document EC 2022/116/W.P.3, together with the agreement at completion point signed by the Government and IFAD Management, as contained in the addendum.
14. Members took note of the statement delivered on behalf of the Government of Eswatini by His Excellency Vuyile Dlamini, Ambassador and Permanent Representative-designate to the United Nations agencies in Rome.
15. Committee members commended the evaluation team for their thorough work, and agreed with the recommendations made and the proposed follow-up actions. The findings and lessons learned from the evaluation should inform the next COSOP.
16. The CSPE highlighted a low level of inclusion of the most vulnerable households and of people with limited access to means of production, such as land and household labour. This finding was linked to the value chain system adopted in the projects in question. Efforts were being made both to improve the value chain approach and to ensure inclusion of the most vulnerable. Management reassured members that there had been a definite evolution towards more accurate targeting strategies, with a particular focus on gender and youth. Management also highlighted the very inclusive approach adopted in the new COSOP, targeting the most vulnerable, including persons with disabilities and giving particular consideration to people living with HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, the COSOP foresaw proactive engagement with a wide range of development partners in country, including United Nations agencies and the private sector.

Agenda item 5: Evaluation synthesis on government performance in IFAD-supported operations (EC 2022/116/W.P.4 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- Given the importance of the evaluation synthesis report on government performance in IFAD-supported operations, the Evaluation Committee recommended submitting the report to the 135th session of the Board to allow members to consider the findings and draw conclusions thereon.
- Members noted the significant decline in public authorities' performance in recent years and called upon Management to capitalize on lessons learned to find ways to strengthen government ownership and performance. Members also reiterated the importance of developing a deep understanding of the context in which governments perform and of adaptive management.

17. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the evaluation synthesis report on government performance in IFAD-supported operations, as contained in document EC 2022/116/W.P.4, together with Management's response, as contained in the addendum.
18. Given the importance of the topic, members proposed that a discussion on the synthesis evaluation be held during the upcoming Executive Board session. Both IOE and Management welcomed the proposal. Recommendations had not been included in the report. This was because evaluation syntheses do not always provide recommendations and, particularly for the subject in question, no one size fits all. Given its focus on learning, the report contained findings for Management's consideration, to inform project design and implementation.
19. Members noted with concern the significant decline in public authorities' performance in recent years, and the difficulty in identifying the root causes of this decline. Countries with fragile situations did not fare worse than other countries in this respect, which suggested that IFAD should continue and indeed intensify its efforts in fragile contexts.

20. While projects implemented by local governments had shown consistent performance, the share of IFAD's portfolio implemented by local government had decreased. Management committed to researching the reason for this move.
21. Government ownership was key to project effectiveness. The evaluation pointed to the value of a deep understanding of the local context and political economy, fostering long-term relationships and enabling flexibility and adaptive management. IFAD's role in institution-building, improving in-country capacity and engaging in policy dialogue was important for strengthening performance, but funding for such "soft" activities was not always readily available.
22. Management noted that governments execute projects, not IFAD. Consequently IFAD had limited influence on some of the key challenges identified in the report, such as ownership and in-country capacity. Nevertheless, Management has taken action to improve government performance through ongoing and planned initiatives.
23. Both IOE and Management agreed that interest and ownership were the biggest incentives for governments to perform well. In this regard, Management noted that larger projects and those cofinanced with other partners often enjoyed greater visibility, hence greater ownership. Management added that identifying the right implementing partner and bringing on board and retaining the right project staff throughout the implementation period was a key element for successful performance. Furthermore, involving ministries of finance alongside ministries of agriculture could also bolster performance. Management was currently working on a sustainability action plan, including the development of exit strategies with governments to ensure that project activities are sustained both financially and through capacity-building.
24. Management agreed that good analysis of the context was crucial, and underlined that adaptive management was a key pillar of the Twelfth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD12). Significant effort was being made to ensure better real time data to facilitate responsiveness. In this regard, Management stated that the adoption of the restructuring policy had enabled greater flexibility to re-programme project components and activities based on performance.
25. Management also acknowledged the importance of building capacity: IFAD invested a lot in related activities both at the level of country teams, through internal training, as well as using grant funding to support capacity-building of project staff in key areas like procurement, financial management and monitoring and evaluation.

**Agenda item 6: Update on the Revised Evaluation Manual
(EC 2022/116/W.P.5)**

Key messages:

- Committee members welcomed the progress made in the preparation of the Revised Evaluation Manual, which provided a coherent framework encompassing both the self-evaluation and the independent evaluation functions at IFAD.

26. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the update provided by IOE and Management on the progress made in the preparation of the Revised Evaluation Manual, as contained in document EC 2022/116/W.P.5.
27. Committee members acknowledged how the Revised Evaluation Manual encompassed both IFAD's self-evaluation and independent evaluation functions, forcing coherence between the two functions, and reflecting international best practices and standards, including those stemming from the 2030 Agenda.

28. In terms of the content, members praised the emphasis on leaving no one behind, transformative change, social justice, gender intersectionality and climate resilience, and the strong focus on context and adaptability.
29. At the same time, the need for attention to conflict and fragility was underlined in order to deepen institutional understanding of such contexts. Non-lending activities like knowledge management, partnership development and policy engagement were highlighted as key to building capacity and promoting country ownership. Generating lessons learned from these activities would inform future discussions on budget and build a case for resource allocation to these activities. Management was also encouraged to consider timeframes to measure impact and transformative results that were neither too short nor too long. Management advised that evaluation efforts would focus more on an intermediate timeframe since the use of indicators tracking outcome-level results in the medium term had become mandatory for projects approved under IFAD12.
30. In response to the call for wider circulation of the Revised Evaluation Manual, beyond IFAD staff, IOE confirmed that the manual would be translated into all IFAD's official languages and presented at international evaluation events. Part II of the manual, containing specific descriptions of evaluation products, would soon be rolled out and would cover joint evaluations. The manual should be thought of as a dynamic living document that will change and need to be adapted.
31. The alignment of IFAD's evaluation standards with international standards and indices (e.g. women's empowerment in agriculture index) used by other agencies would help in comparing IFAD's investments and results with those of other actors working in the same context, particularly in fragile contexts. With regard to climate change, Management stated that through the impact assessments they have developed very strong methodologies to measure resilience and climate adaptation that collect and use the geographic information system (GIS) and satellite data. Resilience measurement improvements are an ongoing effort throughout IFAD to create coherent and objective indicators in addition to those currently being used (i.e. core outcome indicators and subjective ability to recover from shocks). These methods will be detailed in part II of the manual. Members were also informed that the climate action report would be published later this year, in time for the Conference of the Parties (COP27).

**Agenda item 7: Update on the IFAD11 Impact Assessment
(EC 2022/116/W.P.6)**

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee welcomed the Update on the IFAD11 Impact Assessment provided by Management.

32. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the update provided by Management on the approach, progress and achievements of the Impact Assessment of the Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources, as contained in document EC 2022/116/W.P.6.
33. The Committee commended Management for a thorough document and for the innovative yet rigorous approaches taken in collecting data from the field, given the unprecedented challenges posed in part by the COVID-19 pandemic. Members appreciated the effort to strive for face-to-face interviews following strict health and safety protocols instead of phone surveys. Members also expressed their interest in knowing more about other sources for triangulation of results, findings on disability and gender, particularly the impact that the pandemic has had on women as food consumers, producers, labourers and mothers in the food system.
34. Management stated that it was difficult to measure what would have happened in the absence of the pandemic, given that both project (participants) and non-

project (control) groups were affected by it. However, given that both participants and control group members were equally impacted by COVID-19 (which was ascertained using targeted questions in the household surveys), it was still possible to measure the impact attributable to projects supported by IFAD. In addition, through resilience indicators, it was possible to distinguish between such factors as price, weather or macroeconomic shocks, thus fostering an understanding of the different types of shocks affecting IFAD beneficiaries and to what extent IFAD investments have been effective in building resilience against such shocks.

35. Management reiterated the ongoing efforts to improve the methodology to measure resilience in the context of impact assessments (as part of an ongoing internal exercise throughout the institution), drawing data from remote sensing and GIS sources as well as the latest relevant literature.

Agenda item 8: Other business

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee agreed to reschedule the 119th session of the Committee to Tuesday, 18 October 2022.
- Committee members will be called upon to elect a new Chair at the 117th session in June. Members were requested to consult among themselves accordingly.

36. The Secretary informed members of the need to reschedule the 119th session of the Evaluation Committee, originally scheduled for Friday, 14 October 2022, due to an overlap with the Committee on World Food Security and World Food Day. After consultation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme, it was proposed that the session be held on Tuesday, 18 October instead. Committee members agreed to the proposal.
37. The Secretary informed members that, further to the letter received from the Permanent Representative of India to IFAD, Her Excellency Dr Neena Malhotra, communicating the resignation of India as Chair of the Evaluation Committee after the 116th session, an item on the election of the new Chair would be included in the provisional agenda of the 117th session in June. Members were requested to consult with a view to ensuring consensus and a smooth process for this election.
38. Finally, as informed by IOE and Management, the Secretary stated that the Member States Interactive Platform had been updated with revised versions of the Thematic Evaluation of IFAD's Support for Smallholder Farmers' Adaptation to Climate Change and of the related Management response. Both had been originally presented for review at the 115th session. The documents had been revised for reasons of factual accuracy.
39. Lastly, the Secretary informed the Committee that this was the last session that would be attended by Mr Bommakanti Rajender. Both the Secretary and delegates expressed their deep gratitude and appreciation to Mr Rajender for his invaluable contribution to the work of the Committee.

Closure of the session

40. The Chairperson mentioned that, as per the agreed rotation of country composition, this was the last Evaluation Committee session for Luxembourg as a member, and thanked the distinguished delegates of Luxembourg for their valuable contributions to the Committee's work.
41. The Committee was reminded that the Office of the Secretary would share the draft minutes of the session, inclusive of key messages shared by Committee members, for clearance. The minutes once finalized would be submitted for information to the Executive Board at its 135th session.