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Minutes of the 120th session of the Evaluation Committee

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Minutes of the 120th session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 120th session – held both in presence and virtually on 4 April 2023 – are reflected in the present minutes.

2. The minutes approved by the Committee 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, Mexico (Chair), Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nigeria and Switzerland. Observers were present from Austria, Canada, China, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Germany, United Kingdom and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The session was 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, ad interim; and other IFAD staff.

4. The Chair acknowledged the contribution of the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mr Eric Hilberink, as well as that of the representative of Cameroon, Mr Médi Moungui, and thanked both representatives for their support on the Committee. It was noted that Egypt would replace Cameroon at the next session.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2023/120/W.P.1)

5. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2023/120/W.P.1. The Chair encouraged members to highlight their key messages throughout the discussion for inclusion in the minutes.

Agenda item 4: Corporate-level evaluation of IFAD's decentralization experience 2022 (EC 2023/120/W.P.3 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee welcomed the corporate-level evaluation of IFAD's decentralization experience 2022 and Management's response. Members unequivocally reaffirmed decentralization as fundamental to IFAD's ability to deliver on its mandate and maximize impact. Nevertheless, further consideration of how to consolidate and deepen the decentralization process is required, as well as the incorporation of lessons learned moving forward.
- Regarding reporting, members supported the proposal of an annual report on the progress of the decentralization process to be presented to the Executive Board in December, as well as an oral update in September on the steps that have been taken to improve the decentralization process and the changes that have been implemented to make it more effective. The importance of the Executive Board's function in maintaining oversight of the decentralization process was reiterated, while recognizing the need to avoid micromanagement.
- In an effort to manage time and facilitate a structured discussion, members focused their feedback on the six recommendations included in the evaluation report.
- **Recommendation 1.** The recommendation should be implemented, bearing in mind the need to consider the specificities of various country and regional offices that are tailored to national and regional contexts. Moreover, members requested Management to address issues around the structure,

offices, budget and human resources in the annual report. Members appreciated Management's agreement with this recommendation.

- **Recommendation 2.** The recommendation should be implemented, with regular updated information from existing systems provided to members to help inform decision-making, in addition to periodic reports. It was noted that information systems can assist members in following up on the decentralization initiative and ensure proper monitoring of progress and detection of challenges.
- **Recommendation 3.** The recommendation was endorsed by members, including the adaptive nature of Management's response. Members of the Evaluation Committee appreciated Management's agreement with this recommendation.
- **Recommendations 4 and 5 (discussed together as both cover human resource management).** The recommendations were endorsed by members, recognizing the importance of adequate communication with IFAD staff and clearly delineated expectations. The need for reassignment to follow specific timing during a given year was underscored, in order to increase the predictability of staff reassignments and ensure greater continuity in IFAD operations. Moreover, members emphasized the importance of providing staff with incentives as needed, and considering family well-being.
- **Recommendation 6.** The Committee noted the recommendation on the role of the Board, recognizing that the Board had closely followed decentralization since its approval. The Board would continue to perform its oversight function, avoiding micromanagement, and would discuss the indicators required for reporting with Management, as well as the nature and frequency of information required moving forward.

6. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the corporate-level evaluation of IFAD's decentralization experience 2022 and Management's response, and reaffirmed decentralization as fundamental for the future of IFAD. Moving forward, members reiterated the need to agree on the ways and means of implementation to ensure that it served the agreed principles and purposes. It was noted that decentralization was not an easy process in terms of human resources and staff satisfaction. The specific challenges related to COVID-19 were also recognized. Members acknowledged Management's efforts in driving the decentralization process, while noting the need for continuous improvement, in particular in the handling of staff concerns.

7. Members noted the need for more evaluative work to help identify risks, metrics, cost assumptions, and more detailed and accurate forecasts based on IFAD's experience and evidence. Moreover, the large number of indicators that were included in the report did not allow for a clear-cut analysis.

8. Members questioned whether IFAD should have offices in every region, as decentralization may not be effective in certain contexts. The issue of focusing on fragile regions and countries in protracted crises was also raised. Members requested further information on the role of local governments in defining what types of offices IFAD needs, considering that one of the key elements for the success of IFAD's programmes is government participation.

9. In response to the queries on office location, Management noted that IFAD had started out with hubs and then recognized that its technical staff were too thinly stretched. This was the rationale for evolving to regional offices and multi-country offices. IFAD's recalibration plan would further assess how fine-tuning should occur going forward.

10. Regarding budget and accounting matters, the Committee agreed that it would be more beneficial to use and enhance the current platforms and applications to better track decentralization progress and costs rather than acquire new accounting systems.

11. Members requested further data on mapping and personnel to gain a better understanding of the various steps in reassignment, as well as the concerns. One member invited Management to develop information systems that can assist members in following up on the decentralization initiative and ensure proper monitoring of progress and detection of challenges. This could take the form of an interactive and regularly updated map, to be made available on the Member States Interactive Platform (MSIP), providing information on numbers of staff, job titles and status of the signature of host country agreements. A monitoring tool of this kind would provide Member States with a more comprehensive picture of the implementation process, in order to allow more strategic discussions between the Executive Board and Management.

12. The need to consider the future implications on the labour force and hiring of staff was also raised by members. In response, Management agreed to provide updated information on country office maps either through MSIP and the online IFAD dashboard, or as a summary in the annual report.

13. Regarding members' concerns about timely provision of reassignment information to IFAD staff and about staff well-being and that of their families, Management assured the Committee that a clear process and timeline had been established and communicated to staff: decisions are made in December, with staff expected to move in June to provide ample planning time and ensure continuity in the work handover. In an effort to address several areas of common concern, Management informed members that IFAD had strengthened its onboarding support and processes, and was providing additional communication material to staff through a dedicated intranet page.

14. Members recognized the key oversight role of the Board in continuing to follow decentralization closely as it was a core corporate initiative. Several members questioned the purpose of recommendation 6. IOE noted that the aim was to provide general parameters on what the Board could request Management to produce to enable the Board to enhance oversight and make recommendations and informed decisions.

15. In an effort to better track progress, Management agreed to select several key indicators to be monitored and reported on, to guide the Board through existing systems and processes.

16. Given the detailed discussion and the importance of the topic, the Chair invited members to send any additional recommendations and comments in writing to the Chair and Secretary within two weeks, for subsequent follow-up.

Agenda item 3: Approach paper for the thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to gender equality and women's empowerment (EC 2023/120/W.P.2)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee welcomed the approach paper for the thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to gender equality and women's empowerment and recognized the opportune timing given the significant changes in the global context since the last corporate-level evaluation.
- The Evaluation Committee requested clarification about certain aspects of the scope, methodology and timeline, stressing the importance that IOE and Management agree on the methodology to be used. IOE indicated that

several of these issues had recently been addressed in a consultation workshop held with Management. Consultation would continue and these aspects would be elaborated upon in the evaluation report.

- Members underscored the importance of including the paradigm shift towards gender transformative approaches at IFAD within the evaluation scope, as well as the need for proper dissemination and communication of results to support learning.

17. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the approach paper and noted the importance of taking stock of IFAD's work in the context of wider global trends and assessing the value added that IFAD brings on gender.

18. Several questions were raised by members, namely: whether the evaluation would lead to a revised gender policy; whether the information in the 2022 IFAD Evaluation Manual was well reflected in the proposed evaluation; whether the evaluation would take into consideration the ongoing global initiative for gender transformative approaches (2021–2024); the need to examine the gender strategies of the other Rome-based agencies (RBAs) and include the latest developments emerging from the Committee on World Food Security gender negotiations; and whether the evaluation would include the 2019 Gender Action Plan.

19. As to whether the evaluation would lead to a revised gender policy, Management explained that this would depend on the evaluation's findings and recommendations.

20. IOE clarified that the approach paper addressed these issues. In particular, IFAD's 2019 Gender Action Plan would be considered through the assessment of the new project gender transformative designs. Moreover, the experience of RBAs and other international agencies would be reviewed.

21. Members encouraged IOE to elaborate on the evaluation objectives and map them with questions and methodology details, to provide greater clarity. IOE noted that while the main document was brief due to word limit, the appendices provided further information. The evaluation report would further clarify these aspects.

22. Committee members and Management asked about the proposed timeline, noting the importance of having sufficient time for data collection, analysis, consultation, Management comments, a Management response and review by the Evaluation Committee and the Board. IOE clarified that the timeline presented in the approach paper referred only to the finalization of the report. Additional time would be allowed for engagement and for preparation of the Management response. Moreover, the report would be presented to the Evaluation Committee and Executive Board in 2024, thereby providing governing bodies with time for review and discussion.

23. Regarding terminology, it was noted that the paper should use terms from inter-governmentally agreed documents. IOE clarified that the language used in the evaluation was consistent with IFAD corporate documents, including the gender glossary mentioned in appendix I of the approach paper.

24. Management thanked IOE for the consultative process undertaken in developing the approach paper and for incorporating its comments. It was noted that the thematic evaluation was both relevant and timely given that 13 years had passed since the previous corporate-level evaluation. Management encouraged IOE to consider several key areas, namely: the potential synergies with the revised policy on targeting; how IFAD could perform better on gender and on its strategic work; IFAD's response to IOE's assessment of gender performance in the Annual Report on the Independent Evaluation of IFAD 2022; the action plan to improve gender parity within IFAD; core characteristics of gender transformative approaches; and

how to ensure complementarity with the other RBAs. IOE clarified that the approach paper had addressed these issues and they would be further discussed with Management over the course of the next evaluation phases.

25. Management noted the importance of providing an analysis of costs so that results could be mapped to demonstrate whether they were commensurate with investments in gender. IOE responded that this was a valid point but there were data limitations in IFAD reporting. Management's support in obtaining such information was essential. More details on protocols for field missions, as well as aggregation of data were requested. IOE clarified that this would be part of further engagement with Management as per usual practice.

Agenda item 5: Approach paper for the corporate-level evaluation on knowledge management practices in IFAD (EC 2023/120/W.P.4)

Key messages:

- Committee members welcomed the approach paper for the corporate-level evaluation on knowledge management practices in IFAD and recognized that the report covered a highly relevant theme.
- The importance of receiving practical and implementable outputs for the delivery of IFAD's work and mandate was highlighted, as was the need to focus on action-oriented and tangible recommendations.
- Committee members recognized the need to maintain a balance on the methodology used for regions and countries in an effort to ensure that the evaluation was representative of context-specific situations.

26. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the approach paper for the corporate-level evaluation on knowledge management practices in IFAD and underscored the importance of assessing the impact of good knowledge management in IFAD's operations, as well as the impact on rural poor people.

27. Members asked if the recommendations from previous knowledge management evaluations had been factored into the approach paper. Further information on the selection criteria for the case study countries was requested. IOE explained that this was the first comprehensive evaluation of knowledge management at IFAD but past findings from country-level and corporate-level evaluations and from the Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI) on the topic had been reviewed.

28. In response to a question from members about the evaluation timeline (two years), IOE clarified that this included the preliminary consultation process with Management to identify focus areas and determine how IOE could add value to the follow-up on the midterm review of the knowledge management strategy.

29. Management welcomed the approach paper and appreciated that IOE had taken on board many of the interim questions and challenges presented in the follow-up of the 2022 midterm review. The evaluation was recognized as timely given that a new knowledge action plan for 2023-2025 was under discussion. It was important for the evaluation to yield forward-looking recommendations for IFAD to become future-fit and maximize its value added with respect to its knowledge function. Management also underscored the need for practical recommendations that would support the work of the Strategy and Knowledge Department. Management welcomed the intention to explore the role of knowledge management in the context of decentralization, including how knowledge management tools and approaches could be tailored to specific contexts. The learning event proposed after the report's finalization was recognized as important for raising awareness and moving forward with the recommendations.

30. Addressing questions from members, IOE noted that case study countries were selected using criteria such as income status and IFAD country presence, with a view to capturing the diversity of practices and contexts. It was also noted that beyond the case study countries, focus group discussions would be set up to provide an organization-wide picture of cross-cutting knowledge management issues. IOE recognized the strong interest of IFAD staff on the ground in understanding knowledge management more thoroughly and how best to maximize its role at country level.

Agenda item 6: Oral update on the IFAD12 Impact Assessment

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee welcomed the oral update on the IFAD12 Impact Assessment and requested that the definition of impact be expanded given current events. Members would appreciate further information on explaining and interpreting the absence of positive results.
- The Committee requested a stronger emphasis on financial services, risk management initiatives, agricultural insurance and credit issues and the inclusion of additional questions that could be addressed by impact assessment data.

31. Members welcomed the oral update on the IFAD12 Impact Assessment and requested Management to elaborate on how the findings were tied into the overall knowledge management process. Management explained that IFAD's Research and Impact Assessment Division was engaged in generating data, knowledge and evidence related to IFAD's strategic objectives. Moreover, Management highlighted the need to consolidate the lessons learned from other divisions' impact assessment data and knowledge and use then in making IFAD operationally fit for purpose.

32. Management clarified that the top-level indicator being measured by IFAD was economic mobility. Within this scope, the Tier II Results Management Framework indicators being assessed were market access, production capability and resilience. Moreover, biodiversity was recognized as a key focus area that had gained importance and visibility.

33. In response to the query regarding how IFAD explains and interprets the absence of positive results on certain indicators, Management noted that one of the key items examined in IFAD's impact assessments were areas that require further improvement. Moreover, it was noted that while the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations focused on the more normative global space, IFAD focused on data relevant to its beneficiaries in rural areas.

Agenda item 7: Other business

34. Regarding its 2023 work programme, IOE informed members that as anticipated at the Executive Board in December and announced during the Governing Council session in February, the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) in Haiti had been put on hold due to security concerns in the country. In its place, IOE had started a new CSPE for the Republic of Türkiye. In addition, a CSPE for the Dominican Republic would begin in late 2023 and be carried forward into 2024. IOE added that the CSPE for Kyrgyzstan would be included in the provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee session scheduled for 21 June. The Committee accepted the aforementioned changes.

35. Due to a scheduling conflict, the Secretary of IFAD, ad interim, proposed to members that the 123rd session of the Evaluation Committee take place on Friday, 6 October, rather than on Thursday, 2 November, as previously scheduled.

Members approved this change. The Secretary of IFAD, ad interim, noted that the new date would be reflected on MSIP.

Closure of the session

36. The Office of the Secretary would share the draft minutes of the session, inclusive of the key messages, for approval by the Evaluation Committee members. Once finalized, the minutes would be submitted to the Executive Board for information at its 138th session.