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## **Minutes of the 124<sup>th</sup> session of the Evaluation Committee**

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## Minutes of the 124<sup>th</sup> session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 124<sup>th</sup> session – held both in presence and virtually on 22 March 2024 – are reflected in the present minutes.
2. The minutes, as approved by the Committee, will be shared with the Executive Board for information.

### **Agenda item 1: Opening of the session**

3. The Secretary of IFAD informed the Committee of the absence of Ambassador Miguel Jorge García Winder of Mexico due to travel commitments related to his official duties. Ms Sandra Paola Ramírez Valenzuela of Mexico would fulfil the functions of the Chair for the session.
4. The session was attended by Committee members from Egypt, France, Indonesia, Mexico (Chair), the Netherlands (the Kingdom of) and Switzerland. Observers were present from Angola, China, Germany and the United States. Moreover, 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; and other IFAD staff.
5. Dr Telesphore Ndabamenye, Director General of the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board and Ms Sarah Nyiramutangwa, Acting Coordinator of the Ministry of Agriculture's Single Project Implementation Unit (SPIU) participated in the Committee's deliberations on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the Republic of Rwanda. Their presence ensured that the deliberations benefited from the Government's perspective on the evaluation.

### **Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2024/124/W.P.1)**

6. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2024/124/W.P.1. The Chair encouraged members to highlight their key messages throughout the discussion for inclusion in the minutes.

### **Agenda item 3: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Republic of Rwanda (EC 2024/124/W.P.2)**

#### **Key messages:**

- Representatives acknowledged the strong government engagement in the country portfolio, with the SPIU being an interesting project management model that could be replicated elsewhere.
- Given the challenges faced during the period under review, the next country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) should include measures to address the main causes of malnutrition and low level of youth participation and ensure adequate monitoring to allow for results-based management. On a related note, regarding the need for a greater focus on youth and climate change adaptation in the next COSOP, members commended the increased emphasis on these aspects in more recent projects and programmes.
- Efforts should be made to leverage a broader range of partnerships – both multilateral and bilateral – in future projects to foster synergies, for example in ensuring sufficient rural infrastructure or addressing malnutrition in a holistic manner.
- South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) had proved successful in the Rwandan context and its application should be strengthened both in Rwanda and in the region.

- The recent in-country presence of the IFAD Country Director would hopefully lead to greater results in non-lending activities.

7. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE for the Republic of Rwanda, the third such evaluation conducted in the country, covering the period from 2013 to 2022, as contained in document EC/2024/124/W.P.2. The agreement at completion point had not yet been signed. Members commended the collaboration between IFAD and Rwanda, noting the successful outcomes of IFAD's programmes in alignment with Rwanda's development priorities, particularly in livestock and climate change initiatives.
8. Committee members took note of the statement delivered on behalf of the Government by Dr Telesphore Ndabamenye, Director General of the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board.
9. Members acknowledged the need for strategic approaches and increased coordination with partners to address concerns raised in the evaluation, emphasizing opportunities for policy engagement and scaling-up of initiatives for non-lending activities. Additionally, the Committee appreciated IFAD's role in South-South and Triangular Cooperation by advocating for its consideration in enhancing the SPIU and knowledge management in future projects. However, they raised concerns about the limitations of the nutrition component to address malnutrition, urging for proactive monitoring and timely intervention to rectify programme shortcomings.
10. Furthermore, the Committee highlighted Rwanda's remarkable success in rural development and the significance of cooperation with the Government, suggesting a focus on replicable initiatives like the SPIU. They emphasized the importance of youth inclusion and climate change adaptation in future projects, alongside addressing infrastructure gaps in rural areas. Additionally, a more focused approach to IFAD's projects in Rwanda could be considered, given the complexity and scope of activities undertaken. Members also expressed interest in exploring partnerships with other bilateral partners and delving deeper into the policy environment's influence on private sector development.
11. Both IOE and Management underscored the benefits of the country director's in-country presence for strengthening engagement in non-lending activities, fostering partnerships and improving oversight. They highlighted recent actions taken to address nutrition concerns within IFAD's portfolio in Rwanda, including the implementation of two nutrition-sensitive projects, which had just started. Additionally, they noted positive developments in youth engagement and emphasized the importance of addressing capacity challenges, particularly within the SPIU.
12. IOE also acknowledged the need for stronger monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms to facilitate timely course corrections in IFAD's programmes. In response to the observation that not all potential partners were clearly identified in the report, IOE committed to providing clearer information on the contributions of bilateral and multilateral partners in future such reports.
13. Management also acknowledged the importance of addressing nutrition challenges within the new COSOP, recognizing the need for a multifaceted approach that included nutrition-sensitive agriculture and behavioural change communication initiatives. Management commented that IFAD's approach to nutrition had evolved and matured since its introduction as a mainstreaming theme in 2017/2018, noting the inherent complexity but also the need for persistence and collaboration.
14. Furthermore, Management addressed concerns regarding M&E capacity, highlighting ongoing efforts to build capacity both globally and within Rwanda.

They stressed the importance of proper succession planning to mitigate staff turnover in specialized areas like M&E and procurement.

15. Overall, Management expressed a commitment to incorporating the lessons learned from the evaluation into the formulation of future COSOPs and reiterated gratitude to the Evaluation Committee for their valuable feedback.

**Agenda item 4: Project cluster evaluation on rural finance in the East and Southern Africa Region (EC 2024/124/W.P.3)**

**Key messages:**

- Members underscored the usefulness of cluster evaluations as a complement to other evaluation tools produced by IOE.

16. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the project cluster evaluation on rural finance in the East and Southern Africa Region, as contained in document EC/2024/124/W.P.3, together with Management's response contained therein.
17. Committee members praised the comprehensive nature of the evaluation conducted by IOE, emphasizing its value in shedding light on complex issues surrounding rural finance. They commended the evaluation for its insightful systemic questions, which prompted reflection on the effectiveness of interventions and the distribution of benefits. Particularly lauded were the discussions on market imperfections, subsidy allocation and the targeting of marginalized groups such as women and youth.
18. Management's response to the evaluation was also welcome, with its thoughtful questions and practical suggestions, such as the importance of addressing trust deficits in rural banking systems. The Committee underscored the timeliness of the evaluation, emphasizing its relevance to ongoing efforts to enhance access to rural finance across regions. The Committee also advocated for collaborative responses from regional and subregional organizations to address the multifaceted challenges outlined in the evaluation, which would leverage regional dynamics for more effective interventions.
19. Management expressed appreciation for the comprehensive evaluation conducted by IOE, emphasizing the value it held for informing strategic decision-making. They highlighted the significance of project cluster evaluations in facilitating cross-country learning and fostering SSTC. Moreover, Management acknowledged the timeliness of the evaluation, particularly in light of efforts to transition towards new-generation inclusive rural projects, emphasizing its relevance to the portfolio of the East and Southern Africa Region. They particularly praised IOE for delving into key areas crucial for IFAD's mission, including mechanisms to ensure the effective use of benefits by service providers to enhance customer value, especially for marginalized groups, such as youth and women.
20. Management outlined plans to develop mechanisms at the project design stage to enhance customer value, emphasizing considerations such as interest rates, repayment schedules and accessible delivery channels. Additionally, they discussed efforts to assess the capacity of financial service providers and reiterated their commitment to enhancing data collection processes, emphasizing the integration of digitalization to streamline operations and improve monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of a gender-sensitive approach to financial inclusion, outlining initiatives to support women's access to finance and entrepreneurship, including tailored technical support and financial incentives.
21. Management also underscored the importance of targeting strategies to address the needs of disadvantaged groups, such as youth, emphasizing the role of building capacity, fostering financial literacy and supporting entrepreneurship programmes aimed at economic empowerment. Management emphasized their commitment to

leveraging regional dynamics, enhancing guidance for project management units, and exploring innovative approaches to address challenges in rural finance. They concluded by expressing gratitude for IOE's collaboration and reaffirmed their dedication to integrating evaluation findings into IFAD's policies and practices to maximize impact and effectiveness in rural development initiatives.

**Agenda item 5: Approach paper for the thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to nutrition (EC 2024/124/W.P.4)**

**Key messages:**

- IOE confirmed that activities related to school-based interventions in IFAD-financed projects and partnerships with the other Rome-based agencies would be included among the range of nutrition activities to be covered by the evaluation.
- Members highlighted the need for IFAD to use adequate indicators to measure nutrition impacts and for clear definitions and benchmarks to estimate nutrition outcomes.
- Partnerships are key to impact in the field of nutrition given the inherent complexities, which touch on the portfolios of various ministries.
- Nutrition had cultural implications and it was important to ensure respect of cultural norms and traditions while fostering the conservation of natural resources.

22. Members welcomed the approach paper for the thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to nutrition, as contained in document EC/2024/124/W.P.4. They commended the comprehensive nature of the evaluation exercise, acknowledging its timeliness given the growing importance of nutrition within IFAD's agenda.
23. Discussions revolved around the need for consensus on defining and measuring nutrition to gauge optimal nutrition outcomes. The evaluation would consider a broad range of activities contributing to nutrition security, particularly those related to food production and marketing. In response to the observation that school feeding programmes and the purchase of local food should be given greater prominence in the evaluation, IOE clarified that activities related to school-based interventions in IFAD-financed projects, including school feeding programmes, would be covered among the range of activities implemented by IFAD on nutrition and that the evaluation would look at related partnerships with the RBAs. Additionally, concerns were raised regarding the adequacy of indicators used by IFAD to measure nutrition impacts, prompting suggestions for broader and more comprehensive monitoring frameworks.
24. Further discussions delved into the complexity of nutrition interventions within IFAD's portfolio. Members highlighted the importance of examining partnerships and focusing on IFAD's comparative advantages to maximize influence on nutrition outcomes. They emphasized the importance of engaging with diverse partners and stakeholders to leverage expertise and resources effectively.
25. Members provided suggestions for enhancing the evaluation's scope. They underscored the significance of IFAD's role in promoting culturally appropriate and sustainable food practices and emphasized the importance of aligning interventions with local traditions and environmental conservation principles to ensure long-term positive impacts on human health and environmental sustainability.
26. IOE acknowledged the comments from Committee members and Management, which would be reflected in the approach paper. They recognized the importance of clarifying terminology and definitions, particularly regarding nutrition-sensitive projects, and emphasized their adherence to IFAD's chosen definitions for

evaluative purposes. IOE confirmed their intention to organize round tables to discuss preliminary findings, inviting Member States' participation, while clarifying that members would not be involved directly in the evaluation due to considerations of independence and conflict of interest.

27. Furthermore, IOE addressed various suggestions and concerns raised during the discussion, including the need to evaluate IFAD's contribution to nutrition within projects involving other RBAs and the private sector. IOE highlighted their efforts to select case study countries strategically and include in the selection at least two countries experiencing the double burden of malnutrition, namely under-nutrition and overweight, offering diverse examples of IFAD's nutrition interventions and reviewing selectively experiences of RBAs.
28. Management welcomed IOE's commitment to review practices and definitions across different entities. Management also underscored the complexity of achieving nutrition outcomes, noting the involvement of multiple ministries, beyond health ministries, in contributing to nutrition through various pathways. Lastly, they highlighted ongoing efforts related to adaptive crops, innovative financing mechanisms for nutrition, and the importance of ensuring culturally appropriate interventions, particularly at the household level, with a focus on engaging women.

**Agenda item 6: Subregional evaluation on IFAD's experience in the Dry Corridor of Central America (EC 2024/124/W.P.5 + Add.1)**

**Key messages:**

- Members encouraged sharing the report with regional and subregional organizations and interested partners and underscored the potential benefits of developing a subregional strategy or guidance to enhance IFAD's visibility and strategic focus in the region.

29. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the subregional evaluation on IFAD's experience in the Dry Corridor of Central America, as contained in document EC/2024/124/W.P.5. The evaluation focused on four countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, and covered the period 2008 to 2023. Members also welcomed IFAD Management's response to the review, as contained in the addendum.
30. Members emphasized the importance of regional collaboration and strategic guidance for projects in the Dry Corridor, underscoring the need for dialogue with subregional organizations to enhance project effectiveness. Some queries were raised regarding the consistency and comprehensiveness of the evaluation, particularly regarding implementation issues faced in Nicaragua.
31. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to evaluate IFAD's activities in the Dry Corridor of Central America, stressing the importance of regional cooperation and the inclusion of marginalized groups such as young people. They sought clarification on the potential benefits of establishing a regional office for coordination and knowledge transfer across Latin America, as well as feedback on the proposal for developing a strategic document to guide internal operations based on the evaluation findings.
32. Responding to members' observations, IOE clarified that cross-country comparisons were included in the main report. Regarding donor withdrawal from Nicaragua, IOE acknowledged the reduction in funding but highlighted ongoing regional programmes facilitated by United Nations agencies which emphasized continued investment in the Dry Corridor subregion. IOE also assured the Committee of the availability of project data, noting the surveys and impact assessments conducted. Moreover, they welcomed the suggestion to share the report with regional organizations and underscored the potential benefits of developing subregional

guidance to enhance IFAD's visibility and strategic focus in the region, citing examples from other organizations as precedent for effective engagement and resource mobilization.

33. Management expressed appreciation for the evaluation, noting the importance of enhancing engagement and addressing challenges in the Dry Corridor. Regarding the feasibility of country presence, resource constraints were an issue; however, with a regional office opening soon, there would be greater potential for engagement with partners and clients. Additionally, they highlighted ongoing efforts to employ territorial approaches in projects and – noting similarities with other areas of Latin America such as north-east Brazil and other semi-arid regions – an updated version of the vision paper for Latin America and the Caribbean addressing emerging priorities could provide strategic guidance. Finally, Management underscored the relevance of sharing experiences with other regions facing similar challenges and reaffirmed their commitment to addressing climate shocks and promoting rural development in collaboration with partners.

#### **Agenda item 7: Update on the IFAD12 impact assessment (IFAD12 IA)**

##### **Key messages:**

- Representatives welcomed the oral update and the commitment of Management to organize bilateral and informal meetings with Member States to provide more information on the methodology and on the emerging findings of the IFAD12 IA.

34. The Evaluation Committee welcomed Management's oral update on the approach and progress of the IFAD12 IA. The update covered the background and objectives of the IFAD12 IA, presented the current status and progress on the Tier II Development Impact Indicators of the IFAD12 Results Management Framework, discussed the approaches undertaken to ensure quality standards governing IFAD's impact assessment programme, and summarized the way forward to the presentation of the IFAD12 IA Report in September 2025.
35. Management informed members that following the Executive Board's [recommendations](#) in September 2022, a random, regionally stratified selection had been implemented in selecting projects to undergo impact assessments as part of the IFAD12 IA, while the methodological approach remained the same. Management advised the Committee that a paper setting out the assumptions, the challenges and the limitations of the methodology used thus far was under development and could be shared with interested members when available.
36. Management noted that the high standards of IFAD's impact assessments have enhanced transparency and credibility. To ensure the robustness of the methodology, efforts were being made to refine and make the methodology more cost-effective. Additionally, there was a focus on strengthening partnerships for quality assurance, validation and knowledge generation. Following the Board's recommendations to conduct a peer review of the IA methodology and further strengthen it with the support of external experts,<sup>1</sup> Management informed members that IFAD had initiated a validation process of its IA programme with external experts. The validation process involved three complementary tracks: (i) advisory panel; (ii) peer review; and (iii) push button replication. The advisory panel was made up of eminent academics, who validate and strengthen the approach. The peer reviewers included senior professionals from international organizations and United Nations agencies in order to improve project-specific

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<sup>1</sup> See the Minutes of the [127<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board](#) for reference.

impact assessment. Finally, push button replications were being conducted by young academics to ensure clarity and transparency of data use and analysis. The validation process would provide robustness to IFAD's IA methodology, increase IFAD's visibility and enhance its reputation, and help improve, refine and make the methodology more cost-effective. It would also strengthen partnerships for quality assurance, validation and knowledge generation.

37. Members requested more information about the methodology used for IFAD12 IA. It was important that IFAD12 IA unequivocally identified the effects directly attributable to IFAD12 with evidence and the use of a cause-effect approach.
38. Members called upon Management to consider the observations presented by IOE regarding previous IAs, such as those contained in document [EB 2022/136/R.8/Add.1](#) on IFAD11. They also asked about the advantages or added value of the IFAD12 impact assessment methodology compared to other types of evaluations or assessments on IFAD12.
39. Members requested clarifications about the potential involvement of IOE in the validation process based on its experience, independence and knowledge.
40. IOE noted that the IFAD12 impact assessment was part of IFAD's self-evaluation; IOE had provided written comments on previous IA rounds and, as a part of the corporate-level evaluation on IFAD11 and IFAD12, IOE would assess the overall IA exercise. This was in line with its multi-year strategy 2022-2027, which includes periodic assessment of IFAD's self-evaluation.
41. Management reassured the Committee that, if needed, an informal seminar could be arranged ahead of the next session to delve deeper into specific IFAD12 IA emerging findings. A learning event has already been planned for May to share some of the individual project-level impact assessment findings as part of the IFAD12 IA communication and dissemination processes.

#### **Agenda item 8: Other business**

42. Management presented the online tracker for the President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA), which was now fully operational and accessible to the public and provided both detailed follow-up on independent evaluation recommendations and aggregated statistics in graphic form. Management also presented the 2023 digital Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) translated into IFAD's official languages.
43. Committee members welcomed both initiatives, noting with appreciation how the availability of the RIDE online in all IFAD official languages promoted the principle of multilingualism.

#### **Closure of the session**

44. The Committee was reminded that the Office of the Secretary would share the draft minutes of the session, inclusive of the key messages shared by Committee members, for approval. Once finalized, the minutes would be submitted to the Executive Board for information at its 141<sup>st</sup> session.