



Investing in rural people

Executive Board

142nd Session

Rome, 18-19 September 2024

Response of IFAD Management to the corporate-level evaluation on knowledge management at IFAD

Document: EB 2024/142/R.23/Add.1

Agenda: 6(d)

Date: 6 August 2024

Distribution: Public

Original: English

FOR: REVIEW

Action: The Executive Board is invited to review the response of IFAD Management to the corporate-level evaluation on knowledge management at IFAD.

Technical questions:

Jyotsna Puri

Associate Vice-President
Strategy and Knowledge Department
e-mail: j.puri@ifad.org

Lenyara Fundukova

Senior Knowledge Management Specialist
Strategy and Knowledge Department
e-mail: l.fundukova@ifad.org

Response of IFAD Management to the corporate-level evaluation on knowledge management at IFAD

I. Considerations on the main findings

1. Management welcomes the corporate-level evaluation (CLE) on IFAD's knowledge management (KM) practices and thanks the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) for the comprehensive assessment. The CLE recognizes that knowledge is essential to IFAD's mandate in assisting Member States as a development partner.
2. **Management concurs with the CLE finding that several organizational reforms during the review period challenged the implementation of effective organization-wide KM initiatives** that matched the ambition of IFAD's KM Strategy 2019 to 2025. In addition to decentralization, IFAD conducted reassignment exercises in 2020 and 2022. These involved moving staff to different geographical, operational and technical areas, which greatly affected the retention of institutional knowledge.
3. **IFAD has already incorporated many CLE recommendations into its ongoing knowledge work.** The CLE was timely as it coincided with efforts by the Knowledge Unit of the Strategy and Knowledge Department (SKD) to enhance the value of the knowledge function at IFAD, following the KM Strategy midterm review (MTR) in 2022. The findings of both the MTR and the CLE have informed the Knowledge Action Plan (KAP) for 2023–2025. IFAD is leveraging the KAP in preparing country strategies and investment operations and to contribute to global policy efforts towards rural transformation. IFAD's next KM Strategy, to be approved in 2026, will be informed by an assessment of progress and results and will build on the CLE.
4. **Management is committed to further examining and addressing the agreed CLE recommendations once IFAD's recalibrated organizational structure is introduced.** The CLE has come at a pivotal juncture, as IFAD embarks on a recalibration exercise that will realign the institution's structure in order to enhance its operational efficiency and efficacy in service delivery. Within this context, the corporate KM function will be moving to the newly established Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE), which will be responsible for managing, measuring and facilitating the effectiveness of IFAD operations. ODE will consolidate and enhance several functions currently spread across the house, including KM, innovation, and results and impact assessment. In the context of finalizing the structure of ODE, Management will draw on the evaluation's findings to ensure that IFAD has a robust knowledge management function, bearing in mind human and financial resources availability.

II. Management's perspective on the recommendations

5. Overall, Management is aligned with the general direction of the CLE's findings and recommendations. However, some key considerations regarding specific recommendations are detailed below.
6. **Recommendation 1: IFAD should reclaim its role in elevating the operational knowledge it generates to a global level.**
Overall, Management **agrees** with this recommendation, with the caveats below.
7. **Recommendation 1(a): The current KM Strategy should be complemented by a lighter, more flexible knowledge agenda outlining the goals and priorities of KM throughout IFAD.**

Management **partially agrees**. Rather than complementing the current KM Strategy with a 'knowledge agenda', the current KAP effectively fulfils this role: it provides comprehensive coverage of the elements proposed for the "knowledge agenda" such as articulating the KM goals and priorities across IFAD, placing greater emphasis on rural transformation, acknowledging the significance of local knowledge, and encompassing relevant non-lending areas such as South-South and Triangular Cooperation, country-level policy engagement and innovation. A KAP annex outlines the actions foreseen to address many of the CLE recommendations, for example: 1(b) on knowledge partnerships, 1(d) on communities of practice, and 3(a) on monitoring, among others.

8. **Recommendation 1(b): Knowledge partnerships should be at the core of the IFAD approach to KM and will lead to greater effectiveness and impact.**

Management **agrees** that knowledge partnerships should be at the core of IFAD's approach to KM. The pursuit of partnerships is increasingly imperative for fostering learning and facilitating the coordination of knowledge, both internally and externally. Internally, the Knowledge Management Coordination Group (KMCG) serves as the key mechanism for fostering knowledge exchange and coordination, and for supporting KM effectiveness. IFAD has also been collaborating with numerous external partners with the aim of bringing state of the art knowledge to IFAD and its Member States. It engages with United Nations agencies, international financial institutions (IFIs), think tanks, universities, and research institutes for knowledge events and leverages knowledge generated by partners within programmes funded by grants and supplementary funds (e.g. 50x2030 Initiative, SAFIN, Global Environment Facility). The new ODE will enhance this partnership-building function by allowing for cross fertilization of knowledge and enhanced partnerships internally and with external stakeholders.

9. **Recommendation 1(c): IFAD should establish a small strategic office at executive level.**

Management **agrees** with the need to strengthen IFAD's KM architecture. Under the ongoing recalibration, the KM Unit will be moved from SKD to ODE, under the Vice-President. Management will define the specific functions of the KM Unit within this new office using the guidance offered in this recommendation while balancing it with ODE's mandate and role as established by the recalibration exercise.

In the interim, the 2023–2025 KAP already focuses on enhancing IFAD's KM architecture, function and value added. It defines the key role of the corporate KM Unit in providing strategic direction, establishing knowledge priorities and results, and coordinating KM efforts across the institution, in collaboration with the IFAD-wide KMCG.

10. **Recommendation 1(d): Communities of practice should be more systematically used to support innovation and learning.**

Management **agrees** with the recommendation. Presently, IFAD has 11 formalized communities of practice (CoP) groups. However, beyond those, there are numerous other types of KM networks that have proved successful at project, country and global levels, as well for specific thematic areas. These groups operate effectively, actively sharing knowledge and innovations. Collaborating with the KMCG, the KM Unit will continue promoting CoPs alongside other knowledge-sharing practices and platforms such as Dgroups and restricted social media networks. The platform selection should be entrusted to network owners, as they are best positioned to align the group's needs with the most suitable format.

11. **Recommendation 2: IFAD Management should initiate a decisive shift away from its overly centralized KM architecture and allocate sufficient human and financial resources across decentralized levels.**

Management **partially agrees** with this recommendation and supports greater decentralization of key workstreams. Within this context, operational staff with KM functions are decentralized to the regional offices. In this regard, given the current resource-constrained environment, IFAD will need to adjust its KM ambitions and structures in line with existing human and financial resources. This will be considered within the ongoing recalibration.

12. **Recommendation 2(a): The ongoing decentralization would also require more devolved responsibilities and resources for KM.**

Management **partially agrees**, given the need to assess the feasibility of this recommendation. In the context of numerous global, country and organizational priorities, Management will assess the recommendation's feasibility in light of the availability of human and financial resources within an overall constrained budget environment where any real increases to the budget must be kept to a minimum. The purpose of the current organizational recalibration is to identify the most effective ways of working with existing resources to allow IFAD to deliver on its mandate. At present, Management is not in a position to confirm whether or how to address this recommendation, especially regarding regional structures and reporting lines.

13. **Recommendation 2(b): Regional divisions should consolidate KM capacities dispersed throughout the organization and appoint full-time knowledge managers.**

Management **disagrees** with the recommendation. Overall, Management supports the idea of consolidating organizational capacities and will bring together several functions currently spread across the house, including KM. However, this consolidation will take place within the new ODE rather than in regional divisions. Moreover, creating new KM positions needs to be considered within the wider scope of IFAD's decentralized structure and the strategic prioritization of the budget. It is also important to recognize that knowledge management is inherent in the role of all operational and technical staff.

14. **Recommendation 2(c): Regional divisions should develop a framework for monitoring the effectiveness of KM practices.**

Management **agrees** with the recommendation, and further suggests that the frameworks are coordinated by the KM Unit to ensure that they are aligned across regions and at the corporate level for compatibility and cross-learning. The recommendation has been taken into consideration already within the enhanced KAP results measurement framework, building on results data from all divisions, including regional offices.

15. **Recommendation 2(d): The KMCG and KM resource centre should continue to play important roles.**

Management **agrees** with the recommendation. Under the leadership of the KM Unit, the KMCG will continue to support and coordinate organization-wide KM work and will maintain knowledge platforms such as the knowledge resource centre, and knowledge sites on the intranet, xdesk and elsewhere.

16. **Recommendation 3: IFAD Management should monitor KM effectiveness and focus on KM practices and products that provide the best value for money at global and operational levels.**

Management **partially agrees** with this recommendation. Some of the actions proposed will depend on the feasibility of adopting the proposed budgeting system.

17. **Recommendation 3(a): Monitoring of knowledge products and platforms needs to be results-focused.**

Management **agrees** that monitoring needs to be results-focused in order to ascertain which are the most effective products and platforms. This recommendation has been addressed in the enhanced KAP results measurement framework.

18. **Recommendation 3(b): Consistent and comparable budgeting system for KM.**

Management **partially agrees** with the recommendation: KM budgeting should be consistent and comparable, but Management needs to assess the feasibility, system requirements, resource implications and timelines for introducing such a system and decide on its implementation. The system needs to be developed first at the corporate level and then rolled out and implemented by divisions, and it needs to separate the KM budget from the budgets of the Communications Division, the Information and Communications Technology Division (ICT) and others, which are often combined.

19. **Recommendation 3(c): Involve local partners in the co-creation of knowledge.**

Management **agrees** on the importance of prioritizing KM practices that involve local partners in the co-creation of knowledge. IFAD and the World Food Programme have just hosted (in May 2024) the annual Multi-Donor Learning Partnership (MDLP) network meeting, which focused on local knowledge generation and sharing, using KM best practices and lessons from other United Nations agencies and IFIs. Under its grants policy, IFAD is prioritizing support for grantees in developing partner countries as another mechanism to promote local knowledge co-creation.

20. **Recommendation 3(d): Annual reports on budget use and KM results.**

Management **partially agrees** with the recommendation. KM results at corporate level are already reported on annually in the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) and the IFAD Annual Report. However, reconciling KM results with budget expenditures will depend on the feasibility of changing the budgeting system, as noted in the response to recommendation 3(b).

21. **Recommendation 4: IFAD's next strategic framework should define how knowledge would enable IFAD to position itself as driver of rural transformation.**

Management **agrees** with the recommendation and will consider it in the preparation of the 2025–2031 strategic framework.

22. **Recommendation 4(a): Knowledge production should be guided by a systems approach.**

Management **agrees** with the recommendation. The KM Unit has produced a guidance note for IFAD knowledge production which includes knowledge standards and demand, quality, cost-effectiveness and intended use of knowledge among the key criteria. KMCG will continue to serve as a platform to ensure implementation.

23. **Recommendation 4(b): Contribution to the "bigger, better and smarter" dimension of IFAD's strategic framework.**

Management **agrees** that KM should contribute to positioning IFAD as a reliable thought partner and to enhancing IFAD operations for scaling up, replication and policy engagement for transformational change. The current KAP includes many activities that address this aim, for example supporting IFAD's policy development

with Member States and extracting evidence of successful practices and innovations and their dissemination for replication and scaling up.

24. **Recommendation 4(c): KM should be an integral part of IFAD's reform agenda.**

Management **agrees** and has already integrated the knowledge function into the ongoing recalibration, which is aimed at improving the effectiveness of IFAD's operational delivery.

25. **Recommendation 4(d): Application of international standards**

Management **agrees** to consider applying international standards during the development of the next KM Strategy. The KM Unit will engage with relevant external KM networks (e.g. among United Nations agencies, IFIs and MDLP) to benchmark institutional experiences in integrating international standards, resource implications, and potential benefits. Regarding International Standards Organization (ISO) certification (on KM systems), notably, no United Nations agency or IFI has been accredited (see [publication](#), co-authored by the external auditor of the Asian Development Bank).