
Minutes of the 126th session of the Evaluation Committee

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Minutes of the 126th session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 126th session – held both in presence and virtually on 6 September 2024 – are reflected in the present minutes.
2. The minutes, as approved by the Committee members, will be shared with the Executive Board for information.

Agenda item 1. Opening of the session

3. The Chair opened the session by welcoming the Committee members.
4. The session was attended by members from Egypt, Finland, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nigeria (Chair) and Switzerland. Observers were present from Canada, China and Germany. The session was attended by the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); the Deputy Director, a.i., IOE; the Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department; the Director, Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion Division; the Secretary of IFAD, Office of the Secretary; the Lead Advisor, Results and Resources, Operational Policy and Results Division; and other IFAD staff.
5. The Chair welcomed the representatives from France and India, who were participating in the Evaluation Committee for the first time.

Agenda item 2. Adoption of the agenda (EC 2024/126/W.P.1)

6. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2024/126/W.P.1.

Agenda item 3. 2024 Annual Report on the Independent Evaluation of IFAD (EC 2024/126/W.P.2 + Add. 1)

Key messages:

- Members called for further exploration of the impact of cofinancing on project performance, particularly distinguishing between domestic and international sources.
- Efforts to improve project efficiency should be enhanced, focusing on effective project management units (PMUs) and appropriate project durations, particularly in fragile contexts where designs should be adapted and capacity-building strengthened for sustainable project outcomes.
- More strategic, context-specific approaches to partnerships, aligned with IFAD's comparative advantage, should be developed.

7. The Evaluation Committee members welcomed the twenty-second edition of the Annual Report on the Independent Evaluation of IFAD (ARIE), covering evaluations conducted by IOE in 2023, as contained in document EC 2024/126/W.P.2, together with Management's response, as contained in its addendum. Members commended IOE for delivering a high-quality and comprehensive report, as well as Management for its detailed response.
8. Committee members emphasized the importance of understanding the relationship between co-performance and co-responsibility, particularly regarding cofinancing. Some noted that while cofinancing was critical, the evaluation had observed a connection between greater cofinancing and a slight deterioration in performance, suggesting the need for more in-depth analysis of the dynamics between project size, financing and outcomes. In relation to the ARIE observation that small projects generally seemed to perform less well, members recommended further investigation into this trend.
9. Moreover, members emphasized the need for better analysis of cofinancing strategies, distinguishing between domestic and international cofinancing, and whether IFAD or other organizations were leading such initiatives. They encouraged

IFAD to ensure systematic analysis and learning from the impact of cofinancing on project performance, particularly in fragile contexts.

10. There was a strong focus on gender issues in the discussion, with specific attention drawn to women's access to rural finance services. Members agreed on the importance of integrating gender strategies into projects, considering the significant role women play in agriculture.
11. Some members expressed concerns about the disconnect between IOE and project completion report ratings, urging for a unified classification methodology across ARIE and RIDE. The consistency between IOE's and Management's findings was acknowledged as crucial for improving future project design and performance. Another area of concern was the continued poor performance in project efficiency, with 45 per cent of projects not meeting satisfactory levels, partly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic.
12. Members stressed the importance of enhancing local ownership, robust contextual analysis and partnerships. They also highlighted the need to explore innovative technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) to improve project efficiency and performance, especially in rural settings, while recognizing the limitations of such technologies in these environments.
13. IOE emphasized its agreement on the need for a deeper analysis of cofinancing and its relationship to project performance, committing to work closely with Management to develop such an analysis as part of outgoing corporate-level evaluations. IOE also acknowledged the importance of future exploration of the impact of COVID-19 on project outcomes, both quantitatively and qualitatively, despite the limited data currently available.
14. Regarding project efficiency, performance in fragile situations and scaling, IOE explained that the effectiveness of PMUs played a key role in both operational and financial efficiency, particularly in terms of procurement, technical capacity and fiduciary aspects. IOE also elaborated on the challenges of scaling, noting that while IFAD projects were rated moderately satisfactory in terms of innovation, internal factors such as project relevance and external factors such as insufficient government capacity and ownership of IFAD-funded initiatives, as well as institutional weaknesses, were often barriers to successful scaling. Additionally, the use of community-driven development (CDD) in countries with fragility was linked to better performance.
15. Management expressed interest in collaborating with IOE to explore the issues raised, particularly cofinancing and the decline in partnership ratings as highlighted in the ARIE. While partnership ratings in the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) were above target, Management recognized the need for strategic prioritization based on IFAD's comparative advantage, considering the diverse perspectives for partnerships to prioritize in different countries and contexts.
16. On efficiency, Management acknowledged the challenges related to PMUs and local ownership, and stressed the importance of alignment with government preferences while ensuring sustainability and strong exit strategies. Management also recognized the complexities of implementing projects in fragile contexts, noting that although designs were often well prepared, real-world conditions during implementation called for frequent adjustments. The issue of long project durations and start-up delays was raised, with Management highlighting initiatives such as start-up toolboxes and the use of dedicated systems to address fiduciary and procurement challenges. Management also acknowledged the need for simpler project designs and confirmed that IFAD projects were adopting more realistic timelines, which would contribute to improving efficiency.

17. Regarding poverty impact, Management agreed with the Committee's observations on fragility and scaling, and also emphasized the importance of CDD in fragile contexts, noting that these strategies had shown better outcomes. On cofinancing, Management noted that more complex projects often came with larger cofinancing shares, which could reduce IFAD's control. Additionally, Management addressed the use of AI to assess fragility beyond traditional lists and to support sustainability efforts.
18. Finally, Management highlighted its efforts to improve gender equality and women's empowerment in its inclusive rural finance interventions through targeted financial instruments and strengthening of decision-making capabilities at the household level, all guided by the updated Board-approved targeting strategy.

Agenda item 4. Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness for 2024 (EC 2024/126/W.P.3 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- IFAD should continue to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, enhancing gender-transformative approaches, including training on preventing sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse and achieving gender parity in leadership roles.
- Efforts to catalyse private sector investments in rural areas and sustain the momentum on cofinancing should be prioritized to amplify development impact.
- A tailored strategy for projects in fragile and conflict-affected areas was essential to ensure that these were evaluated using appropriate metrics and received adequate support.
- IFAD needed to address persistent challenges in project efficiency and sustainability, with a particular focus on scaling successful initiatives and improving government engagement.

19. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the RIDE, as contained in document EC 2024/126/W.P.3, together with IOE's comments, as contained in its addendum. Members expressed their appreciation for the comprehensive report and acknowledged the progress made.
20. In particular, members emphasized that 53 per cent of projects for the Twelfth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD12) were gender-transformative at design and encouraged IFAD to continue its efforts towards gender parity, including in leadership roles, and to ensure training to prevent sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse. They also welcomed the inclusion of private sector investments in 93 per cent of the country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) approved under IFAD12, highlighting the potential for private sector engagement in rural development. Progress figures on outreach, outcomes and outputs, as covered in the RIDE, were deemed useful and informative.
21. Members emphasized the need to fully leverage decentralization, while recognizing that establishing field offices alone did not guarantee improved development effectiveness. The discussion pointed to the importance of government capacity and ownership as critical factors in project success, particularly in fragile contexts. Concerns were raised about the continued underperformance in West and Central Africa (WCA), with calls for a more targeted strategy to address the unique challenges in these areas, especially conflict zones.
22. Members also highlighted the need for a differentiated approach to evaluating projects in fragile contexts, suggesting that these projects should not be judged using the same metrics as those in more stable regions. Members also noted that

efficiency, sustainability and scaling were persistent challenges that needed to be addressed more effectively. Additionally, questions were raised regarding cofinancing, particularly the growing role of domestic cofinancing in middle-income countries and how that related to IFAD's graduation policy.

23. Overall, there was consensus among members that recurring issues such as regional performance disparities and the challenges in fragile contexts needed a strategic and realistic approach, with a strong recommendation for the Executive Board to address these ongoing concerns in a more tailored manner.
24. On decentralization, Management emphasized the ongoing effort to strengthen the skills of country directors, especially in partnership-building and representation, alongside project management. The ongoing work to improve decentralization was aimed at ensuring greater development impact, while recognizing the need for continuous engagement in building capacity at the country level.
25. On the proactivity index, Management explained that while it might appear straightforward to improve performance by cancelling underperforming projects, this involved significant engagement with governments to address concerns and discuss restructuring. Management also concurred that using the same indicators for projects in fragile and non-fragile contexts posed challenges and would welcome collaboration with IOE to refine the evaluation approach and better capture the realities of working in these environments, noting that, based on an AI-powered analysis undertaken in 2023, over 80 per cent of IFAD's portfolio consisted of projects in situations of fragility.
26. Management acknowledged the regional disparities, particularly in WCA, which consistently faced challenges. Efforts were ongoing to improve project implementation and management in the region, including deploying additional resources and focusing on financial management and restructuring efforts. Management also noted that regions such as Asia and the Pacific, which had seen a dip in performance during the COVID-19 pandemic, were now showing signs of recovery as project start-up delays were being addressed following an AI analysis carried out by Management.
27. On climate resilience, Management highlighted the importance of ensuring that both target populations and infrastructure investments were sufficiently resilient to climate shocks by conducting assessments for all projects. Management reiterated its commitment to improving sustainability and efficiency through better project duration planning and timely project start-ups, which were key factors in achieving successful outcomes.
28. Lastly, Management addressed the issue of disconnect between IOE's and IFAD's internal ratings, explaining that project completion reports assessed performance based on field visits, while IOE reviewed these reports later. Furthermore, with the recent roll-out of the evaluation manual, Management expected the disconnect to narrow in the future. Management also recalled that it no longer rated rural poverty impact as quantitative evidence on IFAD's impact and attribution thereof was reported in the IFAD impact assessment report, which was presented every three years.
29. IOE noted the persistent gaps in the performance ratings of ARIE and RIDE and called for IFAD to align its practices with international best practices. IOE acknowledged the comments from both the Committee and Management, noting its disagreement with certain points, particularly that IOE comments disputed the claim that PCRs provided more up-to-date insights than IOE ratings. This called for further discussions between IOE and Management.

Agenda item 5. Report on IFAD's Mainstreaming Effectiveness for 2024 (EC 2024/126/W.P.4)

Key messages:

- Strengthen IFAD's approach to inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities.
- Address gender and social inclusion challenges by developing an enhanced gender action plan and improving data collection, including disaggregating data by sex, age and disability status.
- Enhance IFAD's collaboration with partners such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) on gender equality and women's empowerment, nutrition and climate-related initiatives, ensuring alignment with national and global strategies.

30. Evaluation Committee members welcomed the Report on IFAD's Mainstreaming Effectiveness (RIME) for 2024, as contained in the document EC 2024/126/W.P.4, focused on IFAD's achievements during 2023 on the mainstreaming themes of environment and climate, gender, nutrition, youth, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities.
31. Committee members raised several key issues regarding IFAD's approach, particularly with respect to Indigenous Peoples, gender sensitivity and nutrition. Members noted that Indigenous Peoples' issues were not addressed in much depth, despite data suggesting that 74 per cent of projects involved them. Members recommended that consideration be given to IOE undertaking a thematic evaluation on Indigenous Peoples, emphasizing the complexity of the issue and the need for better coordination with other organizations, such as WFP and FAO.
32. Performance on supporting gender equality and women's empowerment was also highlighted as needing improvement. Members noted that lack of data would hamper progress and called for data collection disaggregated by sex, age and disability. They expressed hope that the upcoming gender action plan would address these challenges and encouraged IFAD to strengthen partnerships and foster innovation to tackle these areas more effectively.
33. Members also focused on nutrition, applauding IFAD's increasing involvement but questioning its comparative advantage in leading nutrition initiatives. The potential of school feeding programmes to strengthen rural economies and improve gender outcomes was particularly noted. However, members also raised concerns about the report's focus on inputs rather than concrete outcomes, seeking reassurance that ongoing efforts would deliver measurable improvements in project effectiveness, particularly around climate adaptation and funding challenges.
34. Management clarified the criteria for "theme-sensitive" projects such as nutrition- and youth-sensitive interventions and noted that these projects followed clear guidelines that involved aligning with national policies, analysing the specific needs of vulnerable target groups, and ensuring the availability of relevant staff expertise. Management also emphasized that efforts to reach gender-sensitive targets were ongoing, with regional teams strengthened through the addition of gender experts and the development of gender action plans. Management expected these efforts to result in improved performance ratings as projects matured and completed.
35. In terms of broader project monitoring and adaptive capacity, Management highlighted that while monitoring was crucial, the focus remained on taking meaningful action to drive results. Management acknowledged that some indicators were still new, but the process of engaging key stakeholders, such as ministers of agriculture, was a positive step towards achieving longer-term outcomes.

Management also affirmed its commitment to supporting initiatives like the Nutrition for Growth Summit and integrating IFAD's rural development expertise into nutrition-related projects, particularly in linking food producers to school feeding programmes. Management reassured the Committee that shortcomings in climate adaptation would be addressed as newer projects were designed with climate targets in mind.

36. Members enquired as to whether adaptive capacity would come closer to the target in the next cycle, given the current projection of falling short. Management clarified that all projects with additional financing were included in the calculation, some of which originated from previous programming cycles and did not initially receive sufficient climate finance. Increasing climate finance in these projects with a low baseline was challenging. However, this issue would be resolved in IFAD13.
37. IOE highlighted the importance of maintaining a formal process when discussing items presented to the Committee, stressing the need for substantive engagement with independent evidence. IOE noted that documents discussed in the Evaluation Committee were either independent evaluations or Management documents with IOE comments. IOE would be prepared to provide comments on the RIME, ensuring that the perspectives of both IOE and Management were presented to the Board.

Agenda item 6. 2024 President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA) (EC 2024/126/W.P.5 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- Members noted that this year's PRISMA had the lowest share of fully implemented recommendations in the past five years and welcomed Management's commitment to implementing agreed evaluation recommendations. Some recommendations required ongoing action, rendering it difficult to assess when/if they could be considered completed.
- The online PRISMA tracker was welcomed as it improved transparency and accountability, encouraged uptake and proactivity, and facilitated knowledge-sharing – including in cases of staff turnover.

38. Evaluation Committee members welcomed the 2024 PRISMA, as contained in document EC 2024/126/W.P.5, as well as IOE's comments contained in its addendum.
39. Members expressed appreciation for the online PRISMA tracker, acknowledging its potential to improve transparency and accountability, and welcomed Management's efforts in implementing recommendations and enhancing the tool. However, they raised concerns about the declining rate of fully implemented recommendations and the discrepancies between Management's and IOE's assessment of implementation status, highlighting the need for alignment with best practices and thorough consideration of evaluative evidence and risks.
40. Members emphasized the importance of ensuring that tools like the PRISMA tracker were not just information systems but provided meaningful support for Management's work without adding unnecessary pressure or complexity.
41. Regarding the declining percentage of fully followed-up recommendations, Management noted that many actions, such as knowledge management and capacity-building, were ongoing by nature and difficult to mark as fully completed; others required a medium-term perspective for sustainability or were linked to replenishment commitments, which had specific timelines. Management emphasized that while the number of recommendations from IOE had decreased, their complexity had increased, with many including multiple subcomponents, contributing to longer implementation times. Management also highlighted a

difference in how IFAD and IOE assess the completion status of recommendations, leading to discrepancies in reported percentages. IOE mentioned that the decline in recommendation uptake was a temporary issue that would improve in the future. IOE appreciated the recognition of fewer, yet more complex recommendations and emphasized the importance of continuing discussions with Management to address these challenges and ensure progress.

Agenda item 7. Approach paper for the corporate-level evaluation of institutional and operational performance under IFAD11 and IFAD12 (EC 2024/126/W.P.6)

Key messages:

- Members welcomed IOE’s plan to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the organizational efforts to achieve replenishment commitments and targets, and encouraged IOE to consider the impact of COVID-19 on operational performance. They welcomed the fact that IOE would clearly distinguish the assessment of efforts that are ongoing from those that have been completed.

42. Evaluation Committee members welcomed the approach paper for the corporate-level evaluation (CLE) of the institutional and operational performance under IFAD11 and IFAD12, as contained in document EC 2024/126/W.P.6.
43. Given the timeline of the evaluation, Management questioned the application of its findings to the implementation of IFAD13, also given the impact of specific past circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which should be taken into consideration in this context. It was proposed that the recalibration exercise should be viewed as an ongoing process in the evaluation; and that impact assessment should be addressed separately.
44. IOE emphasized the comprehensive nature of the upcoming evaluation, noting that areas where progress was ongoing would be clearly identified. IOE considered assessing the quality of impact assessment to be a necessary part of the evaluation, as it was integral to IFAD’s self-reporting and self-evaluation processes. IOE reassured the Committee that all relevant timelines and accountability issues would be taken into account and committed to working closely with Management to ensure a thorough evaluation of IFAD’s progress in achieving its replenishment commitments and targets.
45. In response to a request from one Committee member to include a review of the performance-based allocation system (PBAS) methodology in the evaluation, particularly in light of potential changes to the reallocation policy, Management advised that such an evaluation had been undertaken in 2017, and that the CLE on IFAD’s financial architecture had addressed the PBAS principles. As a result, significant revisions had been made during IFAD11, which had taken a substantial amount of time to implement. Management was available to address any specific concerns from Member States.

Agenda item 8. Preview of the results-based work programme and budget for 2025, and indicative plan for 2026–2027 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (EC 2024/126/W.P.7)

Key messages:

- The Brazil country strategy and programme evaluation would be brought forward to 2027 in response to the Committee’s recommendation for a timelier assessment.

- IOE would ensure the availability of findings from the thematic evaluation on nutrition to inform preparations for the Nutrition for Growth Summit to be held in France in March 2025.

46. Evaluation Committee members welcomed the preview of the IOE results-based work programme and budget for 2025, and indicative plan for 2026–2027, as contained in document EC 2024/126/W.P.7.
47. Clarification was sought on the high usage of consultants and whether hiring additional staff might be more cost-effective in the long run. Members also asked about the vacant IOE Deputy Director position, about how the expanding workload would be managed without significant budget increases, and about staff welfare. Members also commented about the gender-sensitive budget component, which they felt was relatively low at 10 per cent.
48. IOE explained that its model, in line with other international financial institutions, is IOE staff-led evaluations, based on the use of consultants to meet specific needs for expertise and timelines. Transitioning to permanent staff positions would take time and might not result in cost reduction or increased coverage. Vacancies were being filled, including the Deputy Director position, and IOE was confident about its current staffing situation, staff well-being and funding for the ongoing work programme. However, the potential for increases in future resource needs was acknowledged if expanded coverage was required. IOE recognized that the evaluation process was highly participatory and time-consuming but emphasized that this ensured high-quality outputs and thorough engagement.
49. IOE also addressed concerns about gender-sensitive budgeting, noting that the estimation was based on historical figures and a full assessment of the estimation approach would be completed next year. It was expected that the figure would be higher.
50. In response to a concern raised about the timeline for the Brazil country strategy and programme evaluation, IOE agreed to ensure its completion by 2027 rather than 2028. Furthermore, the thematic evaluation on nutrition would be available in time for the Nutrition for Growth Summit, scheduled to take place in France in March 2025.

Closure of the session

51. 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 142nd session.