
Minutes of the 127th session of the Evaluation Committee

Document: EB 2024/143/R.27

Agenda: 10(a)

Date: 6 December 2024

Distribution: Public

Original: English

FOR: INFORMATION

Technical questions:

Indran A. Naidoo
Director
Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD
e-mail: i.naidoo@ifad.org

Nigel Brett
Director a.i.
Operational Policy and Results Division
e-mail: n.brett@ifad.org

Minutes of the 127th session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 127th session – held both in presence and virtually on 31 October 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 opened the session by informing the Committee that the Chair would be unable to attend the morning proceedings due to unforeseen circumstances, and recalled that in accordance with rule 1.3 of the revised Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Evaluation Committee, "In the absence of the chairperson during a scheduled meeting of the Committee, the Chair shall be temporarily assumed by another member from List B and C selected by the Committee," Ms Erma Rheindrayani, Alternate Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia, was appointed to serve as temporary Chairperson until the arrival of the Chair. Dr Yaya Olaniran of the Federal Republic of Nigeria took over the chairing of the session for the afternoon meeting.
4. The session was attended by Committee members from Egypt, Finland, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nigeria and Switzerland. Observers were present from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany and the United States. Moreover, the session was attended by the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); the Deputy Director ad interim, IOE; the Associate Vice-President, Department for Country Operations; the Director ad interim, Operational Policy and Results Division and Director, Sustainable Production, Markets and Institutions Division; the Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.
5. Ms Annes Kanmani Joy, Deputy Secretary, Other Multilateral Institutions (OMI) Division, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of India, and Evaluation Committee member, provided the Government's perspective on the Committee's deliberations on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for India.
6. Ms Gabriela Alperovich and Ms Laura Calle, Operations and Project Analysts, Ministry of Economy of the Argentine Republic, participated virtually in the Committee's deliberations on the CSPE for Argentina. Their presence ensured that the deliberations benefited from the Government's perspective on the evaluation.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2024/127/W.P.1)

7. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2024/127/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 India (EC 2024/127/W.P.2)

Key messages:

- Members acknowledged the benefits of IFAD's long-term partnership with the Government of India, which had contributed to India's development and focus on rural areas and the most vulnerable farming communities.
- Members stressed the importance of strengthening partnerships with the private sector, local governments and international organizations to maximize impact, as well as a focus on improving small-scale producers' access to markets and enhancing data collection and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems for ongoing projects.

- Members emphasized the need to address policy gaps, create job opportunities for rural youth, and explore financing linked to environmental resilience, sustainable practices and climate change initiatives in the next country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP).
- Management was called upon to reflect on its role in middle-income countries and on readiness for graduation.
- Members noted that the agreement at completion point would be shared with Committee members upon signature.

8. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE, the third such evaluation conducted in India, covering the period from 2016 to 2022, as contained in document EC 2024/127/W.P.2. The agreement at completion point had not yet been signed and would be shared at a later stage. Committee members expressed gratitude to both IOE and Management for the comprehensive report and responses provided.
9. Members took note of the statement delivered on behalf of the Government by Ms Annies Kanmani Joy, Deputy Secretary, Other Multilateral Institutions (OMI) Division, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of India.
10. Members commended the long-standing partnership between IFAD and the Government of India, which had contributed significantly to rural development and contributed to the satisfactory rating of the programme's relevance and coherence, along with its effective knowledge management. Additionally, the targeting strategies were acknowledged for their effectiveness, notably achieving substantial participation by women across all projects.
11. The Committee emphasized the need to enhance partnerships, especially with the private sector, international financial institutions (IFIs) and United Nations organizations, including the other Rome-based agencies. Increased engagement with national and local governments and partners would support scaling and replication across regions and maximize impact. Management recalled its model of working with and through governments. Therefore, the Government had decided on the implementing partners, not IFAD. Such close collaboration and alignment with government priorities at state or provincial levels were critical for successful project implementation. Capacity was also a consideration, given India's size, the number of stakeholders and IFAD's presence on the ground. That said, collaboration was ongoing, for example with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Odisha, where IFAD worked through the tribal department and FAO through the department of agriculture.
12. Committee members underscored the importance of focusing on interventions that enhanced small-scale producers' access to markets. They also stressed the need to reinforce M&E systems and collection of disaggregated data for ongoing projects to facilitate effective assessments and scaling of successful innovations.
13. As preparations for the new COSOP advance, the Committee highlighted the importance of addressing the identified policy gaps, fostering job creation initiatives – especially for rural youth – and exploring new financing opportunities linked to green initiatives and climate adaptation efforts.
14. Management expressed appreciation for the CSPE and its recommendations, reaffirming its commitment to integrating these insights in shaping future COSOPs. Indeed, with the focus in the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD13) on biodiversity, environment and natural resource management, these areas would have greater prominence in future programmes. Already, IFAD was engaging with private sector enterprises and linking them to farmers to promote

market linkages and work on post-production issues, but also with a very clear focus on sustainable value chains.

15. Management was called upon to reflect on IFAD's role and relevance in middle-income countries as they move towards graduation. Management clarified that India was currently well below the World Bank's gross national income threshold for graduation given its lower-middle-income status, suggesting it would likely remain in this category for the foreseeable future. Noting India's status as a G20 country, one member commented that income indicators may not fully capture readiness for graduation and that inequalities, gaps and extremes should also be taken into consideration.
16. **Agenda item 4: Revised results-based work programme and budget for 2025 and indicative plan for 2026–2027 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (EC 2024/127/W.P.3/Rev.1)**

Key messages:

- Members expressed overall support for the increase in IOE's budget for 2025 and for its indicative plan for 2026–2027, though some raised concerns about the pace and implications of the adjustment.
- Members recommended enhancing the strategic approach to country programme evaluations, prioritizing CSPEs for countries approaching graduation.

17. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the proposed revised results-based work programme and budget for 2025, and indicative plan for 2026–2027 of IOE, as contained in document EC 2024/127/W.P.3/Rev.1, which built on discussions with the Evaluation Committee at its 126th session, the Audit Committee at its 174th meeting, and the Executive Board at its 142nd session held in September 2024. Members commended the work done by IOE and its realistic approach to enhancing IFAD's activities and also acknowledged the strength of IFAD's independent evaluation function in improving programme quality.
18. Committee members generally supported the proposed increase to 0.6 per cent of the programme of loans and grants (PoLG) budget, which remained significantly below the 0.9 per cent cap. This increase represented a total budget proposal of US\$7.25 million for 2025, including an additional US\$1.113 million. One member voiced concern about such a significant increase within a short timeframe, and about potential trade-offs required in planned activities if the increase were not approved.
19. While the graduation policy stated that COSOPs for countries advancing towards graduation – i.e. having exceeded the Graduation Discussion Income (GDI) threshold for at least three consecutive years – would be informed by recent CSPEs, when available, members noted that this would not be the case for the Mexico COSOP, as it was due for finalization by December 2025. Management clarified that the graduation policy stipulated that, where feasible, a COSOP for countries exceeding the GDI threshold would be informed by a CSPE conducted in the previous five years. In this instance, a CSPE was last conducted in 2019, making another assessment in 2024 unlikely to provide significant additional insights. IOE highlighted that undertaking all necessary CSPEs for COSOPs due would imply a doubling of the IOE budget, which was neither recommended nor feasible in the short term. IOE further explained that the gender-sensitive budget referred to the proportion of staff and non-staff costs dedicated to assessing operational results on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as IOE's contribution to IFAD working groups and to United Nations-supported initiatives on gender equality.

20. Responding to queries on collaboration among the Rome-based agencies, IOE clarified that the evaluation offices of the Rome-based agencies shared workplans and collaborated on methodological aspects rather than conducting joint evaluations, given the complexity of operational arrangements and significant costs that the latter would involve. Additionally, IOE also noted its increased engagement with multilateral development banks through the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG), which IOE will chair and host in 2025.
21. Members sought further information on the technological and innovative elements in the document and how these might impact or enhance IOE's future work. IOE explained that field evaluations were often constrained by limited access to technology and the need for direct interactions with project beneficiaries in remote areas as well as direct observations. While technology supported certain evaluation aspects, such as the use of geographic information systems for assessing environmental aspects, it currently offered limited cost-saving benefits. IOE also pointed out that high costs for reaching remote areas posed additional challenges to minimizing overall evaluation expenses. Recently, IOE had started piloting the use of artificial intelligence tools in evaluations and had prepared an internal strategy to orient and guide the evaluation teams for that purpose.
22. Clarifications were also provided on the upcoming private sector evaluation, which would differ from the project-level cluster evaluation carried out in 2022. The proposed thematic evaluation on IFAD's engagement with the private sector would focus on IFAD's Private Sector Engagement Strategy approved in 2019 (EB 2019/127/R.3), thus on the Fund's direct engagement with the private sector, while the project cluster evaluation had focused on private enterprise development supported through the PoLG with national governments.

Agenda item 5: Provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2025 (EC 2024/127/W.P.4)

Key messages:

- IOE agreed to fast-track the nutrition evaluation to allow findings to inform discussions leading up to the Nutrition for Growth Summit to be held in France in March 2025.
- The Committee's provisional agenda for 2025 was approved.

23. Committee members approved the proposed provisional agenda for the Committee sessions to be held in 2025, as contained in document EC 2024/127/W.P.4.
24. France proposed advancing the thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to nutrition, originally scheduled for the 129th session of the Committee in June 2025 to the 128th session in March 2025. This adjustment would enable discussions of the evaluation's conclusions in conjunction with the Nutrition for Growth Summit, which would be hosted in Paris in March 2025. IOE explained that the thematic evaluation report would be made available by March 2025 so that it could be used for the summit, even if the report were to be presented at the session in June.

Agenda item 6: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Argentine Republic (EC 2024/127/W.P.5)

Key messages:

- Members underscored the importance of strengthening partnerships, coordination and collaboration with the private sector and international organizations to maximize impact.
- The Committee pointed out the need to bolster the M&E systems of ongoing projects to facilitate timely and agile course corrections, collect

disaggregated data to monitor progress in gender equality and women's empowerment and explore innovations with a view to scaling successful interventions.

- The Committee emphasized the need to ensure adequate support for target groups in the next COSOP, addressing issues related to human capacity and ensuring strengthened capacity-building.
- Members took note that the agreement at completion point would be shared with Committee members upon signature.

25. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE for Argentina, the second such evaluation conducted in the country, covering the period 2011–2023, as contained in document (EC 2024/127/W.P.5). The agreement at completion point (ACP) had not yet been signed and would be shared at a later stage.¹ Committee members expressed gratitude to both IOE and Management for the comprehensive report and responses provided.
26. Members also welcomed the interventions delivered on behalf of the Government by Ms Gabriela Alperovich and Ms Laura Calle, Operations and Project Analysts of the Ministry of Economy of the Argentine Republic.
27. Members highlighted the critical role of the CSPE in informing the new COSOP and welcomed the fact that the findings and recommendations had been shared in a timely manner with the Government and Management to ensure their incorporation into the new COSOP. While the evaluation was based on past activities, some members considered that future-looking recommendations, particularly as regards the graduation trajectory, could be useful. Management assured members that the evaluation findings would be incorporated into the 2025–2030 COSOP, with a focus on inclusive rural development policies and programmes. Given the context of an upper-middle-income country with significant challenges and opportunities, the strategy would address institutional support, innovation, impact scaling, South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and provision of regional public goods. Management was called upon to ensure a focus on agroecology and nutrition as well as on Indigenous Peoples and vulnerable groups.
28. The Committee further emphasized the need to strengthen M&E systems for current and future projects, enabling timely, adaptive assessments and early-stage scalability. Management assured members that M&E would be a priority in the new COSOP. On a related note, the frequency in conducting evaluations was questioned. IOE concurred that a gap of 10-12 years between country evaluations was not ideal and that efforts would be made to reduce the timespan when possible, however, this would be resource-driven. Responding to queries as to why performance issues were not addressed in a timely manner, Management recalled that the period under review was particularly complex from a political, institutional and economic perspective. That said, IFAD's continued engagement in the country was now paying off, with new projects showing greater impact, including vis-à-vis gender. Furthermore, since the Board's approval of IFAD's restructuring policy, Management had greater room for manoeuvre in addressing problems as and when these were identified during supervision missions.
29. Members highlighted the need for stronger collaboration with IFIs, United Nations agencies and the private sector. They also called for a strategic approach to enhance capacity, particularly through regional and country-level presence, to improve engagement and ownership. Management acknowledged the ongoing human resources challenges, specifically the limitations in staffing, and plans to improve coordination across projects to optimize team workloads.

¹ The ACP was subsequently signed and has been included in the documentation package for the upcoming COSOP, currently under review by the Executive Board.

30. Committee members expressed concerns about the limited impact observed among target groups, noting that a substantial portion of the intended population had not received support. They urged for this to be addressed in the new COSOP. Management confirmed that IFAD would redefine territorial strategic plans, working closely with local authorities involved in programmes to better target the needs of the diverse population. The relevance of enhanced engagement with local governments was underscored, in particular in the context of larger countries at more advanced stages of development.

Agenda item 7: Other business

31. Committee members welcomed the launch of the digital edition of the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) 2024, presented by Management.
32. The Committee expressed its appreciation to Mr Nigel Brett for his contribution to the Evaluation Committee as Director, Operational Policy and Results Division, and took note that he would continue to serve IFAD and the Committee in his new role as Director, Sustainable Production, Markets and Institutions Division.

Closure of the session

33. 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 143rd session.