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## **Minutes of the 128<sup>th</sup> session of the Evaluation Committee**

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### **Technical questions:**

**Indran A. Naidoo**  
Director  
Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD  
e-mail: [i.naidoo@ifad.org](mailto:i.naidoo@ifad.org)

**Carola Alvarez**  
Managing Director  
Office of Development Effectiveness  
e-mail: [c.alvarez@ifad.org](mailto:c.alvarez@ifad.org)

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## Minutes of the 128<sup>th</sup> session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 128<sup>th</sup> session – held both in presence and virtually on 19 March 2025 – are reflected in the present minutes, which have been approved by the Committee and shared with the Executive Board for information.

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

2. The session was attended by Committee members from Finland, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nigeria (Chairperson) and Switzerland. Observers were present from Canada, China, Germany and Spain. 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 Managing Director, Office of Development Effectiveness; the Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.
3. Ms Phyllis Mends, Minister Counsellor, Alternate Permanent Representative of the Republic of Ghana to IFAD, attended the session to provide the Government's perspective on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the Republic of Ghana.
4. His Excellency Mohamed Mahmoud Dahi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, attended the session to provide the Government's perspective on the CSPE for the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.
5. Ms Sandra Lara, Director General of Multilateral Cooperation, Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development of the Dominican Republic, attended the session to provide the Government's perspective on the CSPE for the Dominican Republic.

### **Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2025/128/W.P.1)**

6. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2025/128/W.P.1.

### **Agenda item 3: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Republic of Ghana (EC 2025/128/W.P.2 + Add.1)**

#### Key messages:

- Members welcomed IFAD's performance vis-à-vis relevance and its status as a preferred partner in Ghana, while calling for improvements in overall performance, particularly with respect to policy engagement, knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation, and timely course correction. Such issues tended to be recurrent in country programme evaluations and should serve as lessons in the development of new country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs).
- Members underscored the importance of partnerships, including with the private sector in value chains; the promotion of inclusion and gender equality; and the factoring in of capacity-building for long-term sustainability, particularly in terms of infrastructure maintenance and upkeep.
- Members considered the need to strike a balance between more frequent evaluations and identification of lessons learned to ensure that COSOPs remained relevant and responsive to evolving needs, and the related resource implications. IOE would revert to the Committee with a more detailed analysis of the impact of moving to more frequent evaluations.

7. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE for Ghana, covering the period 2013–2023, as contained in document EC 2025/128/W.P.2, the agreement at

completion point signed between IFAD and the Government of the Republic of Ghana, contained in the addendum, the response from Management and the intervention delivered by the Government representative.

8. While IFAD's work was appreciated and considered relevant by the Government, members noted the findings that performance was moderately unsatisfactory in the areas of knowledge management and policy engagement, with little stakeholder involvement, despite the presence of a country office. Members emphasized the need for innovative mechanisms such as knowledge management hubs and farmer-to-farmer learning networks to enhance information sharing.
9. Additionally, members stressed the importance of improving value chain efficiencies from production to market and adopting technology-driven solutions to strengthen small-scale farmer cooperatives, enhance productivity and promote sustainable agricultural practices. Gender-sensitive programming and systematic disaggregated data collection was highlighted as key. Members encouraged further collaboration with the private sector and other development actors, including United Nations agencies and international financial institutions. Attracting private sector investment was key and required the development of risk mitigation instruments, more inclusive rural finance and the assurance of safety and traceability.
10. Challenges in monitoring, implementation delays and accountability highlighted the need for improved communication, capacity-building and timely course correction. Long-term sustainability of infrastructure was a case in point, where the need for investment in both soft and hard infrastructure was underscored. Members wished to know how shorter evaluation cycles could facilitate responsiveness.
11. IOE reported that there had been a significant expansion in its evaluation coverage and explained that evaluations should be aligned with the five-to-seven-year COSOP cycle to allow for meaningful results tracking. IOE also noted the inherent resource implications.
12. Management acknowledged existing challenges and areas for improvement, noting that IFAD and the Government were jointly accountable for the findings and were committed to implementing the recommendations. Management noted that while the presence of IFAD country offices was recognized as important, stability and solid personnel were key drivers of success, as confirmed by a recent notable turnaround in project performance, driven by rigorous oversight, the restructuring of underperforming investments, and the enhancement of monitoring and evaluation processes.
13. To ensure project sustainability, the adoption of a digitalized, georeferenced management information system in Ghana was recognized as a significant advancement, with potential for replication elsewhere. Moreover, Management reaffirmed IFAD's commitment to community-driven development, capacity-building, strengthened feedback mechanisms, improved coordination with country offices, and reinforced knowledge management practices to drive sustained impact. The newly established Office of Development Effectiveness would play a critical role in enhancing knowledge management, self-evaluation processes, and quality assurance reviews, including through an online evaluation tracker to enhance monitoring transparency and accountability.
14. Additionally, Management agreed on the crucial role of the private sector in value chain development and reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening multi-stakeholder platforms towards effective value chain development.

**Agenda item 4: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (EC 2025/128/W.P.3 + Add.1)**

Key messages:

- The Committee highlighted the importance of, inter alia, community-driven development; addressing inequalities among vulnerable groups; influencing public policy dialogue; adopting tailored approaches to ensure inclusion of women and youth; capacity-building in monitoring and evaluation; strengthened knowledge management and sharing, including through South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC); enhanced value chain development; sustainable agricultural practices; and natural resource management.

15. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE for the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, covering the period 2007–2023, as contained in document EC 2025/128/W.P.3, the agreement at completion point signed between IFAD and the Government, contained in the addendum, Management’s response and the intervention delivered by the Government representative.
16. The Committee acknowledged both the strengths and the challenges faced by IFAD’s rural development programmes in Mauritania, praising the evaluation’s depth and IFAD’s commitment to implementing the recommendations. Members sought additional information on how IFAD would address long-term sustainability, scaling up, administrative hurdles, improved targeting of vulnerable populations, including ethnic minorities, and related inequalities.
17. The importance of bolstering expertise within project teams to facilitate adoption of more tailored strategies to ensure the meaningful inclusion of women and youth in decision-making processes was underscored. The Committee also highlighted the critical need to foster partnerships, especially with other United Nations agencies. SSTC should be pursued given its potential for leveraging partnerships to enhance overall effectiveness. Once again, improving knowledge management and engagement in public policy dialogue was considered key.
18. Management outlined the strategic priorities, which had been developed in collaboration with the Government and were informed by CSPE insights and recommendations. The new strategy adopted a sector-wide approach to agriculture and production, focusing on value chain development and sustainable resource management. A key issue raised was the shortage of skilled professionals in monitoring and evaluation, and women’s empowerment. IFAD aimed to address this through investments in soft infrastructure and capacity-building. Management reiterated the importance of local-level collaboration and community-driven approaches as a means of improving targeting and addressing inequalities.
19. IOE clarified that its recommendations were derived from evaluation findings and conclusions. The draft report and its recommendations had been shared with the Government and IFAD for comments, and the feedback received had helped to fine-tune the recommendations.

### **Agenda item 5: Oral update on the IFAD12 Impact Assessment**

Key messages:

- While it was acknowledged that the sample of projects evaluated had limitations vis-à-vis nutrition-sensitive projects, the impact evaluations provided valuable insights into factors in project design and implementation that contributed to positive outcomes while also accounting for external influences.
- The increased focus on identifying lessons and enabling internal course corrections was welcome.

20. The Committee welcomed the oral update on the IFAD12 Impact Assessment, and the preliminary findings. The Committee noted that next steps included an informal seminar in July prior to the formal submission of the IFAD12 Impact Assessment Report to the Evaluation Committee and Executive Board in September. For the future, members recommended that the documentation related to oral updates be posted in advance. Several queries were raised concerning the representativeness of the 16 projects evaluated, the absence of failed projects in the sample and how the potential for such selection bias was mitigated. Members also questioned how comparisons could be made between projects with differing objectives, such as finance-focused versus nutrition-focused initiatives. Additionally, members sought clarification on how IFAD ensured that conclusions drawn from the sample were valid and not overly generalized given the aim of generating lessons learned rather than showcasing IFAD's results for accountability purposes.
21. Management acknowledged that while the evaluation sample was geographically representative, it did not capture the full diversity of the portfolio or sector-specific nuances. However, the focus remained on learning from successful IFAD-supported interventions to identify key factors in project design and implementation that led to favourable outcomes. Priority should continue to be given to identifying projects that yielded innovative, scalable insights. Comparability across projects with diverse objectives was possible because the projects assessed contained common goals in their theories of change, such as increasing income and productivity, which were aligned with the corporate results framework.
22. IOE commended the orientation of the impact evaluation towards fostering learning and enabling internal course corrections rather than focusing on accountability – an area within IOE's remit. It was noted that the ongoing corporate-level evaluation of the Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD11) and IFAD12, which would be presented to the Evaluation Committee and the Executive Board, would cover aspects related to impact assessments.

### **Agenda item 6: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Dominican Republic (EC 2025/128/W.P.4 + Add.1)**

Key messages:

- The Committee acknowledged the Dominican Republic's disagreement with the evaluation's rating of moderately unsatisfactory programme performance over the evaluated period, noting, inter alia, the impact of the time span covered, which had been characterized by political and social unease, the low response capability, the limited selection of some evaluation samples and the progress made by the Government in recent years to address these issues.
- IOE reaffirmed that the evaluation exercise had adhered to the Board-approved Evaluation Policy and the guidance of the IFAD Evaluation Manual, and that it would not reopen the report for further review.

Disagreement on the recommendations could be expressed in the agreement at completion point document.

- Members emphasized the need to strengthen partnerships and collaboration among IFAD, the Government, the private sector and international organizations to enhance project impact.
  - Management was called upon to work closely with the Government of the Dominican Republic in the development of the new COSOP, noting that the country had now exceeded the Graduation Discussion Income (GDI) level, and was thus in a position to begin discussions about graduation.
  - Management noted the significant ongoing institutional reforms and advancements in policy dialogue within the country and IFAD's commitment to working closely with the Government on key priorities for the upcoming COSOP, which included fostering innovation, facilitating knowledge exchange and policy dialogue, and strengthening South-South cooperation.
23. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE for the Dominican Republic, the first such evaluation conducted in the country, covering the period 2011–2024, as contained in document EC 2025/128/W.P.4. The agreement at completion point had not yet been signed because the Government representative advised that they were not in agreement with the evaluation's rating of the country programme as moderately unsatisfactory. Committee members expressed gratitude to both IOE and Management for the comprehensive report and responses provided.
24. Members acknowledged the intervention delivered by the Government representative. While recognizing the efforts of IOE in conducting the evaluation, she expressed the Government's disagreement with the "moderately unsatisfactory" rating, noting that it did not adequately reflect the considerable progress made and the commitment to improvement, especially considering the challenges posed by political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. She underscored the improvements made in inter-institutional collaboration, enhanced efficiency in project implementation, and the strides made towards inclusive rural development policies.
25. The Committee highlighted the critical need to strengthen partnerships, including bilateral partnerships, and enhance coordination among IFAD, government entities, the private sector and international organizations to maximize impact. The Committee also stressed the necessity for evaluations to further deepen the analysis of IFAD-country partnerships, given the criterion of partnership development.
26. The issue of graduation was raised given that the country had exceeded the GDI threshold. While this would influence discussions with the country about the new strategy, it was stressed that graduation was not based solely on income levels but also took into consideration, at COSOP completion, a broader range of factors, including access to capital, rural development policies and institutional capacity.
27. A number of areas to be incorporated into the next COSOP included addressing the rural-urban continuum, bolstering resilience given the country's vulnerability to extreme weather events, enhancing IFAD's policy dialogue, promoting effective knowledge management, and strengthening institutions.
28. IOE emphasized that the CSPE conduct adhered strictly to IFAD's Evaluation Policy (2021), as approved by the Executive Board, and Evaluation Manual (2022) shared with the Executive Board for information. It confirmed that it would not reopen the evaluation report at this stage. IOE further noted that the Government of Dominican Republic had not expressed disagreement on the "moderately unsatisfactory" performance rating in their written comments received in

September 2024, nor was this mentioned during the workshop conducted in November 2024. The evaluation process had been comprehensive and consultative, and led by an experienced senior evaluator. The Government could now consider the recommendations and convey its agreement, partial agreement or disagreement thereto with supporting arguments.

29. Management emphasized recent institutional reforms, which provided an enabling environment for policy dialogue. Furthermore, a productive visit had been carried out in early March during which constructive discussions had taken place on the new strategy and its alignment with government priorities, especially in areas such as institutional strengthening, policy development and rural development.
30. Management reported positive outcomes in areas such as inclusion, resilience and natural resource management, with plans to scale up these successful interventions. Additionally, several key focus areas of the new COSOP were underscored, including the integration of South-South cooperation, the enhancement of institutional frameworks and policies, the promotion of innovation, leveraging of global public goods, and fostering of knowledge exchange.

**Agenda item 7: Other business – Oral update on the progress made for the completion of the thematic evaluation of IFAD’s support to nutrition**

31. Committee members welcomed the oral update provided by IOE regarding the progress on the thematic evaluation of IFAD’s support to nutrition, which would culminate in its presentation at the next Evaluation Committee session in June. Overall, the evaluation found that IFAD’s corporate commitments to nutrition were strong and had kept pace with major global commitments and policy developments. While the internal enabling environment for delivering on nutrition had also evolved positively, it did not yet match the needs of the ambitious nutrition agenda. As Management’s response to the evaluation would be finalized in May, IOE would share the final version with the Committee without IFAD Management’s response, should the Committee so decide.
32. The representative of France conveyed gratitude for IFAD’s commitment to the Nutrition for Growth Summit and encouraged fellow members to actively engage in the summit.

**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 144<sup>th</sup> session.