
Minutes of the 129th session of the Evaluation Committee

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Minutes of the 129th session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 129th session – held both in presence and virtually on 10 June 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 Egypt, Finland, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Nigeria (Chairperson) and Switzerland. Observers were present from Algeria, Brazil, China, Germany and United States. The session was also attended by the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); the Deputy Director, IOE; the Managing Director, Office of Development Effectiveness; the Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.
3. Mr Angkhansada Mouangkham, Deputy Director General, External Finance Department, Ministry of Finance of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, was also in attendance to provide the Government's perspective on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the Lao People's Democratic Republic.
4. Mr Mina Rizk, First Secretary and Alternate Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Rome-based United Nations agencies, provided remarks on the CSPE for the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2025/129/W.P.1)

5. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2025/129/W.P.1, with the addition, under other business, of an update by IOE on the forthcoming external peer review of IFAD's evaluation function.

Agenda item 3: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (EC 2025/129/W.P.2 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- The absence of a dedicated in-country office in the Lao People's Democratic Republic prompted constructive discussions on how IFAD can maintain its field presence and influence, given the negative impact on policy engagement and participation in coordination mechanisms.
- Acknowledging the critical role of strategic partnerships in amplifying project impact, as testified by the successful ongoing collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), members encouraged enhanced partnerships with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to bolster South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC), and with other partners to address weaknesses in efficiency and sustainability.

6. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE for the Lao People's Democratic Republic, covering the period 2011–2023, as contained in document EC 2025/129/W.P.2, the agreement at completion point signed between IFAD and the Government, contained in the addendum, the response from Management and the intervention delivered by the Government representative.
7. Members broadly welcomed the alignment of IFAD's work with national priorities, including its focus on upland communities and nutrition-sensitive agriculture. The Committee emphasized the importance of strategic partnerships to enhance programme reach and impact, welcoming the positive collaboration with WFP and enquired about the potential to scale this up. The importance of stronger collaboration with other development partners including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), bilateral partners and the European Union was underscored, including as a means of addressing weaknesses in efficiency and sustainability. Challenges in

effectively targeting the poorest and most vulnerable groups, along with the limited integration of climate resilience into infrastructure design, were identified as opportunities to strengthen IFAD's strategic positioning and impact.

8. A recurring discussion point was the closure of IFAD's country office in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and its impact on the Fund's capacity to engage in policy dialogue and in-country coordination. Members urged Management to capitalize on opportunities to leverage synergies between IFAD's grant and loan operations, and to integrate SSTC activities within projects, including through ASEAN. Finally, members called for strengthened results measurement systems through data collection and monitoring to facilitate timely course correction and enhance accountability.
9. On the issue of country presence, IOE noted that the Mekong multi-country office in Hanoi had produced several knowledge products, particularly on nutrition. However, even with the continued in-country presence of national officers and country programme coordinators, barriers were often faced when attempting to participate in United Nations or international financial institution working groups. On partnerships, IOE noted that the collaboration with WFP centred on nutrition, raising issues with respect to economic sustainability and returns, while engagement with ADB focused on value chains but struggled with targeting. These findings reinforced the need to improve coherence and manage trade-offs.
10. Management outlined its strategy for maintaining a cost-effective country presence by strengthening regional hubs, particularly in Bangkok, where technical and operational staff could support multiple countries, including the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Key interventions to enhance IFAD's support included the appointment of a designated country coordinator, retention of local expertise, and a recalibrated matrix staffing approach. While acknowledging that in-country presence was important for effective policy engagement and programme delivery, Management emphasized that the key question was not whether IFAD needed a country office, but whether it could afford one – especially amid tightening budget constraints.
11. On the issue of reach versus impact, Management underscored the importance of balancing cost per beneficiary with the depth of impact, acknowledging that reaching fewer beneficiaries sometimes yielded more meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Management also highlighted several ongoing initiatives to strengthen partnerships, particularly with WFP, through the Agriculture for Nutrition project and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program and with ADB on infrastructure development and inclusive value chains. Efforts were being made to focus on enhanced targeting, scaling up successful innovations from grant-funded activities, and strengthening results measurement. These initiatives would inform the development of the upcoming country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) and project designs under the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD13), with the aim of improving effectiveness, efficiency and accountability in future interventions.

Agenda item 4: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Arab Republic of Egypt (EC 2025/129/W.P.3)

Key messages:

- Members welcomed the incorporation of lessons learned into the new COSOP and looked forward to improved performance in non-lending activities, knowledge management, policy engagement and thorough market and financial services analysis.
- Strong collaboration with the Government, donors, Rome-based agencies (RBAs), the private sector and international institutions was emphasized as essential to facilitate scaling and maximizing development impact, with SSTC cited as an opportunity to be leveraged.
- Members emphasized the need for data-driven, granular targeting approaches to reach women, youth, landless populations and the most marginalized groups more effectively.

12. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE for the Arab Republic of Egypt, covering the period 2017–2023, as contained in document EC 2025/129/W.P.3, Management's response and the intervention delivered by the Government representative.
13. The Committee appreciated the comprehensive evaluation and regarded it as an accurate reflection of IFAD's work in Egypt, particularly amid ongoing external and fiscal challenges. Members acknowledged IFAD's strong strategic alignment with Egypt's rural development priorities, notably in addressing water scarcity, landlessness and unemployment. Nonetheless, several members noted the moderate performance ratings, particularly in non-lending activities such as knowledge management, partnerships and policy engagement.
14. Members emphasized the need for stronger collaboration – not only between IFAD and the Government but also with other donors, RBAs, the private sector and international institutions – to maximize development impact. Members also encouraged IFAD to draw more explicitly on lessons learned to inform future project design, enhance value chain interventions through robust market analysis, improve evidence-based targeting and scale up successful innovations in a more systematic manner. In this context, the upcoming COSOP was recognized as a critical opportunity to apply these insights.
15. IOE expressed satisfaction that all recommendations had been accepted, viewing this as a strong foundation for a more effective COSOP moving forward. IOE noted that while IFAD articulated ambitious goals for donor coordination, discussions with partners revealed a significant gap between these aspirations and their practical implementation. This gap was largely attributed to resource constraints within IFAD's small team in Egypt and the limited engagement capacity of partners. Nonetheless, IFAD's strong leadership in the Nexus for Water, Food and Energy (NWFE) initiative reflected the Government's sustained trust and confidence in the organization.
16. Management acknowledged a systemic institutional challenge within IFAD related to knowledge management, policy engagement and resource allocation, emphasizing the need for a structural solution to ensure sustained support for non-lending initiatives across all countries. Reaffirming its commitment to the CSPE recommendations, Management also acknowledged the challenging operating environment in recent years, which had constrained the effectiveness of operations and, in turn, limited both policy dialogue and access to finance. The forthcoming COSOP would prioritize policy engagement in key areas such as rural finance, natural resource management, market access and the development of

market-oriented value chains. It would also adopt a more strategic approach to scaling up, leveraging partnerships with institutions like the German Agency for International Cooperation to enhance impact. Ongoing partnerships with WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and others would also be enhanced, while exploring the potential of new partnerships with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for the NWFE initiative, and with the Kingdom of the Netherlands and FAO on water harvesting and watershed management.

**Agenda item 5: Thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to nutrition
(EC 2025/129/W.P.4 + Add.1)**

Key messages:

- Members expressed strong support for the evaluation and acknowledged its value in informing the forthcoming Nutrition Action Plan. They emphasized the importance of a comprehensive food systems approach, involving diverse ministries and partners; consolidation of achievements; and a continued focus on IFAD's specific role and value added in efforts to improve dietary diversity.
- There was a clear call to tailor nutrition strategies to the specific needs of women and girls, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous communities and the most vulnerable groups, ensuring that they are evidence-based, context-specific and aligned with broader development priorities.
- Members underscored the need to strengthen IFAD's internal capacity, enhance collaboration with partners such as FAO, WFP, the private sector and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), and improve monitoring through disaggregated data.
- School feeding programmes were recognized as opportunities to connect smallholder farmers with institutional markets. Additionally, integrating behavioural change components at the household level was emphasized as crucial for ensuring sustained and meaningful impact.

17. Members welcomed the evaluation of IFAD's support to nutrition, recognizing it as a timely and strategic initiative, particularly in shaping the upcoming Nutrition Action Plan. They commended IFAD's alignment with global nutrition priorities and emphasized the critical need for targeted support to vulnerable populations, women and girls, youth, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous communities. Given the cross-cutting nature of nutrition, which touched upon, inter alia, agriculture, health and education, a strong consensus emerged around adopting a comprehensive food systems approach to foster dietary diversity and promote more sustainable nutrition outcomes.
18. Members expressed support for strengthening internal capacity, fostering strategic partnerships with organizations such as FAO, WFP and GAIN, and enhancing knowledge-sharing systems to promote engagement with private sector actors. The Committee highlighted the potential of school feeding programmes to connect smallholders with institutional markets, thereby supporting inclusive growth. They also underscored the importance of improved monitoring mechanisms through the use of disaggregated data.
19. Cross-sectoral collaboration, particularly during COSOP development, was recognized as essential for facilitating data collection and designing effective, context-specific and equity-oriented nutrition strategies. Overall, members expressed clear support for integrating nutrition into existing investments and emphasized the importance of ensuring that interventions were evidence-based and aligned with broader development goals.

20. It was noted that the Group of Friends on Food Security and Nutrition meeting scheduled for 19 June would provide a valuable opportunity for early dialogue on the upcoming IFAD Nutrition Action Plan.
21. Management welcomed the Committee's comments and emphasized that key points would be further addressed in the Nutrition Action Plan. They highlighted two primary entry points for school feeding initiatives: direct interventions such as establishing school gardens, and connecting smallholder producers with national procurement programmes to enhance impact. Regarding stakeholder coordination, it was noted that IFAD actively supported the coordination of interministerial groups and leveraged partnerships with organizations like GAIN and the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement.
22. Management emphasized the importance of addressing the distinct needs of youth, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities. They also highlighted the value of delivering nutrition training at the household level, while acknowledging practical constraints such as women's workload. In addition, they stressed the need to integrate targeted behavioural change interventions to support sustainable dietary improvements within households.

Agenda item 6: Proposed dates for sessions of the Evaluation Committee in 2026 (EC 2025/129/W.P.5)

23. Several members suggested postponing the 134th session of the Evaluation Committee to a later date in September, considering the proximity to the holiday period. They also emphasized the importance of publishing documentation well in advance to ensure adequate preparation.
24. The Secretary of IFAD clarified that the Evaluation Committee's proposed dates for 2026 were coordinated in close consultation with RBA colleagues responsible for managing the RBA calendar to ensure alignment with the corresponding Executive Board sessions. The Office of the Secretary would ascertain whether an alternative date could be arranged for the 134th session, taking into account any potential cascading effects on other planned meetings.
25. The Committee approved the proposed dates for the sessions of the Evaluation Committee in 2026, as contained in document EC 2025/129/W.P.5, namely:
 - 132nd session Wednesday, 18 March 2026
 - 133rd session Thursday, 18 June 2026
 - 134th session Friday, 4 September 2026
 - 135th session Wednesday, 21 October 2026

Agenda item 7: Other business – Update by the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the forthcoming external peer review of IFAD's evaluation function

26. The Director, IOE, informed the Committee about the appointment of three panel members for the upcoming external peer review of IFAD's evaluation function. The panel would be chaired by Dr Véronique Salze-Lozac'h, Chief Evaluator, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and include Dr Geeta Batra, Director, Independent Evaluation Office, Global Environment Facility; and Dr Jörg Faust, Director, German Institute for Development Evaluation and Chair of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. It was also noted that the external peer review would place a strong emphasis on self-evaluation, given its inclusion in the revised Evaluation Policy. The approach paper would be presented at the 131st session of the Evaluation Committee, in November 2025.

27. Management expressed full support for the initiative and looked forward to commenting on the approach paper and working with the external panel to gain insights into the interaction between independent evaluation and self-evaluation.

Closure of the session

28. 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 145th session.