
Approach paper of the third external peer review of IFAD's evaluation function

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Action: The Executive Board is invited to approve the approach paper of the third external peer review of IFAD's evaluation function.

Technical questions:

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I. Background

1. Per the 2021 IFAD Evaluation Policy, an external peer review (EPR) of the implementation of the evaluation policy is to be conducted every seven years.
2. The last external peer review – the second to be undertaken of IFAD's evaluation function – was completed in 2019, and the third external peer review of IFAD's evaluation function will be conducted in 2026. Following the approval of the Executive Board in December 2024, preparatory work began in 2025 for the conduct of the review in 2026. As was the case for a previous EPR, oversight of this exercise was entrusted to the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) of which the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) is a member.
3. This external review will cover both the self-evaluation and the independent evaluation functions.
4. An external peer review panel (EPRP) was established in line with the ECG's Review Framework for the Evaluation Function in Multilateral Development Banks (2009). The EPRP is composed of members representing the ECG, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC). IFAD's evaluation office is a member of all the aforementioned networks. The EPRP developed the present draft approach paper, which includes terms of reference and a timetable for the review.
5. The draft approach paper has been commented on by IOE and IFAD Management, and will be submitted to the Evaluation Committee at its November 2025 session. The revised approach paper, which takes into consideration the Committee's comments, will be presented to the Executive Board for approval in December 2025. This will allow the panel members to fully complete the process by June 2026 and ensure presentation of the findings to the Evaluation Committee in October 2026 and to the Executive Board in December 2026. Members of the EPRP and the timeline for its work are presented in sections VIII and IX of this document.
6. Since the 2019 EPR, several key changes have impacted IFAD's evaluation processes:
 - The Executive Board approved a revised Evaluation Policy in 2021, which included self-evaluation for the first time.
 - The Executive Board approved changes to the Evaluation Committee's Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure.
 - IOE revised the IFAD Evaluation Manual in 2022, in collaboration with IFAD Management.
 - IOE developed a multi-year strategy.
7. Additionally, IFAD Management has strengthened its self-evaluation system.
8. The current EPR will be undertaken in the context of broader institutional-level changes under way in IFAD, which require further strengthened evaluation functions. These include the IFAD decentralization process, the business model and commitments for the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD13) and the Development Effectiveness Framework.

9. The preparation of this approach paper and the implementation of the EPR are guided by:
 - The ECG's 2009 [Review Framework for the Evaluation Function in Multilateral Development Banks](#);
 - The guidelines of OECD-DAC, and more specifically the [OECD-DAC Peer Review Methodology](#), updated 2023; and
 - The 2023 UNEG [Guidelines for Professional Peer Reviews](#) and the 2016 [UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation](#) (given IFAD's hybrid nature as both an international financial institution and a United Nations specialized agency).

II. Objectives and scope

10. **Objectives.** The EPR aims to provide an external assessment of IFAD's evaluation function, encompassing the independent evaluation function, Management-led self-evaluation and engagement of the Executive Board. Its main objective is to enhance the evaluation function's contribution to the Fund's development effectiveness and institutional efficiency through accountability and learning.
11. The EPR will help IFAD improve its operational performance and policymaking, adopt best practices and comply with established standards and principles.
12. Additionally, the peer review seeks to: enhance the knowledge of, confidence in and use of evaluations by governing bodies and IFAD senior managers; improve evaluation policy and practice; build internal capacities; and support greater use of evaluation findings in IFAD's performance management system.
13. **Scope.** The EPR will cover the period 2019–2025. Its scope will include the following elements organized under the overarching principles of "good evaluations", namely credibility, independence and utility.
14. The EPR will engage with all relevant stakeholders, including: IFAD staff and Management, Board members, project participants, partners, governments, civil society organizations and other key actors to ensure all perspectives are taken into account.

Credibility

- (a) **Quality and rigour:** Ensuring methodological rigour and high-quality evaluations (both self and independent), including sound evaluation frameworks, robust data collection and thorough analytical methods. This also includes the evaluation product mix, quality assurance of evaluation processes and reports, and the reliability, quality and accessibility of data.
- (b) **Reporting and transparency:** Maintaining transparency throughout the evaluation process and ensuring that reports are accessible and clear for all stakeholders.
- (c) **Compliance with standards:** Adhering to established international evaluation norms and standards and best practices to reinforce the trustworthiness and reliability of all evaluation activities.

Independence

- (d) **Governance and independence of IOE:** Upholding the independence of the evaluation function from operational departments, supported by robust governance structures and safeguards to ensure impartiality.
- (e) **Capacity and resources:** Allocating adequate resources – financial, human and technical – to preserve and strengthen the independence of the evaluation function. The allocation of adequate resources also applies to self-evaluation.

Utility

- (f) **Use and influence:** Maximizing how evaluation findings and recommendations inform institutional decision-making, policy development and programme improvement.
- (g) **Relevance and coverage:** Making certain that evaluations address the critical aspects of the institution's work, align with strategic priorities and respond to the evolving needs of the organization.
- (h) **Stakeholder engagement:** Actively involving stakeholders – project participants, partners and other key actors – to enhance the practical value of evaluations and ensure relevance.
- (i) **Efficiency and effectiveness:** Ensuring that evaluations are carried out efficiently and deliver timely and cost-effective results that contribute meaningfully to organizational objectives.
- (j) **Learning and improvement:** Establishing strong mechanisms for learning from evaluations – including outreach, communication, Management responses, agreements at completion point, feedback systems and continuous review processes by governing bodies.

15. It will also cover:

- (i) The implementation of the recommendations from the 2019 EPR final report, including recommendations and comments from IOE, IFAD Management and the Evaluation Committee;
- (ii) IOE's engagement with the Board and with Management;
- (iii) IFAD's self-evaluation system, including managing for results, surveys, the corporate reporting framework and measurement system, project and country strategy completion reports, impact assessments, aggregation of impact assessments/projections to the portfolio/corporate reporting and quality assurance activities;
- (iv) IOE's enabling environment, especially its independence;
- (v) Access by evaluators to the IFAD information and data required to implement the evaluation (portfolio data, project descriptions, etc.);
- (vi) The content and application of the 2021 IFAD Evaluation Policy, and related changes.

16. The review will include a comparison with other institutions with a mandate, basic principles, policies and ways of working that are similar to those of IFAD.

III. Process and approach

17. The key elements of the EPR approach are as follows:

- (i) The review will be conducted on a non-adversarial basis, relying on mutual trust between the panel and IFAD and their shared confidence in the framework.
- (ii) Through this reciprocal evaluation process, the EPR is designed to create a system of mutual accountability and an independent external review mechanism that serves Executive Board representatives and Member States.
- (iii) The review extends to all IFAD evaluation activities, including self-evaluation.
- (iv) Its four pillars are set out in the ECG guidelines: independence, credibility, utility and management.
- (v) The Executive Board, through the Evaluation Committee, will be the main point of contact for the EPR and the recipient of the final report.

- (vi) The EPR will include recommendations for consideration by the Evaluation Committee, IOE and Management.

18. The EPR process has five phases:

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Description</i>
Preparation	The EPRP is established, the approach paper prepared and approved, and consultants selected to provide support. The draft approach paper is prepared by the EPRP, with inputs by IOE and IFAD Management, and finalized after receiving feedback from the ECG Chairperson. The approach paper is reviewed by the Evaluation Committee and recommended for approval by the Executive Board.
IOE and Management input	IOE and Management self-assessments are submitted to the EPRP.
Consultation	The EPRP undertakes a detailed assessment and consultations with IFAD stakeholders and Member State representatives via interviews carried out in IFAD headquarters and conference calls. The EPR will not entail country visits.
Synthesis	The EPRP prepares a draft report that is shared with IFAD Management and IOE for comment and factual corrections.
Assessment	The Evaluation Committee and Executive Board review the final report and take any decisions they consider appropriate.

IV. Evaluation questions

19. The evaluation questions draw upon the OECD-DAC Peer Review Methodology, the ECG Review Framework for the Evaluation Function in Multilateral Development Banks, and the 2023 UNEG Guidelines for Professional Peer Reviews and are presented below.

A. Overarching question

20. How effectively does the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) conduct and utilize both self-evaluation and independent evaluation to enhance accountability, performance and organizational learning?

B. Indicative sub-questions

Evaluation function and environment

- (i) To what extent do IFAD's evaluation policies, processes and instruments – both self-evaluation and independent evaluation – effectively deliver on expectations for learning and accountability, contributing to improved institutional performance?
- (ii) How is the independence of the independent evaluation function ensured within IFAD?
- (iii) How is the accountability of the independent evaluation function maintained within IFAD?
- (iv) How does the organizational environment foster the effectiveness and credibility of both self-evaluation and independent evaluation?
- (v) To what extent are good practice standards (such as ECG, UNEG, OECD-DAC standards) being applied in both the independent and the self-evaluation functions?
- (vi) How does IFAD ensure that ethical standards – such as integrity, impartiality, transparency and respect for participant confidentiality – are upheld throughout the evaluation process? In what ways are ethical considerations reflected in the design, implementation and communication of both self-evaluations and independent evaluations?

- (vii) What is the status of implementation of the 2019 EPR recommendations, and how are these reflected in both self-evaluation and independent evaluation systems?
- (viii) What mechanisms exist within IFAD for planning and budgeting for evaluation activities? How effectively are evaluation priorities integrated into overall organizational planning and budget allocation processes?
- (ix) How are resourcing and staffing for evaluation functions determined and managed? Are resources (financial and human) adequate to ensure quality and timely evaluations?

Partnerships

- (i) How are partnerships with internal and external stakeholders (e.g. other development agencies, academic institutions, civil society organizations) established and leveraged to enhance the quality and impact of IFAD's evaluations?
- (ii) To what extent do partnerships contribute to methodological innovation, capacity-building, and the dissemination of evaluation findings and lessons?
- (iii) How does IFAD engage with partners to harmonize evaluation standards and practices, and what are the main challenges and successes in these collaborations?

Evaluation quality

- (i) Self-evaluation: How are self-evaluation processes and procedures designed, and to what extent do they align with international standards?
- (ii) Self-evaluation: What methodologies are used in the self-evaluation process, and how rigorous and reliable are they?
- (iii) Self-evaluation: How well does self-evaluation capture, assess and report on project outcomes and impacts?
- (iv) Self-evaluation: What is the quality of IFAD's self-evaluation approaches in generating relevant and useful lessons for future projects?
- (v) Independent evaluation: What criteria and standards guide the independent evaluation process, and how do they support quality and objectivity?
- (vi) Independent evaluation: How comprehensive, balanced and objective are the findings and recommendations delivered through independent evaluations?
- (vii) Independent evaluation: How effective is the product mix in ensuring thorough coverage of IFAD's activities for both learning and accountability?

Evaluation utilization

- (i) What is the assessment of key stakeholders regarding the credibility, utility and integration of evaluation results from both self-evaluations and independent evaluations?
- (ii) How does IFAD foster a culture of learning and continuous improvement based on insights from both self-evaluation and independent evaluation?
- (iii) What mechanisms are in place to ensure that findings and lessons from both types of evaluation are systematically used in decision-making, strategy and learning?
- (iv) Self-evaluation: To what extent and in what ways do the findings and lessons from self-evaluation contribute to project improvement, adaptive management and organizational learning?
- (v) Self-evaluation: How well are the results of self-evaluation communicated to stakeholders, and how is feedback integrated into subsequent activities?

- (vi) Independent evaluation: To what extent and how effectively have recommendations from independent evaluations been implemented by Management?
- (vii) Independent evaluation: How well are lessons learned from independent evaluations embedded into IFAD's policies and practices?
- (viii) Independent evaluation: What is the perceived utility and effectiveness of recommendations from independent evaluations among key stakeholders?

Complementarity

- (i) What challenges and opportunities exist in harmonizing the processes, standards and outputs of self-evaluation and independent evaluation?
 - (ii) How well do the self-evaluation and independent evaluation functions complement and reinforce each other within IFAD's overall evaluation system?
21. These indicative questions aim to provide a comprehensive framework for assessing the effectiveness, rigour and utility of IFAD's evaluation functions, ensuring alignment with international best practices and enhancing organizational learning and accountability.
 22. A detailed evaluation framework will be developed by the EPRP following the approval of this approach paper.

V. Methodology

23. The review will include several key steps to ensure a thorough and objective assessment:
 - (a) **Preparation and planning:** The EPR is established and starts with careful planning, including finalizing the scope and objectives of the review, selecting the review team and developing a detailed workplan. An evaluation framework is developed specifying evaluation questions, judgement criteria, indicators and data sources. This stage also involves identifying key stakeholders and determining the methods and tools to be used for data collection and analysis.
 - (b) **Document review:** The EPR entails a thorough examination of relevant documents, including evaluation policies, guidelines, reports, a sample of self-evaluation and independent evaluation reports, and other materials. This helps to understand the existing evaluation framework, practices and outputs.
24. In addition, the EPR will take into account the self-assessments prepared by both the self-evaluation and the independent evaluation units.
 - (a) **Interviews and consultations:** The review team conducts interviews and consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including evaluation staff, Management, operational staff, the Evaluation Committee, Executive Board members, Member State representatives and external partners. These interactions provide valuable insights into the functioning of the evaluation function and the perspectives of different stakeholders.
 - (b) **Surveys and questionnaires:** Surveys and questionnaires may be used to gather quantitative data on various aspects of the evaluation function. This helps to complement the qualitative information obtained through interviews and document reviews.
 - (c) **Analysis and synthesis:** The data collected through various methods are analysed and synthesized to identify key findings, strengths, weaknesses and

areas for improvement. This stage involves comparing the evaluation function against international standards and best practices.

- (d) **Reporting:** The EPRP prepares a comprehensive report that presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations. The draft report is shared with the evaluation function and other relevant stakeholders for feedback and comments. The report is then finalized by the panel.
- (e) **Follow-up and action plan:** Based on the review report, the evaluation function develops an action plan to address the recommendations. This may involve implementing changes to policies, procedures and practices to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the evaluation function.
- (f) **Monitoring and learning:** The implementation of the action plan is monitored to ensure that the recommended improvements are effectively carried out. The evaluation function also engages in continuous learning to adapt and improve its practices based on the review findings and evolving best practices.

VI. IOE and Management input

- 25. IOE and IFAD Management will each prepare their own assessments of evaluation function components they believe are relevant for the EPR. The purpose is to provide observations and analysis from the perspectives of active participants in IFAD's evaluation function.
- 26. The ECG review framework does not provide specific guidance on the structure or content of these assessments, and a variety of approaches have been used in ECG member institutions. However, it would be most useful for the self-assessment to take into account: the issues and questions identified in this approach paper; the six principles of the IFAD Evaluation Policy; and experience with the evaluation function since completing the 2019 EPR, including implementation of its recommendations.

VII. Governance

- 27. The EPR has been approved by the Executive Board. The Evaluation Committee will discuss the review process as presented in the approach paper and endorse it for final approval by the Executive Board. It will also review the final EPR report before its presentation to the Executive Board.

VIII. Panel membership

- 28. Panel membership includes representation from the ECG, the UNEG and OECD-DAC. The panel members are:
 - Véronique Salze-Lozac'h, Chief Evaluator, Independent Evaluation Department, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
 - Geeta Batra, Director, Independent Evaluation Office, Global Environment Facility
 - Jorg Faust, Director, German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)
- 29. The EPRP will select one external consultant to provide support.

IX. Timeline

30. Key steps to date and the proposed EPR timeline are presented below. A final timeline was approved by the Executive Board in September 2025.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Date</i>
Executive Board approves EPR exercise	11–12 December 2024
Evaluation Committee reviews approach paper	6 November 2025
Executive Board approves approach paper	9–11 December 2025
Evaluation Committee reviews final EPR report	21 October 2026
Executive Board considers final EPR report	8–10 December 2026

X. Financing

31. The cost of the exercise is estimated at a maximum of US\$100,000.
32. These costs will be financed by IFAD through a one-time contribution in the IOE budget comprising EPR preparatory activities and data collection activities conducted by the panel in 2025 and further analysis, drafting, revision, finalization and presentation of the EPR in 2026.
33. The costs are expected to include one external senior consultant, possibly a junior consultant, as well as travel costs for consultants and panel members for data collection and presentation of the final results.

Provisional list of documents to be reviewed

OECD-DAC Peer Review Methodology, updated 2023

[https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC\(2022\)57/FINAL/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC(2022)57/FINAL/en/pdf)

ECG's Review Framework for the Evaluation Function in Multilateral Development Banks (March 2009)

<https://www.ecgnet.org/document/review-framework-evaluation-function-multilateral-development-banks>

2021 IFAD Evaluation Policy

<https://ioe.ifad.org/en/evaluation-policy>

2022 IFAD Evaluation Manual. Third edition.

<https://ioe.ifad.org/en/w/evaluation-manual-third-edition>

Agreement between IFAD Management and the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the Harmonization of IFAD's Independent Evaluation and Self-Evaluation Methods and Systems Part I: Evaluation Criteria

<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/ec/96/docs/EC-2017-96-W-P-4.pdf>

Revised Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Evaluation Committee of the Executive Board, 2025

<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/eb/132/docs/EB-2021-132-R-6-Rev-2.pdf>

UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation

https://www.unevaluation.org/uneq_publications/uneq-norms-and-standards-evaluation-un-system

UNEG 2023 Guidelines for Professional Peer Reviews

https://www.unevaluation.org/uneq_publications/uneq-guidelines-professional-peer-reviews

Approach Paper – External Peer Review of IFAD's Evaluation Function

<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/eb/124/docs/EB-2018-124-R-8.pdf>

Final draft report of the external peer review of the evaluation function at IFAD

<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/ec/106/docs/EC-2019-106-W-P-7.pdf>

Minutes of the 128th session of the Evaluation Committee

<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/eb/144/docs/EB-2025-144-R-16.pdf>

2024 Annual Report on the Independent Evaluation of IFAD

<https://ioe.ifad.org/en/w/2024-annual-report-on-the-independent-evaluation-of-ifad>

2023 Annual Report on the Independent Evaluation of IFAD

<https://ioe.ifad.org/en/w/2023-annual-report-on-the-independent-evaluation-of-ifad>

2024 Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness

<https://www.ifad.org/en/w/report-on-ifad-development-effectiveness-2024>

2023 Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness

<https://www.ifad.org/en/w/corporate-documents/financial/report-on-ifad-development-effectiveness-2023>

2024 President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions

<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/ec/126/docs/EC-2024-126-W-P-5.pdf>

2023 President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions

<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/ec/122/docs/EC-2023-122-W-P-6.pdf>

2023 IFAD Annual Report

<https://www.ifad.org/en/annual-report-2023/>

IFAD Strategic Framework 2025–2031

[Draft not yet available]

IFAD Strategic Framework 2016–2025

www.ifad.org/documents/10180/edb9b9d4-664e-42dc-a31e-db096e6a71b5

IFAD13 Results Management Framework

<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/repl/13/3/docs/IFAD13-3-R-2-Rev-1-Add-1.pdf>

2024 IFAD's programme of work and budget

<https://webapps.ifad.org/members/gc/47/docs/GC47-L-8-Rev-1.pdf>

Draft guidelines for project completion reports

[Draft not yet available]

IFAD11 Impact Assessment Report

<https://www.ifad.org/en/w/publications/ifad11-impact-assessment-report>