



**IFAD**  
**INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**  
**Executive Board – Sixty-Ninth Session**  
Rome, 3-4 May 2000

**IFAD POLICY ON THE DISCLOSURE OF DOCUMENTS**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. At its Twenty-First Session in February 1998, the Governing Council considered document GC 21/L.8 on an IFAD Policy on the Disclosure of Documents. After careful review, it agreed to the principle of having a disclosure policy and therefore:

- (a) approved an 18-month interim phase, from July 1998 to December 1999, during which governing body documents would be made available on IFAD's website in the four official languages of the Fund; and
- (b) requested the Executive Board to review the disclosure policy and procedures at its Sixty-Ninth Session in the year 2000 (subsequent to the end of the interim phase) and authorized it to adopt a final disclosure policy.

**II. THE INTERIM PHASE**

2. During the interim phase, governing body documents once approved by and with the consent of the governing body concerned (i.e., the Executive Board and the Governing Council), were posted on IFAD's public website in all four official languages. Governing body documents already undergo editing and are translated for meetings. The Fund has thus incurred no incremental production costs during the interim phase.

3. Statistics collected show that there has been a modest decline (13%) over the 18-month period in the number of paper copies of governing body documents requested from outside IFAD, which is the first indicator of the impact of the disclosure policy. This reduction in the demand for paper copies has been counterbalanced by a small increase in the number of electronic copies requested (as e-mail attachments), which is the second indicator. The big increase has been in terms of "hits" on IFAD's Internet website, the third and most important indicator.



4. The public has accessed IFAD's disclosed documents in small but increasing numbers. The number of requests (hits on governing body documents) for disclosed documents increased from 3 866 for the sixth-month period of disclosure in 1998 to 37 061 for the year 1999, nearly a fivefold monthly increase. This substantial increase has occurred even though IFAD's website remains relatively underdeveloped.

5. In summing up, there has been relatively little impact on IFAD's budget by the interim phase of disclosure, which was designed to fit within the Fund's existing zero-growth budget. In any event, the Fund has not incurred significant incremental costs or experienced increases in its workload because of the policy. IFAD is now storing documents electronically, and this has greatly facilitated implementation. The demand for documents from the general public has been experienced by IFAD through its website. As predicted, there has been a decline in the demand for paper copies. External clients for paper and electronic copies of documents tend to be researchers (a relatively small group), whereas, to date, there seems to be little demand from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the business community.

### III. THE POLICY AND ITS OBJECTIVES

6. The primary rationale for having a disclosure policy is to increase IFAD's accountability, transparency and service to its stakeholder community while furthering general knowledge and transparency about its governance structure and its role in promoting sustainable development.

7. As an international organization, IFAD has an obligation to make information available to its donors and stakeholders in order to inform them of the use and productivity of the funds with which it is entrusted. IFAD believes that the trust and public support of its constituencies is in direct relation to the efficiency, transparency and responsibility with which it executes this obligation. In developing a policy on the disclosure of documents, IFAD has given priority to ensuring the transparency of information relating to its governance process.

The basic objectives of the disclosure policy are to:

- (a) account for the use of public funds to IFAD's stakeholder community, including, but not limited to, IFAD Member States, development partners (public international and bilateral, private and non-governmental), and taxpayers at large;
- (b) increase public awareness, knowledge and interest in IFAD's activities and those of other development organizations; and
- (c) strengthen a global, democratic and sustainable governance process through increased accountability and transparency.

8. In response to the above objectives, management feels that it should expand the scope of the disclosure policy to include evaluation reports, which would also include all documentation submitted to the Evaluation Committee of the Executive Board. These documents furnish substantive data and analysis on project implementation and beneficiary impact, including various types of project evaluations, country portfolio evaluations, thematic studies and reports on "lessons learned". In exceptional cases and where extensive portions are deemed sensitive, the director of the IFAD division concerned may restrict public access to the document as a whole.

9. In addition, the Consultation to Review the Adequacy of the Resources Available to IFAD is presently reviewing whether country strategic opportunities papers (COSOPs) should be made available to the Executive Board on a systematic basis. If so decided, this would be another type of document that, once reviewed by the Board and approved for disclosure, could be publicly disclosed. COSOPs provide



a concise, analytical basis for all IFAD-initiated operations in a designated country. They are generated through a participatory process, in consultation with stakeholders, and contain an overview of the following sectors: economy, agriculture, institutional framework and rural poverty. As such, they identify a strategy for IFAD interventions.

10. Management feels that if the above approach is followed, the primary objective of the disclosure policy – to ensure transparency about IFAD governance – will be met. In addition, since all the above documents will be coming through an official governing body, they will go through a clearance and document-control process and will also be translated into the four official languages.

11. Management is also aware that, in accordance with IFAD's goal of becoming a knowledge organization and in the interests of increased knowledge-sharing, a disclosure policy is not sufficient. The Fund is in the process of defining an independent strategy on knowledge management, which will, *inter alia*, have the following objectives:

- (a) improve the quality, efficiency and potential for replication of development programmes and projects through enhanced coordination and sharing of "lessons learned" among donors;
- (b) encourage beneficiary participation and project ownership through increased knowledge of development activities in neighbouring or similar regions;
- (c) promote public debate on the benefits of sustainable development activities.

12. Sharing information about what worked and what failed will raise the quality of development assistance as a whole. In defining a knowledge-management strategy, IFAD will support the global effort to achieve sustainable development. In addition, the potential will be greater for cross-fertilization and the replication of successful projects or components. With better access to information, moreover, development partners and beneficiaries will be able to draw on examples of other projects in order to reinforce ownership and sustainability.

13. Work on defining a knowledge-management strategy is under way and will dovetail with the work of the Process Re-Engineering Programme. In defining that strategy, management will also give careful consideration to the possibility of releasing other types of reports, such as appraisals and environmental assessments, for public disclosure.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATION**

14. The Executive Board is asked to approve an expansion of the present scope of the disclosure policy to include all evaluation reports, as well as the documentation submitted to the Evaluation Committee of the Executive Board. These documents could be primarily disclosed in electronic format through IFAD's corporate website, and paper copies would be kept to the minimum necessary.

15. The Consultation will independently review the issue of COSOPs and make a recommendation to the Governing Council.

16. In the development of its knowledge-management strategy, IFAD will review the possibility of sharing the knowledge gained in project design and implementation with the public by making available a wider range of its working documents such as appraisal reports and environmental assessments.