

Document: EB 2007/90/R.5
Agenda: 5(a)
Date: 17 April 2007
Distribution: Public
Original: English

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Enabling the rural poor
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Report of the Evaluation Committee Chairperson on the field visit to Mali

Executive Board — Ninetieth Session
Rome, 17-18 April 2007

For: **Review**

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Report of the Evaluation Committee Chairperson on the field visit to Mali

Background

1. In line with its terms of reference and upon the invitation of the Government of Mali, the Evaluation Committee undertook its annual field visit to Mali from 4 to 8 March 2007. All Committee members took part in the field visit, including the representatives of Belgium, Cameroon, Germany, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Sweden and Switzerland. Executive Board members from Brazil, China, Guatemala, Mali and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland also participated in the visit. In addition, IFAD was represented by the Assistant President of the Programme Management Department, the Director of the Office of Evaluation (OE), the Director of the Western and Central Africa Division, the Executive Director of the IFAD Action Plan, the Secretary of IFAD and other staff.
2. The main objectives of the field visit were to: (i) enable the Committee to visit selected sites of an IFAD-funded project in Mali and hold discussions with project staff, beneficiaries, local authorities and other partners; and (ii) participate in the Mali country programme evaluation (CPE) national round-table workshop.

Field visit

3. The field visit was conducted from 4 to 6 March in the region of Timbuktu, the location of the IFAD-funded Zone Lacustre Development Project – Phase II, cofinanced with the West African Development Bank and the Belgian Survival Fund. This project – for which IFAD provided a loan of US\$12.7 million under highly concessional terms – closed in June 2006. The region of Timbuktu is one of the poorest in the country, and IFAD has been declared by the Government of Mali as the lead agency for rural poverty alleviation purposes in the northern regions of the country.
4. Before the field visit, a briefing was organized in Bamako for the Evaluation Committee and others concerned with the overall country programme and the project to be visited. The Malian Minister of Agriculture and the Commissioner for Food Security also actively participated in the field visit to the Timbuktu region.
5. The field visit provided Committee and other Board members with an opportunity for face-to-face interaction with men and women from the targeted population, project authorities and other partners working at the grass-roots level. Various project activities in Timbuktu, Niafunké and Tonka were visited, including representative examples of irrigation and flood recession schemes, schools, community health centres, boreholes, ferry service, etc. A visit to the community radio station, established with project resources, and the opportunity to hold discussions with both the programming staff and some of the listeners were particularly useful in appreciating the role communication can play in deepening the involvement and participation of the community.
6. The field visit enabled Committee members to familiarize themselves with the benefits accruing to the community from these infrastructure development schemes. The visit also generated a lively debate among Committee members, and facilitated on-site discussions with the project authorities, IFAD officers and other stakeholders, on how to contextualize and sequence development interventions in difficult and often hostile agroclimatic environments, such as the one visited. It also helped bring out the need for matching creation of infrastructure with simultaneous efforts at the community level to impart skills and establish processes for sustainable use and maintenance of assets. Furthermore, members were able to familiarize themselves with the measures taken by the local administration for decentralized governance.

7. Members of the Committee found the annual field visit informative and useful in improving their understanding of the field-level issues related to the implementation of IFAD projects. They were also very appreciative of the very warm, traditional welcome as well as the ancient cultural and historic legacy of the region that the Government and the people of Timbuktu have successfully managed to conserve.

CPE national round-table workshop

8. On 7 and 8 March, the Committee and Board members participated in the CPE national round-table workshop, which was organized by the Government of Mali and OE, in collaboration with IFAD's Western and Central Africa Division. The workshop was attended by around 100 participants, including representatives from central and local Government, project staff, international organizations, research institutions, NGOs and farmers' organizations, in addition to IFAD Management and staff. The Committee found that the workshop was very well organized and that it allowed for open and in-depth discussions. Committee members would like to thank the Government of Mali and OE for the excellent arrangements, which facilitated the deliberations.
9. To aid the workshop discussions, an issues paper was prepared by OE on the main themes emerging from the Mali CPE. The following were the three themes of the issues paper:
 - **Theme 1:** Towards a new strategy for cooperation between the Government of Mali and IFAD.
 - **Theme 2:** How to strengthen IFAD's capacity to promote innovation, and its scaling up and replication through IFAD's own interventions and those of other partners.
 - **Theme 3:** How to strengthen programme implementation, in particular the strategic steering of interventions with partners.
10. The workshop participants broke up into three working groups on the afternoon of 7 March. Each group deliberated on one key theme, and provided feedback in the form of a PowerPoint presentation to the workshop plenary session on 8 March.
11. The main workshop issues and conclusions are captured in the workshop closing statement, delivered by the Minister of Agriculture on behalf of the Government of Mali. This statement is contained in the annex.

Specific issues and lessons learned

12. The following paragraphs contain a summary of some of the key issues discussed during the workshop.
13. In general, the Government of Mali and other workshop participants expressed broad consensus on the main findings and recommendations of the CPE. In particular, these results show that IFAD operations have been effective in the construction of irrigation and basic village infrastructure, and that impact has been generally significant on food security and on health and hygiene. However, given the remoteness and difficult ecological conditions of the region, it was discussed whether a more market-chain-oriented approach, as advocated in the evaluation, would, in fact, have been appropriate. On one hand, it was argued that effectiveness could be improved by focusing efforts on pre-production activities (such as providing microfinance and inputs) and post-production phases (including processing and marketing), and by supporting farmers' organizations. On the other hand, some maintained that these considerations may be less relevant in the case of this particular region, where distances and ecological conditions made it difficult to create and sustain such market structures, especially in the area of food insecurity that only now has reached a situation of food surplus.
14. Among other issues, the workshop highlighted the need – also underlined by the evaluation – to strengthen IFAD's capacity in Mali to promote innovations that can be

scaled up and replicated by the Government of Mali and other organizations. This will require more systematic and adequately resourced policy dialogue efforts, in addition to knowledge and partnership management. Institutional issues, such as how IFAD adapts to a changing environment, including processes of decentralization, were also considered important.

15. Committee members were broadly in agreement with other stakeholders that there was a strong case for IFAD to strengthen its country presence in Mali. This would allow the Fund, inter alia, to be more proactively engaged in policy dialogue, and to follow project implementation closely, in order to introduce the corrective measures necessary for greater results and impact. The Committee would be interested to learn more about the strong partnership with the Government of Mali, as demonstrated also by the building provided for IFAD project management.

Next steps in the CPE

16. Based on the recommendations contained in the CPE report and the key issues emerging from the CPE national round-table workshop, OE will prepare the draft evaluation agreement at completion point. As per usual practice, the agreement at completion point will reflect the consensus of the Government of Mali and IFAD on the main evaluation findings, and their agreement to adopt and implement the CPE's recommendations within specific time frames. The agreement at completion point will be finalized by the end of April 2007.
17. Following the finalization of the agreement at completion point, the final evaluation report will be published inclusive of the agreement at completion point and disseminated to internal and external audiences, both in print and in electronic form.

Conclusion

18. With regard to the organization of the field visit to the project area, the Committee felt that it might be more effective in the future to restrict the number of other participants accompanying the Committee in such events. This would not only facilitate logistical arrangements, but would also provide a wider opportunity to Evaluation Committee members for direct interaction with local communities and others in the project area.
19. In closing, the Evaluation Committee and other Board members who travelled to Mali would like to express their deepest appreciation to the Government of Mali for the excellent arrangements made and attention provided to all participants throughout the trip, during both the visit to the Timbuktu region and the workshop in Bamako. Discussions with various stakeholders, the beneficiaries, project authorities, partner organizations and Government representatives were very informative and useful. Meetings with the President of the Republic of Mali, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture have given Committee members a rare opportunity to appreciate the perspectives and priorities of the Government of Mali for rural and agricultural development in the country. In closing, the Committee would also like to thank OE and the Western and Central Africa Division for their excellent collaboration and support during the field visit.

REPUBLIC OF MALI
ONE PEOPLE – ONE GOAL – ONE FAITH

FINAL DECLARATION BY THE GOVERNMENT OF MALI
MALI COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION WORKSHOP
Bamako, 7 and 8 March 2007

March 2007

Following two days of field visits in the Lake District, fruitful exchanges on the conclusions and recommendations of the country programme evaluation report, and substantive discussion in working groups, we have now come to the end of this important meeting.

In the Lake District, we viewed project achievements in the areas of village infrastructure, water management, community health care centres, schools and rural radio. Our conversations with the people have given us a better understanding of their living conditions and the hope these achievements have aroused, as well as prospects for the future.

Exchanges on the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report have led to a number of issues being addressed:

- The need to establish an IFAD field office in Mali and continue to build IFAD's alliances with other technical and financial partners
- Project sustainability and replicability
- Rates of return
- Innovation
- Monitoring and evaluation

The groups' work has led to substantive results that will enrich not only the agreement at completion point but also the new country strategic opportunities paper. Highlights are as follows:

Concerning IFAD's new strategy in Mali:

- Given that focalization is an important approach but may not be the most appropriate way to achieve sustainability and enhanced impact in the Sahelian and Sahelo-Saharan areas, you have voiced a preference for geographic and social targeting based on communal plans for social, economic and cultural development (with reference to information systems and poverty/vulnerability studies).
- Having regard to the structural food deficits in IFAD's operating areas, you have agreed that projects should put in place production infrastructure first of all, in order to reactivate production and meet nutritional needs while laying the groundwork for developing supply chains, taking into account activities upstream and downstream of production (inputs, equipment, processing, marketing and consultative frameworks).
- In view of the predominant role that farmers' organizations must play in developing, implementing and evaluating development strategy and policy in a context of dynamic dialogue, you have deemed it advisable to support such organizations under two main headings: (i) technical and economic services, and (ii) representing farmers in local dialogue.

With respect to promoting innovation:

- The need to design flexible financing facilities to underwrite agricultural research, create opportunities for inter-institutional exchange through policy dialogue, and establish systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for innovation.
- Priority areas for innovation were confirmed and expanded to include training and advisory assistance to farmers' organizations and family farms, land tenure security, rural microfinance, gender issues.
- The need to link technical assistance grants and projects, develop information exchanges among the actors, and improve consultation and coordination between programmes benefiting from technical assistance grants and development programmes.

On the question of strengthening project management and implementation support:

- The importance of decentralizing IFAD operations to the field by opening a technical office in the country.

Annex

- Reinforcing the monitoring and evaluation of project impact, the country's major strategic thrusts on poverty reduction and IFAD's strategies with national specialized agencies (National Statistics Directorate - DNSI, Planning and Statistics Unit - CPS, Structural Adjustment Programme - SAP); and the policy dialogue unit.
- Building technical skills among project teams through IFAD programmes designed for this purpose.
- Ensuring project sustainability through the involvement and accountability of populations and territorial collectivities in managing and maintaining social investments.

These are unquestionably relevant guidelines that will enrich both the agreement at completion point and the new country strategic opportunities paper.

It is important that this exercise take place in accordance with the major thrusts of the following framework documents:

- Mali: Prospects to 2025
- Strategic Framework for Growth and Poverty Reduction
- Master Plan for Rural Development
- Agriculture Act

Before concluding, I should like to reiterate our appreciation to IFAD for organizing this workshop in conjunction with the Executive Board's annual visit. The results we have achieved here represent a further step forward in Mali-IFAD cooperation.

Wishing you all a pleasant trip back to your countries, I hereby adjourn this workshop on the Mali country programme evaluation.

