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Enabling the rural poor
to overcome poverty

Report of the Chairperson on the forty-seventh session of the Evaluation Committee

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

For: **Review**

Report of the Chairperson on the forty-seventh session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The Forty-Seventh Session of the Evaluation Committee met on 13 April 2007 and considered three agenda items: (a) Completion evaluation of the Rural Micro-enterprise Development Programme in Colombia; (b) Completion evaluation of the Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management Project in the Philippines; and (c) Completion evaluation of the Participatory Irrigation Development Programme in the United Republic of Tanzania. All Committee members except for Nigeria participated in the session. The Committee also welcomed the new representative of Switzerland, Mr Pio Wennubst. Observers from Brazil, Colombia, Netherlands, Mali, the Philippines, and Tanzania were also present. In addition, **Mr Samuel Zambrano from the national planning department of Colombia and Mr Laurent Gallet, project director of the Tanzania programme** were also present. Mr Cameron Odsey, project director of the Philippines programme was unfortunately not able to attend the session due to visa problems. Various IFAD staff members also attended the meeting, including the Assistant President, Programme Management Department (PMD), Director of the Office of Evaluation (OE), Director of the Eastern and Southern Africa Division (PF), Secretary of IFAD, and other staff.
2. **Completion evaluation of the Rural Micro-enterprise Development Programme (RMDP) in Colombia.** The Committee expressed its appreciation for the evaluation and its overall consensus on its findings and recommendations. Among various issues, it noted that the programme was particularly successful in promoting innovative approaches to rural micro-enterprise development and rural finance in Colombia, and felt that some of the specific experiences from the RMDP could be replicated in the country and elsewhere, in an appropriate manner.
3. In general, the Committee noted that the evaluation once again revealed that further reflection is needed in determining the appropriate balance between promoting social capital and human assets on one hand, and income-generating and productive activities on the other hand. This important theme has emerged in other OE evaluations and, as such, merits additional deliberation in the future.
4. The importance of ensuring a robust programme design was underscored by the Committee, which conveyed that this is a precondition for ensuring successful and timely programme implementation, as well as results on rural poverty reduction.
5. Also, members were pleased to note that the efficiency analysis conducted by the evaluation included a useful quantitative benchmarking with other projects in the region. This enabled Committee members to gain a better understanding of the programme's achievements in relation to the costs incurred. On this issue, OE reassured the Committee that it is making concerted efforts to conduct benchmarking analysis as a standard feature in all project evaluations.
6. In response to a query by the Committee, OE clarified that the methodology applied in programme evaluations allows for a consolidated final rating to be attributed to overall programme performance, taking into account the individual evaluations ratings for programme relevance effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, performance of partners and innovations.
7. The Ambassador of Colombia, Dr. Sabas Pretelt de la Vega, who attended the session as an observer, shared his views on the evaluation. Among various comments, he noted that part of the success of the programme is due to the strict accountability for results that the IFAD-assisted project demand and the comprehensive institutional approach taken during the RMDP's implementation. In particular, he noted that the inputs of various technical experts, management professionals, policy makers and government officials, as well as the commitment and contributions of beneficiaries, ensured the success of the programme.

8. Finally, PMD expressed appreciation to OE for the high quality evaluation. Among other issues, PMD highlighted the usefulness of benchmarking the performance of IFAD programmes and the need for reducing design ambitions. PMD further highlighted that IFAD's favourable performance in the programme is partly attributable to the country programme manager, who is out-posted in the field and not based at IFAD headquarters. In general, PMD noted that the latter is an important factor in determining the success of IFAD-funded projects on the ground. It also noted that part of the success is attributable to the high degree of ownership and the resultant political willingness and prevalence of effective grassroots democracy with social control.
9. **Completion evaluation of the Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management Project in the Philippines.** The Committee conveyed its overall support to the main findings and recommendation of the evaluation. It recognised that the project was implemented in a difficult agro-ecological environment, a factor that needs to be taken into consideration in assessing overall project performance. The Committee appreciated that, building on the recommendations of the evaluation, the management is designing a second phase of the project in order to allow for a consolidation of the activities and achievements in phase one of the project.
10. On the issue of participation, the Committee underlined the importance for evaluations to assess projects based on the actual opportunities available - at the time of design - to the rural poor for participation and engagement in rural development activities. This will allow for a better appreciation of the contribution of IFAD-funded operations in promoting participatory processes.
11. On another issue, some members conveyed that efforts need to be made, as noted by the evaluation, to further improve coordination between IFAD and the Asian Development Bank in ongoing and future projects that are funded jointly by the two organisations. In addition, it was agreed that IFAD should take a larger role in supervision and implementation support in such future operations.
12. The usefulness to develop exit strategies early on in projects funded by IFAD would be one important aspect that could contribute to promoting sustainability. The lack of exit strategies has been often brought up in the past by the Committee, and this requires serious attention in the follow-up phase of the project and, more generally, other operations funded by IFAD.
13. The Committee underlined that the project had ambitious objectives at design in some areas, for example, in terms of the expected increases in income. The evaluation revealed that the project was not able to reach such objective set at design, and encouraged the setting on realistic and achievable objectives in future projects. On a related issue, the evaluation highlighted the importance of better overall social development for Indigenous People through a broader definition of poverty, which includes issues such as a respect for cultural integrity and protection of communal lands.
14. The representative of the Philippines in Rome, Mr Noel de Luna, expressed appreciation to OE for the evaluation, and among other issues, noted the over-ambitious targets set for this project and conveyed the need for IFAD to continue working in the region. He also noted the importance for IFAD to work more closely with other donors and the UN System operating in Cordillera region, to ensure synergies, complementarities, and greater result in reducing rural poverty.
15. Among other issues, PMD highlighted the need to work with a longer term engagement in such challenging project areas, with a specific focus on target groups such as Indigenous People. PMD also noted that recently-approved direct supervision and implementation support policy will allow IFAD the possibility to more closely follow execution in the second phase of the project, which is crucial to ensure the success of such type of operations.

16. **Completion evaluation of the Participatory Irrigation Development Programme (PIDP) in the United Republic of Tanzania.** The Committee also broadly agreed with the findings and recommendations of this evaluation. It highlighted the need to improve design of IFAD-funded programmes by collecting adequate baseline data, including information on the availability of private contractors who have the skills and resources to become effectively involved in IFAD-funded operations. On the same point, the Committee noted the need to involve the private sector in project design processes, as appropriate, so that they are fully committed and capable of providing the required services.
17. On another issue, the committee considered important for IFAD to contribute to the establishment of legal frameworks for the proper functioning of Water User's Association. It also noted that, while it is necessary to promote social sustainability, it is equally important to ensure financial and institutional sustainability.
18. The Committee recalled that IFAD had previously funded projects related to water and irrigation development in broadly the same area as the PIDP. On this, as requested by the Committee, OE clarified that the PIDP evaluation benefited from the experiences and knowledge available in the evaluations and studies related to the aforementioned projects operations.
19. The Permanent Representative of Tanzania to IFAD in Rome, Mr Wilfred Ngirwa, underlined that efforts under the PIDP have been made to partner with a range of institutions, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Tanzania on the farmer field school concept. Among other points, he also mentioned the importance of promoting wider synergies among IFAD-funded project in Tanzania, so that they mutually reinforce themselves in the broader interest of the rural poor. He also conveyed the Government's commitment of using the evaluation's results in the ongoing preparation of the country's irrigation policy, appreciated positive contribution made by the IFAD's field presence in Tanzania and highlighted the need for a permanent representation of IFAD in Tanzania for an early detection of the problems and to contribute to several reforms on-going in Tanzania.
20. PMD noted that the PIDP had a flexible design allowing it to adapt to the evolving development environment in Tanzania, with emphasis on sector wide approaches and overall donor harmonization and co-ordination.
21. **Other business.** Before closing, it was noted **that Mr Bernd Dunnzlaff, Representative of Germany, and Mr Vladimir Hernández Lara, Representative of Mexico and Chairman of the Evaluation Committee,** would leave Rome in the near future to take up new assignments in their **respectives** countries. The Committee expressed its appreciation to both of them, for their excellent contributions to the work of the Committee in the past years.