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Enabling poor rural people
to overcome poverty

Report of the Chairperson on the fifty-first session of the Evaluation Committee

Executive Board — Ninety-third Session
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For: **Approval**

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Report of the Chairperson on the fifty-first session of the Evaluation Committee

1. This report covers the deliberations of the Evaluation Committee during its fifty-first session on 18 April 2008. There were three agenda items for discussion: (a) the country programme evaluation (CPE) of Brazil; (b) the interim evaluation of the Community-based Rural Development Project in Burkina Faso; and (c) other business.
2. All Committee members (Belgium, Germany, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mexico, Nigeria, Sweden and Switzerland) attended the session. This was the first Committee session attended by two new members, namely Mr Mohamed al Moustapha, from Mali, and Ms Amalia Garcia-Thärn, from Sweden. Observers were present from Cameroon and Canada. The Committee also welcomed the Executive Board Director for Brazil, Mr Benvindo Belluco, who participated in the discussion on the Brazil CPE. The Committee was joined by the Assistant President, Programme Management Department (PMD); the Director of the Office of Evaluation (OE); the Director of the Western and Central Africa Division (PA); the Secretary of IFAD; and others.

Brazil CPE

3. Committee members commended OE on the high quality of this evaluation and expressed their broad agreement with its main findings and recommendations. The Committee noted the positive collaboration between OE, PMD and the Government of Brazil during the evaluation, and also acknowledged the insightful and helpful comments of the Director for Brazil.
4. The Director for Brazil expressed appreciation to OE for the CPE and conveyed his Government's concurrence with its main findings and recommendations. He underlined the importance of the CPE for the preparation of the new country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) for Brazil, to be presented to the Board later in 2008. Among other issues, he emphasized the need for the Fund to provide further direct supervision and implementation support in the country, and to give serious consideration to the possibility of establishing a more permanent country presence in Brazil. Such a presence could eventually also be used to cover IFAD operations within the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) subregion.
5. Committee members raised a number of issues that deserve to be considered by IFAD Management when preparing the new COSOP. They emphasized, in particular, the need for IFAD to develop a systematic approach to policy dialogue in large countries such as Brazil, and to include policy dialogue as a specific project activity so as to ensure that sufficient resources were allocated for this purpose. This would also contribute to furthering the broader objective of scaling up and replicating innovations promoted through IFAD-supported operations.
6. As highlighted by the Brazil CPE, the Committee noted that it was important for IFAD to develop an approach for its engagement in middle-income countries (MICs), whose requirements in terms of IFAD assistance were different from those of low-income countries. On this topic, the Assistant President, PMD, informed participants that OE was currently analysing the implications of country context on IFAD's development effectiveness.¹ Within this framework, OE was also specifically assessing the opportunities and challenges shaping IFAD operations in MICs. He noted that PMD would build on OE's work, and thereafter develop an overall approach for the Fund's engagement in MICs.

¹ As agreed with the Board last year, this is one of the main learning topics covered by OE in this year's Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations.

7. On another issue, and as suggested by the CPE, the Committee felt it would be useful for IFAD to explore options for lending directly to state governments and municipalities in Brazil, provided the federal government agreed with such an approach. It was acknowledged that IFAD's financial resources were indeed important for agriculture and rural development purposes, especially for state governments and at the municipality level. This was partly because the policy of "non-additionality" of donor funds – applied by the Government to internationally funded projects executed by federal-level agencies – did not apply at the state or municipality level in Brazil.
8. The CPE revealed that no past IFAD-funded project in Brazil had been cofinanced with other donors. Moreover, apart from sporadic activities in some projects, the Brazil country programme had not formed partnerships with other international players active in agriculture and rural development in the country. Thus, the issue of partnership came up prominently during the discussions at the session, and the need for IFAD to devote more attention to the topic in the new COSOP was considered crucial. In particular, while ensuring due attention to its overall development objectives and specificity, IFAD needed to find ways and means to improve cooperation with the community of international financial institutions and United Nations agencies in Brazil.
9. On the operational side, the Committee underscored the need for efforts to be made to shorten the time lapse between Board approval and loan effectiveness, and to inform the Board when long effectiveness delays might exceptionally be expected.
10. It was noted that there was an opportunity for IFAD to facilitate South-South cooperation between Brazil and Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa. This was an area worth further exploration.

Interim evaluation of the Community-based Rural Development Project in Burkina Faso

11. The Committee expressed its appreciation to OE for the good quality of the evaluation and conveyed its overall support for the evaluation's findings and recommendations. It recognized that, for IFAD, the project was unique because of its wide geographic coverage and high total project costs, the limited IFAD financial contribution to total project costs, and the range of partners involved.
12. Although the Committee underlined that this was a successful project, it raised questions about IFAD's role and added value in a project where the Fund was a relatively minor player – and had only a marginal role in supervision and implementation support. In this regard, the Committee discussed the challenges IFAD had encountered in promoting its priorities in the project, for example, in terms of its targeting approach, gender mainstreaming and attention to bottom-up development. On this issue, Management reassured the Committee that the Fund's participation in the next phase of the project would only be considered if the IFAD-specific concerns and priorities were fully and promptly taken on board by the main partners involved.
13. On another topic, members highlighted the importance of taking the new institutional framework and decentralization policy in Burkina Faso into account, while considering IFAD's participation in the further phase of the project. It was pointed out that communes had recently been created in the rural areas as the lowest level of decentralized government, and that they had specific capacity-building needs that required addressing. The project should, however, also continue its support to organizations at the village-level in order to ensure social capital formation and community empowerment. It was noted that good results had been achieved in health and education activities, whereas the results in agriculture productivity were less encouraging: IFAD was asked to be more focused on this core area in future programmes. Moreover, linkages between loans and grants had been very limited, an area that needed to be examined further in order to find

opportunities for synergies. Finally, the Committee requested information about how OE undertook joint evaluations in cofinanced projects. The OE Director responded that OE had approached the World Bank about undertaking a joint evaluation of this project. However, since the project was implemented with an adaptive lending mechanism that allowed for multiple phases, the Bank would only envisage an independent evaluation at the end of the project's third phase. IFAD, on the other hand, required an interim evaluation at the end of each phase. As such, OE undertook its own evaluation. The World Bank, however, was a member of the evaluation's Core Learning Partnership. The OE Director also reiterated that OE would continue to explore opportunities to conduct additional joint evaluations, especially of IFAD-funded projects and programmes cofinanced with other international financial institutions or United Nations agencies.

Other business

14. Under this agenda item, discussion took place on proposed changes to the 2008 OE work programme. Based on the compelling reasons outlined by IFAD Management, the Evaluation Committee recommended that the Executive Board agree to the following changes to this year's OE work programme – on the understanding that these changes would not have any implication on the current level of OE's human and financial resources.
15. The proposed changes include the undertaking of:
 - (a) An interim evaluation² of the Qinling Mountain Area Poverty Alleviation Project in China from May to December 2008, instead of the previously planned completion evaluation of the Wulin Mountains Minority Areas Development Project in China;
 - (b) A CPE in the Niger instead of the planned CPE in Côte d'Ivoire from November 2008 to December 2009; and
 - (c) An interim evaluation of the Poverty Reduction Project in Aftout South and Karakoro in Mauritania, instead of a completion evaluation of the Rural Development Project in the Zanzan Region in Côte d'Ivoire from May to December 2008.

It was agreed that, in future, when a proposed change to the OE work programme was to be discussed, OE would circulate the proposal in written form before the Evaluation Committee session.

16. On another topic and based on the request of the Committee, OE clarified that it systematically recorded the names of all consultants involved in each evaluation, and that their names appeared in the final published version of the full evaluation report. It was agreed that, in future, the same information would also be provided in the documentation submitted to the Evaluation Committee.
17. Moreover, OE underlined that – as per standing practice – the full version of all final evaluation reports were shared with Board members and the public at large, through a variety of dissemination mechanisms.
18. The Committee also briefly discussed the lack of written procedures in the IFAD Evaluation Policy for the appointment and reappointment of the Director of the Office of Evaluation. The Committee decided to seek Executive Board approval for the Committee to examine this matter in a comprehensive manner and report back to the Board at its next meeting in September 2008.

² According to the IFAD Evaluation Policy, interim evaluations must be undertaken before Management embarks on the design of a second phase of the project or programme concerned.