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Enabling poor rural people
to overcome poverty

Report of the Evaluation Committee Chairperson on the country visit to India

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Report of the Evaluation Committee Chairperson on the country visit to India

1. **Background and objectives.** In line with its terms of reference, the Evaluation Committee undertook its annual country visit, this year to India from 7 to 11 December 2009. All nine Committee members took part in the visit. IFAD was represented by the Assistant President of the Programme Management Department (PMD), the Director of the Office of Evaluation (OE), the Director of the Asia and the Pacific Division (PI), the India Country Programme Manager and other staff.
2. The overall objective of the country visits is to gain knowledge and experience of IFAD's evaluation work and operations in the field, thereby enabling the Evaluation Committee to provide more informed guidance on evaluation matters to the Executive Board, Management and OE, and enhance members' competence in the area.
3. **Programme of the annual visit.** The Committee first participated in the national round-table workshop for the India country programme evaluation (CPE) on 7-8 December, which was held in New Delhi. Following the conclusion of the workshop, the Committee held meetings with the: (i) Inter-Agency Working Group on Rural Development, Food Security and Nutrition and (ii) staff of the IFAD country office in New Delhi. Thereafter, the Committee travelled to Pune in the State of Maharashtra to visit the IFAD-funded Tejaswini Rural Women's Empowerment Programme on 9-10 December. On 11 December, the Committee travelled to Mumbai to hold meetings with: (i) the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and (ii) Sir Ratan Tata Trust, which has cofinanced IFAD-funded projects in India.
4. **CPE national round-table workshop.** The event was organized by the Government of India, in collaboration with OE and PI. The Government took the lead and ownership in organizing the event, which is a manifestation of the importance attributed to its partnership with IFAD. More than one hundred persons took part in the event, including members of parliament, government officials, project directors; NGOs and civil society representatives; bilateral and multilateral aid agencies; representatives from the private sector, IFAD management and staff; and others.
5. An Issues Paper was prepared by OE in collaboration with the Government and PI as background for the workshop discussions, which was circulated together with the main CPE report ahead of the event. The Issues Paper was organized around four themes: (i) the value of the partnership between the Government of India and IFAD in supporting smallholder agriculture; (ii) the priorities for knowledge sharing and promotion of innovations; (iii) social empowerment and institutional architecture; and (iv) economic empowerment. The Issues Paper effectively captured the main learning elements of the CPE and raised a number of pertinent points to be considered in the development of the new India country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP), which will be presented to the Board for consideration in 2010.
6. In general, the Committee found the workshop to be well organized, with adequate time and space for presentations and discussions in both plenary sessions and working groups. It provided a useful forum for the validation of the CPE's findings and discussion of key issues and lessons learned. It also served to collect valuable inputs for the CPE's agreement at completion point, as well as country context issues that would be useful for the preparation of the forthcoming India COSOP.

7. The Committee was satisfied with the inclusive nature of the workshop, which brought together IFAD's varied clientele. However, consideration could be given in the future to selecting chairpersons and rapporteurs for the workshop working groups. This would make for more organized discussions and output from the workshop and also for the next COSOP. The Committee is of the view that IFAD could also consider increasing further the participation of non-IFAD clientele to enrich and enhance the quality of the discussion.
8. **Field visit.** The visit to Maharashtra provided members with a good opportunity to exchange views and interact with different stakeholders at the project level. Before visiting the project, the latter's executing agency (the Maharashtra Women's Development Agency [MAVIN]) provided the Committee with a brief overview of the project and its main activities.
9. From the field visit, it was evident that IFAD is a respected partner that has a valuable catalytic role to play in rural poverty reduction in the country. In particular, discussions with women's self-help groups (SHGs) revealed that IFAD had made an important contribution to promoting women's empowerment and confidence building, and to enhancing their incomes and livelihoods.
10. The nature of the project visited, however, gave the Committee limited exposure to the diverse range of activities supported by IFAD in India. For example, the Committee notes that a visit to a more remotely located project focused on tribal communities might have provided deeper insight into the opportunities and challenges in terms of agriculture and rural development in the country, and into the role played by IFAD in supporting such communities. Moreover, meetings with village heads and local authorities (e.g. Panchayati Raj [local government] institutions) would have enhanced the Committee's appreciation of the successes and constraints experienced by the SHGs.
11. **Other meetings.** The meeting with the Inter-Agency Working Group (see paragraph 3) was chaired by the World Food Programme (WFP) representative and was held at the WFP which houses IFAD's country office. Representatives from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation – as members of the working group – attended the meeting. The Committee noted that the working group meets on an ad hoc basis, mainly to exchange information, with limited collaboration among its members.
12. The meeting with staff in the country office provided the Committee with an opportunity to learn about the role of country presence staff in direct supervision and implementation support, and about other relevant issues. The meeting revealed that the nature of the contracts provided to country presence staff was a cause of concern, which merits attention by Management to ensure continuity and motivation among staff.
13. The Committee met with the Chairman and other senior staff of NABARD at its headquarters in Mumbai. NABARD is a large institution concerned with promoting rural finance for agricultural and rural development. It is involved in a range of development initiatives encompassing schemes directly supporting the farm sector and rural non-farm sector, programmes for financial inclusion, microfinance, research and development activities, training and capacity-building. NABARD has also established professional consultancy services with an international dimension through its presence in Nairobi, Kenya. NABARD views IFAD as an organization with piloted models and operating principles that can be used by NABARD to channel credit. The Maharashtra Rural Credit Project is an example of such convergence. NABARD expressed interest in collaborating further with IFAD in areas of common interest, based on each organization's comparative advantage.

14. The meeting at the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (a private-sector foundation linked to the Tata Sons conglomerate) revealed the vast amount of resources and capacity available in the private sector, and the important contribution this can make to rural poverty reduction in India. The trust is involved in various agriculture and rural development projects, and expressed interest in strengthening its collaboration with IFAD.
15. In closing, the Evaluation Committee would like to convey its deepest appreciation for the excellent arrangements made and attention accorded to all participants during the country visit by the Government of India during the CPE workshop and subsequently by MAVIN during the field visit to Maharashtra. The discussions with the various stakeholders – including beneficiaries, project officials, partner organizations and government representatives – were most informative and useful.