

Document: EC 100
Date: 11 April 2018
Distribution: Public
Original: English

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Investing in rural people

Minutes of the 100th Session of the Evaluation Committee

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Minutes of the 100th Session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 100th session, held on 23 March 2018, are reflected in the present minutes.
2. The minutes have been approved by the Evaluation Committee. These will be shared with the Executive Board and used as the basis for the Chairperson's oral report to the Board.

Agenda item 1. Opening of the session

3. The Chairperson, Mr Rishikesh Singh (India), welcomed participants to the centennial session, which coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the Evaluation Committee. He noted that this was the last session with the current composition of the Committee and with India as Chair, and thanked all members for their commitment and contributions over the past three years.
4. The session was attended by Committee members for France, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands and Nigeria. The Chair conveyed the apologies of the representative for Switzerland who was unable to participate but had sent comments on some agenda items. The representative for the Dominican Republic attended as an observer. The session was also attended by the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); Deputy Director, IOE; Associate Vice-President, a.i. Strategy and Knowledge Department; Chief, Operational Programming and Effectiveness Unit, Programme Management Department; Officer-in-Charge, East and Southern Africa Division (ESA); Programme Officer, ESA; Director, Near East, North Africa and Europe Division (NEN); Country Programme Manager (CPM), NEN; Lead Portfolio Adviser, Asia and the Pacific Division (APR); CPM, APR; Officer-in-Charge, Office of the Secretary; and other IFAD staff.
5. Mr Hok Kimthourn, Programme Manager for the Agriculture Services Programme for Innovation, Resilience and Extension Secretariat, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of the Kingdom of Cambodia, shared his Government's views on the Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation for Cambodia through video link. Mr Nodar Kereselidze, First Deputy Minister for Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, participated in the session as an observer and shared the Government's views on the Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation for Georgia.
6. Commemoration of the 100th session and thirtieth anniversary of the Evaluation Committee at IFAD. The Director, IOE, noted that 2018 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Evaluation Committee, which had held its first session in 1988. He highlighted the Committee's role in assessing the overall quality of IFAD projects and ensuring that evaluations contributed to institutional learning and enhanced accountability, in keeping with the evolving nature of evaluation at IFAD and the increasing focus on both self- and independent evaluation aspects. The Evaluation Committee served as an advisory body to the Executive Board in assessing the quality and impact of IFAD-supported operations and ensured that IFAD had an effective and efficient evaluation function geared towards improved performance and growth. The Committee would continue to exercise this role and support IFAD in rising to the challenges associated with implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Agenda item 2. Adoption of the agenda

7. The provisional agenda comprised the following items: (i) opening of the session; (ii) adoption of the agenda; (iii) Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation for the Kingdom of Cambodia; (iv) Project Performance Evaluation of the Rural Finance Intermediation Programme in the Kingdom of Lesotho; (v) Strategic Role of the

Evaluation Committee; (vi) Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation for Georgia; (vii) Evaluation Synthesis Report on Building Partnerships for Enhanced Development Effectiveness; (viii) Draft Approach Paper on the Corporate-level Evaluation of IFAD's Contribution to Pro-Poor Value Chain Development; and (ix) Other business: Information on the international conference on "Rural inequalities – evaluating approaches to overcome disparities".

8. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2018/100/W.P.1 (to be issued as document EC 2018/100/W.P.1/Rev. 1).

Agenda item 3. Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation for the Kingdom of Cambodia

9. The Committee reviewed the Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation for the Kingdom of Cambodia (EC 2018/100/W.P.2/Add.1), which included the agreement at completion point reflecting the Government's views on the evaluation. The evaluation focused on the period 2007 to 2017 and was the first such evaluation to be conducted in Cambodia since IFAD started operations there in 1996.
10. The Committee welcomed the findings of the evaluation, which showed that IFAD had significantly contributed to aspects of rural transformation by supporting the government's deconcentration and decentralization processes; gender equality and rural women's empowerment; agricultural productivity and diversification; capacity-building; and recently, stronger market linkages.
11. The Committee commended IOE for the participatory and transparent manner in which the evaluation had been conducted, and welcomed the findings and recommendations. Management's agreement to take these recommendations into consideration in the update and extension of the country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) was noted. The Committee also noted the Government's appreciation of IFAD as a valued partner that was responsive to the needs of the country, and welcomed its agreement with the findings and recommendations. One member highlighted IFAD's efforts to tailor interventions such as training and capacity-building to the needs of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, and the need to provide young people with appropriate support.
12. The main challenges identified by the evaluation were the significant delays in adapting IFAD strategy and project design to reflect the considerable changes in the country and rural context, and the sustainability of results.
13. Members asked why programme design had remained static in such a context and requested Management to outline what was being done to ensure that IFAD projects had the flexibility to respond to rapid changes. Management noted that many of these issues are being addressed through the ongoing Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD11) reforms and discussions on the transition framework and that the new programmatic approach favoured more flexible responses to changing country contexts and circumstances. At the project level, enhanced monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and the capacity to adapt interventions based on M&E data were other key steps being taken to ensure relevance and achieve results. The planned restructuring policy would also enhance the adaptability of operations to changing contexts.
14. In terms of assessing the level of achievement, IOE explained that country strategy and programme evaluations (CSPEs) provided ratings for various evaluation criteria, supported by assessment of the performance and impact of IFAD operations. Regarding sustainability of benefits, the evaluation had highlighted the need for increased national capacity in the area of extension services, with a focus on new skills that responded to the shift from subsistence to commercial agriculture. IFAD had also supported the formation of value-chain-based farmers' associations and others based on linkages to markets and larger farmers' organizations to ensure sustainability.

15. Members noted the importance of strengthening government capacity while working closely with NGOs and civil society organizations to benefit from their experience and knowledge in dealing with rural communities. Management noted that the latest project in Cambodia was focusing on pluralistic extension services in partnership with the private sector, NGOs and the Government and on enhancing the policy framework for provision of extension services. In the context of the IFAD11 commitments, non-lending activities such as partnership-building and policy engagement were being strengthened through capacity-building of country programme staff and the decentralization efforts. The proposed citizen engagement policy currently under development would also ensure that citizens were involved individually, through the civil society and as beneficiaries.
16. Responding to concerns about IFAD's contribution to food security and nutrition, Management assured the Committee of its commitment in this regard and that this aspect would be integrated into the COSOP update and extension. IFAD was working with the World Fish Centre to integrate small fish production within rice-based farming systems. IOE reiterated that through the agricultural diversification strategy, IFAD was already addressing the issue of nutrition and food security.
17. In response to comments on partnerships and Rome-based agency (RBA) collaboration, IOE reiterated that the evaluation highlighted how these partnerships were utilized, and that the recommendation for enhanced investment in smallholder agriculture implied engagement with the private sector and other partners. Regarding lessons learned from evaluations, Management confirmed that new policies and approaches were significantly informed by IOE's evaluations.
18. One member pointed out the challenges faced by IFAD in the country, such as weak government capacity, limited IFAD in-country presence and limited collaboration with the private sector. Management responded that through discussions with Government there had been progress towards streamlining agriculture under one ministry instead of fragmenting it across several. With the ongoing decentralization, the Hanoi hub had been strengthened, channelling more IFAD resources to the subregion and enhancing the Cambodia country programme's focus on partnership-building and other non-lending issues.
19. A member stated that the support to commercialization should not compromise the efforts to "leave no one behind", and that the Government should take the lead in exploring options for supporting regulatory services in agriculture and food safety to ensure alignment with relevant policies.

Agenda item 4. Project Performance Evaluation of the Rural Financial Intermediation Programme in the Kingdom of Lesotho

20. The Committee reviewed the Project Performance Evaluation (PPE) of the Rural Financial Intermediation Programme in the Kingdom of Lesotho (EC 2018/100/W.P.3/Rev.1), and thanked IOE for the unambiguous findings and recommendations.
21. Members noted the moderately unsatisfactory rating of the programme, which was mainly attributed to over-ambitious design, high staff turnover in the programme management unit and changes in country programme managers, and other challenges that had hampered achievement of several project objectives. Despite these setbacks, the Committee noted that the programme was strongly aligned to the overall objectives of the Government's poverty reduction strategies; had targeted the less poor; and had yielded positive results in terms of gender equality, women's empowerment and sustainability of results.
22. While welcoming Management's response to the PPE, the Committee emphasized that in addition to agreement with the recommendations, a fundamental change was needed in project design and other approaches to ensure that future projects achieved better results. Members were of the view that Management should inform

the Committee of the steps taken to address the issues raised in the PPE, such as the over-reliance on government agencies for implementation which had proved ineffective, invalid assumptions and efficiency issues. Management proposed holding an internal workshop with IOE to discuss what action was being taken in Lesotho to address the PPE findings and recommendations, and thereafter presenting the plan to the Committee.

23. Members welcomed the transformation of the Lesotho Post Bank into a self-reliant financial intermediary that had expanded rural credit and savings outreach, and the successful establishment of member-based financial institutions with the participation of two international NGOs. However, they expressed concern about the absence of data to enable the evaluation of impact on rural poverty and food security. IOE clarified that the methodology used for PPEs did not include in-depth impact analysis. While the PPE contained a section and criteria for rural poverty impact (with its four dimensions – institutions and policies; human and social capital empowerment; household income and assets; and food security and agricultural productivity), these were based on secondary data. For PPEs, resource constraints hampered primary data collection for impact assessment. Members asked that in future, IOE indicate what would be covered in specific evaluation products to clarify why some data were missing or not used. A member echoed the importance of providing the initial or indicative rural poverty impact of projects based on whatever data was available. In response, Management noted the commitment to present a synthesis of the IFAD10 impact assessments in April 2019, as provided for in the Development Effectiveness Framework. Management agreed that an update of the IFAD10 impact assessment approach would be shared with the Evaluation Committee as an opportunity to keep the Committee informed on data collection and impact assessment issues.
24. A member asked why equal workload distribution had not been achieved despite the project's positive results in gender equality and women's empowerment. IOE noted that in assessing this dimension, three aspects were considered – access to resources, empowerment of women and equal workload distribution. In this case, there were positive results on two aspects but not on the third because, in most cases, men had migrated to work in South Africa leaving the women to cope with households singlehandedly.
25. Members emphasized the importance of realistic and relevant project design, quality and timely implementation, effective partnerships for enhanced project delivery, and capacity-building to ensure strong implementation units.

Agenda item 5. Strategic role of the Evaluation Committee

26. The Officer-in-Charge, Office of the Secretary, presented the results of the benchmarking study undertaken as one of the actions envisaged in the matrix of issues and actions to strengthen IFAD's governance emanating from the third Executive Board Retreat. The study would provide the Committee with the basis for continuing the discussion on enhancing their strategic role in supporting the Board.
27. The study covered nine comparators, which included both United Nations agencies and international financial institutions. The findings showed that: records of meetings were shared with members for their comments; some committees maintained a follow-up action table to keep track of issues for discussion at future meetings; some had a time limit for interventions by members; and, in some cases, the Chairperson provided an oral summary at the end of each discussion item to ensure consensus and take note of divergent views.
28. The Committee unanimously welcomed the practice of the Chairperson summarizing key issues arising on each agenda item. However, it was felt that instituting a time limit on interventions at IFAD would undermine the rich nature of Committee's discussions. Members took note of the possibility of taking stock of lessons learned during their tenure and documenting them as a point of reference

going forward, but commented that this should not become just another bureaucratic report.

29. The Committee also emphasized upon the need to be more selective in what was submitted to the Board for consideration.
30. The item on enhancing the strategic role of subsidiary bodies would be discussed further at the fourth retreat of the Executive Board, where the Committee would share its perspectives. The Audit Committee would also present a position paper, and the Office of the Secretary would prepare a discussion paper based on the benchmarking study results. A document would be prepared after the retreat for presentation to the September Board session.

Agenda item 6. Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation for Georgia

31. The Committee reviewed the first CSPE undertaken for Georgia (EC 2018/100/W.P.4). The evaluation covered the period from 1991 to the present day. Members thanked IOE for the candid evaluation, and welcomed the findings and recommendations.
32. The findings showed that IFAD had supported important institutional innovations; built institutional capacity in the agricultural sector for microfinance, land registration and food safety; and addressed barriers to agricultural development in line with government policies and strategies. However, given the length of IFAD's engagement in the country and the amount of investments, the impact on rural poverty was lower than expected. This was partly due to challenges in the portfolio such as insufficient targeting of people at risk of poverty and exclusion in rural areas, in particular women and youth; lack of a strategy to improve outreach among poorer farmers; lack of linkages between investments in infrastructure and the interventions required to move from subsistence to commercialized farming; and limited country presence.
33. The Government representative for Georgia noted that prior to 2013, it had not been possible for IFAD to adopt an effective approach for the agricultural sector because of the low priority given by the Government to agricultural development and the lack of strategies that IFAD could work with. Georgia now had goals and a clear agenda for agricultural and rural development in the context of accession to the European Union and this, together with the CSPE recommendations, would enhance the new COSOP for the country. Georgia recognized the importance of strengthening public institutions and was open to working with IFAD on this and other aspects of the portfolio.
34. The Committee welcomed Management's response to the CSPE and the plans to address the challenges highlighted, such as enhanced country presence through a strengthened regional hub and the development of a new COSOP built on lessons learned and focused on enterprise development, commercial farming, market linkages, access to finance, and rural youth.
35. Members raised the issue of delays in adapting to the changing country context and the fact that an inefficient strategy had remained in place for a long period. Management noted that in the context of the OpEx reforms and the transition framework, attention would be paid to ensuring that approaches and projects had the flexibility to respond quickly to changes. Management was already reviewing the targeting strategy to ensure that poor people were adequately targeted in the framework of the new COSOP and planned projects.
36. Regarding cofinancing, Management noted that the Government of Georgia decided which partners cofinanced its programmes. Management, for its part, would continue seeking partnerships with other development agencies and the private sector in the country for better results. In new initiatives such as the livestock sector project, IFAD was working in partnership with NGOs to build capacity and provide technical assistance.

37. Responding to a question about the assumptions underlying the comparison between IFAD-led and IFAD cofinanced operations, IOE highlighted that the comparison was based on actual project evaluation performance as reflected in IOE ratings contained in the report.
38. The Committee also noted that the CSPE had been presented without a signed agreement at completion point containing the Government's views on the evaluation findings and recommendations. IOE pointed out that according to the Evaluation Policy, the agreement at completion point should be signed three months after a stakeholder workshop is conducted.

Agenda item 7. Evaluation Synthesis Report on Building Partnerships for Enhanced Development Effectiveness

39. The Committee reviewed the Evaluation Synthesis Report on Building Partnerships for Enhanced Development Effectiveness (EC 2018/100/W.P.5) and Management's response contained in the addendum thereto, welcoming it as a timely document to inform the IFAD partnership agenda.
40. The evaluation synthesis report (ESR) covered the period 2006 to 2016 and focused on country-level experiences and results associated with the range, frequency and effectiveness of partnership types. The synthesis found that the current partnership strategy did not propose specific instruments and modalities for country-level partnerships, despite their importance. Also, while partnerships had increased as a result of enhanced country presence, they tended to lack clarity and a results focus. IFAD placed emphasis on partnerships with civil society, farmers' organizations and indigenous peoples that resulted in knowledge-sharing, learning and policy influence.
41. The Committee welcomed Management's agreement with the ESR findings and the fact that it was already taking steps to address the recommendations. During IFAD11, Management would develop and implement a framework to plan and monitor country-level partnerships; streamline implementation of partnership instruments to ensure results; and strengthen accountability and monitoring of partnership results and outcomes.
42. Members were surprised by some of the findings, such as the view that because of their focus on coordination and cooperation, partnerships in low-income countries performed better than those in middle-income countries, which emphasized knowledge and learning. The finding that cooperation with the RBAs had not produced tangible results at the project level despite the efforts at corporate level pointed to the need for enhanced attention at country and project level. Management also stressed the need for greater documentation of RBA collaboration activities and results at all levels, and said that plans were under way to ensure a systematic and streamlined approach to this partnership.
43. The ESR recommended cooperation with the private sector and foundations but also highlighted the risks this entailed. Members noted that the ESR had not looked into IFAD's risk management structure as this was a recent development.
44. Regarding enhanced monitoring and follow-up, members requested clarification on the time frame for refining the indicators and criteria to increase the focus on partnership results and on how the Board would be involved in the process. Management replied that partnerships were now incorporated into logical frameworks, and performance in this regard was being measured through client surveys. Management reiterated that, as indicated in the IFAD11 commitment matrix, the client survey was being updated and would be ready by 2019. The IFAD11 Results Management Framework also contained a new indicator on IFAD's performance as a partner, which would be systematically assessed through COSOP completion reviews.

45. Members encouraged Management to put in place a mechanism for monitoring private sector partnerships to ensure that they benefited IFAD's target group. Management emphasized that a rigorous due diligence process was observed, and that the private sector engagement strategy would be revamped by the end of 2019.
46. Given the broad nature of the concept, a member noted the need to further define partnerships and what they should focus on in the context of IFAD operations. Another member noted the importance of establishing partnerships with embassies and bilateral agencies at country level.

Agenda item 8. Draft Approach Paper on the Corporate-level Evaluation of IFAD's Contribution to Pro-Poor Value Chain Development

47. The Committee did not review the approach paper (EC 2018/100/W.P.6) in session due to time constraints. The Chairperson requested members to share their comments on the document with the Secretariat after the meeting for incorporation by IOE. The comments received from members are summarized below:
 - Consider including a joint study undertaken by Agence Française de Développement and IFAD on rain-fed food crops in West Africa in the analysis of relevant experience in partner organizations supporting the development of agricultural value chains. Other organizations to consider are the Inter-American Development Bank and the Corporación Andina de Fomento (Andean Development Corporation).
 - Consider the extent of the risk posed by the limited availability of information on the results and impact of IFAD value chains development projects given that this is a relatively recent priority for IFAD, and the implications of this for the quality of the analysis and conclusions of the corporate-level evaluation (CLE).
 - Give more prominence to the private sector role in pro-poor value chain development.

48. A member went on to note the importance of agricultural value chain support in IFAD's work and welcomed the CLE as it would enable the Committee and Board to assess IFAD's performance in fulfilling its poverty reduction mandate through this type of activity. Another member highlighted that the evaluation would provide pertinent information for the IFAD11 midterm review.
49. In addition, members inquired whether the document on the self-evaluation to be conducted by Management would be shared with the Committee.

Agenda item 9. Other business

50. IOE shared information on the international conference on "Rural Inequalities: Evaluating Approaches to Overcome Disparities," (EC 2018/100/INF.1). The conference was being organized by IOE in collaboration with IFAD Management and would take place on 2 and 3 May 2018, at IFAD headquarters.
51. The purpose of the conference was to explore whether strategies and programmes aimed at eradicating rural poverty also reduce disparities in rural areas, in the context of the Agenda 2030 commitment to "leave no one behind." The focus would be on the impact of approaches to rural poverty reduction in four areas of inequality in rural areas: resources, resilience, relationships and rights.
52. The representative for Indonesia expressed appreciation for the initiative and hoped that the Indonesian Minister of Village and Developing Regions would participate in the conference as keynote speaker. He noted that Indonesia had considerable experience to share regarding progress and challenges in addressing rural inequality.

53. In closing, the Chairperson requested the Management and IOE to come up with a mutually agreed action plan to address the issues raised by the committee regarding the Project Performance Evaluation of Rural Financial Intermediation Programme in the Kingdom of Lesotho, and update members at the earliest.
54. The Chairperson thanked all participants for their active contributions to the discussions, and the interpreters and all support staff for a successful session.