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Management's Comments on the Draft Approach Paper for the External Peer Review of IFAD's Evaluation Function

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For: Information

Management's Comments on the Draft Approach Paper for the External Peer Review of IFAD's Evaluation Function

1. Management welcomes the peer review of IFAD's evaluation function and appreciates the timeliness of the exercise since it corresponds with Management's internal review and reform agenda. Under the umbrella of the IFAD Development Effectiveness Framework (DEF), Management is committed to: promoting a stronger evaluation culture and its mainstreaming throughout the organization; and enhancing the results focus of self-evaluation through a series of mutually reinforcing initiatives.
2. Management believes that the learning generated through the peer review will further enhance IFAD's independent and self-evaluation functions, contributing to better results and strengthening IFAD's efficiency and effectiveness. In this context, Management's comments below on the draft approach paper could further enrich the learning generated from this important exercise.

General observations

3. Management considers that the peer review should be viewed in the broader context of the ongoing IFAD reform process, particularly the Operational Excellence for Results reform initiative, the business model of the Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD11), the IFAD11 commitments and the DEF. The draft document does not mention the significant changes at IFAD, which will impact the nature and process of future evaluations. Taking these into consideration would help to frame recommendations for strengthening the Fund's evaluation function in the future.
4. Management would like to draw attention to the approach paper of the Peer Review of IFAD's Office of Evaluation and Evaluation Function in 2009 and the Evaluation Committee comments on that paper. The approach paper was resubmitted at a special session of the Evaluation Committee to ensure that the Committee's comments were addressed in the final draft for presentation to the Executive Board. The comments by the Evaluation Committee (included in annex below) are still applicable today and could be considered in approach paper for the current peer review.
5. The peer review would benefit from a benchmarking analysis of IFAD's evaluation function compared with the evaluation functions in other multilateral organizations. This comparison will provide opportunities for IFAD to benefit from the good practices of other organizations. Benchmarking should consider IFAD's size and scope, and comparisons should be drawn with organizations of similar size and mandate.
6. In the global context of diminishing resources, it is important that the peer review assess the value for money and cost efficiency of IFAD's evaluation function. For this reason, a question related to the size of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) annual budget should be included along with a question about the size of the IOE work programme, given the concerns expressed by Management about "absorption capacity" in dealing with independent evaluation recommendations. In this context, it would also be important to assess the utility of various evaluation products.
7. Management believes it is important for the peer review to examine the effectiveness of the IOE communication function and its impact on IFAD's communication agenda following the Fund's adoption of a strategic communications approach in 2013 (the IFAD Evaluation Policy was adopted in 2011).

Scope, approach and methodology

8. Section II of the paper on the scope of the review merits a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of the roles of IFAD's Evaluation Committee and Executive Board beyond those indicated in paragraph 7. As in the 2009-2010 peer review, an additional point could be included (in the section on scope) regarding the roles of the Evaluation Committee (based on its terms of reference and rules of procedure) and Executive Board in evaluations.
9. The approach paper would benefit from an evaluation framework. Section IV contains evaluation questions that will be covered by the peer review and indicates that an evaluation framework will follow. However, the paper would benefit from the inclusion of a matrix mapping the review objectives, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee evaluation criteria and evaluation questions at the outset. The evaluation framework would then allow for better determination of the evaluation instruments required for primary and secondary data collection.
10. While acknowledging the need for flexibility, Management believes that the approach paper would benefit from inclusion of the detailed self-assessment questionnaire in an annex to guide IOE and Management in the self-assessment process.
11. The current methodology section contains a description of the tools and instruments to be deployed for data collection. It could therefore be renamed "process for data collection" and included in the approach section. Moreover, in the previous peer review, country visits for this purpose were also included in the approach paper. Such visits are important to capture the views of multiple stakeholders about the usefulness of IFAD's independent evaluation activities.
12. Management believes that there should be an analysis of IOE's performance with regard to the key performance indicators included in the annual workplan and budget. A similar section was included in the previous approach paper to assess performance against the results measurement framework.
13. In addition to the documents indicated in the provisional list for review, Management believes it would be important to include the following documents, which are central to the reform of IFAD's self-evaluation function: (i) the Development Effectiveness Framework (2016); (ii) the IFAD11 business model (2017); (iii) Taking IFAD's Results and Impact Management System to the Next Level (2017); and (iv) the Report of the Consultation on the Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (2018). Additional documents in areas relevant to the peer review can also be provided by Management.

Process-related comments

14. A more detailed budget for the peer review could be presented in the approach paper, including a breakdown of the budget by the phases indicated.
15. The section on governance of the peer review exercise could be elaborated to reflect the roles of the Evaluation Committee and Executive Board in oversight of the peer review. It would also be useful to detail the specific roles of IOE and Management in facilitating the review.
16. The approach paper would benefit from a section on deliverables to be expected from the exercise.
17. The approach paper would also benefit from a more detailed timeline, including major milestones in addition to Evaluation Committee and Executive Board meetings.
18. Given the convergence of the goals of Management and IOE to improve IFAD's effectiveness and efficiency, and achieve better results, Management highly values the peer review exercise and believes that the outcomes of the review will be beneficial to both IOE and Management. Management looks forward to engaging in the peer review process and the production of the final report.

Key issues identified by the Evaluation Committee¹

1. Define a clearer role for the Evaluation Committee, as the Evaluation Committee is the main client for the peer review.
2. Clarify objectives and expected outputs, including changes that may be needed in both the Evaluation Policy and the procedures and practices associated with IFAD's evaluation system. Emphasize that the purpose of undertaking the peer review is to learn from the experience of both IFAD and peers to improve IFAD's evaluation system.
3. For each objective, define the work activities to be undertaken.
4. Define an approach and methodology to be used in the peer review that reflects IFAD's characteristics.
5. Propose countries for field visits. Likely countries will have recently been the locations of programme evaluations.
6. Provide a more detailed assessment of the timeline and implementation schedule; revisit the current proposal to complete the peer review in time for the December Board.
7. More detailed budget presentation, taking into account field visits.
8. More emphasis on "what will be done" and less descriptive background of the peer review concept.
9. Greater use of comparison between the IFAD system and those of Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) members, taking into account IFAD's unique features.
10. Explicitly reference to cost-efficiency and value for money.
11. Illustrate institutional changes resulting from the work of the Office of Evaluation.
12. More specific description of the roles of the panel and consultants: clarify that the consultants should have expertise in agriculture and rural development and, preferably, knowledge of IFAD and some exposure to evaluation.
13. Consultants may be identified but contracts may not be signed until after the September Board session.
14. The result will be a clearer, shorter and more focused (delete lengthy annexes that served the purpose of informing the Evaluation Committee of the ECG approach as these are not necessary for a Board paper).

¹ Based on a review of the first version of the approach paper submitted to the Evaluation Committee in July 2009. A special session of the Evaluation Committee was held in September 2009 to discuss the revised approach paper after the initial comments had been addressed. The paper was then submitted to Executive Board at its next session.