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Investing in rural people

IFAD Management Response to the Evaluation Synthesis on IFAD's Support to Technical Innovations for Rural Poverty Reduction

Note to Evaluation Committee members

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For: Review

1. Management welcomes the evaluation synthesis report (ESR) prepared by the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) on IFAD's support to technical innovations for rural poverty reduction. Management is pleased to note that IOE is devoting attention to the important topic of innovation in line with the priority given at the corporate level – as evident in the establishment of the Change, Delivery and Innovation Unit and the Private Sector, Advisory and Implementation Unit and the recent launch of an IFAD innovation challenge.
2. Management appreciates IOE's efforts to capture lessons on technical innovations in isolation, while recognizing the limitations of such an approach. Management would like to raise the following two issues, which were highlighted earlier in its comments on the approach paper:
 - (i) Most innovations are hybrid in nature rather than purely technical. Viewing them on their own therefore risks being reductive. Significant innovations may exist in social, economic, institutional and policy processes that are not only enabling factors – as considered by the ESR – but innovations in themselves.
 - (ii) As noted by IOE in the ESR report, an "important limitation is the limited depth of the analysis included in IOE evaluations with regard to innovation". As the synthesis evaluations are based entirely on past IOE evaluations, Management believes it is important to recognize that reaching strong conclusions – based on the limited evidence captured on purely technical innovations – is challenging.
3. While the ESR identified isolated cases of good practices in technical innovation as well as some missed opportunities, Management believes that the corporate-level evaluation (CLE) is better positioned not only to validate the conclusions of the ESR but also to provide a more holistic and reliable analysis. In this context, the ESR can serve as an important building block for the CLE.
4. Management looks forward to continued engagement with IOE on the CLE and believes the lessons generated will help Management learn from what has worked, what has not and the underlying reasons for both, in order to contribute to the Fund's evolving approach to supporting innovations for inclusive and sustainable smallholder agriculture.

Recommendations

5. Management welcomes the three recommendations outlined in the ESR and believes they are relevant to enhance IFAD's work in promoting technical innovations in its programme of loans and grants (PoLG). In addition to informing future project design, the recommendations should be incorporated into the CLE currently under way on IFAD's support to innovations for inclusive and sustainable smallholder agriculture.
6. Management's detailed response to each recommendation follows below.
7. Recommendation 1: Enhance focus on transformative practices within IFAD's approach to technical innovation while continuing to promote low risk improvements to productivity for the majority of poor smallholder farmers.
8. Agreed: Management agrees with the need to balance support to innovative approaches with continuing to provide low risk interventions for the majority of rural smallholder farmers, as they are both most at risk and the least able to access and invest in new innovations. Management will ensure that greater efforts are made to identify and analyse potential innovations for rural transformation during the design of country strategic opportunities programmes and investment projects.
9. Management will focus on innovation not as a standalone input into the agricultural value chain but as an integrated approach – e.g. moving from considering improved seed varieties as an innovation in itself to looking at innovations in the farming

system as a whole, as farmers invest in and adopt climate-resilient, sustainable and profitable farming livelihoods.

10. Recommendation 2: Systematically monitor, evaluate and learn from innovations.
11. Agreed: Management agrees with the need for increased monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of innovation, and of programme results more generally. In this ESR there is some overlap in the use of the terms innovation and adoption. As per the 2017 ESR on scaling up, Management requests that these two terms are defined accurately and separately, as innovation is not adoption. Innovation is a process, and adoption (or the lack of adoption) is the result of this process.
12. Management will continue to focus on improving the design quality of projects and providing closer technical implementation support, so that data can be collected, analysed and used to improve project management. In fact, this may be one area where innovative approaches can be used in the PoLG to collect accurate and timely field data via information and communications technologies for development (ICT4D) approaches.
13. Management would like to underscore, in agreement with the ESR observation, that increasing attention is being paid to this approach throughout the organization. The current initiative to develop an ICT4D strategy will for the first time give IFAD a framework to use ICTs to improve targeting, M&E, management of project data and project portfolio management.
14. Recommendation 3: Use the forthcoming CLE to explore IFAD's readiness to promote transformative innovations.
15. N/A. This recommendation is for IOE and therefore is not applicable to Management.