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Investing in rural people

Minutes of the 107th Session of the Evaluation Committee

Note to Evaluation Committee members

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Minutes of the 107th Session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 107th session, held on 29 October 2019, are reflected in the present minutes.
2. These minutes will serve as the basis for the oral report by the Evaluation Committee Chairperson to the Executive Board. As approved by the Committee, the minutes will be shared with the Board.

Agenda item 1. Opening of the session

3. Attending the session were Committee members for Cameroon, France, Indonesia (Chairperson), Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Participating as observers were representatives for China, the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom. The session was also attended by the: Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); Deputy Director, IOE; Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department; Director ad interim, Operational Policy and Results Division; Director, Latin America and the Caribbean Division; Lead Officer, Change Delivery and Innovation Unit; Lead Global Technical Advisor on Agronomy, Sustainable Production, Markets and Institutions Division; Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.
4. The Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Niger to IFAD, His Excellency Aboukar Abdoulaye Diori; the First Secretary and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Niger, Mr Maman Hamet; and the Director of Studies and Programming, Mr Abdou Kaibou, participated in the Committee's deliberations on the impact evaluation of the Food Security and Development Support Project in the Maradi region of Niger. They provided the Government's perspective on the evaluation.

Agenda item 2. Adoption of the agenda (EC 2019/107/W.P.1)

5. The provisional agenda comprised the: (i) opening of the session; (ii) adoption of the agenda; (iii) Results-based Work Programme and Budget for 2020, and Indicative Plan for 2021-2022 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD; (iv) evaluation synthesis report on Technical Innovations for Rural Poverty Reduction; (v) impact evaluation of the Food Security and Development Support Project in the Maradi Region of Niger; (vi) provisional agenda for the Evaluation Committee in 2020; (vii) draft action plan to follow up on the external peer review of the evaluation function at IFAD; (viii) country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the United Mexican States; and (ix) other business.
6. At the request of one member, the sequence for consideration of agenda items was revised as follows: 3, 7, 6, 4, 5, 8 and 9. However, the minutes follow the order reflected in the agenda.
7. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2019/107/W.P.1, with the inclusion of an item under other business on the identification of experts to be included in the selection panel for the IOE Director.
8. The agenda would be revised as EC 2019/107/W.P.1/Rev.1.

Agenda items 3. Results-based Work Programme and Budget for 2020, and Indicative Plan for 2021-2022 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (EC 2019/107/W.P.2)

9. The Committee thanked IOE for the updated results-based work programme and budget document, noting that the comments on the previous version by the Committee and the Board in September had been taken into consideration.
10. Members expressed appreciation for the inclusion of some actions arising from the peer review of the evaluation function, such as the thematic evaluation of IFAD's

contribution to smallholder adaptation to climate change, and the reduction in the number of project performance evaluations (PPEs). Members also noted with appreciation the planned joint corporate-level evaluation (CLE) by the evaluation offices of the Rome-based agencies on collaboration among these agencies, and supported the proposal to enhance the use of information and communications technologies in evaluations.

11. Regarding the reduction in the number of project evaluations from eight to six in line with the peer review recommendation, members advised further reducing the number if this would not negatively affect other evaluation products. It was noted that the PPEs might be of less interest to the Board since they assessed specific interventions rather than cross-cutting thematic issues. Members suggested that reducing the number of PPEs could free up budgetary and human resources for more relevant evaluation products. IOE highlighted the importance of PPEs as an evidence base for aggregate-level evaluations, adding that a critical number of them were needed to provide useful information for operations at the project and country levels.
12. IOE further indicated that the issue of what evaluation products were required would be addressed through an updated toolkit and a flexible product mix as indicated in the peer review recommendations. In preparing the revised evaluation policy and product mix, members asked that IOE consider the critical minimum number of PPEs required.
13. Responding to a question about the selection criteria for countries where CSPEs would be conducted, IOE noted that priority was given to countries for which the results would inform the design of new country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs).
14. In response to queries about the purpose of planned field visits related to the 2020 evaluation synthesis, IOE noted that the visits would provide additional evidence to strengthen findings on the maintenance and sustainability of the benefits resulting from investments in rural infrastructure, yielding more accurate recommendations for the evaluation synthesis report (ESR).
15. The Committee welcomed the inclusion of the contingency figure of US\$80,000 in the budget to provide IOE with some flexibility in its work, in line with the peer review recommendations. Committee members noted that the use of these funds would be reported in the year-end accounts. Members requested a comparison between the IOE budget and the IFAD administrative budget. IOE confirmed that this would be introduced in the 2020 budget document.
16. Noting that impact evaluations were not only tools for accountability but were also used for quantifying results and highlighting lessons learned, members sought clarification on how IOE impact evaluations fed into other evaluation products. They also questioned the relevance of such evaluations given the significant difference between the cost of conducting impact evaluations and PPEs. IOE noted that while only one impact evaluation was conducted annually, this rigorous assessment contributed to other evaluation products.
17. Given that Management also conducted impact assessments, the consolidation of Management-led impact assessments and IOE impact evaluations was suggested. IOE expressed the opinion that ex-post impact assessments, if conducted for accountability, should be the responsibility of IOE, while those carried out ex-ante for learning purposes could be conducted by Management. One member noted that IOE could validate impact assessments by Management and asked that part of the contingency budget be dedicated to such validations.
18. In response to a question about budget utilization, IOE noted that a 40 per cent expenditure of the travel budget in the last three months of the year was not unusual given that most CSPE workshops would be held in that period.

19. The Committee noted that the IOE budget corresponded to 0.43 per cent of IFAD's programme of loans and grants (PoLG) and inquired whether this was expected to increase if the PoLG level increased. IOE noted that the PoLG was at a historical high and that in preparing future IOE budgets, a three-year rolling approach should be taken in order to align with the annual PoLG.

Agenda item 4. Evaluation synthesis report on Technical Innovations for Rural Poverty Reduction (EC 2019/107/W.P.3 + Add.1)

20. The Committee reviewed the ESR on technical innovations for rural poverty reduction together with Management's response. Members thanked IOE for the information provided in the ESR and noted with appreciation that Management agreed with its recommendations.
21. Members acknowledged that the ESR built upon the 2010 CLE on IFAD's capacity to promote innovation and scaling up. The synthesis highlighted that most technical innovations in IFAD aimed to enhance productivity and offered low-cost, low-tech marginal improvements in cropping and animal health; a smaller number of innovations were transformative. The synthesis recommended that IFAD enhance its focus on transformative practices and systematically monitor, evaluate and learn from innovations.
22. It was noted that while the ESR looked specifically at technical innovations and their impact on smallholders, it did not examine other forms of innovations that could have had an impact. In this regard, members welcomed the view that the ESR would serve as a building block for the forthcoming CLE on innovation (which would explore innovations more holistically), and appreciated IFAD's readiness to promote transformative innovations.
23. It was also noted that the recommendation to "use the forthcoming corporate-level evaluation to explore IFAD's readiness to promote transformative innovations" applied to IOE.
24. Members highlighted the need to: monitor the effect of innovations on the environment; and capture their impact on household incomes. Management agreed that capturing lessons learned and the impact of innovations was a critical factor in enhancing IFAD's culture of innovation.
25. Commenting on the recommendation to promote transformative innovations, a member noted that such innovations implied higher risks, and inquired about IFAD's risk appetite and risk-management approaches. Management underscored the importance of creating space for controlled risk-taking and embracing failure as important in fostering a culture of innovation.
26. Another member highlighted the importance of targeting innovations to very poor groups.

Agenda item 5. Impact evaluation of the Food Security and Development Support Project in the Maradi Region of Niger (EC 2019/107/W.P.4 + Add1)

27. The Committee thanked IOE for the impact evaluation and its innovative methodology. The project had led to significant impacts on food security and nutrition for beneficiary households.
28. Applauding Management's agreement with the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, the Committee welcomed the integration of the lessons learned into the new project to be funded by IFAD.
29. Government representatives for Niger thanked IFAD for its long-term partnership, and IOE for the important impact evaluation. The Government endorsed the findings and recommendations, and noted that some of the recommendations were already being implemented in other operations within the country.

30. Members noted that the success of the project had been affected by the cost and delays in the implementation of market infrastructure. To address these issues, in-depth studies would be conducted and the country team would initiate social engineering much earlier for similar interventions.
31. The Committee found the project's direct impact on women's empowerment to be relatively limited, but noted Management's commitment to continue implementing gender-transformative approaches – including through household methodologies and gender action learning – to promote gender equality, household planning and budgeting. Management also reiterated IFAD's commitment in the Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources to increase the number of projects classified as gender transformative, nutrition sensitive and youth sensitive; a criterion had been developed to measure and track these cross-cutting issues within projects.
32. To ensure sustainability of results in the new IFAD-supported project, Management noted that an emphasis would be placed on strengthening producer organizations' capacity in organizational management, revenue generation and infrastructure maintenance.
33. In response to a query about Rome-based agency collaboration, Management noted that this was strong in Niger, as evidenced by the existing common action plans in the field, the ongoing development of joint programming and a study on how best to work together. Focus areas included resilience, land recovery, access to water and agricultural productivity.
34. Responding to a request for elaboration on impact figures in the report's executive summary, IOE noted that most of the quantitative data was included in the annexes; however, relevant information would also be included in the executive summary.

Agenda item 6. Provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2020
(EC 2019/107/W.P.5)

35. The Committee reviewed its provisional agenda for 2020 and concluded that it did not capture certain aspects of the draft action plan to address recommendations from the peer review of the evaluation function. Members noted the need for flexibility in the agenda to ensure that the key issues arising from the action plan were included.
36. In line with a recommendation from the peer review, members asked IOE to ensure adequate consultation with Management in the formulation and finalization of the action plan.
37. The Committee endorsed the proposed dates for their sessions in 2020, noting that adjustments might be necessary. It was confirmed that members could discuss the agenda at a future session if needed. Furthermore, members could propose items for discussion at any session by making a request once the provisional agenda was posted, or during the session for items under other business.
38. Finally, members decided to hold an informal meeting on 16 January 2020 to discuss the revision of the Committee's terms of reference (ToRs). Members agreed that the meeting would be conducted in English only, with no interpretation.

Agenda item 7. Draft action plan to follow up on the external peer review of the evaluation function at IFAD (EC 2019/107/W.P.6)

39. The Committee noted that the draft action plan was a joint output of IOE and Management. Members expressed full support for the action plan and the roles to be played by IOE, Management, the Evaluation Committee and the Board.
40. Members discussed the timing and optimal sequencing for considering the evaluation policy, the Evaluation Committee's ToRs, the evaluation product mix and the evaluation manual in order to ensure that all the documents were aligned.

41. Members recalled the peer review recommendations to move procedural aspects from the policy to the manual and to ensure that the policy focused only on key strategic and structural issues. IOE expressed the view that, in line with the peer review recommendations, the product mix should be a sub-set of – and arise from – the evaluation policy, and inform the expected deliverables. IOE further emphasized that the revision of the policy, product mix and manual was sequenced, and could not be conducted in parallel.
42. Regarding the revision of the ToRs of the Evaluation Committee, Members agreed that at the informal meeting on 16 January 2020, a road map could be considered. The draft ToRs could then be discussed at the Committee session in April and further at the June session. The ToRs would subsequently be presented to the Board in September 2020 for approval.
43. Members noted that the main issue may not be the revision of the Committee's ToRs, but a change in working methods to better balance consideration of self-evaluation and IOE products during Evaluation Committee sessions. There was currently a high reliance on IOE products and this issue would be addressed in the revision of the ToRs.
44. Members proposed reviewing and benchmarking the ToRs and mandates of similar committees in other international financial institutions. The Office of the Secretary would share ToRs from other institutions with committee members.
45. The Committee also requested earlier involvement in the review of the revised product mix so that members would not have to wait until the June session to review the draft.
46. Members looked forward to clarification about the multi-year strategy for IOE, including whether it would cover a replenishment period over three years, and how it would be related to the budget process.

Agenda item 8. Country strategy and programme evaluation for the United Mexican States (EC 2019/107/W.P.7 + Add. 1)

47. The Committee thanked IOE for the useful information and recommendations provided in the CSPE report.
48. The CSPE showed that there had been social outreach to very poor areas, households, indigenous groups and women. In addition, IFAD's operational procedures had helped national agencies to reach groups that could not previously be reached by public programmes. The focus on natural resource management and climate change adaptation was also positive. However, in many cases project designs did not include sufficient analysis of agriculture sector policies, and as a result did not reach implementation targets.
49. Noting that the evaluation showed moderately unsatisfactory results, members asked why there had been no interim course-correction measures to ensure better portfolio performance. Management responded that high staff turnover in the country had contributed to a lack of consistent follow-up on critical issues. However, it was expected that the newly established hub in Panama would greatly contribute to improving IFAD's relationship with the Government and would enhance the Fund's capacity to address challenges as they emerge.
50. Management noted that the CSPE recommendations would inform the development of the new COSOP, which was scheduled for submission to the Executive Board in early 2020. IFAD would continue to employ a differentiated approach to addressing the needs of Mexico as a middle-income country.
51. The representative for Mexico welcomed the CSPE as a useful source of lessons to inform the new COSOP, and expressed agreement and support for its recommendations. He highlighted the need for: aligning IFAD's interventions with the National Development Plan, geographic focus and focus on the poorest rural

people; improved design; and integration of grants into loan activities. Recommendations on these issues should all be integrated in the new COSOP. He also underlined the importance of portfolio continuity as a means to strengthen policy dialogue.

52. Members noted that the agreement at completion point with regard to the evaluation had not yet been signed. Therefore, Management's response to the CSPE would be embedded in the agreement at completion point at a later stage.

Agenda item 9. Other business

(a) Identification of experts to be included in the selection panel for the IOE Director

53. The Chairperson noted that the Committee was mandated to select two experts to be included in the selection panel for the new IOE Director, and asked members to share their proposals by mid-November 2019.
54. Members were reminded of the Committee's agreement in the past selection process to follow best practices regarding regional and gender balance in the selection of expert panellists.
55. Once the Committee had identified these two experts, the Office of the Secretary would determine their availability. Bearing in mind that the selected experts might not be available, the Committee could consider providing up to four selections, clearly identifying the order in which they should be contacted.
56. The Office of the Secretary would identify dates for the panel meetings in 2020, with a view to making a panel chairperson's report ready for presentation to the Board in September 2020.
57. Members requested additional information to facilitate the process. It was therefore agreed that IOE would provide the names of current heads of the United Nations Evaluation Group and Evaluation Cooperation Group to the Office of the Secretary for transmittal to the members as soon as possible. It was emphasized that the list was not exhaustive and that the Committee was free to select other names with relevant experience.
58. Having thanked all participants and staff for their contribution to the session's success, the Chairperson declared it adjourned.