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Investing in rural people

Minutes of the 109th Session of the Evaluation Committee

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Evaluation Committee — 109th Session
Rome, 19 June 2020

For: Approval

Minutes of the 109th Session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 109th session, held virtually on 19 June 2020, are reflected in the present minutes.

2. Once approved by the Committee, the minutes will be shared with the Executive Board.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the session

3. The session was attended by Committee members for Cameroon, France, India, Indonesia (Chair), Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria and Switzerland. Silent observers were present from Bangladesh, China, the Dominican Republic, Finland, Norway and the United Kingdom. The session was also attended by the Deputy Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department; Associate Vice-President, Strategy and Knowledge Department; Director, Operational Policy and Results Division; Regional Director, Asia and the Pacific Division; Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean Division; Director, Research and Impact Assessment Division; Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.

4. Mr Bhuwan Paudel, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Nepal to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva, participated in the Committee's deliberations on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for Nepal. The Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Ecuador, His Excellency Nelson Robelly Lozada, and Ms Virginia Navas, Second Secretary, Alternate Permanent Representative of the Republic of Ecuador, participated in deliberations on the Ecuador CSPE. Their presence ensured that the deliberations benefited from the Government's perspective on the respective evaluations.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2020/109/W.P.1)

5. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2020/109/W.P.1, with the inclusion of an update on the provisional agenda for the remaining Evaluation Committee sessions of 2020 under other business.

Agenda item 3: Country strategy and programme evaluation for Nepal (EC 2020/109/W.P.2)

Key messages:

- Consideration may be given to strengthening the IFAD Country Office (ICO) in Nepal and boosting support from IFAD headquarters and the regional hub, taking into account IFAD's resource constraints and its overall corporate decentralization approach.
- Both in Nepal and across countries in general, IFAD should collaborate with partners (United Nations system and international financial institutions) with a view to maximizing outreach and benefiting from expertise of other partners where IFAD's country presence is limited.

6. The Committee welcomed this third CSPE for Nepal, covering the period from 2013 to 2019 and thanked IOE for a well-written document. Management was thanked for its response and commitment to following up on the recommendations.

7. The representative for Nepal shared the Government's views on the CSPE and highlighted its agreement with IOE's findings and recommendations, expressing confidence that these would be incorporated into the design of the new country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP). He thanked IFAD for its contribution

to the country's development, stating that his country was preparing for graduation from low-income-country status in 2022 and could reach middle-income status by 2030.

8. Members appreciated the increased effectiveness and positive impact of IFAD's rural poverty programme in Nepal, noting the significant reduction in poverty and improvement in food security. In answer to a query on the sustainability of benefits and continued progress, Management expressed optimism – based also on the positive results achieved despite the devastating earthquake of 2015 and the move to federalism – that a positive trajectory would continue in terms of performance.

9. On the shift to federalization, members welcomed Management's commitment to stepping up IFAD's involvement in policy engagement, capacity development and institutional strengthening.

10. Regarding IOE's recommendation to strengthen the Nepal ICO, Management noted that IFAD had to work with limited resources; however, improvements were already visible as a result of the addition of a country director and technical staff to the regional hub in Delhi. Furthermore, partnerships with other United Nations agencies and NGOs were actively being fostered. Management also acknowledged the importance of engagement with the private sector in developing value chains and providing long-term business opportunities. Such partnerships would also strengthen innovation, technical know-how and knowledge management.

11. It was noted that the evaluation indicated that improvements had been made in market access and agricultural modernization, but for the poorest people living in remote locations, market access still tended to be difficult. In this regard, one member recalled the recommendations of the corporate-level evaluation (CLE) on pro-poor value chain development, in particular the importance of adopting an inclusive approach to ensure that no one is left behind.

12. On gender equality, members appreciated the programme's contribution to enhancing women's status within the household, thanks to their role as income generators, and within communities, as leaders in grass-roots organizations. The programme had also recognized the need to reduce women's workload – through, for example, mechanization of some activities – given the high rate of male migration, which had left many villages with a scarcity of labour resources.

13. Given Nepal's inherent vulnerability to climate change, it was noted that this element should be given greater prominence in the next COSOP. It would be important for IFAD to work with the topography of the country, which posed both challenges and opportunities.

Agenda item 4: Country strategy and programme evaluation for Ecuador (EC 2020/109/W.P.3 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- The importance of ensuring strong linkages and coordination among grants within country programmes should be borne in mind in revising IFAD's grant policy.
- IFAD clearly adds value in combatting pockets of poverty in rural areas of middle-income countries.
- To advance knowledge management, good practices identified in the evaluation – including those related to the territorial approach – should be disseminated widely to ensure their implementation across portfolios.

14. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE and commended IOE for a well-written report. The evaluation covered the period 2009-2019, which included two COSOPs, four projects and nine grants.

15. The Committee also welcomed the statement by the Ambassador of Ecuador and noted that the agreement at completion point would be signed in the coming months. It had been delayed mainly due to COVID-19-related restrictions.

16. The Committee appreciated the importance of IFAD's support in Ecuador's rural transformation and in promoting rural development. Members also highlighted the importance of the CSPE conclusion that IFAD clearly added value in addressing rural poverty pockets in middle-income countries.

17. Concern was expressed about the relative lack of progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. Acknowledging these shortfalls, Management explained that the new project under design would be gender-transformative as gender equality and women's empowerment were its core priority. In addition, at the policy level, IFAD had strongly influenced the creation of the Ministry of Agriculture's new "super rural woman" programme.

18. Members recognized the good practices that had been implemented by IFAD in Ecuador, in particular the agroforestry systems that had facilitated climate change adaptation and the innovative approach to territorial planning. Knowledge-sharing on these practices should be undertaken to extend their benefits beyond Ecuador to other country programmes.

19. The issue of sustainability of project benefits was raised. In the case of Ecuador, this was particularly relevant in the area of marketing and trade, financial inclusion, engaging local government and introducing innovations to modernize agriculture. Management concurred on the need to integrate small-scale producers into larger markets; work was therefore ongoing through a grant programme to facilitate such integration by means of an e-commerce platform. Grant funding was also being used to support financial inclusion in Ecuador.

20. Members stressed the relevance of financial inclusion to support sustainability of benefits and the validity of recommendation 5, which called for reconsideration of the timing of the next COSOP to allow for more in-depth analytical work. It was also proposed that the next COSOP incorporate Ecuador's climate and biodiversity strategy and its contribution under the Paris Agreement, and that greater prominence be given to the linkage between agriculture and climate.

21. The importance of ensuring integration and linkages among grants within the country programme was emphasized. It was proposed that this issue be taken into consideration in revising the IFAD grant policy.

22. In relation to IFAD's country presence, the Committee noted that Ecuador was served from the regional hub in Lima, in line with IFAD's decentralization model. Richer engagement was expected with the country as a result of increased resources in the regional hub, which could provide the needed administrative and technical support. On a related note, Management explained that IFAD was embarking on the new decentralization "2.0 phase" under which 45 per cent of staff would be outposted to the field. Ideally, at some point Ecuador would have a country programme officer but for the moment it was important that staff from the hub in Lima travelled more regularly to Ecuador, particularly for policy dialogue and engagement with the projects.

Agenda item 5: Results from IFAD10 sensitivity analyses and implications for IFAD11 (EC 2020/109/W.P.4 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- The Committee recommends that Management follow IOE's recommendations to the maximum extent possible, in particular on the sampling size. Any disagreement should be clearly stated and communicated to the Board.

23. The document was presented in response to the request of the Board at its 127th session and the IOE recommendation that IFAD should conduct a peer review of the methodology used for the IFAD10 impact assessment. This review should benefit from the support of experts and include a sensitivity analysis to test the results.

24. The Committee thanked Management for having carried out the sensitivity analysis and IOE for their comments and recommendations. Members noted the support provided by Professor Gagliarducci to assess the IFAD10 methodology, check the robustness of the results and conduct a sensitivity analysis to validate the sample selection for the planned IFAD11 impact assessment.

25. Members commended IFAD for being the first international financial institution trying to draw conclusions on the impact of its operations and welcomed the positive results of the assessment. The Committee, however, expressed concern about the reservations vis-à-vis the methodology that had been adopted. Diverging opinions needed to be addressed on, inter alia, the appropriate sample size (IOE noted that in IFAD11 the sampling size would increase from 15 to 21 per cent of the portfolio), the use of supervision versus project completion reports and selection bias. Members underlined the importance of this study for the donor community as a means of clearly demonstrating IFAD's impact on the lives of its beneficiaries and hence the need to ensure the credibility of the assessment results.

26. The Committee invited Management to follow up on the recommendations made by IOE and report back on those with which it disagreed. Management confirmed its general agreement with the recommendations. Going forward, Management would ensure that:

    - Sensitivity analyses would be carried out;
    - Disclaimers would be included to reference the limitations inherent to the methodology used;
    - Management agreed that a larger sample size would be better. IFAD would try its best to increase the sample size given the resource constraints;
    - The methodology to be adopted for IFAD12 would be shared and discussed with IOE and with external experts, given the very specific nature of the analysis.

Agenda item 6: Oral update by the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the programme of work in 2020

27. The Committee noted the oral update provided by IOE on modifications to its programme of work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

28. IOE confirmed that most projects were on track and that the following adjustments would be necessary:

    - Of the five CSPEs foreseen in 2020, two or three would be completed as planned and the remainder would be completed in 2021;

- To postpone presentation of the impact evaluation for the Ethiopia project from October 2020 to March 2021, given that it required intensive interaction with the stakeholders in the field; and
- To put on hold the start-up of the new impact evaluation, originally scheduled for 2020. Given the uncertainty and risks related to the COVID-19, IOE could instead advance work on the joint CLE on Rome-based agency collaboration.

29. The above amendments would be included in the work programme and budget overview document to be presented to upcoming sessions of the Evaluation Committee and the Executive Board.

Agenda item 7: Proposed dates for sessions of the Evaluation Committee in 2021 (EC 2020/109/W.P.5)

30. The Committee approved the proposed dates for the sessions of the Evaluation Committee in 2021, namely:

- 112th session on Friday 19 March 2021
- 113th session on Wednesday 30 June 2021
- 114th session on Wednesday 1 September 2021
- 115th session on Tuesday 19 October 2021

Agenda item 8: Other business

Update on the provisional agenda for the remaining Evaluation Committee sessions of 2020

31. Members took note of the oral update on the provisional agenda for the remaining sessions of 2020 provided by the Secretary of IFAD, namely that:

- Consideration of the impact evaluation of the Community-based Integrated Natural Resources Management Project in Ethiopia would be postponed from October 2020 to the 112th session in March 2021;
- Consideration of the approach paper for the CLE on Rome-based agency collaboration originally scheduled for the 111th session would be brought forward to the 110th session of the Evaluation Committee, in September.

32. The Secretariat would work with the Chair of the Committee to ensure that sufficient time was allocated for consideration of the many items on the Committee's agenda.

33. Members were advised that the Evaluation Committee would be called upon to consider the report of the search panel for the selection of the Director, IOE, and that a special session might prove necessary. The Secretariat would update the Committee when there was greater clarity with respect to the timeline.

Closure of the session

34. The Committee was reminded that the draft minutes would be circulated to members for their comments.

35. The Chairperson thanked participants for their contributions to the discussions and for the timely closure of the session.