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Investing in rural people

## Minutes of the 110<sup>th</sup> Session of the Evaluation Committee

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## Minutes of the 110<sup>th</sup> Session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 110<sup>th</sup> session, held virtually on 2 September 2020, are reflected in the present minutes.

### **Agenda item 1: Opening of the session**

2. 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, Dominican Republic, Finland, Norway and the United Kingdom. The session was also attended by the Deputy Director and Interim Officer-in-Charge, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department; Regional Directors; Director, Operational Policy and Results Division; Director, Research and Impact Assessment Division; Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.
3. The session was also attended by Mr Philip Ward, Secretary to the World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Board and Director, Executive Board Secretariat; Mr Masahiro Igarashi, Director of the Office of Evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); Ms Andrea Cook, Director of Evaluation, WFP; and Senior Officers Ms Rachel Bedouin of FAO and Ms Deborah McWhinney and Mr Michael Carbon of WFP.

### **Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2020/110/W.P.1)**

4. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2020/110/W.P.1, with the removal of the item on the Report of the Search Panel for the selection of the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD, because the panel had not yet finalized its report, and the inclusion of an update on the provisional agenda for the 111<sup>th</sup> Evaluation Committee session under other business.

**Agenda items 3 and 4: 2020 Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI) (EC 2020/110/W.P.2 + Add.1) and 2020 Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) (EC 2020/110/W.P.3 + Add.1)**

**Key messages:**

- The downward trend in government performance must be addressed and reversed, particularly since the commitment of governments was of key importance for sustainability. Every effort should also be made to improve partners' performance.
- Efficiency and sustainability continued to be areas of weakness, and a clear action plan to address these areas was needed.
- Management was encouraged to leverage the youth strategy more effectively, to establish more specific conditions for targeting and to engage youth in all stages of the project cycle.
- The Committee welcomed the unprecedented high cofinancing ratio achieved in 2019, encouraged Management to persist in its efforts in that regard and appreciated the good results attained in terms of decentralization and gender equality.
- Consideration needed to be given to the limitations related to the evaluability of nutritional outcomes, which hindered the assessment of nutrition in evaluations.
- The Committee appreciated the wealth of information provided on IFAD's operations from a quality assurance perspective (annex IV of the RIDE). In particular, the concise analysis of grants would prove useful for the discussion on regular grants, and the qualitative outputs were also welcome. It was noted that the Quality Assurance Group was in the process of updating the quality assurance guidelines in order to help to ensure the continued and consistent good quality of the review process.

5. In line with past practice, the Committee reviewed the ARRI and the RIDE together and welcomed both reports along with the comments provided by IOE and Management.
6. Members appreciated the revised format of the ARRI, which was more reader-friendly and took into consideration the recommendations of the external peer review. The report provided a good overview of IFAD's performance for the period 2016-2018 and highlighted both positive achievements and areas requiring improvement.
7. Concern was expressed about the downward trend in government performance, given the importance of governments' commitment to the sustainability of IFAD operations. Management agreed that the issue was linked to ownership and that ministries other than agriculture ministries needed to be engaged. Oversight by ministries of finance would be beneficial given their focus on value for money. Management also noted that bigger projects, because of their increased visibility, often enjoyed greater ownership and involvement on the part of governments. Management confirmed its intention to work with IOE to identify a long-term solution for this issue. IOE recalled its plan to conduct an evaluation synthesis on government performance as indicated in the budget preview document.
8. Members took note of the satisfactory performance of social targeting for gender, adaptation to climate change and management of natural resources but encouraged Management to leverage the youth engagement strategy given the need to integrate this new approach into all aspects of the project cycle. One

member also suggested that focused evaluations and systematic reviews of partnerships be carried out in order to provide useful guidance to staff in the field.

9. The Committee welcomed the assessment of corporate mainstreaming themes and the fact that it also focused on lessons learned rather than only on performance assessment. Concern was expressed regarding the findings related to nutrition, in particular those dealing with limitations on the evaluability of nutritional outcomes. More in-depth discussions would be required, along with clarification on the progress made while taking into account the ongoing discussions concerning the Results Management Framework (RMF).
10. Members welcomed the proposal to review the rating systems and methodologies employed for self- and independent evaluations and suggested that this could be carried out in the context of the revision of the evaluation manual. Furthermore, it was noted that capacity-building alone would not be sufficient to improve implementation performance and that a more institutional context-specific approach would be required. A greater focus on evaluating the sustainability of impact rather than of activities could also give rise to important lessons.
11. Regarding the RIDE, members commended IFAD for having achieved a record level of cofinancing in 2019 and expressed the hope that this trend would continue, although the risk of a possible decline in cofinancing due to COVID-19 was recognized. Management clarified that a possible decline in domestic cofinancing was foreseen and that IFAD's plan would be to work very closely with government partners to reduce the risk of such a decline. IFAD's in-country presence would be beneficial in this regard.
12. Members noted the continued weak performance in the areas of efficiency and sustainability and urged Management to develop a clear action plan to address the issues raised in both the ARRI and the RIDE. Management explained that four aspects were critical to strengthening efficiency and sustainability: (i) ensuring that projects/programmes started off on the right foot in the design and start-up stage; (ii) investing in delivery capacity; (iii) strengthening monitoring and evaluation capacity both in IFAD and in projects by ensuring that the right systems and tools were put in place; and (iv) working with IOE to identify consistent, robust and uniform measures and indicators for those two areas.
13. Members expressed appreciation for the wealth of information provided on IFAD's operations from a quality assurance perspective (annex IV of the RIDE). In particular, the concise analysis of grants would prove useful for the discussion on regular grants, and the qualitative outputs were also welcome. It was noted that the Quality Assurance Group was in the process of updating the quality assurance guidelines in order to help to ensure the continued and consistent good quality of the review process.
14. One member encouraged IFAD to position itself at the centre of rural development knowledge initiatives and to engage with relevant partners, including in academia, given IFAD's abundant expertise in the field of rural development.
15. One member also highlighted the inconsistency of indicator 2.3.14 in the RMF (annex I) in relation to the indicators included in the IFAD11 RMF presented to the Board.
16. The newly introduced value-for-money scorecard was welcomed by the Committee, and it was suggested that a traffic light system be introduced to allow for a more immediate reading of areas that were on track as compared to those that were not.

**Agenda item 5: 2020 President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA)  
(EC 2020/110/W.P.4 + Add.1)**

**Key message:**

- Management was encouraged to continue to provide coverage of all evaluations. Part of the follow-up could be included in future PRISMA reports and part could be done through participation in a web-based tracking system such as that used by other United Nations agencies and international financial institutions.

17. The Committee welcomed the fact that Management had taken up 99 per cent of the IOE recommendations and appreciated the information that it had provided on the reasons for the delayed implementation of some recommendations.
18. Members urged Management to continue to report on follow-up to the recommendations made in all evaluations to ensure the sharing of lessons learned and facilitation of the Committee's oversight role in tracking follow-up actions, including those taken in the field.
19. Members welcomed IOE's proposal to link the PRISMA to a web-based tracking system, as that would make it possible to have follow-up responses in real time. Management's proposal to have more action-oriented recommendations was also welcomed and could be discussed further in the context of the revision of the evaluation manual.
20. The Committee also supported the suggestion that information be included in future PRISMA reports on the challenges encountered in implementing recommendations, together with a clear list of IOE recommendations that were not agreed to by Management and hence not implemented.

**Agenda item 6: Corporate-level evaluation on IFAD's support to innovations for inclusive and sustainable smallholder agriculture  
(EC 2020/110/W.P.5 + Add.1)**

**Key messages:**

- The Committee expressed its broad consensus on the recommendations set forth in the evaluation report.
- The Committee encouraged Management to strengthen knowledge management and communication with relevant stakeholders, including IFAD staff and government officials, while bearing in mind the context dependence of innovation effectiveness.
- Given the importance of the grant programme as a platform for nurturing innovation, Management was called upon to bear in mind the recommendation for the prioritization of grants aimed at: "(i) strengthening the capacity of national stakeholders involved in IFAD-supported innovation processes; (ii) scouting for novel solutions; and (iii) enhancing the effectiveness of partnerships and synergies at national and regional levels" in its review of the IFAD grants policy.
- Strong partnerships – including alignment with government innovations – were key to successful and sustainable innovations that were user-friendly for IFAD staff and/or beneficiaries.

21. The Committee welcomed the corporate-level evaluation (CLE) and expressed its broad consensus on the recommendations set forth in the report.

22. Members underlined the timeliness of institutionalizing IFAD's approach in support of innovation within the context of the United Nations system-wide strategy on innovation and welcomed the related recommendations and Management's response thereto.
23. Given the importance of the grant programme as a platform for nurturing innovation, members called upon Management to bear in mind the recommendation for the prioritization of grants aimed at: "(i) strengthening the capacity of national stakeholders involved in IFAD-supported innovation processes; (ii) scouting for novel solutions; and (iii) enhancing the effectiveness of partnerships and synergies at national and regional levels" in its review of the IFAD grants policy.
24. The Committee encouraged Management to strengthen knowledge management and communication with relevant stakeholders, including IFAD staff, government officials and beneficiaries. As the effectiveness of innovations was very closely linked to their context, the importance of channelling lessons learned and good practices to relevant parties was underscored. Consideration should also be given to the means of communication, especially when communicating with beneficiaries, where language barriers could hinder uptake of relevant innovations.
25. Members also highlighted the importance of partnerships in supporting successful and sustainable innovations. One member noted that the most sustainable innovations were those that were mainstreamed into national policies linked to government innovation. The further development of innovations, especially in ICT and in digital technologies, would be welcome. Members encouraged IFAD to foster relationships, in particular with other Rome-based agencies (RBAs), and to consider ideas coming out of the WFP innovation boot camps.
26. Management clarified that partnerships with RBAs were being strengthened, as was demonstrated by the joint efforts being made to reinforce the global framework on agriculture. As part of those efforts, substantive contributions were being made to the conceptualization of the International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture, which would provide advice on good policy and good practices for Member States. IFAD regional directors shared examples of RBA collaboration around innovation in their respective regions. Emphasis was placed on the importance of ensuring an enabling environment for innovation, where the focus was not only on results and outcomes, but also on leveraging innovative opportunities that could be mainstreamed into other projects.

**Agenda item 7: Joint evaluation of collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based agencies (EC 2020/110/W.P.6)**

**Key messages:**

- The Committee had high expectations for this evaluation and looked forward to targeted, actionable recommendations that would highlight synergies and potential efficiency gains by leveraging the expertise of RBA colleagues, including in the field.
- The evaluation should focus on both positive and negative experiences and aim to identify future strategic directions, as well as areas of redundancy, overlap, potential mission creep and conflict, areas where cooperation had been particularly useful and those where the transaction costs outweighed the benefits of collaboration.
- The evaluation should aim to identify impact on other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), beyond SDG 2, and bear in mind the broader United Nations context as a whole and the ongoing reform of the United Nations development system being conducted in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

27. Members welcomed the joint evaluation, including its terms of reference, underlined its relevance for all three RBAs and expressed high expectations regarding its outcome. In particular, members looked forward to targeted, actionable recommendations that would highlight synergies and potential efficiency gains by leveraging the expertise of RBA colleagues, including in the field.
28. Some members highlighted the importance of obtaining first-hand evidence and impartial observations and therefore of hearing the opinions of external stakeholders. Anonymous surveys would thus be very useful, in particular as a means of learning of any potentially negative opinions.
29. One member requested clarification regarding the proposed surveys and their geographical coverage and scope. IOE clarified that, although the details of the surveys had yet to be developed, the first step in terms of their geographic scope would be to confirm what countries would be covered. The process of identifying the key stakeholders had already begun; they would include government representatives, as their views on RBA collaboration needed to be understood.
30. Regarding the governance of the joint evaluation and its recommendations, IOE clarified that this would be a joint effort on the part of the three RBAs and that, in addition to the senior evaluation officers in charge of the day-to-day operations, the three Heads of Evaluation would be the ones to decide when the document would be ready for final consideration.
31. The Committee noted that the evaluation should focus on both positive and negative experiences and should aim to identify future strategic directions, as well as areas of redundancy, overlap, potential mission creep and conflict, areas where cooperation had been particularly useful and those where the transaction costs outweighed the benefits of collaboration.
32. Members questioned the urgency of carrying out this evaluation in the light of the ongoing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. IOE clarified that the evaluation was intended to serve as a response to the many calls from Member States to find ways to improve RBA collaboration and as a response to the ongoing United Nations reform process.
33. Consideration should also be given to assessing the impact on other SDGs, beyond SDG 2. The broader United Nations context as a whole and the ongoing reform of

the United Nations development system being conducted in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system should also be taken into account.

**Agenda item 8: Preview of the results-based work programme and budget for 2021, and indicative plan for 2022-2023, of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (EC 2020/110/W.P.7)**

**Key messages:**

- The accountability function of IOE was underscored and should be made more explicit in the document.
- Additional consideration and discussion were required around the goals, strategic objectives and RMF in the document.
- Broad preliminary agreement was expressed in connection with IOE's proposal that the cap on the IOE budget of 0.9 per cent of IFAD's programme of loans and grants (PoLG) be calculated on a three-year average of the PoLG.

34. Members welcomed the preview of IOE's results-based work programme and budget for 2021, and indicative plan for 2022-2023.
35. Considering IOE's strategic goals, members called for additional emphasis to be placed on IOE's accountability function, which was a key part of its work. IOE reassured the members that it continued to focus on accountability, and was committed to including more explicit references to that function in its final submission. Further discussion around the RMF was also deemed necessary.
36. The Committee agreed with the proposed programme of work. In particular, support was expressed for the new thematic evaluations, the CLE on decentralization and the piloting of new evaluation products such as subregional evaluations.
37. One member questioned the timeliness of conducting a CLE on decentralization, given that the final target of 45 per cent of out-posted staff had not yet been reached. IOE clarified that there was strong interest on the part of Management in looking at every individual input regarding the decentralization process. The CLE would be carried out in 2021 and 2022, and the decentralization process would have progressed further by that time. IOE was encouraged to handle the issue of the evaluation of government performance with great caution and tact.
38. There was also broad preliminary agreement among the members with IOE's proposal that the cap on its budget of 0.9 per cent of IFAD's PoLG be calculated on a three-year average of the PoLG rather than on a yearly basis. It was noted that the calculation of the cap on a yearly basis led to major discrepancies, given the front-loading of the PoLG in the first year of the replenishment cycle.
39. At the request of some members, IOE provided clarification with respect to the subregional evaluation of small countries with situations of fragility in West Africa foreseen for 2021, which should help IFAD to assess operations in several countries that share similar characteristics and to analyse how it had worked with them, how strategies had been adapted and what it had learned across these groups of countries. This new product should provide a more realistic view of how development efforts were being implemented in a regional context and how changes were being brought forward.
40. The budget document would be revised to incorporate comments received from the Evaluation Committee, the Audit Committee and the Board before being finalized for approval.



**Agenda item 10: Other business****Update on the provisional agenda for the 111<sup>th</sup> session of the Evaluation Committee**

41. Members took note of the oral update on the inclusion of an item in the provisional agenda for the 111<sup>th</sup> session of the Evaluation Committee concerning:
  - Consideration of the planned level 1 restructuring of the Niger portfolio, which would need to be moved from category B to category A.

**Closure of the session**

42. The Committee was reminded that the draft minutes would be circulated to members for their comments. Given the imminent commencement of the 130<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board, members would be requested to provide their comments within one working day.
43. The Chairperson thanked the participants for their contributions to the discussions and for having facilitated the timely closure of the session.