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## **Comments by the Senior Independent Advisors on the Thematic Evaluation of IFAD's Support for Smallholder Farmers' Adaptation to Climate Change**

### **Note to Evaluation Committee members**

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#### Technical questions:

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Evaluation Committee — 115<sup>th</sup> Session  
Rome, 19 October 2021

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**For: Review**

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## **Comments by the Senior Independent Advisors on the Thematic Evaluation of IFAD's Support for Smallholder Farmers' Adaptation to Climate Change**

### **Note to Executive Board representatives**

#### Focal points:

#### Technical questions:

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Executive Board —134<sup>th</sup> Session  
Rome, 14-16 December 2021

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**For: Review**

# **Comments by the Senior Independent Advisors on the Thematic Evaluation of IFAD's Support for Smallholder Farmers' Adaptation to Climate Change**

By Rob D. van den Berg, Professor, King's College London and Gonzalo Hernández Licona, Director, Multidimensional Poverty Network, University of Oxford

## **A. Summary**

1. This is a highly relevant evaluation for IFAD's role in tackling the increasingly urgent climate crisis, especially in supporting smallholder farmers in partner countries. The evaluation shows the changes that IFAD has adopted and provides a fresh perspective on how these can be further improved and strengthened, for which credible and valid evaluative evidence has been assembled and discussed.
2. We are especially appreciative of the interactive way in which this evaluation has taken shape and of the way in which the findings have been discussed with Management and stakeholders. The meticulous way in which the draft report and the evidence has been discussed with those who need to use its findings and recommendations add to the validity of the work done. As independent advisors, we have interacted with the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) on methodological issues and on ensuring that best international practice was followed in the evaluation of poverty, rural development and its linkages to climate change.
3. We very much recommend this evaluation report to its readers and hope IFAD and partner countries will use its valuable lessons.

## **B. Quality of the Evaluation**

4. As independent advisers, we were involved in looking at the draft report of the evaluation. This means that we did not have any input regarding the design and implementation of the evaluation. While an independent perspective could be useful in the design phase, we were pleased to see that a "core learning partnership" had been formed with relevant professional experts in IFAD, who were involved in all phases of the evaluation. Our assessment of the quality of the evaluation is based on our interaction with IOE on the draft report. We feel that the evidence gathered by this evaluation is credible, valid and relevant for the work of IFAD.

## **C. Context of the evaluation**

5. Our comments on the draft report are focused on two areas of major concern for IFAD: the climate crisis and rural poverty. On both issues, we feel the report has a lot to contribute to further thinking at IFAD, which would go beyond the confines of this evaluation. We believe the evaluation offers a solid foundation for future work and recommend its findings and recommendations for future action.

## **D. The climate crisis and its impact on smallholder farmers**

6. As is well known, the climate crisis will have its biggest impact on the poor and disadvantaged, and especially so in the least developed countries. It is therefore a key area of concern for IFAD. This report provides timely evidence and recommendations for future action. While the report is focused on resilience and adaptation to climate change, and its findings will help IFAD ensure better support to smallholder farmers, it should be noted that, in addition, farmers will need to be supported when extraordinary climate events take place, such as longer-term hot spells, more destructive hurricanes and similar weather phenomena, as well as flooding or extreme droughts. There is only so much that farmers can adapt to, and the time will come when more needs to be done than increasing the capacity of farmers to adapt to gradual climate changes. We hope the discussion of the report will include this forward-looking perspective.

7. While the focus on local adaptation in the report is important and useful, and IFAD is applauded for it, in our view there should also be interaction and exchange on national, regional and global adaptation issues and plans, in both directions: scaling-up solutions that work but also being informed about national and regional adaptation plans that, for example, would uproot farmers or transform agricultural practices. There should be mechanisms to learn throughout the portfolio, but also to learn from national or ecosystem level adaptation efforts. The evaluation demonstrates that IFAD should be up to this task.

## **E. Poverty issues**

8. In most countries, the incidence of poverty is higher in rural areas. There are various reasons for this, including low education, fewer possibilities to address risks, low mobility, low productivity and institutional challenges. The evaluation is right in assessing one of the most important elements that increases poverty in rural areas: the effects of climate change.
9. One of the most important findings of the evaluation is determining that most climate change adaptation (CCA) projects do not target the most vulnerable population. It will be important that new projects are able to target properly, using the best targeting tools available. These tools should include income-based indicators, but also multidimensional tools and indicators. IFAD should use multidimensional poverty measurements in the future.
10. The risk of climate change increases for poor families because they live in high-risk places. Lack of resources is not the only reason for this; it is also caused by bad institutional arrangements between poor families and authorities. Due to elections and corruption, politicians allow families to remain in risky settlements. This evaluation does not take this element into account, but we believe it is important for it to be addressed in further analysis, especially when the evaluation mentions that "Dialogue and learning to strengthen the enabling policy and regulatory environments at sub-national, national and international levels (e.g. UNFCCC) should also be a key programme effect."
11. It would also be important to assess, in the future, the different strategies adopted by families to reduce risk and improve well-being, including moving to other sectors in the economy. Poverty reduction in rural areas comes also from other income sources; smallholders should be flexible enough to make such a move.

## **F. Methodological issues**

12. This report presents a very solid approach to evaluation. Nevertheless, even solid approaches have their limitations, and the climate crisis has posed challenges in this regard, which will need to be taken up by IFAD and IOE. The report contains a very useful discussion of this in its main text (paras. 15-23). The further development of thinking about resilience and how it should be defined and measured, and on transformational change, adaptive capacities and so on should receive a further push through this evaluation. It is good to see that IFAD and IOE are working on these issues and are connecting to international initiatives in this regard. This has implications beyond climate issues: as is noted in paragraph 24, climate resilience is intricately linked to overall development resilience, especially of the rural poor.

## **G. Conclusion**

13. The report will provide a valuable resource for IFAD to deepen and enhance its approach to CCA and resilience. The climate crisis will hit the poorest hardest; this puts an emphasis on how IFAD looks at and measures poverty and includes this in its strategy to support adaptation and resilience regarding climate change in smallholder farming. The many findings and lessons draw together information from a range of sources and deserve to be widely read.

14. Even if IFAD does well on CCA, climate change remains a huge global problem. We can overcome the effects of climate change, but the root problem is there and it is growing. IFAD and the other United Nations agencies, taking into account the United Nations reform, should seriously work with countries to mitigate the problem. Smallholders' adaptation to climate change will greatly benefit if the world adopts a new and concrete strategy for climate change.