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Minutes of the 115th Session of the Evaluation Committee

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Minutes of the 115th Session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 115th session – held both in person and virtually on 19 October 2021 – are reflected in the present minutes.
2. Once approved by the Committee, the minutes will be shared with the Executive Board for information.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the session and election of the Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee

3. The Secretary of IFAD welcomed participants and informed them that further to the deliberations at the 114th session of the Evaluation Committee, he had conducted a straw poll with respect to the Chair of the Committee and had shared the information gathered with the two candidates, Cameroon (with Egypt) and India.
4. The representative of Cameroon informed Committee members that, in agreement with Egypt and bearing in mind the desire to ensure a productive and consensus-based Evaluation Committee, they wished to withdraw their candidacy. India was therefore appointed by consensus as Chair for the term of office of the current Committee composition. Her Excellency Dr Neena Malhotra, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of India to IFAD delivered a statement, expressing her appreciation for the support of the Committee members in electing India to the Chair.
5. The session was then formally opened by Mr Bommakanti Rajender, Minister (Agriculture), Alternate Permanent Representative of the Republic of India to IFAD. The session was attended by Committee members for Cameroon, France, Indonesia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Mexico and the Netherlands. Observers were present from Angola, Canada, China, Denmark, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom, as well as from the World Food Programme. The session was also attended by the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); Deputy Director, IOE; Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department; Associate Vice-President, Strategy and Knowledge Department; Associate Vice-President, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Controller, Financial Operations Department and Officer-in-Charge, External Relations and Governance Department; Director, Operational Policy and Results Division; Director, Research and Impact Assessment Division; Director, Global Engagement, Partnership and Resource Mobilization Division; Associate Vice-President and General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel; Officer-in-Charge, Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion Division; Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2021/115/W.P.1/Rev.2)

Key messages:

- For future sessions of the Evaluation Committee, a schedule of work will be posted on the Member States Interactive Platform as an addendum to the provisional agenda.

6. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2021/115/W.P.1/Rev.2, noting the change in the order of the items to be presented, and the inclusion of the presentation from Management of the digital Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) for 2021 under the agenda item "other business".

Agenda item 3: Results-based work programme and budget for 2022 and indicative plan for 2023-2024 of IOE (EC 2021/115/W.P.2)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee commended IOE for the good level of execution of the 2021 budget, and endorsed the proposed results-based work programme and budget for 2022 and indicative plan for 2023-2024 of IOE.

7. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the proposed results-based work programme and budget for 2022 and indicative plan for 2023-2024 of IOE, as contained in document EC 2021/115/W.P.2. Committee members commended the fact that IOE's budget had been optimized and kept well below the 0.9 per cent ceiling.
8. Members particularly welcomed the attention given to inclusiveness and cultural responsiveness throughout the work programme and indicative plan. This was of particular importance given the increased engagement in fragile and conflict-affected states and the approach to gender-sensitive budgeting. Noting that nutrition was the sole mainstreaming theme that had not undergone evaluation, one member encouraged a focus on IFAD's niche and comparative advantage in increasing access to affordable nutritious foods for the most vulnerable. The Committee appreciated the ongoing efforts by IOE to make its products more accessible by providing evidence on specific topics in response to ad hoc requests.
9. IOE provided additional information on efforts to ensure quality of data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, when IOE staff could not travel to the field, and advised that IOE was exploring means of striking the right balance between staff and consultants, including by recruiting more full-time evaluation staff in order not to overstretch current staff in terms of workload.
10. With regard to learning, IOE informed the Committee that learning events were being jointly organized with Management to reflect on results and share knowledge. The new Evaluation Manual was under preparation by IOE in collaboration with Management. It would be finalized this year and presented to the Committee at its session in March 2022.

Agenda item 6: Joint Evaluation of Collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies (EC 2021/115/W.P.5)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee welcomed the Joint Evaluation of Collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies (RBAs), and endorsed the main findings and recommendations.
- Members emphasized the need to promote RBA collaboration at country level within the framework of the broader United Nations development system reform.
- Committee members underscored the need for better understanding of the different, although complementary, mandates of the three agencies and to identify where overlapping exists and where incremental joint activities can address inefficiencies/duplication and build on synergies and complementarities.
- Members stressed the importance of sharing technical expertise and data among the RBAs.

11. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the Joint Evaluation of Collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies, as contained in document EC 2021/115/W.P.5, together with Management's oral response to the findings and

recommendations of the joint evaluation. Overall, Committee members endorsed the main findings and supported the recommendations made.

12. Members emphasized the need to promote RBA collaboration at country and regional level within the framework of the broader United Nations development system reform. In this regard, the outcomes of the Food Systems Summit provided an opportunity to review the whole concept of collaboration within an overarching framework. Members asked Management whether there was scope for developing a joint results framework to assign joint accountability for the delivery of results.
13. Noting that one of the main recommendations of the evaluation was the call for a review of the RBA's memorandum of understanding, members considered how best to approach this. While the agencies had different operational and business models, their mandates were complementary. Members underscored the importance of a better understanding of the different mandates of the three agencies and where overlapping exists, and the need to identify potential areas where the comparative advantage of each could be leveraged.
14. Committee members underlined the need to share technical expertise and called for overarching rather than competing strategies in certain areas (e.g. gender, nutrition, private sector and microfinance). They also highlighted the need to share big data collected by the three agencies and related analyses to avoid duplication.
15. IOE noted how the evaluation found good examples of data-sharing as part of the positive broader knowledge-sharing and exchange of lessons learned and good practices among the three agencies. Management confirmed they would continue working to strengthen the mechanisms for information and knowledge exchange. From an operational perspective, there had been several examples of collaboration, not least on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. RBA collaboration seemed to work better when governments took on a strong leadership role, communicating clear expectations, including on the need to work together.
16. Management also noted that, rather than providing a stand-alone RBA response, the three agencies had been working together within the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) to provide a coordinated response to agriculture, food security and rural poverty. Management acknowledged the importance of the joint results framework in country under the UNSCDF. IFAD had mapped its results to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 and 2, to show how it is contributing to those SDGs.

Agenda item 5: Approach Paper for the Second Corporate-level Evaluation of IFAD's Decentralization Experience (EC 2021/115/W.P.4)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee welcomed the approach paper and emphasized that the evaluation should prioritize the identification of cost efficiencies in delivering on IFAD's mandate.
- Committee members also stressed the need to evaluate less tangible elements, such as culture and leadership, and to consider what would be the level of acceptable risk, particularly in fragile and conflict situations.

17. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the Approach Paper for the Second Corporate-level Evaluation of IFAD's Decentralization Experience, as contained in document EC 2021/115/W.P.4.
18. Committee members stressed the need to evaluate not just tangible elements such as business processes and costs, but also less tangible elements around culture, leadership and ways of working, the skill mix and professional backgrounds of field staff, diversity, etc. IOE should also consider the level of acceptable risk based on

the risk appetite as set by the Board, particularly in conflict situations, and assess the timeframe needed for the decentralization to contribute to development outcomes, as it was unlikely to show results in the short term.

19. Committee members emphasized that the evaluation should assess cost efficiencies and consider the value added of decentralization for non-lending activities. The evaluation would also provide a good opportunity to identify the functions that should or should not be decentralized. Management looked forward to an assessment of the impact on areas that it hoped to improve through the proximity and adaptability afforded by decentralization, namely, government ownership, sustainability and efficiency.
20. IOE confirmed that they were planning country and field visits to ascertain whether decentralization had made a difference on the ground. Action taken to address recommendations made in the 2016 evaluation would be assessed and IOE would also look at the impact of decentralization on programme performance both from a quantitative perspective through ratings on several indicators, and from a qualitative standpoint, through interviews and qualitative data and analysis.

Agenda item 7: Updated Development Effectiveness Framework (EC 2021/115/W.P.6)

Key messages:

- Committee members emphasized the importance of incorporating lessons learned into project design and implementation, and adopting an adaptive management approach, as proposed in the updated Development Effectiveness Framework (DEF).

21. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the updated DEF prepared by Management, as contained in document EC 2021/115/W.P.6, together with IOE comments, which were provided orally.
22. In particular, Committee members welcomed the shift in focus with respect to the 2016 DEF from the production of evidence to the utilization of evidence for quality decision-making and enhancement of development effectiveness. Committee members were pleased by the learning aspect of the updated framework, but emphasized the need to share such learning and incorporate it into programmes and projects.
23. Management confirmed their agreement with the proposal that IOE should independently review the Results Management Framework for the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD13). One of the biggest challenges related to the capacity-building of project management units (PMUs) and government staff on monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Management had redoubled its efforts in training PMUs, not only on M&E, but also on results-based management and on more practical project management issues like procurement and financial management.
24. Management stressed how the updated DEF enhances the focus on using real-time data for adaptive management. The updated DEF also foresees linking and synchronizing M&E with impact assessment activities as part of project survey implementation, thus shifting from M&E to monitoring for evaluation (M4E). Management highlighted that learning mechanisms were already in place. For example, IFAD produces significant knowledge through impact assessments, which then feeds into the preparation of project completion reports. This knowledge is disseminated through dedicated knowledge products and provides lessons learned and data for future project design. Management also confirmed that a module for country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) was being built into IFAD's Operational Results Management System to measure results and effectiveness at

the country level, based on the same approach used for projects. This would also be useful for capturing the results of non-lending activities like partnership, knowledge management and policy dialogue.

25. The consultative process through which COSOPs were developed represented a key opportunity to discuss lessons learned with governments. In response to a query about the outcomes of the United Nations Food Systems Summit, Management would look for opportunities to respond to government demands in line with the national pathways through the programme of loans and grants, upcoming country strategies and amending existing country strategies,.

Agenda item 4: Thematic Evaluation of IFAD's Support for Smallholder Farmers' Adaptation to Climate Change (EC 2021/115/W.P.3 + Add.1 + Add.2)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee commended the quality of the evaluation and welcomed the positive outcomes while acknowledging that there was room for improvement, particularly with regard to targeting of the most vulnerable populations.
- Committee members emphasized the need for a conceptual framework and operational guidance on climate change adaptation.
- The importance of tracking progress and impact with regard to increased resilience and adaptation was underscored.
- Members also stressed the need to increase in-house climate adaptation capacity.

26. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the Thematic Evaluation of IFAD's Support for Smallholder Farmers' Adaptation to Climate Change, as contained in document EC 2021/115/W.P.3, as well as Management's response and the comments by the senior independent advisers, contained in the addenda. Committee members particularly welcomed the rigorous methodology and timeliness of the evaluation, given the current climate change crisis, which represented one of the most pressing issues of our times. Members recognized this as an area where IFAD had a comparative advantage and possessed the mandate, capacity and skills to become the go-to agency in the United Nations system on climate adaptation. However, in order to make such a step-change, resources would be needed and a strategic discussion on next steps, alignment of resources and potential trade-offs should be held.
27. Members noted how the evaluation highlighted the changes that IFAD had adopted in dealing with the climate crisis, and provided a fresh perspective on how these could be further improved and strengthened, including through better targeting of vulnerable rural populations.
28. Acknowledging the challenge of measuring progress in resilience and adaptation, members welcomed Management's efforts to develop a conceptual framework to measure resilience and the explanation of the methodology adopted to track progress. Management noted how the results of the impact assessments for IFAD10 indicated a 13 per cent increase in resilience for project beneficiaries, with an estimated 26 million people having increased their resilience, including to climatic shocks, in the areas of IFAD intervention. This represented a huge advance. Management agreed with IOE that IFAD should look at wider impacts on landscapes as well as on people. Management also acknowledged the need to strengthen capacity to implement climate responses and noted the need for additional resources.

29. The Committee emphasized the need for a conceptual framework and operational guidance on climate change adaptation, which would also strengthen IFAD's ability to assess organizational progress and performance. This could be an opportunity for RBAs to share their work or even to develop a shared RBA conceptual framework. The principle of simplicity should be central to such a framework so as to ensure the development of a tool that was just as understandable to clients, partners and local stakeholders as it was to experts at headquarters.
30. Members also stressed the need to increase in-house climate adaptation capacity (e.g. GIS skills) in order to fill the "adaptation gap", and the need to highlight the important role of non-lending activities in adaptation.
31. Referring to the "harm effect" identified in almost 50 per cent of the cases assessed, some members called for caution in drawing such conclusions. IOE clarified the interpretation of "do no harm", noting that where cases did not meet the "do no harm" indicator, it did not necessarily mean that harm had been done, but rather that the likelihood of harmful outcomes may have been increased. IOE recalled how development interventions, including agricultural interventions, had an impact on ecosystems and the environment, not just on people, and that those consequences needed to be managed and offset. IFAD needed to develop methodologies, guidance and rigorous indicators to address this issue, which was both an accountability exercise and a learning exercise. IOE also noted the need for more resources to address these challenges.

Agenda item 8: Provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2022 (EC 2021/115/W.P.7)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee endorsed the provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2022.

32. The Evaluation Committee welcomed and endorsed the provisional agenda, as contained in document EC 2021/115/W.P.7.
33. One member suggested that consideration of the evaluation of the Indonesia country strategy and programme evaluation could provide an opportunity to discuss lessons emerging from the RBA joint country strategy pilot.

Agenda item 9: Annex I of the Revised IFAD Evaluation Policy (EC 2021/115/W.P.8 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee agreed that no additional revisions to annex I of the Revised IFAD Evaluation Policy were required, and endorsed the submission of the annex to the 134th session of the Executive Board for approval.

34. In response to the Executive Board's request at its 132nd session, IOE had presented, at the 113th session of the Evaluation Committee, the findings of a benchmarking exercise on the practices of independent evaluation offices in other international financial institutions and members of the Evaluation Cooperation Group of Multilateral Development Banks regarding the selection and appointment of heads of evaluation.
35. Based on the results of the benchmarking exercise, the Evaluation Committee was invited to review annex I of the Revised Evaluation Policy, as contained in document EC 2021/115/W.P.8, and its addendum, as tasked by the Executive Board.

36. One Committee member sought feedback from other members on the practice of having two meetings with the President of IFAD (one with the Chair of the selection panel and one with the Executive Board) and the potential impact on the independence of the process. Committee members agreed that no additional revisions to annex I of the Revised IFAD Evaluation Policy were required, and endorsed the submission of the annex to the 134th session of the Executive Board for approval.

Agenda item 10: Other business

37. Management presented the digital RIDE 2021 website, which displays information contained in the RIDE in a more graphic and intuitive way, thus facilitating access, reading and analysis of the data contained in the report.

Closure of the session

38. The Committee was reminded that the Office of the Secretary would share the draft minutes of the session, inclusive of key messages shared by Committee members, for clearance. The minutes once finalized would be submitted for information to the Executive Board at its 134th session in December 2021.