
Minutes of the 118th session of the Evaluation Committee

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Minutes of the 118th session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 118th session – held both in presence and virtually on 2 September 2022 – are reflected in the present minutes.
2. The minutes approved by the Committee will be shared with the Executive Board for information.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the session

3. The session was attended by Committee members for France, Indonesia, Ireland, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria and Switzerland. Observers were present from Canada, China, Dominican Republic, Germany, United Kingdom and Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The session was attended by the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); the Deputy Director, IOE; the Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department; the Director, Operational Policy and Results Division; the Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.
4. Mr Readwell Musopole, Deputy Director of Planning, Ministry of Agriculture, and Mr Nations Msowoya, Director Debt and Aid, Ministry of Finance, were present during the Committee's deliberations on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for Malawi to ensure that the deliberations benefited from the Government's perspective.

Agenda item 2: Election of the Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee (EC 2022/118/W.P.2/Rev.1)

5. The Committee unanimously elected Mexico as Chair of the Evaluation Committee for the term of office of the current Committee composition, in accordance with rule 1.3 of the Revised Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Evaluation Committee of the Executive Board. The representative for Mexico, Ambassador Miguel Jorge García Winder, Permanent Representative of the United Mexican States to IFAD, assumed the role of Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda (EC 2022/118/W.P.1 + Add.1)

6. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2022/118/W.P.1 and its addendum.

Agenda item 4: 2022 Annual Report on the Independent Evaluation of IFAD (EC 2022/118/W.P.3 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- While welcoming the overall positive trend in project performance, Evaluation Committee members expressed concern regarding the continued underperformance in the areas of project efficiency, government performance and sustainability, as well as the impact on rural poverty and gender equality.
- Members highlighted the importance of sustainability in ensuring long-term impact.
- Members called for greater attention to the drivers of fragility, such as weak public institutions, conflict and access to land, an analysis of which was fundamental for an effective food systems approach.

7. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the twentieth edition of the new-look Annual Report on the Independent Evaluation of IFAD (ARIE), covering evaluations conducted by IOE in 2021, as contained in document EC 2022/118/W.P.3, together with Management's response, as contained in its addendum. Members commended IOE on the report, particularly on its inclusiveness and strong focus on learning by

extracting findings and lessons learned from the evaluations. The inclusion of more focused recommendations could facilitate follow-up in the future.

8. Members noted that IFAD continued to be a strong performer, with the majority of projects rated moderately satisfactory or better across the evaluation criteria. Members also acknowledged IFAD's good performance in the areas of environment and natural resource management, and climate change adaptation, but added a note of caution that IFAD should not lose sight of its *raison d'être*, namely agricultural and rural development. Members also welcomed the strong focus on community-driven development projects and agreed with the need to use longer timeframes to track results.
9. Members pointed out that efficiency, government performance and sustainability remained the areas with the lowest percentage of positive ratings. In particular, they expressed concern with regard to performance on criteria related to gender equality and impact on rural poverty. Furthermore, impact generated by projects would lead to limited change if it was not sustainable. The unique context created by the COVID-19 pandemic represented a useful opportunity to focus on identifying both the obstacles to and the drivers of sustainable impact.
10. A holistic assessment of fragility, with due attention to the interrelated drivers of fragility (weak public institutions, insecurity and conflict, and access to land), was key to successful interventions in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Members expressed concern about the lower performance levels of projects in West and Central Africa on all evaluation criteria compared to other regions, and called on IFAD to gain a better understanding of the root causes of fragility.
11. Members noted the report's finding that while in-country presence was important, without technical expertise and deployment of senior IFAD staff in-country, it was not sufficient to improve implementation performance. Members also made reference to the observation that donor support for Rome-based agency (RBA) collaboration was not consistently strong, which highlighted the disconnect between donors' advocacy on RBA collaboration and how it was supported in practice.
12. Management reiterated their commitment to improve performance "across the board", noting, however, the impact of scarce resources, particularly for non-lending activities and also the higher costs incurred for operations in fragile situations. In line with the Twelfth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD12) commitments, action plans were under development to address areas of weakness such as monitoring and evaluation (M&E), sustainability, efficiency and scaling up. The pandemic had had an impact on staffing in country offices and efforts were ongoing to rebuild staff expertise, with considerable investment in upskilling and training. Management underlined the urgent need for an action plan in order to fill the current high number of vacant positions, and called on IOE to evaluate the long-term impacts of the pandemic. Management also encouraged IOE to look at both inputs (resources available) and outputs (results) while evaluating performance, as IFAD projects were delivering increasing results with fewer resources available for design and supervision.
13. With regard to fragility, Management stressed the need for an increased focus on skills to engage in fragile contexts, greater adaptability to respond to specific needs in design and implementation and greater in-country presence. On regional trends, Management noted that these very much reflected the fragility in institutional quality on the ground.
14. With regard to gender equality and empowerment, Management explained that indicators were improving in the current cohort of projects, but it would be important to monitor the situation to ensure that the positive trend was maintained.

15. IOE acknowledged the point made by Management on suggested areas for more granular analysis, such as the effects of COVID-19 on the IFAD portfolio, and conflict-affected and fragile situations. IOE looked forward to presenting the corporate-level evaluation on decentralization to the Evaluation Committee in March 2023, and to the Executive Board in April of that year.

16. **Agenda item 5: Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness for 2022 (EC 2022/118/W.P.4 + Add.1)**

Key messages:

- Members welcomed the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) and valued the detailed reporting on the mainstreaming issues. Management stated that from next year onwards, the mainstreaming results would be reported in more detail in a stand-alone document accompanying the RIDE.
- Members called for better and more integrated planning and streamlining of non-lending activities, which could improve efficiency and impact.
- Members recommended a stronger emphasis on food systems in future reports
- Management and IOE agreed that the adoption of the new evaluation manual would help align the definitions and methodological approaches used by independent and self-evaluations upon which the ARIE and RIDE were based.

17. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the RIDE, as contained in document EC 2022/118/W.P.4, together with IOE's comments, as contained in its addendum. Members particularly valued the detailed reporting on the mainstreaming issues, and were pleased to see examples of IFAD leveraging its knowledge and experience in events such as COP26, and examples of innovation such as using social media for knowledge exchange as well as leveraging climate financing for impact on the ground.
18. Overall, members welcomed the positive results achieved by IFAD, particularly in the areas of environment and natural resource management, climate change adaptation, youth and decent work, as well as improvements in efficiency and sustainability. Members also praised the delivery of the programme of loans and grants and the overall improvement in the performance of completed projects in comparison with IFAD10.
19. Members particularly welcomed the attention paid to scaling up and sustainability, with evidence showing that the quality of policy engagement was correlated to both these areas, along with beneficiary participation, South-South and Triangular Cooperation and the quality of project management units. In this regard, members agreed that non-lending activities such as policy engagement and knowledge management should be strengthened, as they improved impact by fostering scaling up and sustainability. At the same time, members called for better and more integrated planning and streamlining of non-lending activities, without necessarily increasing financial allocations. Members also recommended a greater emphasis on food systems in future RIDE editions, as this could help revisit the role of government effectiveness at different levels, for example project performance.
20. Members appreciated the admission that some of the performance indicators may be overstated because of the reliance on remote missions during the pandemic. They recalled a similar note of caution in the ARIE about remote data collection. Members therefore suggested there was a possible need to validate the data

collected and the resulting findings. As in previous years, members noted some differences in performance trends between the RIDE and ARIE.

21. Finally, members questioned the tendency in the report to blame weaknesses in the areas where targets have not been met on exogenous factors beyond Management's control, such as COVID-19, liquidity constraints and the short-term effects of institutional reforms. Members encouraged Management to identify and present areas needing additional resources to improve or maintain performance.
22. Management informed the Committee that the scaling-up strategy was being updated to embed scaling-up ambitions in each country's country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP), in project design and at start-up. With better M&E systems, COSOP results would be reviewed regularly to allow for real-time adjustments to implementation as needed. COSOPs would also aim to align policy with strategic country objectives.
23. Regarding the adoption of the new evaluation manual and work on harmonizing ratings and descriptors, Management and IOE agreed that further alignment between the two reports may be possible. In Management's view, the RIDE and ARIE complemented each other as they each reviewed different time spans. Referring to its written comments on the RIDE, IOE reiterated that the practice among international financial institutions (IFIs) was to use independent evaluation ratings for their equivalent of the RIDE, not self-evaluation ratings. IOE recommended that the same be done at IFAD in the future. On data quality and reliability, Management observed that overall remote data collection and reporting had been good, and any distortion would be corrected within six months through field missions.
24. Given the importance of the ARIE and RIDE documents, it was proposed that ample time be allowed for their discussion in future Evaluation Committee sessions.

**Agenda item 6: 2022 President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions
(EC 2022/118/W.P.5 + Add.1 + Add.2)**

Key messages:

- Members requested Management to present a timeline indicating when the online tracking tool, announced last year, would be implemented.
- Members noted the difference, albeit minor, between Management and IOE on the number of recommendations considered as fully followed up.

25. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the nineteenth edition of the President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA), as contained in documents EC 2022/118/W.P.5 and Add.1, together with IOE comments, as contained in Add.2. The 2022 PRISMA tracks Management's follow-up on recommendations made by IOE, based on evaluations conducted in 2020–2021.
26. Members requested Management to present a timeline indicating when the online tracking tool, announced last year, would be introduced. Members noted a slight difference between Management and IOE on the number of recommendations that were considered as followed up. Finally, members asked Management to explain the renewed concept of innovation for development contained in the document.
27. Management replied that detailed design of the online tracking tool had commenced, and the final design document was expected to be available by the end of September. The tool should be rolled out in 2023, depending on capital

budget availability and capacity within the Information and Communications Technology Division.

28. Management explained that, as of this year, IFAD had adopted a new definition of innovation, developed by the Change, Delivery and Innovation Unit (CDI). It referred to a new process, product or approach that adds value in delivering sustainable, equitable and inclusive solutions to development challenges. The definition is broadly in line with the one contained in the new evaluation manual.
29. Both Management and IOE acknowledged that the differences in the number of recommendations considered completed were minor, and decreasing over time, with only two recommendations moved back from fully implemented to ongoing in 2022, based on IOE's independent review of the PRISMA. IOE pointed out that PRISMA was a Management document on which IOE provided independent comments. As such, space needed to be preserved to analyse differences, when required, and to safeguard the principle of independence, which was so key to the work of IOE.

Agenda item 7: Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Republic of Malawi (EC 2022/118/W.P.6)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee welcomed this first CSPE for Malawi, and agreed with the report's findings, which had informed the development of the new COSOP.
- Members reiterated the importance of a structured approach to knowledge management, and the need for better and more effective integration of non-lending activities to facilitate scaling up, impact and sustainability.
- Evaluation Committee members recommended that all future CSPEs include lessons learned on RBA collaboration.

30. The Evaluation Committee welcomed this first CSPE for Malawi, covering the period from 2011 to 2021, as contained in document EC 2022/118/W.P.6. Committee members agreed with the report's positive findings about the strategic focus and policy alignment of the COSOP.
31. Members took note of the statements delivered on behalf of the Government of Malawi by Mr Readwell Musopole, Deputy Director of Planning, Ministry of Agriculture, and Mr Nations Msowoya, Director of Debt and Aid, Ministry of Finance.
32. Members particularly welcomed the focus on improved access to land, seen as a driver for irrigation uptake and agricultural commercialization, as well as a stepping stone to sustainable natural resource management. Members highlighted the many opportunities for collaboration, joint programming and leveraging of finance once in-country presence was strengthened, as recommended in the report.
33. Members noted the limited progress in addressing the dichotomy between sustainable transformation of agriculture and addressing food security among the most vulnerable farmers. They welcomed the recommendation for a more explicit approach to food security through crop diversification, more efficient targeting of subsidy programmes henceforth, which would provide a more enabling environment for foreign investment in agriculture to stimulate rural job creation.
34. It was noted that the report reinforced a common thread throughout the session, namely the importance of a structured approach to knowledge management, and the need for better and more effective integration of non-lending activities to facilitate improved scaling up, impact and sustainability. Members also recommended that all future CSPEs include lessons learned on RBA collaboration.

35. Management confirmed that the recommendations made by IOE had been taken on board in the new COSOP, and noted in particular the potential for partnerships with local NGOs, the private sector and other actors, as well as more structured engagement with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme. IOE acknowledged the excellent collaboration with the Government of Malawi and Management, noting that many of the lessons learned were also applicable to global operations.

Agenda item 8: Preview of the results-based work programme and budget for 2023, and indicative plan for 2024–2025 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (EC 2022/118/W.P.7)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee endorsed the preview of the IOE results-based work programme and budget for 2023 and indicative plan for 2024–2025.

36. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the preview of the IOE results-based work programme and budget for 2023, and indicative plan for 2024–2025, as contained in document EC 2022/118/W.P.7. Following the discussions with the Evaluation Committee at the present session, and subsequently with the Executive Board in September, IOE would develop the final work programme, budget and indicative plan for discussion at the 119th session of the Evaluation Committee.
37. Members welcomed the thorough programme of work and budget presented by IOE, and were supportive of the slight budget increase. Planned evaluations on gender equality, IFAD's financial architecture, nutrition and food security were of interest, as was the project performance evaluation of the Rural Development Programme Phase II in the Solomon Islands, which would lead the way for the subregional evaluation on Pacific small island developing states (SIDS). For the latter, members suggested a consultative process in order to incorporate the perspectives of SIDS stakeholders at the design stage.
38. In response to queries, IOE clarified that staff costs could not be further reduced given the increasing demand for more strategic evaluations (from Management and as a part of IOE's multi-year strategy), and pointed out that IOE evaluations were led by staff, not by consultants, which ensured quality and was overall more cost-effective.
39. On outreach, IOE had launched a dedicated website, which had registered about 38,000 hits thus far. The objective was to ensure that the work of IFAD was depicted and disseminated among all countries as well as other IFI networks, the Evaluation Cooperation Group, the United Nations system, and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC).

Agenda item 9: IFAD11 Impact Assessment Report (EC 2022/118/W.P.8 + Add.1)

Key messages:

- The Evaluation Committee welcomed the IFAD11 Impact Assessment Report and were pleased to note that IFAD had exceeded all but one of the targets set in the IFAD11 Results Management Framework.
- Members fully endorsed the report's recommendation that future projects should have a stronger theory of change focusing on nutrition and embedding behavioural change and behavioural science components.
- Members called for more coherence in the findings and recommendations provided across the reports presented by IOE and Management.

40. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the IFAD11 Impact Assessment (IA) Report, as contained in document EC 2022/118/W.P.8., together with IOE's comments, as contained in the addendum. Committee members commended the work done by the Research and Impact Assessment Division (RIA) in producing a very useful and informative report, which provided evidence of IFAD's positive impact on the ground.
41. Members were pleased to note that IFAD had exceeded all the targets set in the IFAD11 Results Management Framework, except for the one on nutrition. Members were particularly pleased with the metrics on increased income, given the particularly challenging contexts in which IFAD works. Members also expressed their appreciation for the fact that, in addition to measuring corporate-level impacts, the report also made clear and straightforward recommendations for future project design, implementation and strategies.
42. Members fully endorsed the report's recommendation that future projects should have a stronger theory of change focusing on nutrition and embedding behavioural change components.
43. Given that significant impacts in the area of nutrition may not be detectable in the short- or medium-term, members suggested that timeframes and commitments relating to intermediate results would facilitate timely oversight and guidance on this issue.
44. Members requested clarification about the absence of baseline data for conducting impact assessments. Members also suggested using a more conservative projection method which would be less likely to be criticized, thereby minimizing the risk of overestimation of the number of beneficiaries reached and ensuring credibility.
45. Considering the reports submitted to the current session of the Evaluation Committee, members noted the lack of coherence between the findings presented in the RIDE, ARIE and other work. While this could be attributed to different perspectives and the use of different methodologies, it hampered the ability to distil the essence of the messages and draw clear recommendations.
46. Management clarified that it would be preferable to have baseline data rather than relying only on ex post data collected from beneficiaries and a rigorous comparison group towards project completion. However, budget and time constraints for corporate reporting meant that ex ante baselines were not feasible and that quasi-experimental methods were used. Management clarified that in the face of this constraint and striving to maintain high scientific standards, they focused on using data from sources such as national censuses, administrative data and geographic information system data to establish a set of comparable units that would allow them to measure the impacts brought about by interventions. Management also specified that the sample selection took place at two different levels – location level and household level –and that the selection was validated through key informants and local experts. The rigorous approach taken was validated and illustrated by the balance tests and "bootstrapping" that Management had undertaken to show the absence of bias in the statistical variables utilized, as shown in the IA Report. Sensitivity analysis and robustness checks also corroborated the validity of the results.
47. Members queried whether the aggregate impacts may be stating the results differently because the number of projects showing positive results, which varied among countries, may be playing a big role in these meta-analysis estimates. Management clarified that actually meta-analysis mitigated this concern as its methodology was not a simple vote-count, which would unfairly weight data. Instead, meta-analysis minimized any such risk because it took into consideration the standard errors of the individual estimates (i.e. the confidence with which these

estimates could be considered). With meta-analysis the data for all the projects in the sample were pooled before the aggregate effect was re-estimated.

48. On the issue of inconsistencies among the three reports (RIDE, ARIE and the IA Report), Management recognized this to be true to a certain extent (given that the methodologies and approaches differed from each other), and noted that the differences among the reports also provided an opportunity to learn, to exchange knowledge, and to improve. Moving forward, Management urged Member States to consider the need for sufficient resources to be able to incorporate all the suggestions and to collect baseline data to design ex ante impact assessments, and investigate other issues (including cost-effectiveness, last-mile issues and behavioural science issues) that could increase the impacts of IFAD investments. Working with colleagues in projects to collect good end-line data would not only enable IFAD to do rigorous cost effectiveness analyses, but also complement the impact assessments by expanding the sample size, which would contribute to reporting using larger samples and a richer set of indicators.

Agenda item 10: Other business

49. On behalf of the Evaluation Committee, the Chairperson expressed appreciation for President Houngbou's work and his dedication to IFAD. He assured the President-elect that the Evaluation Committee was committed to working with Management to further IFAD's mandate.
50. The Committee agreed to include an item on the agenda for the next Evaluation Committee regarding the process for the election of the President of IFAD.

Closure of the session

51. The Committee was reminded that the Office of the Secretary would share the draft minutes of the session, inclusive of the key messages shared by Committee members, for clearance. Once finalized, the minutes would be submitted to the Executive Board for information at its 136th session.