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## **Minutes of the 122<sup>nd</sup> session of the Evaluation Committee**

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## Minutes of the 122<sup>nd</sup> session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The deliberations of the Evaluation Committee at its 122<sup>nd</sup> session – held both in presence and virtually on 5 September 2023 – are reflected in the present minutes.
2. The minutes, as approved by the Committee members, will be shared with the Executive Board for information.

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

3. The Chair opened the session by welcoming the Committee members.
4. The session was attended by members from Egypt, France, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Mexico (Chair), Nigeria and Switzerland. Observers were present from Angola, Austria, Canada, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. 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 Associate Vice-President, Strategy and Knowledge Department; the Director, Operational Policy and Results Division; the Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.
5. Mr Mei Hongyong, Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations agencies for food and agriculture, participated in the deliberations on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the People's Republic of China. The representative's presence ensured that the deliberations benefited from the Government's perspective on the evaluation.

### **Agenda item 2. Adoption of the agenda (EC 2023/122/W.P.1)**

6. The Committee adopted the agenda as contained in document EC 2023/122/W.P.1.

### **Agenda item 3. Country strategy and programme evaluation for the People's Republic of China (EC 2023/122/W.P.2)**

#### **Key messages:**

- The CSPE provides important inputs that will facilitate the consultations between IFAD and the People's Republic of China aimed at reviewing and discussing the country's overall economic situation, development of the next country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) and the articulation of a sustainable and inclusive transition pathway for China that is context-specific and aligned with the Executive Board-approved policy for countries approaching graduation<sup>1</sup>.
- The importance of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) in capturing and disseminating knowledge and generating global public goods was emphasized. Members noted in this respect the need to clarify the role for IFAD's multi-country office in Beijing.
- Members recognized the need for flexibility in COSOPs, to allow for a timely response to evolving country priorities and contexts.

7. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the CSPE for the People's Republic of China, the second such evaluation conducted in the country, covering the period from 2014 to 2022, as contained in document EC 2023/122/W.P.2. The agreement at

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<sup>1</sup> This includes reviewing and discussing the capacity to sustain long-term development without further recourse to IFAD's financial assistance.

completion point between the People's Republic of China and IFAD would be shared with Committee members upon signature.

8. Members took note of the statement delivered on behalf of the Government by Mr Mei Hongyong, Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations agencies for food and agriculture.
9. Acknowledging the rapid development experienced by China in the period under evaluation, members, IOE and Management recognized the strong Government leadership and the support of IFAD in addressing inclusive rural value chains and poverty reduction.
10. Committee members stressed the importance of clarifying the role for IFAD's multi-country office in Beijing in SSTC. Management agreed that the new COSOP should include a focus on leveraging IFAD's partnership with China to generate global public goods and disseminate knowledge.
11. On partnerships, it was important to consolidate and further strengthen IFAD's cooperation with United Nations agencies and international financial institutions on the ground. IFAD's presence in China had raised its visibility as a partner, including with the other Rome-based agencies. IFAD was actively engaged in the development of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and its partnership with UN Women had led to benefits in advancing gender, at the country level.
12. Members welcomed recommendations that IFAD's comparative advantage on environmental sustainability and climate change resilience, focus on marginal areas and smallholders, in accordance with IFAD's mandate, while ensuring flexibility in the design of the 2025 COSOP to respond to the rapid changing framework and the socioeconomic context.
13. In terms of recommendation 5, on facilitating China's access to IFAD's Borrowed Resource Access Mechanism (BRAM), members noted that the question of the BRAM modality goes beyond the China CSPE and underlined the need for IFAD to develop a clearer communication strategy for the BRAM, so borrowing countries have a better understanding of it. Management concurred and advised that the BRAM was oversubscribed, with demand considerably outstripping supply.
14. Members noted that the CSPE was the first such report on one of the eight IFAD Member States in the process to approach graduation, and together with other such reports would generate important lessons learned. Management advised that the steps agreed in the policy for countries approaching graduation were being followed in the case of China. The steps include consultation with the Government of China, outlining the country's trajectory towards achieving graduation from IFAD finance and establishing benchmarks to be achieved. An important consideration for the new COSOP would be the extent to which funding new projects should contribute to development and/or strengthening of sustainable rural institutions, promote global or regional public goods, foster innovations or demonstrate their scalability.

**Agenda item 4. 2023 Annual Report on the Independent Evaluation of IFAD (EC 2023/122/W.P.3 + Add. 1)**

**Key messages:**

- Members expressed concern on the reported decline observed in poverty alleviation by IFAD projects.
- Members welcomed the finding that projects related to the environment, climate change and natural resource management had seen consistent improvement.

- Concerns were raised regarding the slight decline in project quality and efficiency.
- Reinforced efforts were called for to address the poor performance of the West and Central Africa (WCA) portfolio.

15. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the high-quality twenty-first edition of the Annual Report on the Independent Evaluation of IFAD (ARIE), covering evaluations conducted by IOE in 2022, as contained in document EC 2022/122/W.P.3, together with Management's response, as contained in its addendum.
16. Members acknowledged the overall positive project performance but raised concerns about the lack of impact on addressing rural poverty and a slight decline in quality, even when taking into account external factors, such as the impact of COVID-19 and deteriorating contexts. The Committee welcomed the consistent improvement in projects related to the environment, climate change and natural resource management.
17. Management was called upon to address the poor performance of the WCA portfolio, ensuring close monitoring and a timely response to any issues that may arise. The Committee considered the possibility of discussing how IFAD should respond to the specific challenges in the WCA region, perhaps based on a regional evaluation.
18. The Committee endorsed the call for concrete, results-based strategies in COSOPs for non-lending activities, emphasizing their importance for sustainability and impact. Concerns were raised about IFAD's performance in fragile contexts, leading to discussions about the need for further clarity on the causes for the differences in the assessment of ARIE and RIDE.
19. Committee members emphasized the importance of addressing the impact of COVID-19 on IFAD's projects and development effectiveness, and encouraged a forward-looking approach in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic. The Committee asked for clarifications on the concept of fragility within IFAD and encouraged Management to be clear about IFAD's role in fragile situations. The Committee also commented on the observation regarding the size of projects and suggested further discussion regarding the benefits of larger and complex projects as the results provided suggested they run risk of leaving out those in more need.
20. Management recognized the importance of addressing fragility. They emphasized the value of knowledge management in terms of learning from results and highlighted ongoing efforts in the fragility space to enhance performance. Management acknowledged the need for more extensive work on understanding fragility.
21. Management underscored the importance of non-lending activities for better sustainability, scaling up and ultimately achieving impact. They expressed the need to integrate non-lending activities more seamlessly into IFAD's operations, as it is not a separate area but a critical component of projects. They highlighted that IFAD's business model for non-lending activities is demand-driven, focusing on increasing the capacities of country institutions and thereby reinforcing IFAD's role on the ground.
22. Management emphasized that a substantial amount of work is under way to enhance efficiency such as the People, Process and Technology Plan, the OPEN procurement system and financial management reforms. New guidelines for measuring performance at completion had been introduced based on the 2022 Evaluation Manual, aiming to improve the accuracy of the assessment of project performance (including effectiveness) and increase consistency with independent evaluation ratings. Management highlighted the shift away from rating impact, as rigorous impact assessment is now handled by the Research and Impact

Assessment Division. This shift allows for assessing the attribution of results related to (income, production, market access, resilience and nutrition) to IFAD projects.

23. Management recognized that projects in WCA had lacked robust peer reviews in the past, but noted the significant improvement in the quality of peer review of ratings in the region, highlighting its positive performance trajectory – which was not yet reflected in the ARIE.

**Agenda item 5. Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness for 2023 (EC 2023/122/W.P.4 + Add.1)**

**Key messages:**

- Members noted the declining levels of international and domestic co-financing, while acknowledging they remained above target.
- Concerns were raised about the impact on nutrition targets and the alignment of IFAD's operations with commitments made at the 2021 Food Systems Summit, highlighting the need for further discussion and data.
- Noting the divergences between the findings of the ARIE and the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE), members called for a clearer explanation of the root causes and underscored that ensuring learning from both reports was essential for informed decision-making.

24. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the RIDE, as contained in document EC 2023/122/W.P.4, together with IOE's comments, as contained in its addendum. Members recognized the quality of the RIDE and reiterated their interest in benchmarking IFAD's performance against other international financial organizations.
25. Members noted the declining levels of international and domestic co-financing presented in the RIDE report, while acknowledging they remained above targets. They expressed interest in benchmarking IFAD's co-financing achievements against other actors in the food and rural development sector. Management highlighted the challenges of maintaining these results for the future, considering the external environment, particularly in connection with the mobilization of domestic resources, which could limit the goal of achieving higher co-financing for the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD13).
26. While members supported the recommendation to expand non-sovereign operations (NSOs), they called for an evaluation of the poverty targeting and poverty impact of these operations compared to the rest of IFAD's portfolio. They stressed the need for NSOs to align with IFAD's institutional mandate of assisting those furthest behind.
27. Concerns were raised about the number of people supported to improve their nutrition, which was below target. Members emphasized the importance of addressing nutrition and suggested a need for further discussions on this topic. Members also expressed their concern that there was limited discussion in the report regarding IFAD's delivery on commitments made at the 2021 Food Systems Summit, and requested data demonstrating how IFAD's operations are aligned with a food systems approach. Management reassured that the Food Systems Summit commitments were being tracked and reported, and will also be part of IFAD13 discussions.
28. Members highlighted the divergence between the RIDE and ARIE reports, particularly IFAD's work in fragile contexts. They questioned the use of binary metrics to categorize countries as fragile or non-fragile and called for a re-evaluation of this approach in light of the complexity of subnational fragility. There

was also significant divergence in conclusions regarding decentralization, with one report presenting it as an enabler of adaptive management and the other as negatively affecting efficiency.

29. Some level of divergence was to be expected between two reports as they use different sources of ratings and timelines. IOE cautioned against convergence as it could undermine its independence. IOE further pointed to the high uptake of recommendations by Management, as evidenced in the President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA), and its common position with Management regarding decentralization. Members emphasized that while convergence may not be the goal, understanding and explaining divergence and extracting learning from both reports are essential for productive discussions and informed decision-making.

**Agenda item 6. Report on IFAD's Mainstreaming Effectiveness for 2023 (EC 2023/122/W.P.5 + Corr.1)**

**Key messages:**

- Members welcomed the first report on IFAD's Mainstreaming Effectiveness and encouraged to continue working on it.
- Members stressed the significance of nutrition as a critical theme, urging IFAD to prioritize it in project design and monitor progress.

30. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the first Report on IFAD's Mainstreaming Effectiveness (RIME) for 2023, as contained in the document EC 2023/122/W.P.5 and its corrigendum, focusing on IFAD's achievements during 2022 in the mainstreaming themes, including environment and climate, gender, nutrition, youth, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities.
31. The Committee recognized the RIME as a valuable tool for understanding IFAD's efforts in mainstreaming various themes, and particularly appreciated the illustration of the impact of mainstreaming in one theme reinforcing efforts in others, while emphasizing the contribution to overall development effectiveness. This dedicated document allows for a more in-depth examination of crucial aspects related to project design, supervision and quality. Its primary purpose is to monitor progress in fulfilling commitments undertaken in IFAD12, with a focus on identifying areas that require immediate or intensive action.
32. Members stressed the significance of nutrition as a critical theme that required increased attention by all stakeholders, including IFAD. Despite having taken some positive steps, IFAD needed to do more in this area by prioritizing nutrition in project design across the portfolio and monitoring progress through specific indicators measuring resource allocation. Reporting against the nutrition policy marker created by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) could provide a better picture of IFAD's engagement in this area. Additionally, the Committee advocated for the creation of an internal community of practice dedicated to nutrition for sharing best practices. Members expressed the aspiration for IFAD to establish a reputation in addressing and allocating resources to the area of nutrition similar to its focus on climate. One Committee member requested a strategic discussion with the President, possibly at the December Board session, to further elaborate on this matter.
33. Management acknowledged the significance of food systems transformations and the challenges they pose, particularly for smallholder farmers in developing countries, as these changes can adversely affect nutrition. They emphasized their commitment to mitigating the negative impact on nutrition levels among farmers who are transitioning to more commercialized production.

34. Furthermore, Management highlighted the interrelation of gender and nutrition, noting that improvements in gender equity and equality indicators have positive effects on nutrition. Despite the challenges, Management also pointed out the strong demand from Member States for gender-related initiatives, with a substantial percentage of new projects designed to be gender transformative. One member highlighted the importance of ensuring that the country context is taken into account when applying the gender related evaluation criterion.

**Agenda item 7. 2023 President’s Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (EC 2023/122/W.P.6 + Add.1 + Add.2)**

**Key messages:**

- Members noted some delays in implementing some of the recommendations and looked forward to the launch of an online version of the report for real-time updates, expected at the beginning of 2024,

35. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the 2023 President’s Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA), as contained in the document EC 2023/122/W.P.6, as well as IOE’s comments contained in its addendum. Members emphasized the essential nature of the report in ensuring that governing bodies have an updated view of decision implementation, and its role in highlighting areas for improvement within IFAD’s business model.
36. The Committee noted that some recommendations had experienced delays in implementation. Management reassured members of their commitment to implementing recommendations where possible, even though partial uptake may be necessary in certain cases. The online PRISMA, whose release had been delayed to 2024, would help track the timeliness of recommendation implementation and provide reasons for delays, when applicable. Launching the online version to the public would enhance transparency and accountability.
37. Members highlighted the importance of understanding how data and variables are defined in the report, to ensure clarity for effective decision-making.
38. Committee members welcomed the positive collaboration between Management and IOE. The feedback mechanism was seen as transformative in addressing weaknesses and opportunities, especially in areas such as policy dialogue, climate adaptation, sustainability and scalability.

**Agenda item 8. Preview of the results-based work programme and budget for 2024, and indicative plan for 2025–2026 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (EC 2023/122/W.P.7)**

**Key messages:**

- The expected good execution rate of the 2023 IOE budget was noted, together with the budget discipline exercised in preparing the 2024 budget.
- IOE was called upon to reassess capacity and the feasibility of the ambitious workplan and reduced budget.
- IOE outlined its plan to assess the effects of the pandemic on IFAD’s portfolio, including using the ARIE to analyse trends and gathering qualitative information from individual and country evaluations.

39. The Evaluation Committee welcomed the preview of the IOE results-based work programme and budget for 2024, and indicative plan for 2025–2026, as contained in document EC 2023/122/W.P.7.
40. The Committee expressed satisfaction with the current implementation and execution status of IOE's workplan and budget, and noted that the budget for 2024, while slightly reduced, would need to support an ambitious work programme. Members endorsed the choice of country assessments and evaluations, including several countries approaching graduation, and the emphasis on nutrition was viewed as important, especially in the lead-up to the Nutrition for Growth Summit in 2024. The emphasis on Central America in the workplan was welcomed, with interest in how lessons from this region would be applied to other areas, such as West Africa, and broader policy dialogue.
41. The Committee expressed particular interest in the corporate-level evaluations on knowledge management and food and nutritional security. They suggested that the approach paper for knowledge management should incorporate a framework to assess behavioural and operational changes resulting from knowledge management activities, whereas the thematic evaluation on food and nutrition was seen as vital for IFAD's partnerships and policy engagement in improving food systems, particularly in vulnerable regions. The human resources budget needs would also be reviewed based on comments and feedback.
42. Some members raised concerns about the feasibility of the ambitious workplan with the reduced allocated budget and the increased number of in-person evaluations while maintaining the same staff numbers, and the potential impact on quality. IOE committed to reassess capacity and to consider expanding gradually over a two-year period to meet the growing demand, especially for synthesis and meta-evaluation reports, while maintaining quality. In response to queries regarding the gender component in the budget, which appeared relatively low compared to IFAD's goals for gender equality, IOE explained that the figures reflected historical parameters on the cost and time required for gender analysis in evaluations. IOE expressed a willingness to review these figures to ensure they accurately represent the resources needed for gender analysis in evaluations.
43. Members appreciated the integration of technology components, such as geo-based tools and remote interviews, as a means to optimize costs, as well as the return to in-person evaluation missions, as essential for maintaining quality and objectivity. While acknowledging the cost-saving benefits of remote interviews, IOE noted that the nature of their work required field visits, which could be costly but were essential for the quality of their evaluations. IOE recognized the need to enhance communications further, segmenting messages more effectively, and pointed to potential enhancements in their communications unit to improve the dissemination of evaluation findings.
44. Regarding the assessment of the pandemic on IFAD's portfolio, IOE informed that this could be done through future ARIE editions and include rating trend analysis, complemented with more qualitative inputs gathered by individual project and country-level evaluations.

#### **Closure of the session**

45. 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 approval. Once finalized, the minutes would be submitted to the Executive Board for information at its 139<sup>th</sup> session.