



Investing in rural people

## Evaluation Committee

125<sup>th</sup> Session

Rome, 19 June 2024

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# Response of IFAD Management to the thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to gender equality and women's empowerment

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Document: EC 2024/125/W.P.5/Add.1

Agenda: 6

Date: 5 June 2024

Distribution: Public

Original: English

### **FOR: REVIEW**

**Action:** The Evaluation Committee is invited to review the response of IFAD Management to the thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to gender equality and women's empowerment.

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### **Technical questions:**

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## Executive Board

142<sup>nd</sup> Session

Rome, September 2024

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# Response of IFAD Management to the thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to gender equality and women's empowerment

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Document: EB 2024/142/R.X/Add.1

Agenda: X

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# **Response of IFAD Management to the thematic evaluation of IFAD's support to gender equality and women's empowerment**

## **I. Considerations on the main findings**

1. Management welcomes the thematic evaluation (TE) on IFAD's support to gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) and appreciates its balanced tone, reflecting the evaluation team's efforts to collect and analyse multiple perspectives across the institution. The TE encourages IFAD to test, show results, and advocate for gender mainstreaming and gender-transformative approaches as both effective strategies and necessary conditions for rural transformation; and to cement its role as a catalyst for change. Findings from the TE are instrumental in this process and, coupled with lessons emerging from self-evaluation, will feed into the updated gender action plan, to be delivered within the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD13) period.
2. Management is pleased to note that the evaluation confirmed the coherence of IFAD's gender policy and gender action plan with the Fund's priorities, and their alignment with global strategies for gender equality. Management also agrees that the 2012 policy is outdated given the extent of changes to corporate GEWE commitments, as well as IFAD's increased engagement on gender-transformative programming. At corporate level, it is widely acknowledged that the growth in human resources in the gender and social inclusion team since 2016 has not kept pace with its increase in workload and ambitious replenishment commitments.
3. Management is aware of the challenges that limit performance towards achieving the three strategic objectives of the gender policy. These include lack of evidence and subjective measurement descriptors, as well as limited capacity among implementing partners. In particular, findings from self-evaluation concur with the TE conclusion that weaknesses exist in gender outcome monitoring and reporting. This affects, among others, IFAD's performance on the Results Management Framework indicator on projects rated satisfactory on GEWE at completion, which is below the aspirational target of 60 per cent.<sup>1</sup> The progressive rollout of standardized, mandatory core outcome indicator surveys at baseline, midterm and completion should in part address the issue. However, more resources are required to build the capacity of project management units (PMUs) to collect and analyse the data according to the guidelines provided.
4. Linked to the above, and as remarked in the context of different evaluations, the capacity-building needed to strengthen skills and knowledge of implementing partners is mostly outside the direct mandate of IFAD and its administrative budget, which does not clearly cover technical assistance. While global/regional grant funds and supplementary funds have been used to provide some support, Management's focus has been to encourage projects to budget for capacity-building on GEWE (and other technical expertise) in their annual workplans and budgets, using project financing. Unfortunately, these activities are often not approved by the country steering committees. As a result, the portfolio's GEWE technical assistance needs generally exceed the human and financial resources available in IFAD's budget.
5. On the topic of IFAD interventions not consistently addressing land tenure issues, Management would like to highlight IFAD's commitment towards improving women's access to and control of resources (including land). Following the 2019 grant of US\$2.2 million to the International Land Coalition, IFAD's commitment to

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<sup>1</sup> As reported in the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE), the indicator has been scored between 42 and 53 per cent during IFAD11 and IFAD12 so far.

land is substantiated in the US\$2 million Women's Land Rights Initiative, approved in 2020 and implemented by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) together with three other CGIAR centres in Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Niger and Uganda. The grant promotes and strengthens women's land rights through the integration of gender-transformative approaches (GTAs) in rural development interventions, by improving policies, implementation tools and practices in targeted countries. Some of the grant's main activities include the following: (i) the completion of socio-legal and gender analyses; (ii) the development and piloting of 12 GTA tools in the pilot projects; (iii) the organization of knowledge and learning events at country, regional and global levels; and (iv) the organization of two learning and capacity development workshops, attended by IFAD project partners, in Nairobi and Rome.

6. IFAD also adopted a proactive approach to nurturing policy engagement on GEWE, to compensate for the limited budget available. On the ground, non-lending activities are primarily implemented under the leadership of IFAD country teams and are prioritized based on opportunities, local priorities, comparative advantage, skills and resource availability. As noted, opportunities for policy engagement in GEWE are leveraged with grants and supplementary funds. These offer great sources of learning and avenues for engagement to countries that have expressed a strong interest in policy engagement on GEWE. The current scale of policy engagement on GEWE illustrates the limited demand on GEWE policy engagement from the IFAD portfolio. Moreover, while gradual actions through policy engagement are well placed in country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs), an additional element of high importance is the engagement on GEWE at higher level, to foster the enforcement of existing policies, the development of policies for line ministries, and strengthening the gender responsiveness of sectoral policies such as National Adaptation Plans.

## **II. Management's perspective on recommendations**

7. Management carefully reviewed the findings and recommendations of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE), which provide valuable learning, and generally concurs with their overall direction. However, there are some important considerations that Management would like to put forward, as detailed below.
8. **Recommendation 1: Focus the update of the gender policy and the gender action plan on strengthening IFAD's position to promote gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in agricultural and rural development.**

**Management agrees with recommendation 1.** The gender policy approved in 2012 and the current gender action plan ending in 2025 are still valid and applicable in their principles and objectives. However, an update would foster improved performance and impact of IFAD's operations and strengthen IFAD's position to promote GEWE in agricultural and rural development. Management also fully acknowledges the importance of interpreting what a gender-transformative process means in practical terms at the community, project and policy levels. Greater clarity in this regard will add value to IFAD's mandate and facilitate more meaningful and sustainable development outcomes.

9. Management will update the IFAD gender policy in 2025 to align with the release of the IFAD Strategic Framework 2025–2031. The policy will be accompanied by an updated gender action plan that will serve as implementation strategy for the period 2026–2031. These products will be developed through a participatory and consultative process with internal and external stakeholders. The updated policy and action plan will prioritize the following:
  - (i) Outlining the intersectionality of GEWE with multiple drivers of poverty, with a special attention to fragile contexts;

- (ii) Defining results from interventions at both national and community levels so they can be strategically utilized for advocacy, partnership-building and knowledge management; and
  - (iii) Putting in place collaborative efforts with partners, to develop pathways aimed at catalysing changes owned by national partners and local stakeholders, effectively addressing the root causes of gender inequality in rural areas.
10. By reinforcing the Fund's visibility as a key global player on GEWE in rural development, these efforts will contribute to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in IFAD's operations and beyond.
11. **Recommendation 2: Strengthen the effectiveness of IFAD's interventions on GEWE through consolidated guidance, promoting its shared understanding and buy-in among relevant stakeholders.**
- Management agrees with recommendation 2.** IFAD will consolidate and update guidance tools and products for all relevant decision-makers, implementing partners, IFAD staff and experts on mission. This will also involve updating IFAD's operational manuals, design, supervision and completion guidelines as related to gender, as well as the performance score descriptors. As required, modus operandi will be revised to ensure alignment between the different parts of the organization involved throughout the project cycle.
12. Management also acknowledges the importance of further building its accountability and results framework to reinforce the organization's capacity to track gender-transformative changes and empowerment results. While IFAD has a robust system of outcome-level indicators, there is room to pilot gender specific outcome indicators at project level.
13. IFAD is committed to learning from experience, drawing on lessons and good practices from its own operations and others. Partnerships with relevant national, regional and international actors with expertise in gender across thematic areas (climate, nutrition, youth, value chains, rural infrastructure, rural finance, digital technology, natural resource management, etc.) will be developed and strengthened. South-South and Triangular Cooperation, along with other sharing, learning and peer-to-peer initiatives (e.g. learning routes) will continue to be promoted to ensure the adoption and scaling up of good practices on GEWE.
14. **Recommendation 3: Ensure the Fund has human resources with the capacities and competencies to address its GEWE priorities and leverage key partners as necessary.**
- Management partially agrees with recommendation 3.** Management concurs with the importance of ensuring that IFAD has human resources with the capacities and competencies to address its GEWE priorities; however, this aspect is heavily dependent on budget availability and balancing the level of ambition with the resources available. Subject to the above, Management will work to strengthen IFAD's roles and capacity in this area, effectively identifying any staffing gaps and clarifying priorities, roles and shared responsibilities in the current decentralized structure.
15. Additionally, Management recognizes the importance of strengthening support provided to PMUs and implementing partners throughout the project cycle. This will include systematic inclusion of gender expertise at key moments of the project cycle (early implementation, midterm, completion) in IFAD field missions and organizing capacity-building opportunities and regular technical backstopping beyond mission timeframes. However, capacity-building of implementing partners relies on funding sources outside of IFAD's administrative budget.
16. Capacity development efforts will continue and will be reinforced for all relevant actors, including decision-makers, implementing partners, IFAD staff and experts

on mission. There will be a special focus on practical perspectives and concrete mind-set shifts for positive behaviour change regarding GEWE, GTAs, empowerment methodologies and policy engagement. Collaboration with Rome-based agencies, research institutes, academia, and other national and international partners will be instrumental in this regard. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, IFAD resources alone are not sufficient to directly support programmes. The technical expertise and capacity enhancement needs for PMU staff should be budgeted as part of the programme of work of projects and programmes, prioritized by line ministries and approved by country steering committees.

17. **Recommendation 4: Establish high-level metrics to track and report progress towards IFAD's GEWE goals to ensure accountability and promote learning.**

**Management partially agrees with recommendation 4.** While Management agrees with the importance of having high-level metrics to track and report progress towards IFAD's GEWE goals to ensure accountability and promote learning for staff, PMUs and implementing partners, it also recognizes that IFAD's systems and mechanisms are already quite solid. High-level metrics have been introduced in the Results Management Framework for IFAD13, with a new impact level indicator focused on women empowerment. Therefore, Management will not introduce any further high-level metrics.

18. Nevertheless, Management is committed to further addressing weaker areas and reinforcing existing mechanisms to ensure better reporting and shared accountability. For example, quality of project design GEWE assessment measures may be strengthened. The concrete actions to address gaps may be considered in the updated gender policy and the updated gender action plan.
19. In addition, stocktakes will continue to examine gender successes and challenges – as per the ongoing practice, this may take place during quarterly or annual stocktakes in line with the method for selecting stocktake themes. PMU staff will be included in stocktakes when appropriate, for example at regional retreat sessions on annual performance reviews.
20. Finally, the President of IFAD will continue to play a leadership role in GEWE, closely collaborating with the Vice-President and Senior Management to ensure shared accountability. IFAD will continue to track performance at corporate and project levels, and report progress in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, as well as its own Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) and Report on IFAD's Mainstreaming Effectiveness (RIME).