
Response of IFAD Management to the evaluation of IFAD's engagement in Small Island Developing States

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Action: The Evaluation Committee is invited to review the response of IFAD Management to the evaluation of IFAD's engagement in Small Island Developing States.

Technical questions:

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Response of IFAD Management to the evaluation of IFAD's engagement in Small Island Developing States

I. Introduction

1. Management welcomes the evaluation of IFAD's engagement in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as formulated by the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE). The evaluation assesses how IFAD's support has contributed to mitigating vulnerabilities, strengthening institutional frameworks and building resilience in rural communities across SIDS. The evaluation provides timely evidence and recommendations that will inform IFAD's engagement in these contexts, given SIDS' vulnerability to climate change, external shocks and economic constraints.
2. Management agrees with the evaluation finding that IFAD's approach is aligned with international and regional SIDS frameworks, namely the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway 2014, the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) 2024, IFAD's Strategic Framework 2016–2025 and IFAD's Strategy for Engagement in Small Island Developing States 2022–2027. IFAD-financed projects contributed to higher household incomes. Food security gains were achieved in the four regions covered by the evaluation (Asia and the Pacific [APR], East and Southern Africa [ESA], Latin America and the Caribbean [LAC], and West and Central Africa [WCA] regions). Moreover, Management acknowledges that the results have been uneven and that the scale of IFAD's impact has been constrained by piecemeal approaches and challenges in synergizing IFAD's efforts in grants, loans and partnerships, as well as the limited availability of robust impact data. These findings will be key to nurturing IFAD's engagement in SIDS in the coming years.
3. At the same time, Management stresses the importance of avoiding duplication with existing diagnostic and vulnerability assessment tools and will implement recommendations by balancing them with value-for-money considerations, given IFAD's limited presence and resources in SIDS. Going forward, IFAD will focus on consolidating its comparative advantage in promoting inclusive climate-resilient rural transformation while leveraging partnerships and innovation to maximize impact in SIDS.

II. Considerations on the main findings

4. Management generally concurs with the findings and conclusions derived from the evaluation. The points presented hereafter combine these conclusions with reflections stemming from the self-evaluation experience.
5. The evaluation's gender analysis relies mainly on regional averages. While acknowledging the importance of looking at aggregate data, Management would also like to highlight the presence of important intraregional differences and successful country-level experiences. Therefore, conclusions about results in women's economic empowerment across SIDS should necessarily be accompanied by important caveats. For example, the evaluation notes that several projects in LAC and APR, as well as ESA, contributed to women's economic empowerment and mentions notable successes. More specifically, in Cuba, Fiji, Grenada, Kiribati and Tonga, activities such as coconut oil processing, mat weaving, pig farming and produce sales created new income opportunities for women. In Comoros, women who were engaged in crop production reported higher yields, while projects in the Cuba, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tonga reduced workloads through labour-saving technologies and practices. Women's influence in decision-making also increased, with leadership roles in water users' committees in Kiribati and active participation in harvest and distribution decisions in Tonga.

6. Management would like to stress the cross-region and within-region differences pointed out in the evaluation, which add important nuances to the evaluation's findings on women's economic empowerment and workload reduction.
7. Management confirms that IFAD's design process already embeds vulnerability analyses and fragility assessments, including in SIDS. For example, in Guinea-Bissau and Sao Tome and Principe, recent country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) and additional financing operations have applied multidimensional fragility and vulnerability frameworks, drawing on Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP) assessments and fragility assessments. Likewise, the regional strategic opportunities programme (RESOP) for the Pacific, recently cleared by the Operational Strategy and Policy Guidance Committee and to be discussed at the Executive Board session in December, places stronger emphasis on multidimensional, context-specific vulnerability assessments, in alignment with the SIDS strategy 2022–2027.
8. Management concurs about the importance of strengthening synergies between loans and grants in SIDS, particularly as a means of piloting and scaling innovative approaches. Synergies are especially relevant in data-scarce environments, where grants have enabled the piloting of innovations and knowledge products. For example, the "West and Central Africa Small Island Developing States ADAPT - Building Resilience of Agricultural Systems to Climate Change" programme¹ in Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and Sao Tome and Principe aims to establish a knowledge exchange network across project management units (PMUs) and promote innovations in climate resilience. Similarly, ex post impact assessments in Cabo Verde, Papua New Guinea,² Sao Tome and Principe,³ and Solomon Islands⁴ have generated critical evidence to inform future project design. Going forward, Management will continue to explore options for scaling innovations already piloted through grants into larger investment operations.
9. Management will continue to pursue policy dialogue with regional and global SIDS institutions. IFAD has participated in major forums such as the International Conference on SIDS in 2024, which led to the launch of the new ABAS pathway, and the biannual Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry. At the regional level, it facilitated policy dialogue through collaboration with partners such as the Adaptation Fund and the African Development Bank, while national-level engagement has strengthened government capacities for resilience-planning in fragile island contexts.
10. Moreover, Management recognizes the importance of non-lending activities, including South-South and Triangular Cooperation, knowledge management and partnerships, as highlighted in the evaluation. These areas remain underfunded in SIDS and yet are critical to enhancing IFAD's impact. Initiatives such as embedding geospatial monitoring into project monitoring and evaluation (M&E), supporting cross-country learning networks and leveraging partnerships with universities and research institutes are already under way.

III. Management's perspective on recommendations

11. Management carefully reviewed IOE's findings and recommendations, which provide valuable learning, and generally concurs with their overall direction. However, there are important considerations that Management would like to put forward, as detailed below.

¹ https://www.adaptation-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/AFB.PPRC_.26.a-26.b.45-Proposal-for-Cabo-Verde-Guinea-Bissau-Sao-Tome-and-Principe.pdf

² https://www.ifad.org/ifad-impact-assessment-report-2021/assets/pdf/impact/PNG/BAR_PNG_ISLANDS_RI_BRIEF.pdf

³ <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/publications/impact-assessment-papafpa-and-papac>;

<https://www.ifad.org/en/w/publications/impact-assessment-rural-socio-economic-opportunities-program-posep>

⁴ https://www.ifad.org/ifad-impact-assessment-report-2021/assets/pdf/impact/Solomon-Islands/SOLOMON_ISLANDS_RI_BRIEF.pdf

12. **Recommendation 1: Adopt a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to resilience-building in SIDS.**
13. **Management partially agrees.** IFAD already systematically conducts climate-related vulnerability assessments through its SECAP. Furthermore, multidimensional vulnerability and fragility assessments and resilience frameworks are already being applied and used as a key operational feature under the diagnostics work area in the Updated Approach to Fragile Situations (2024) and are part of updated guidance also applicable to SIDS. The aforementioned assessments are a core part of the design process, where they inform COSOPs, country strategy notes (CSNs), RESOPs and project designs, and provide risk mitigation measures.
14. In light of the above, Management's position is that introducing additional stand-alone vulnerability assessments may not represent value for money, as they risk duplicating those already in place. Over time, IFAD has developed a suite of diagnostic tools, including but not limited to SECAP, COSOP strategic environmental assessments, strategic partnership assessments, fragility assessments and targeting studies. Any additional layer of vulnerability assessment should address a clearly identified gap not already covered by existing processes and have a clearly defined and differentiated purpose risk. This will help avoid overburdening country teams and PMUs, particularly in SIDS, where capacity is often limited.
15. However, Management fully supports deepening the understanding of vulnerabilities in SIDS contexts and exploring options to refine the SIDS approach in IFAD's existing tools and procedures. It is therefore open to the possibility of leveraging the evaluation recommendations to refine the SIDS-specific lens while applying current vulnerability assessments and analyses, as noted above.
16. **Recommendation 2: Strengthen and leverage strategic and operational partnerships to improve performance in SIDS contexts.**
17. **Management agrees** and would like to note that the importance of strategic partnerships in fragile contexts, including SIDS, is a key work area and operational feature in the Updated Approach to Fragile Situations (2024). Additionally, action area 4 of IFAD's SIDS strategy 2022–2027 refers to strengthened partnerships and enhanced coordination.
18. Management recognizes the importance of tailoring partnership approaches to the specific contexts of SIDS and agrees that structured frameworks are key to strengthening engagement. At the country level, COSOP and CSN guidelines already require the identification of strategic partnerships, with each COSOP including a section on "Strategic partnerships and South-South and Triangular Cooperation" to guide their management and monitoring. Looking forward, Management will ensure that explicit mapping of potential partners will be integrated into this existing process during COSOP preparation. Building on these corporate instruments will boost efficiency and effectiveness. Meanwhile, Management will make sure that IFAD initiatives take advantage of new frameworks such as the RESOP, with its dedicated partnership component aligned with the SIDS strategy. Collectively, these mechanisms will help advance SIDS-specific partnerships around priorities such as resource mobilization and knowledge-sharing.
19. Strategic partnership approaches currently pursued by IFAD include improving guidance on humanitarian-development-peace nexus collaboration and forging partnerships with critical partners. IFAD is reinforcing active participation and collaboration with the fragility working groups and technical teams of the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the African Development Bank. Collaboration includes sharing diagnostics and assessments, learning from each other's operational approaches and jointly leveraging existing systems, as well as sharing approaches that support cofinancing.

20. While building and maintaining partnerships are essential, IFAD's limited in-country presence in some SIDS, combined with the high transaction costs of travel, can pose practical challenges. Management therefore emphasizes the importance of balancing ambitious partnership mapping with a pragmatic approach that ensures that partnerships remain realistic and implementable, while maximizing opportunities for collaboration.
21. **Recommendation 3: Tailor operational approaches to SIDS contexts for more effective resilience-building support.**
22. **Management agrees** with and notes IOE's indications on the specific operational approaches that need to be tailored to SIDS contexts. Management is committed to ensuring that project designs systematically integrate context-sensitive diagnostics, identify locally relevant pathways for resilience and diversification, and promote innovation and experimentation in partnership with domestic and international stakeholders. Operational entry points may include market access, income diversification, food systems and nutrition, and social inclusion, but the choice of specific interventions must remain flexible and country-driven.
23. **Recommendation 4: Improve the focus of knowledge management (KM) systems in recipient SIDS in line with vulnerability versus resilience topics and leverage policy and scaling-up outcomes.**
24. **Management agrees** with and notes the importance of strengthening KM systems in SIDS, with a heavier focus on vulnerability/resilience themes, leveraging KM for policy influence and scaling up. Data scarcity is a key constraint in many SIDS. To address this, IFAD has conducted ex post impact assessments in Papua New Guinea (the Productive Partnerships in Agriculture Project), the Solomon Islands (the Rural Development Programme – Phase II) and Sao Tome and Principe (the Participatory Smallholder Agriculture and Artisanal Fisheries Development Programme, and the Smallholder Commercial Agriculture Project), which have expanded the evidence base in these data-poor contexts. Going forward, IFAD will explore embedding such rigorous assessments earlier in the project cycle, ideally from inception, to allow for continuous monitoring, improve the attribution of results and enhance learning on delivery mechanisms and approaches.
25. Building on this, geospatial monitoring tools can further strengthen KM systems. For instance, in Papua New Guinea, satellite data revealed both positive spillovers in agricultural activity from road rehabilitation and potential forest loss along rehabilitated roads. Embedding remote sensing indicators in M&E frameworks while training M&E officers in geographic information systems and satellite imagery analysis can yield timelier, data-driven insights on land use change, deforestation and other externalities.
26. Finally, robust KM requires close collaboration with stakeholders. Impact assessments and other KM activities should be pursued as multi-stakeholder processes involving project teams, technical specialists, IFAD colleagues and research institutions. Such participatory approaches not only enhance the policy relevance of findings but build local capacity to generate, manage and apply knowledge. Systematically introducing these practices will help ensure that KM becomes a driver of continuous learning, evidence-based decision-making and sustained resilience outcomes in SIDS.