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Enabling poor rural people
to overcome poverty

Minutes from the Sixty-fourth session of the Evaluation Committee

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Evaluation Committee — Sixty-fifth Session
Rome, 25-26 November 2010

For: Approval

Minutes from the Sixty-fourth session of the Evaluation Committee

1. These minutes cover the deliberations of the Evaluation Committee during its sixty-fourth session held on 8 October 2010. The five agenda items for discussion were: (i) Peer Review of IFAD's Office of Evaluation and Evaluation Function; (ii) IFAD's Office of Evaluation's results-based work programme and budget for 2011 and indicative plan for 2012-2013; (iii) Country programme evaluation for Argentina; (iv) Completion evaluation of the Raymah Area Development Project in Yemen; and (v) Other business.
2. All Committee members attended the session, with Egypt chairing the proceedings. The Committee welcomed Ms Regina Gurgel de Saboya from the Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management in Brasilia, who participated on behalf of Mr Benvindo Belluco from Brazil. The Committee also welcomed the new representative for Ireland, Mr Jarlath O'Connor, who was attending his first Evaluation Committee session.
3. The Committee was joined by IFAD's Associate Vice-President, Programmes, Programme Management Department (PMD); the Chief Development Strategist of IFAD; the Director of the IFAD Office of Evaluation (IOE); the Secretary of IFAD; the Directors of the Near East and North Africa Division and Latin America and Caribbean Division; and other IFAD staff. Government representatives for Argentina¹ and Yemen² attended the discussions, respectively on the Argentina country programme evaluation and the completion evaluation of the Raymah Area Development Project in Yemen.

A. Peer Review of IFAD's Office of Evaluation and Evaluation Function

4. The Committee considered the implementation of the recommendations of the Peer Review of IFAD's Office of Evaluation and Evaluation Function, together with Addendum 2 - the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Findings and Recommendations of the Peer Review of IFAD's Evaluation System (EC 2010/64/W.P.2/Add.2): Update as of 7 October 2010.
5. Regarding addendum 1 on the legal issues raised in the Report of the Peer Review of IFAD's Office of Evaluation and Evaluation Function (EC 2010/64/W.P.2/Add.1), the Committee decided to postpone the discussion of this document to a later stage, to allow it to be considered along with the draft revised Evaluation Policy.
6. The Committee considered the draft terms of reference for the proposed consultant and the overall estimated costs. The Committee agreed to the proposal, with the addition of a specific mention of the five domains in which the consultant would be active and an explicit reference to the consultant's reporting function to the Evaluation Committee.
7. Furthermore, the Committee decided to narrow down the list of possible candidates for the consultancy to two names: Mr Bruce Murray and Mr Robert Picciotto. The Committee requested IOE to approach both these candidates for feedback on their availability, the fee they would accept (with a view of achieving possible savings), and how they would approach the task in question.
8. The candidates should provide their answers not later than nine days from their being approached, and these would be circulated immediately among Committee members to allow a selection to be made within a three-day time frame.

¹ Mr Jorge Neme, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries.

² Mr Abdul Malik Al-Thawr, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation.

9. Commenting on Addendum 2, Committee members welcomed the information provided. At the same time, several members expressed the wish for greater clarity in some areas, including: (i) a more finely tuned and clearer list of deliverables; (ii) specific responsibilities for each deliverable; (iii) the role of the consultant in each deliverable; (iv) a more detailed and clearer timeline; and (v) a meeting schedule of the Evaluation Committee Peer Review.
10. In order to expedite the process, Committee members decided to liaise more closely with IFAD Management and IOE to monitor the process. The Chairperson will schedule the first meeting and communicate details to the Committee.

B. IOE's results-based work programme and budget for 2011 and indicative plan for 2012-2013

11. The Committee expressed its broad agreement with IOE's proposed objectives, divisional management results, and work programme and budget for 2011. Committee members also appreciated IOE's efficiency gains, which are reflected in the larger work programme and smaller budget for 2011.
12. Committee members welcomed the indicators produced by IOE to track achievement of the divisional management results. The Committee suggested further fine-tuning of the indicators by introducing baselines for reaching targets.
13. In addition, the Committee underlined the importance of the corporate-level evaluation of IFAD's approaches and results with respect to policy dialogue. The Committee requested that this evaluation be introduced, along with specific timelines, into IOE's forward work programme in the near future.
14. Furthermore, the Committee recommended that this year's ratio between (i) IOE's budget and IFAD's programme of work; and (ii) IOE's budget and IFAD's administrative budget be taken as guidelines for the development of future IOE budgets.
15. On human resources, the Committee noted that IOE plans to send staff on training for professional development purposes and enquired how the corresponding costs will be met.
16. Members emphasized the importance of its annual country visit for 2011. To this end, IFAD has been invited to make adequate provisions for this activity in the budget. They also reiterated the need to develop a manual to guide their country visits in the future. On another issue, members noted greater involvement of and cost-sharing by borrowing governments in the organisation of evaluation learning workshops, which have led to cost savings as well as efficiency gains.
17. Among other issues, Director IOE agreed with the importance of undertaking a corporate level evaluation on policy dialogue, which will be added to the division's indicative work plan for 2012-2013. With regard to learning workshops, he reassured the Committee that IOE will continue to organise workshops in the future in close collaboration with the IFAD management and the borrowing governments, and opportunities for cost-sharing with governments will be explored as a standard practice. On training, the Director IOE conveyed that IOE does not have a dedicated budget for the purpose, and that extra-budgetary funds will have to be mobilised especially for specialised training that is not organised by IFAD's human resources division.

C. Argentina Country Programme Evaluation

18. The Committee welcomed the discussion on the country programme evaluation (CPE) for Argentina.
19. The Government's representative from the capital stressed the economic and social constraints that Argentina faced until 2001 and the fact that the current policy environment is conducive to an effective partnership between IFAD and Argentina

and to effective project implementation. He hoped for continued strengthening of the relationship between the Fund and Argentina and voiced appreciation for the evaluation.

20. The Committee emphasized the fact that IFAD, through its grant support in the framework of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and its work in facilitating South-South cooperation, can play a major role in achieving food security in Argentina.
21. They underlined the importance of promoting ownership on the part of the Government regarding policy and financial commitment to ensure success in reducing the country's rural poverty. In addition, members highlighted the need to improve portfolio performance under all circumstances.
22. The Committee pointed to the need for the Fund to be more focused in its support to Argentina, especially in terms of the overall objectives pursued in the framework of the country strategy. Members also recommended that IFAD proceed cautiously in deciding to establish a country office, in light of Argentina's status as a middle-income country and the limited size of the portfolio.
23. Members underlined the importance of clarifying the number of rural poor people in the country, as this has implications for IFAD-funded operations. They also noted that the Spanish Food Facility could now provide an opportunity for co-financing IFAD-funded projects in Argentina.
24. The Committee asked for clarification on the relatively long time frame covered by the Argentina evaluation. It also sought further information of how IOE evaluated the actions of IFAD during the crisis in Argentina.
25. Among other issues, IOE informed the Committee the reason for the time coverage of the evaluation was to enable a comprehensive assessment of the country programme through this first CPE in Argentina. The evaluation's time coverage was agreed with the IFAD management and the Government, at the outset of the process. On how IOE evaluated IFAD's actions during the crisis in Argentina, the CPE assessed whether specific measures were deployed by IFAD during the period, such as additional supervision efforts, attention to closely monitoring the evolution in the policy and institutional environment, as well as whether specific adjustments were made to projects to ensure their effectiveness in the prevailing country context.

D. Completion evaluation of the Raymah Area Development Project in Yemen

26. The Committee discussed the completion evaluation of the Raymah Area Development Project in Yemen.
27. The Government's representative highlighted the very challenging nature of the project's implementation area. He underlined that the Government has learned from the Raymah experience and made key adjustments to its internal procedures to ensure project effectiveness. While acknowledging that the project suffered from weak management, he also emphasized that the Government has now very transparent processes for hiring project staff. Finally, he informed the Committee that the Government has streamlined the procedures for the allocation of counterpart funds, which should facilitate project implementation.
28. Committee members welcomed the opportunity to discuss this weakly performing project and recognized that the project's outcomes were unsatisfactory. They emphasised the need for clear and candid evaluation of results, in order to foster debate and learning even from poorly performing operations.

29. Members highlighted the need to undertake in all evaluations a comprehensive assessment of gender and women's empowerment, an element which must become a regular feature in all future IOE evaluations.
30. The Committee also underlined the need for IFAD to pay greater attention to follow-up during implementation, including ensuring that mid-term review recommendations are implemented, especially in cases - such as the Raymah project - that are considered at risk. The importance of regular visits by the IFAD Country Programme Manager (CPM) to problem projects was emphasized by members. However, the Committee was satisfied that the situation has changed since the recent appointment of a new CPM for Yemen.
31. The Committee highlighted that it may be useful for project supervision to continue for some time beyond project closing date, in order to see what are the opportunities and challenges faced by the operation after its completion.
32. Members noted the need to clearly specify loan covenants and for IFAD to proactively follow-up to ensure they are adequately fulfilled. They also conveyed the importance of ensuring proper project design, one that carefully takes into consideration the context in which activities will be implemented. On another issue, the representative of the Netherlands clarified that her government did not stop co-financing the project during implementation. In this regard, she noted that there was a clear agreement from the outset of the project that Netherlands would provide financing only for a two-year period during implementation.
33. The Committee highlighted that the recommendations in the evaluation report could be made more specific and supplemented in certain areas, for example in terms of IFAD's engagement in isolated areas and work on gender issues, so to guide IFAD's future activities in the country. It was also decided that these minutes of the session will be added as an annex to the evaluation report before it is published.
34. Among other issues, IOE clarified that the division is developing specific gender indicators that will be applied in all evaluations henceforth. The division also underlined that it is not always easy to develop specific recommendations from a project completion evaluation that can have wider strategic implications for IFAD-financed operations across the country, due to the diversity of contexts that may be found within the same country.

E. Other Business

35. The Committee decided that the draft minutes of each session will be added to the provisional agenda of the subsequent Committee session for approval by members. The Committee also agreed with the Chairperson's suggestion regarding the need for regular reporting on the implementation status of the Peer Review recommendations at each Committee session. Before closing the session, on behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson conveyed his appreciation to Brazil for its constructive and useful contributions to the Committee's work over the past two years. The Chairperson also informed Committee members that Brazil will be replaced by Mexico on the Committee, starting from November 2010, till the end of the mandate of the current Committee.