

Document: EC 2014/85/W.P.2  
Agenda: 3  
Date: 29 August 2014  
Distribution: Public  
Original: English

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Investing in rural people

## Minutes of the eighty-fourth session of the Evaluation Committee

### Note to Evaluation Committee members

#### Focal points:

#### Technical questions:

**Kees Tuinenburg**  
Officer-in-Charge  
Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD  
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2274  
e-mail: k.tuinenburg@ifad.org

#### Dispatch of documentation:

**Deirdre McGrenra**  
Head, Governing Bodies Office  
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2374  
e-mail: gb\_office@ifad.org

Evaluation Committee — Eighty-fifth Session  
Rome, 10 October 2014

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**For: Approval**

## Minutes of the eighty-fourth session of the Evaluation Committee

1. These minutes cover the deliberations of the Evaluation Committee during its eighty-fourth session, held on 2 July 2014.
2. Committee members attended the session from: Angola, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria and Norway. Observers were present from China and Germany. The Committee was joined by the Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department (PMD); the Officer-in-Charge, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); the Secretary of IFAD; and other IFAD staff.
3. The provisional agenda contained seven items for discussion: (i) opening of the session; (ii) adoption of the agenda; (iii) minutes of the eighty-third session of the Evaluation Committee; (iv) preview of the results-based work programme and budget for 2015 and indicative plan for 2016-2017 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD; (v) President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA) and IOE comments thereon; (vi) project performance assessment (PPA) of the Rural Poverty Reduction Programme in Mongolia; and (vii) other business.

### **Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda**

4. The agenda was adopted with the addition of an "Update on the appointment of the Director, IOE" under other business.

### **Agenda item 3: Minutes of the eighty-third session of the Evaluation Committee**

5. The Committee discussed the minutes contained in document EC 2014/84/W.P.2, as well as procedures for approving summing up notes and the official minutes.
6. The minutes were adopted, subject to amendments to paragraphs 11 and 13 and shall be duly revised and posted on IFAD's website as EC 2014/84/W.P.2/Rev.1.
7. In discussing the minutes of the eighty-third session of the Evaluation Committee, and in particular paragraph 10(xiii), some members noted that, since the revisions to the policies and criteria for IFAD Financing had been adopted by the Governing Council in February 2013, there appeared to be no justification for revising the lending terms as provided for within the policy.
8. With respect to the procedural issues concerning reporting on the deliberations of the Evaluation Committee, it was agreed that the standard procedures would be applied for the current session. In addition, the Office of the Secretary would draft a paper for the consideration of the Committee outlining options to facilitate an informed decision on this matter.

### **Agenda item 4: Preview of the results-based work programme and budget for 2015 and indicative plan for 2016-2017 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD**

9. The Committee considered document EC 2014/84/W.P.3, the preview of the results-based work programme and budget for 2015 and indicative plan for 2016-2017 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD.
10. The Committee welcomed the proposed workplan for 2015, which foresaw, inter alia, completion of one corporate-level evaluation (CLE); the beginning of five country programme evaluations (CPEs) and completion of three; undertaking of one impact evaluation; and preparation of three evaluation synthesis reports.
11. The Committee welcomed the budget proposal and took note of the nominal increase of 1.9 per cent, or a 0.9 per cent increase in real terms, largely as a result of the conversion of one professional staff position from part-time to full-time.

12. Members expressed their appreciation for and broad agreement with the document – the presentation and format of which had improved significantly over previous years’ submissions.
13. Members requested clarification on a number of issues, including;
- (a) **Topics to be considered for annual CLEs.** The Chairperson indicated that suggestions had been made during the Replenishment Consultation that CLEs be considered of: (i) middle-income countries (MICs); (ii) the performance-based allocation system (PBAS); and (iii) a synthesis of non-lending activities in the context of South-South and triangular cooperation.
- (i) With respect to the issue of a CLE of MICs, some members recalled the evaluation synthesis report on this topic, and questioned whether a full CLE of this topic would be of significant added value.
- (ii) With respect to evaluation of the PBAS, one member indicated that this may not be an appropriate topic for a CLE, while several other members supported the suggestion that IOE consider undertaking a CLE of this topic in 2015. An observer also indicated that this could be followed by an evaluation of additional resource mobilization in 2016, considering that this was an important issue raised by the Consultation.
- (iii) The proposal for an evaluation synthesis of non-lending activities in the context of South-South and triangular cooperation was supported by several members. One member also proposed that a CLE on knowledge management could be considered, in the light of related IFAD9 priorities.
- (iv) Some members also suggested an evaluation of the Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP) and of climate change issues, following consultation with the Environment and Climate Division (ECD), and inquired whether modalities existed for a midterm evaluation that might assist the Board in assessing implementation of the ASAP. One observer raised concerns regarding the possibility that other trust funds might also request that evaluations be included in IOE’s programme of work. Management clarified that it might be early for a results-focused evaluation of the ASAP. Finally, the Committee suggested that IOE could do a synthesis, rather than a CLE, of a topic related to smallholder agriculture and its implications for poverty reduction.
- (b) The Committee discussed the issue of **evaluation syntheses** and noted that these synthesis reports would be enriched if a written Management response could be built into future such reports. The Committee also underlined that it would welcome more evaluation synthesis reports in the future, given their potential for summarizing key lessons and good practices on specific topics of interest. Finally, discussion also took place on the possibility of including recommendations in synthesis reports in the future, and also of having a written Management response. IOE would address this in the context of the development of the new evaluation manual.
- (c) On the issue of IFAD’s **absorptive capacity** for the evaluations produced by IOE and the **quality and quantity** of these evaluations, Management indicated that evaluations were of greatest use when a manageable number of clear recommendations were presented, and that the timing of evaluations was key to their usefulness to the institution. IOE reiterated the importance of independent evaluations to key strategic discussions and to the transformation that had taken place in IFAD, and informed the Committee that the quality of IOE products had undergone a peer review by the Evaluation Coordination Group of the international financial institutions (IFIs).

- (d) While discussing the performance of IFAD projects, it was indicated that the evaluation standards applied to judging **project performance** were in line with international practice at other IFIs, the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Management indicated that the number of criteria applied to assessing project performance – and in particular, rural poverty impact – was large and resulted in difficulty in reaching a highly satisfactory rating. This issue should be dealt with in the revised evaluation manual, currently under preparation, to ensure results are commensurate with efforts. The revised manual will be presented to the Committee before completion, and a progress report on preparation of the manual will be submitted before end 2014.
- (e) Members inquired as to the level of **collaboration** between IOE and its sister organizations in Rome. IOE recalled that a statement of intent was signed in 2013 by the heads of evaluation of the Rome-based agencies to strengthen collaboration in evaluation. In this regard, a number of such collaborations were highlighted, such as preparation of the joint evaluation synthesis of pastoral development by IOE and the FAO Office of Evaluation, and indication was given that this topic would be given even more attention going forward.
- (f) Clarification was requested regarding the additional funds dedicated to completion of the **evaluation manual**, in the light of approval of funds on a one-off basis for use in 2014. IOE noted that the manual will only be finalized in 2015, to allow the new Director, IOE, to have input into the process. As such, IOE indicated that some additional funds were necessary in 2015 to complete the work, hold training activities and ensure outreach, publication and dissemination of the document. On a related note, IOE was encouraged to consult with stakeholders such as ECD to ensure that climate-change-related issues are fully mainstreamed in evaluation work and the manual.
- (g) Clarification was requested with respect to the level of mission-related **travel costs**. IOE underscored the importance of field visits in ensuring the quality of evaluations, their dissemination, and capacity-building of local actors. It was indicated that these costs were budgeted and used in line with IFAD travel procedures and budgeting and financial rules and regulations, and that variations in the level were largely the result of differences in the destination of missions.
- (h) Members raised the issue of **national consultants** and the importance of ensuring impartiality of evaluations. IOE concurred that finding impartial national consultants could sometimes pose a challenge, but indicated that strict conflict of interest guidelines were adhered to, and consultants from the region were often employed in order to overcome this challenge.
- (i) In response to some queries from members, IOE clarified that activities related to the **international year of evaluation** would have little or no impact on the budget proposal for 2015.
- (j) IOE was commended on the **ratio of professional to general service staff** in the office, and other IFAD departments were encouraged to look to the IOE model and strive to achieve a similar ratio. In this regard, IOE clarified that it had undertaken several cost-cutting initiatives in 2013, including streamlining evaluation processes and undertaking an administrative and financial review to identify efficiency gains, as well as organizational de-layering to expedite decision-making and communication and to enhance efficiency.
- (k) The Committee expressed its support for IOE's undertaking of **impact evaluations**. IOE clarified that it is doing independent impact evaluations, as approved by the Executive Board and in line with the practice of independent offices of evaluation in other IFIs and United Nations organizations, including

the World Food Programme. IOE clarified its role in impact evaluations vis-à-vis the self-evaluations carried out by Management, and underscored its ongoing contribution to the latter. A new harmonization agreement between IOE and Management was to be developed in early 2015, following issuance of the new evaluation manual, to ensure continued alignment of IFAD's self-evaluation systems (including impact evaluations) with the methodology set up by IOE.

- (l) With respect to the **key performance indicators** included in the work programme and budget, it was requested that these also reflect measures of efficiency. IOE indicated that it was in the process of preparing a revised results measurement framework (RMF) and will integrate such measures into this RMF, which will be included in the final document for consideration by the Board in December 2014.
  - (m) Additional information was requested, inter alia, on RMF table 3 in order to distinguish between capacity-building activities taking place in beneficiary countries and internal training.
14. In conclusion, the Committee expressed its broad agreement with the preview of IOE's proposed objectives, divisional management results, work programme and budget for 2015 and indicative plan for 2016-2017. The comments and feedback provided during the meeting will be taken into consideration when finalizing the document for submission to the eighty-fifth session of the Evaluation Committee in October 2014.

**Agenda item 5: President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA) and IOE comments thereon**

15. The Committee considered the eleventh edition of PRISMA as contained in document EC 2014/84/W.P.4, including IOE's written comments thereon, and complimented Management on the measures taken to ensure a high rate of compliance. The Committee noted the inclusion of a historical overview of recommendations as agreed at the Committee's seventy-seventh session and suggested it be made a regular feature of future PRISMA reports. The Committee underscored the continuing importance of this report in ensuring an effective learning loop between evaluation and operations.
16. Clarification was provided relative to recommendations not agreed to by Management and hence not implemented. IOE further clarified that it had not stopped conducting project evaluations, but rather had transformed its approach to such evaluations – conducting project completion report validations, project performance assessments and impact evaluations of projects – as well as assessing individual projects in the context of country programme evaluations.
17. The Committee welcomed the clarifications provided by Management on the issues raised, including:
- (a) On the issue of country selectivity and the paper planned for submission to the September Executive Board session, members highlighted that this issue should be discussed not only within the working group on the PBAS, but also in a broader context. Moreover, in response to a request by various members, Management agreed to consider the possibility of broad-basing this discussion. Members requested that Management consider the possibility of submitting a document to the Evaluation Committee, together with IOE's written comments.
  - (b) On the follow-up to recommendations arising from past CLEs, it was clarified that recommendations that had been addressed, and thus did not require a second-round follow-up, would not be included in future editions.

- (c) In response to a request regarding the study on IFAD culture that had been envisaged in the past, it was agreed that additional questions on innovation and culture would be included in the next IFAD staff survey to address this concern.
  - (d) Management agreed to the suggestion made by some members that a formal written Management response be provided by IFAD also on future PPAs carried out by IOE.
  - (e) With respect to the envisaged set of 10 additional country offices, Management underlined that IFAD was committed to reaching this goal despite challenges posed in terms of both resources and staff quality issues.
18. The Committee noted the PRISMA report and IOE's response, both of which will be reviewed by the Executive Board in September 2014.

**Agenda item 6: Project performance assessment of the Rural Poverty-Reduction Programme in Mongolia**

19. The Committee discussed the PPA of the Rural Poverty-Reduction Programme in Mongolia, as contained in document EC 2014/84/W.P.5.
20. The Committee welcomed IOE's evaluation report and noted the need for Management to present a formal response to the recommendations addressed to it in future PPAs – to be reflected in the PRISMA report.
21. The Committee underlined the important issues raised by the evaluation, including: (i) risk assessments undertaken in pastoral projects before and during implementation; (ii) project design and the corrective measures taken as a result of implementation experience; (iii) collaboration between IFAD and other donors working in the region; (iv) conflicting interests of alternative land uses; (v) the impact of severe climatic conditions; and (vi) the manner in which targeting of specific groups was undertaken.
22. The Committee noted IOE's observations regarding: (i) its assessment being less satisfactory than the self-evaluation by PMD in three significant areas of intervention of the project; (ii) difficulties experienced in specifically targeting interventions to assist poorer pastoralists and in establishing relative proxies in this regard; (iii) adjustment of the logical framework and indicators taking place close to project completion; and (iv) significant turnover of country programme managers during the implementation period.
23. The Committee appreciated Management's oral response regarding the difficulty associated with targeting and climate-related challenges faced by the pastoralists in Mongolia, as well as their vulnerability, and suggested that the challenges of the context and related assumptions be adequately reflected in project design to ensure successful outcomes.

**Agenda item 7: Other business**

**Update on the appointment of the Director, IOE**

24. As agreed at the adoption of the agenda, the Committee was updated with regard to the status of the appointment of the Director, IOE. In this regard, the Secretary of IFAD informed the Committee that, following approval of the recommendation of the Evaluation Committee by the Executive Board, through a vote by correspondence, the recommended candidate had been contacted and was expected to assume the position of Director, IOE, by 1 October 2014 at the latest.
25. Prior to closing the meeting, the Committee expressed its deep appreciation to Kees Tuinenburg for his service as Officer-in-Charge of IOE. The Committee also bade farewell to Shyam Khadka and thanked him for his dedicated service to IFAD and to the work of the Committee.