

Document: EC/88/Rev.1
Date: 9 October 2015
Distribution: Public
Original: English

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Investing in rural people

Minutes of the eighty-eighth session of the Evaluation Committee

Note to Evaluation Committee Members

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Evaluation Committee — Eighty-eighth Session
Rome, 26 June 2015

Minutes of the eighty-eighth session of the Evaluation Committee

1. These minutes cover the deliberations of the Evaluation Committee during its eighty-eighth session held on 26 June 2015.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the session

2. The session was attended by Committee members from Egypt, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland. Observers were present from China. The Committee was joined by the Associate Vice-President, Strategy and Knowledge Department; the Senior Portfolio Manager, Programme Management Department (PMD); the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); the Secretary of IFAD; the Deputy Director, IOE; and other IFAD staff. His Excellency James Alex Msekela, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Agencies in Rome, joined the deliberations on the country programme evaluation (CPE) for the United Republic of Tanzania. The meeting was opened by the Secretary of IFAD who led the committee through the election of a new Chairperson.

Agenda item 2: Election of the Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee

3. The Committee unanimously elected India as its Chair for the period until end-April 2018, in accordance with rule 1.3 of the Evaluation Committee's revised Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure approved by the Executive Board in May 2011. Mr Vimlendra Sharan (as representative of India at the session) assumed the role of Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee. The Committee expressed appreciation to Indonesia for chairing the Committee until April 2015 and to Mr Tazwin Hanif as representative of Indonesia, in his role as the outgoing Chair.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda

4. The provisional agenda contained the following items: (i) opening of the session; (ii) election of the Chairperson of the Evaluation Committee; (iii) adoption of the agenda; (iv) preview of the results-based work programme and budget for 2016 and the indicative plan for 2017-2018 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD; (v) impact evaluation of the Jharkhand-Chhattisgarh Tribal Development Programme in India; (vi) country programme evaluation for the United Republic of Tanzania; (vii) President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA) with IOE comments; (viii) Revision to the IFAD Evaluation Policy: Revised timeline for the Annual Report on the Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI); and (ix) other business.
5. Under other business, the provisional agenda was amended to include: (a) two proposals by the Netherlands, namely: (i) to discuss ways to make Evaluation Committee reporting to the Board more precise, following up on the wish expressed at the recent Board retreat; and (ii) to participate in the Rome-based agency (RBA) evaluation of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS); (b) interpretation on demand; and (c) an update on the second edition of the Evaluation Manual.
6. The agenda contained in document EC 2015/88/W.P.1, duly amended to include four additional items under other business was adopted by the Committee (to be revised as EC 2015/88/W.P.1/Rev.1).

Agenda item 4: Preview of the results-based work programme and budget for 2016 and the indicative plan for 2017-2018 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

7. The Committee welcomed IOE's results-based work programme and budget for 2016 and indicative plan for 2017-2018 contained in document EC 2015/88/W.P.3, recognizing that the document had been developed keeping in mind the priorities identified for the period of the Tenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD10) and incorporated feedback and priorities as expressed by IFAD's governing bodies.

8. Appreciating the attempt to quantify the gender sensitivity of the IOE budget for 2016, the Committee acknowledged that this was work in progress and looked forward to further refinement in future editions of the budget. It noted the development of IOE's strategic vision within IFAD's corporate vision, as well as a tailored balance scorecard to be introduced in 2016-2018. The Committee further noted IOE's strategic objectives – SO1 and SO2 – which are in line with IFAD's corporate priorities to promote accountability and foster learning.
9. The Committee endorsed the proposed budget of US\$5.65 million for 2016, a nominal decrease of 7 per cent against the current year's budget, mostly on account of the exchange rate difference and acknowledged that the proposed budget was well within the IOE budget cap of 0.9 per cent of IFAD's programme of loans and grants. Noting the increased per unit cost of CPEs in 2016, the Committee encouraged IOE to find ways to lower these costs from 2017 onwards through efficiency gains.
10. In considering the programme of work, the Committee endorsed the proposed list of evaluation activities for 2016, in particular the corporate-level evaluation on IFAD's decentralization. After noting the lack of enough evaluative evidence on fisheries and aquaculture, the Committee suggested preparing this evaluation synthesis report once more evidence had been acquired, and carrying out instead an evaluation synthesis on IFAD's policy engagement at the country level. Members further endorsed IOE's proposal to undertake a third evaluation synthesis on gender equality and women's empowerment in collaboration with the evaluation offices of the RBAs, but requested IOE to revert with clarification on the timing of this exercise. The Committee welcomed the increase in number of project performance evaluations (PPEs), from eight in 2015 to 10 in 2016 onwards, recognizing that PPEs fed into most other evaluation products. It encouraged IOE to enhance its work in the area of in-country CPE learning events to ensure full utilization of funds.
11. The Committee heard Management's views on the need to balance evaluation products with the organization's absorptive capacity and was of the view that the current level of evaluation activity was necessary for meeting the twin objectives of accountability and learning. Commenting specifically on evaluation synthesis reports (ESRs), the Committee encouraged IOE to include therein recommendations that went beyond those made in individual evaluation studies and reiterated its earlier advice that Management's comments on the recommendations be included in ESRs. The Committee further noted Management's intent of working in close collaboration with IOE to highlight IFAD's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals on poverty, food security and gender.
12. The Committee encouraged IOE to continue carrying out impact evaluations, but on a selective basis, using and testing latest evaluation tools to assess project results in a more quantitative manner and to experiment with innovative qualitative, quantitative and triangular methods for primary data collection and analysis.
13. **Emerging issues for Executive Board consideration.** The Evaluation Committee wished to flag the following issues for consideration by the Executive Board:
 - (a) IOE's revised results measurement framework for the IFAD10 period to measure its efficiency;
 - (b) IOE's work programme for 2016 as elaborated in paragraph 10 and especially the proposed:
 - (i) Corporate-level evaluation on decentralization;
 - (ii) Additional ESR on gender equality and women's empowerment in collaboration with RBAs;

- (iii) Postponement of the ESR on fisheries and aquaculture in 2016 and replacement with a synthesis on IFAD's country-level policy engagement;
 - (c) The Committee's decision to have impact evaluation studies and ESRs presented to the Executive Board for discussion as it considered the conclusions and recommendations emanating from these evaluation products to be important for organization-wide learning and thus meriting the attention of Board members;
 - (d) The Committee's endorsement of increasing the number of PPEs from eight to 10;
 - (e) The proposed budget of US\$5.65 million for 2016 against US\$6.07 million in 2015.
14. Finally, the Committee welcomed the progress on the preparation of the second edition of the Evaluation Manual and expressed the desire that the harmonization agreement be considered by the Evaluation Committee before finalization.

Agenda item 5: Impact evaluation of the Jharkhand-Chhattisgarh Tribal Development Programme in India

15. The Committee welcomed this excellent and timely impact evaluation, and the clear analysis and evidence trail included in document EC 2015/88/W.P.4, which, while focusing on impact, had also covered other criteria, such as relevance, efficiency, sustainability, innovation, scaling up, and gender equality and women's empowerment.
16. The Committee noted the overall conclusion of the evaluation that the decision by IFAD to finance the programme was appropriate, timely and consistent with the Fund's mandate and appreciated IOE's effort to use cutting-edge evaluation methodology with the latest quantitative and econometric analysis in this evaluation.
17. The Committee appreciated the satisfactory rating given. It also appreciated Management's efforts in implementing the programme in extremely difficult contexts, as the target area was among the most underdeveloped in the country with little or no infrastructure, low implementation capacity of local government, fragile social fabric, unrest and strife. It welcomed the impact made by the programme on community mobilization, women's empowerment, microfinance development, grass-root institution-building and increased crop productivity. Matters of concern emanating from the study were also discussed, with the Committee noting that simpler design and more attention to diversification of the productive base of the rural poor – taking into account the heterogeneities of the different groups and their specific requirements – would have contributed to even better results. The Committee also voiced its concern over the high programme management cost and looked forward to incorporation of the learning from this evaluation into IFAD's future programmes.
18. While expressing concern on the incompleteness of baseline data in the programme, the Committee noted Management's reassurance that cognizant of the importance of ensuring baselines in IFAD projects, the number of baseline surveys and studies had been steadily increasing, as had their quality.
19. The Committee deliberated on the four main recommendations and noted Management's efforts in initiating and implementing the proposed recommendations.

20. **Main findings for Executive Board deliberation.** The Committee wished to bring to the notice of the Executive Board the following main findings for deliberation. The need to:
- (a) Customize programme design to context, especially in cases of fragility and conflict, and reduce the complexity of programme components to ensure enhanced delivery on the ground;
 - (b) Use appropriate targeting approaches to carefully differentiate between diverse social groups with a view to incorporating the most marginalized groups into projects;
 - (c) Ensure sustainability and encourage innovation in programme design, and make efforts to find pathways for scaling up successful and innovative features of the programme, including through convergence with national programmes and a well-defined exit strategy;
 - (d) Use theory of change and the logical framework proactively as a basis for the ongoing monitoring of achievements, and for introducing any adjustments to enhance effectiveness;
 - (e) Maintain the focus on nutrition among the targeted beneficiaries by integrating it into all agriculture intervention strategies;
 - (f) Prepare project completion reports in line with IFAD guidelines and submit them for systematic peer review within PMD;
 - (g) Desist from planning projects encompassing two or more states.

Agenda item 6: Country programme evaluation for the United Republic of Tanzania

21. The Evaluation Committee considered the CPE for the United Republic of Tanzania as contained in document EC 2015/88/W.P.5, and welcomed the findings related to the project portfolio, non-lending activities, and the relevance and effectiveness of the 2003 and 2007 country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs). It welcomed the decision to extend the current COSOP until 2015 to ensure that the learning from this CPE informed the design of the next COSOP.
22. The Committee reviewed the evaluation findings for projects assessed under four blocks – the mainland Agriculture Sector Development Programme (ASDP) and its Zanzibar subprogramme; the Rural Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Support Programme (MUVI); and the Marketing Infrastructure, Value Addition and Rural Finance Support Programme (MIVARF) – in terms of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, rural poverty impact, sustainability, innovation and scaling up, and gender equality and women’s empowerment.
23. The Committee discussed the positive impact of proper project design across all evaluation criteria as seen in the ASDP and the ill effects of incorrect assumptions and poor design on programme implementation as seen in MUVI and MIVARF. In this regard, the Committee emphasized the importance of institutional feedback and learning to ensure that future projects did not suffer from similar technical and process-related shortcomings. The Committee appreciated, in particular, innovative features such as farmer facilitators and community animal health workers introduced under the ASDP Zanzibar to expand the reach of extension.
24. It welcomed the strong gender focus in project design and implementation, both as an instrument of social justice and a means towards increased agricultural production and productivity.
25. The Committee concurred with the CPE’s findings and recommendations on the need to emphasize strengthening of agricultural infrastructure and knowledge dissemination; pay closer attention to post-harvest and market linkage issues; have

in place effective institutional delivery mechanisms; and emphasize stronger gender integration at design and during implementation.

26. **Highlights for Executive Board consideration and deliberation.** The Committee wished to highlight the following points for the Board's consideration and deliberation, some of which were country-specific and others of organization-wide relevance:
- (a) Prioritization of rangeland management and the dairy value chain in the next phase of the ASDP;
 - (b) Better design of value chain development interventions in consultation with all stakeholders, especially the private sector;
 - (c) Adequate resourcing of knowledge management, partnership development and policy dialogue in the next phase of the ASDP;
 - (d) Increased attention to post-harvest activities and market linkages to enhance household income;
 - (e) Weaving of gender equality into project design and implementation strategy; and
 - (f) Refraining from setting overambitious but under-resourced agendas while designing COSOPs in consultation with national governments.
27. At the end of the discussion on this agenda item, the Evaluation Committee commended IFAD and the Government of the Republic of Tanzania for their mutual cooperation efforts, and called for greater efforts in strengthening partnerships with non-state actors, the RBAs and the private sector. It also welcomed the signing of the agreement at completion point reflecting IFAD Management's and the Government's commitment to adopting and implementing the CPE's recommendations within specific time frames.

Agenda item 7: President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA) with IOE comments

28. The Committee considered the President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions and IOE comments thereon, contained in document EC 2015/88/W.P.6.
29. The Committee noted that the PRISMA covered 19 evaluations from 2013/2014, including project performance assessments for the first time. Members commended Management's intense efforts in taking action on most of the recommendations. The Committee also welcomed the second round of follow-up on recommendations in order to boost compliance. It appreciated Management's commitment to strengthening the internalization of learning and recommendations emanating from evaluations.
30. Committee members requested inclusion of an additional column in the report showing the implementation status of recommendations. Management agreed to update the format from PRISMA 2016.
31. Going forward, the Committee requested that the traceability and visibility of gender-related recommendations be enhanced in future editions of the PRISMA.
32. Regarding the proposal to conduct COSOP completion reviews in a systematic manner, keeping in mind the long-term benefits of such an exercise, the Committee took note of Management's view that COSOPs were regularly assessed during implementation, and the budgetary implications of the proposed systematic completion review. It noted IOE's assertion that systematic undertaking of COSOP completion reviews would be consistent with the wider evaluation systems in other international financial institutions and regional development banks.

33. Further, while noting Management's inclusion of recommendations directly addressed to IOE in the PRISMA, and its proposal that the recommendations be followed up, a representative expressed the view that delivery of recommendations from Management to IOE would be more appropriate in the context of regular exchanges and constructive dialogue rather than in a report. The Committee noted that further reflection on the appropriate context in which recommendations should be presented would be required and that the PRISMA might not be the most suitable instrument for this purpose.
34. Finally, the Committee welcomed Management's suggestion regarding presentation of the PRISMA together with Management's response to ARRI, along with ARRI and RIDE, but as a separate document.

Agenda item 8: Revision to the IFAD Evaluation Policy: Revised timeline for the Annual Report on the Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI)

35. The Committee considered document EC 2015/88/W.P.7 regarding a proposed revised timeline for submission of the ARRI and for reasons enunciated in the document, concurred with the proposal to present ARRI and the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) at the September session of the Board from 2016 onwards and introduce a corresponding amendment to paragraph 54 of the Evaluation Policy (2011). It also agreed to shifting the Evaluation Committee session scheduled in June to early September, from next year, to accommodate the proposed change in the timeline for the presentation of the ARRI.

Agenda item 9: Other business

36. The Committee considered the four issues raised under other business, and
- (a) Welcomed Netherland's proposal to hold an in-house discussion within the Evaluation Committee on ways to make reporting by the Committee to the Executive Board more precise and focused;
 - (b) Noted Netherland's views regarding the missed opportunity by the evaluation offices of the three RBAs to undertake an evaluation of the work of the reformed CFS. In this regard, the Committee noted IOE's view that such an evaluation was not feasible before 2017, due to scheduling issues. IOE assured the Committee of its willingness to associate itself with the proposed evaluation, perhaps in an adviser capacity, if required;
 - (c) Noted the Secretariat's request to provide interpretation on demand and, after due consideration, decided to revert on the issue after the next two Committee sessions in order to better assess the situation;
 - (d) Noted the status of the second edition of the Evaluation Manual being prepared by IOE, and acknowledged the efforts made to incorporate best practices.

The Committee concluded its deliberations, thanking the Management, IOE, the interpreters and messengers for their help in the smooth running of the meeting.