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Investing in rural people

Synthesis on the Technical Seminar "Enhancing the evaluability of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2)", jointly organized by the evaluation offices of FAO, IFAD, WFP and CGIAR

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For: Information

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Rome 17-18 November 2015

1. **Background.** The evaluation offices of the Rome-based agencies (RBA), which include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) the World Food Programme (WFP), and the CGIAR (formerly known as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research), jointly organised a technical seminar within the framework of their 2012 joint statement of collaboration. The theme of the seminar was "Enhancing the evaluability of Sustainable Development Goal 2. How can we evaluate progress towards achieving SDG2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture?"[1] By focusing on evaluability, this seminar was intended to inform how SDG2 can and should be evaluated, and thus provide a basis for planning of a future evaluation agenda. The seminar was a great success. Over 160 participants from national governments, representing over 35 countries, academia, think tanks, private sector and United Nations organisations, attended and contributed actively to the discussion. Some 1,600 people were following the event on line. The social media coverage on Twitter and Facebook generated more than 100 posts through the #SDG2Eval hashtag.

2. **Objective and approach.** The objective of the seminar was to contribute to a shared understanding of how SDG2 could be evaluated and identify actions needed to enable future evaluations of SDG2 through the UN system, other international organizations or countries themselves. Specific objectives of the seminar were to: (i) share lessons learned on the evaluability of MDGs and other partnership initiatives of similar scale; (ii) jointly review key challenges for evaluation in relation to the post-2015 development agenda in general and SDG2 in particular; and (iii) identify concrete steps for Rome-based agencies towards building evaluability of SDG2. The seminar was opened by the IFAD President, the FAO Deputy Director General, the WFP Chief of Staff and the CEO of the CGIAR. It included keynote speeches by Sunita Narain, Director General at the Centre for Science and Environment in India, and Jomo Kwame Sundaram, Assistant Director-General, Coordinator for Economic and Social Development at FAO. Most of the discussions took place in parallel roundtables, led by panels of carefully selected speakers and focussing on the following four themes.

3. **Theme 1, The relevance of 'new metrics' for the evaluation of SDG2** – Data revolution and innovative approaches for assessing human wellbeing, was chaired by John Hoddinott, H.E. Babcock Professor of Food and Nutrition Economics and Policy at Cornell University. The discussions focused on questions such as: For which dimensions of SDG2 do we already have indicators/indices/data; and do we need 'new metrics' to measure all the dimensions of SDG2; what systems exist to measure these indicators, accurately and reliably; how complete and reliable is the global 'data architecture'; and where are the gaps? The presenters pointed out that some areas are in relatively good shape (e.g. monitoring of under-nutrition and of

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[1] The focus on SDG2 is in line with the mandates of the FAO, IFAD, WFP and the CGIAR, which cover the wide range of issues, from research to technical assistance, in contexts from humanitarian crisis to development, and production systems to investment.

food production), but others require serious investment (e.g. for monitoring dietary quality and the sustainability of agricultural practices). The discussion recognised that the implicit Theory of Change underpinning SDG2 does not reside solely within it; that progress on meeting SDG2 is intimately bound up with progress on other SDGs. It concluded that there is a significant opportunity for the RBA's to re-invigorate the measurement of nutrition and food security and the need to make progress on a commonly agreed measurement of sustainable agriculture.

4. Theme 2, Partnerships and development actors – Dealing with the increasing complexity of development processes was chaired by Simon Levine, Research Fellow at the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute in the UK. The discussion revolved around the challenges of undertaking evaluation within a relationship between development partner and a country , how best to work with partner countries, while being accountable to the agency itself, to the partner country and also, critically, to the people whose lives need to improve if the SDGs are to be met. The discussion emphasised that the process is inherently political, recognising that government are not the only actors who have political interests. Conceiving complexity within the evaluation of SDGs underpins pluralism. Evaluability of SDGs should thus allow evolution of different concepts and approaches to evaluation.

5. Theme 3, National M&E systems and data availability – Building on the progress made and addressing existing (capacity) gaps was chaired by Carlos Barahona, Deputy Director at Statistical Services Centre, University of Reading. The discussion recognised that some SDG targets, are better aligned to national priorities and strategies. Hence the level of ownership of these targets can vary at the country level. The discussion emphasised that to monitor and evaluate SDG 2, consistent acquisition of data that will be converted into information is essential. This information needs to be available with the level of granularity that is useful to make decisions that allow for the diversity of 'relevant' contexts in each country. This requirement poses a challenge to the already established national systems in charge of gathering data and generating that information as they have been set up to fulfil information needs that were set well before the SDGs were conceived. The SDG agenda could potentially include 230 indicators which makes it counterproductive and costly for countries to monitor all of them. RBA's have the opportunity to work with countries to identify more efficient use of data within the SDG 2. There is a need for the identification of minimum standards or the set indicators required for meaningful monitoring and afterwards, evaluation. This process requires mediation, convincing power, advocacy and facilitation. The discussion concludes that the RBAs should use the potential from the Committee on World Food Security CFS platform to influence and advocate national country level engagement on the SDG targets.

6. Theme 4 , Demand for and Use of Evidence from Evaluation: Understanding the political economy of evidence and developing a joint evaluation agenda for SDG2, was chaired by Ian C. Davies, Independent Evaluator. The discussion started from the understanding that the SDGs, by their very nature and the principles that underpin them, challenge evaluation to evolve consistent with these and offer a global platform to rethink and reposition evaluation and its practice in development. The SDG agenda is country-led and evaluations will take place in the context of their political economies. Evaluation should support learning and adaptive management within the SDG process. Evaluation should generate cumulative knowledge across evaluations so as to contribute to theory. Countries may need support to generate knowledge, for example on what policies and interventions are positive for small holder farmers, and in developing capacity for evaluation "where change can be affected" such as ministries of agriculture. Definitional questions are important especially when attempting to articulate between systems, e.g. national system and UN system. There is a significant difference with important implications in defining food security either as "access to food" and as "right to food". Finally,

with the proliferation of SDG indicators there may be a role for the RBAs to support the development of key indicators with regard to their mandates.

7.   In their concluding remarks, the speakers agreed that the technical seminar provided a starting point to initiate a conversation, a dialogue, and a process. The SDG agenda provides an opportunity to be even more serious about evaluation. The complexity of the SDG framework is an antidote to oversimplification, including the myth that development can be reduced to results management by numbers. It promises to foster investment in national evaluation systems. The seminar recognised the need for evaluators, and commissioners of them, who are seeking to catalyse learning and adaptation, and recognise they are accountable for doing this. This takes evaluative practice beyond compliance with targets, offering instead a vision of evaluators as change agents who are accountable for learning. Commissioning and delivering weighty reports will no longer suffice. The consultative process sparked by the Rome-based agencies should continue beyond the technical seminar in an organized, consultative and participatory manner.