Minutes of the ninetieth session of the Evaluation Committee

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1. These minutes cover the deliberations of the Evaluation Committee during its ninetieth session held on 27 November 2015.

2. As per the decision of the Evaluation Committee at that session (see paragraphs 44-46 below), these minutes will be shared with the Executive Board.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the session

3. The session was attended by Committee members from India (Chair), Egypt, France, Indonesia, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway and Switzerland. China attended as an observer. The Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department (PMD); Senior Portfolio Manager, PMD; Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); Secretary of IFAD; Deputy Director, IOE; Strategic Planning Officer, Strategy and Knowledge Department (SKD); Director, Near East, North Africa and Europe Division (NEN); Country Programme Manager, NEN; Senior Legal Officer, Office of the General Counsel (LEG); and other IFAD staff joined the Committee for the session.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

4. The provisional agenda contained the following items: (i) opening of the session; (ii) adoption of the agenda; (iii) revision to the IFAD Evaluation Policy; (iv) revised provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2016; (v) proposed procedure for drafting, clearance and sharing of records of Evaluation Committee sessions; (vi) project performance assessment of the Programme for Sustainable Development in Rural Mountain Areas in Albania; (vii) Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI); (viii) Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE); (ix) second edition of the Evaluation Manual; and (x) other business.

5. In the interests of time efficiency, the Chairperson proposed reorganizing the agenda items in order to move the discussion of the ARRI and the RIDE to immediately after the adoption of the agenda. The two items would be reordered respectively as items (3) and (4). The Chairperson further proposed that these items be considered concurrently as per the current practice at Executive Board sessions.

6. The provisional agenda was amended to include, under other business: (a) the sharing of a synthesis by IOE on the recently held technical seminar on enhancing the evaluability of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2): "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture"; and, as proposed by France, (b) the inclusion of the evaluation synthesis report on pastoral development in the revised provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2016. It was agreed to place this sub-item under agenda item (5) on the revised provisional agenda for the Evaluation Committee in 2016.

7. The agenda contained in document EC 2015/90/W.P.1/Rev.1, amended to reflect the revised order of agenda items and to include two items under other business (to be issued as EC 2015/90/W.P.1/Rev.2) was adopted by the Committee.

Agenda items 3 and 4: Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI) and Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE)

8. Prior to delving into these items, the Committee took note of the comment by the Secretary of IFAD on the nature of the two documents, ARRI and RIDE. In view of the "Report on the measures and implementation plan for achieving greater efficiency in supporting IFAD's governance" to be presented to the 116th session of the Executive Board for information, the Secretary indicated that together with IOE

and Management, additional ways to better address members' reporting needs without compromising the efficiency measures, were being explored. A proposal in this regard would be provided to the Committee in due course.

9. The Committee reviewed the ARRI as contained in document EC 2015/90/W.P.5 and the Management response as reflected in addendum EC 2015/90/W.P.5/Add.1. At the same time, the Committee reviewed the RIDE and IOE's comments as contained in document EC 2015/90/W.P.6 and addendum EC 2015/90/W.P.6/Add.1, and provided comments on both items.

10. The Committee welcomed both documents and commended IOE and Management on their efforts in drafting these documents, and especially IOE for preparing the 2015 ARRI entirely in-house. Appreciation was expressed also for the inclusion of an overview of the progress made with respect to selected priorities for the period of the Ninth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD9) such as increasing operational effectiveness and enhancing IFAD's results management system. The two documents were discussed in detail by the Committee. A summary is provided below.

ARRI

11. The Committee expressed appreciation for the ARRI as both a learning and an accountability tool and commended IOE for the quality of the report. Members welcomed the new features included in this year's edition; especially, the clear explanation of the data sets used and the statistical distribution analysis of available ratings that provided a clearer picture of the institution's performance based on the evaluation criteria. The Committee recommended that due prominence be given to critical evaluation findings backed up by statistical analysis to ensure greater balance between statistics and key messages.

12. Members welcomed the peer-to-peer comparison of the same samples of project completion reports, which was helpful in better understanding the net disconnect in ratings for each of the 11 evaluation criteria. The Committee further noted the improved rating of project performance since 2008, as well as the positive trend in rural poverty impact. However, there was still room for improvement in areas of operational efficiency.

13. The Committee noted that findings related to sustainability, especially those emerging from the thematic study, could have been better reflected in the recommendations, and urged Management to take these into consideration irrespective of their placement within the recommendations or not. The Committee also encouraged IFAD Management to focus on (a) community-level ownership and participation, (b) risk analyses at project design and (c) human and social capital in the follow-up of ARRI, in order to ensure sustainable results.

14. In addition, the Committee greatly appreciated the highly satisfactory rating accorded to some IFAD-financed projects on gender issues, and underlined the importance of improving gender ratings throughout IFAD operations.

15. The Committee acknowledged IFAD's good performance as an effective partner and the positive impact of decentralization, and suggested that IOE analyse the effect of outposted country programme managers on project performance. Management was encouraged to ensure that decentralization would not only translate into an increased number of country offices, but would also imply their strengthening for enhanced effectiveness.

16. While commending IOE and Management on findings relating to non-lending activities and improved performance in policy dialogue, knowledge management and partnership-building, the Committee urged that while IFAD must be careful not to overburden IFAD country offices, considering the limited staff available, it must adequately resource the COSOPs for further strengthening of IFAD's work under

these three aspects of non-lending activities, given the vast opportunities that existed.

17. The Committee supported the recommendation regarding sustainability, while requesting a clarification from IOE about the apparent differentiation between sustainability of project benefits (at the beneficiary level) and the consideration of the continuation of services to beneficiaries after project closure. On this issue, IOE clarified that sustainability was to be intended as the continuation of net benefits from a development intervention. Members requested that the issues underlying figures on sustainability be unpacked, and asked Management to ensure that these issues were adequately addressed at the project level. Members suggested that a road map be developed to this end.

18. The Committee acknowledged IFAD's efforts to enhance the environmental sustainability of its operations, such as the inclusion of a dedicated indicator for climate change adaptation in the IFAD10 Results Measurement Framework (RMF) and of the Social, Environment and Climate Assessment Policy (SECAP) in 2015. Members noted the increased number of projects for which the environmental sustainability rating was improving, but underlined the importance for Management to ensure adequate capacity enhancement in the areas of natural resources, environment and climate change.

19. The recommendation in the ARRI to include exit strategies in projects either at design or implementation was widely discussed by the Committee. It was noted that there was a difference in the way IOE and Management conceptualized the relationship between exit strategy and effective project sustainability. The Committee noted Management's view on the importance of maintaining a country programme approach that emphasized continuous engagement and scaling up over "exit". Nevertheless, the Committee endorsed IOE's recommendation to include exit strategies in projects in a bid to ensure sustainability, and encouraged Management to further consider this recommendation. IOE underlined that the recurrent weakness in the design and implementation of viable exit strategies during the life of a project limited sustainability.

20. On the same issue, the Committee recognized the need for Management to distinguish between IFAD's midterm and long-term engagement in a country on one hand, and its successful completion of and exit from individual projects on the other.

21. The Committee requested additional information on how IFAD differentiated between its own scaling-up work and that of other partners, especially in the context of formulating strategies for sustainability and scaling up.

22. The Committee noted IOE's findings regarding project performance in non-fragile versus fragile countries, and underlined the need for further information on how fragile states were treated in both the ARRI and the RIDE. In particular, members enquired whether fragility was taken into consideration at the time of drafting the ARRI or during project implementation as this would affect the gap between the non-fragile and the fragile state ratings. The Committee expressed the view that it would be advisable to consider the classification of fragility at the time of implementation, and also that the aspects of the national and subnational fragile areas in which IFAD works needed further discussion.

23. The Committee welcomed Management's agreement regarding the recommendation on completion reviews of country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs), and noted its disagreement with the recommendation to introduce specific measurable indicators and targets for non-lending activities in all COSOP frameworks. The Committee, while acknowledging that lending and non-lending activities complemented each other and that results-based COSOPs should identify measurable indicators and targets for country strategy outcomes to which lending

and non-lending activities jointly contributed, asked Management to clarify how performance in non-lending activities in these areas was being measured in the absence of specific indicators.

24. The Committee also appreciated the inclusion of a section on recurrent issues for the IFAD9 period and agreed with the need for effective and efficient country- and project-level monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. The Committee noted Management's renewed efforts to tackle this problem through a series of new initiatives, such as M&E training and certification, but remained concerned over the persistent weakness of M&E systems within IFAD. It encouraged Management to further explore how to offset the weaknesses on the part of governments.

25. In response to why the benchmarking of IFAD's performance did not include the Inter-American Development Bank, IOE clarified that this specific agency did not use a rating system similar to those of IFAD and the other multilateral development banks. The other United Nations specialized agencies did not have a comparable report to the ARRI.

26. Finally, the Committee welcomed the proposed learning theme of knowledge management for the 2016 ARRI, and requested that the theme be broadened to cover an analysis of knowledge-sharing constraints and the key factors facilitating learning within organizations. In addition, the Committee encouraged IOE to consider emphasizing fiduciary aspects of government performance in future ARRIs.

RIDE

27. The Committee commended Management for its efforts to enhance the report's focus on strengths, weaknesses and remedial actions and to include a status update on the implementation of IFAD9 commitments. The introduction of a colour-coded system to better visualize results and display trends in IFAD's performance was particularly appreciated.

28. The self-assessment ratings indicated robust performance across effectiveness, efficiency, rural poverty impact, gender equality, sustainability and scaling up, with the majority of targets for 2015 having been met or exceeded. The Committee, however, indicated that more remained to be done on several aspects. In view of the recent establishment the Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme, the Committee expressed interest in seeing the programme's implementation gain momentum.

29. The Committee noted the convergence of views in RIDE and ARRI on the need to further focus on improving efficiency, sustainability and government performance, and appreciated the action already initiated by Management in this regard. Management's efforts in the area of decentralization were also commended.

30. The Committee called upon Management to provide a clearer and more specific match between the weaknesses identified and remedial measures initiated, to facilitate better understanding. In response to a request to include an indicator on knowledge management, Management explained that a number of existing RMF indicators already reported upon in the RIDE reflected performance in the area of knowledge management and that annex I of the RIDE (on the status of IFAD9 commitments) included reporting on progress against commitments related to knowledge management. The Committee also sought to understand the basis of the indicator on number of people reached and number of people brought out of poverty.

31. The Committee noted its desire for the next RIDE to report on specific activities and progress made with regard to the IFAD10 commitment to have 50 per cent of the COSOPs cover issues related to South-South and Triangular Cooperation and other IFAD10 commitments.

32. Finally, the Committee looked forward to the consolidated report on IFAD9 in next year's RIDE.

Agenda item 5: Revised provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2016

33. The Committee discussed the revised provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2016 (EC 2015/90/W.P.3). It was noted that the revised version reflected the decision by the Executive Board at its 115th session to shift the presentation of the ARRI and RIDE from December to September starting in 2016. To accommodate this new timeline, the Evaluation Committee session that in the past had been held in June would be moved to early September. In addition, the revised provisional agenda for 2016 reflected the decision of the Committee to bring forward the session planned for November 2016 to June 2016.

34. The Committee endorsed the revised provisional agenda for 2016 with sessions to take place in March, June, September and October. The Committee also noted the mix of evaluations proposed for the sessions.

35. Finally, the revised agenda would be further amended to include the Committee's agreement to consider the joint evaluation synthesis report on pastoral development at the June 2016 session.

Agenda item 6: Project performance assessment of the Programme for Sustainable Development in Rural Mountain Areas in Albania

36. The Committee reviewed the project performance assessment for the Programme for Sustainable Development in Rural Mountain Areas in Albania (2007–2013) contained in document EC 2015/90/W.P.4, and noted the programme goal to improve household income particularly among the poorer rural population.

37. It was brought to the attention of the Committee that, although various activities and outputs were reported, the level of achievement was difficult to assess due to the absence of baseline targets and quantified indicators in relation to the goal and objectives. Furthermore, no midterm review had been undertaken to ensure corrective measures for any design- or implementation-related weaknesses.

38. The findings of the PPA revealed the successful implementation of well-grounded strategies for improved participatory planning and governance at local levels; rehabilitation of the economic infrastructure; and the creation of employment through the loan facility. However, failures were noted in targeting poor households; the prohibitive loan interest rates (17.5-21 per cent), which had discouraged the very poor; the small number of direct beneficiaries; and the lack of equal gender opportunities, among other issues.

39. The Committee noted that for the last three cycles, Albania decided not to request loans from IFAD. The Committee sought and appreciated clarification from Management on engagement with Albania going forward.

40. The Committee appreciated Management's commitment to carefully review the PPA findings to internalize the main lessons, and its decision to convey these findings to the Government and other development partners for their consideration and application in similar projects.

41. Finally, the Committee welcomed Management's willingness to report back on weaknesses, such as design issues that had not been captured despite IFAD's rigorous quality enhancement and assurance processes, and the implementation issues that had not been handled through the implementation support and supervision missions. In this regard, Management would reflect on ways to avoid similar weaknesses.

Agenda item 7: Revision to the IFAD Evaluation Policy

42. The Committee endorsed document EC 2015/90/W.P.2 for submission to the 116th session of the Executive Board in December. The document contained a proposed amendment to paragraph 54 in the IFAD Evaluation Policy, in line with the decision taken by the Executive Board at its 115th session in September 2015 to shift the presentation of the ARRI and RIDE from the December to the September Board session starting in 2016. The Board had also approved the associated revision of the timeline for the ARRI in the Evaluation Policy.

43. Therefore, as proposed in document EC 2015/90/W.P.2, paragraph 54 in the Evaluation Policy, which originally stated that "Every year, IOE shall present the ARRI to the IFAD Management, and thereafter to the Evaluation Committee and Executive Board in their December sessions" was amended to read "Every year, IOE shall present the ARRI to IFAD Management, and thereafter to the Evaluation Committee and Executive Board at their September sessions."

Agenda item 8: Proposed procedure for drafting, clearance and sharing of the records of Evaluation Committee sessions

44. The Committee considered the proposal contained in EC 2015/90/W.P.7 relating to the procedure for drafting, clearance and sharing of records of the Evaluation Committee sessions, prepared by the Office of the Secretary in response to the request by the Committee at its eighty-ninth session to streamline reporting to the Executive Board.

45. The Evaluation Committee agreed with the proposal to limit its official written records to the minutes, which would be shared with the Executive Board, and to no longer prepare a written Chairperson's report, with the understanding that the Chairperson would continue to deliver an oral statement at the Executive Board session subsequent to the Committee session, based on the minutes. The proposal was well aligned with the revised Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Evaluation Committee of the Executive Board contained in EB 2011/102/R.47/Rev.1.

46. To finalize this proposal, the Office of the Secretary agreed to inform the Committee on the time line needed to share the draft minutes in the official languages; this time line would be specified in paragraph 12 of the revised and final version of document EC 2015/90/W.P.7.

Agenda item 9: Second edition of the Evaluation Manual

47. The Committee noted IOE's oral account of how comments provided at the informal session held on 24 June 2015 had been addressed in the final version of the second edition of the Evaluation Manual. The manual would be used for all evaluations conducted by IOE starting in January 2016, and was expected to lay the basis for the preparation of a new harmonization agreement between IFAD's independent and self-evaluation systems.

48. In response to a request to highlight exactly which of the Committee's comments had been adopted and how, IOE clarified that these were incorporated on page 41 of the manual. The Committee welcomed the improved second edition, especially the inclusion of a comparative chart of differences from the first edition, the theory of change and the upcoming version of the manual in all official languages.

49. IOE informed members that the harmonization agreement currently under preparation and to be discussed with Management would be shared with Committee members, as requested, before it was finalized early next year. The harmonization agreement would ensure that IOE and IFAD Management used the same evaluation criteria, rating system and methods, with the aim of enhancing the comparability of the results reported by both.

Agenda item 10: Other business

50. Under other business, the Committee welcomed the report from IOE on the technical seminar held on 17-18 November 2015 on enhancing the evaluability of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2): "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture". The seminar had been jointly organized by the evaluation offices of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, IFAD and the World Food Programme within the framework of Rome-based agency (RBA) collaboration and in the context of the International Year of Evaluation.

51. The Committee noted the information contained in EC 2015/90/INF.1 and commended IOE and counterpart evaluation offices of the other RBAs for the initiative. The goal of the seminar was noted, namely, to contribute to a shared understanding of how to evaluate SDG2 throughout the United Nations system, other international organizations and Member States, along with the seminar's objectives: (i) share lessons learned on the evaluability of the Millennium Development Goals and other partnership initiatives of similar scale; (ii) jointly review key challenges for evaluation in relation to the 2030 development agenda in general and SDG2 in particular; and (iii) identify concrete steps for RBA towards building evaluability of SDG2.

52. Having concluded the Committee's deliberations, the Chairperson conveyed his appreciation to members, IOE, Management, staff, interpreters and messengers for their participation and contribution to a successful session.