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Minutes of the ninety-second session of the Evaluation Committee

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Minutes of the ninety-second session of the Evaluation Committee

1. These minutes cover the deliberations of the Evaluation Committee during its ninety-second session held on 21 June 2016.
2. Upon the approval of the Evaluation Committee, the minutes will be shared with the Executive Board at its September session.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the session

3. Committee members from Egypt, France, India (Chair), Indonesia, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway and Switzerland attended the session. China attended as an observer. The session was attended by the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department (PMD); Associate Vice-President, Strategy and Knowledge Department (SKD); Director, Global Engagement, Knowledge and Strategy Division (GKS); Director, West and Central Africa Division (WCA); Country Programme Manager, WCA; Director, Asia and the Pacific Division (APR); Country Programme Manager, APR; Regional Director, East and Southern Africa Division (ESA); Country Programme Manager, ESA; Officer-in-Charge, Office of the Secretary; and other IFAD staff.
4. Management representatives and staff from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) joined the Evaluation Committee for discussions on the joint evaluation synthesis on FAO's and IFAD's engagement in pastoral development.
5. The Committee benefitted from the participation of Dr Abreha Ghebrai Aseffa, Minister Plenipotentiary, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to IFAD, for the discussions on the country programme evaluation (CPE) for Ethiopia; and the Honourable Ismaila Sanyang, Minister for Agriculture of the Islamic Republic of The Gambia, for the agenda item on the CPE for The Gambia.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda

6. The provisional agenda contained the following items: (i) opening of the session; (ii) adoption of the agenda; (iii) country programme evaluation for the Islamic Republic of The Gambia; (iv) country programme evaluation for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; (v) project performance assessment of the Environment Conservation and Poverty Reduction Programme in Ningxia and Shanxi in the People's Republic of China; (vi) evaluation synthesis on non-lending activities in the context of South-South Cooperation; (vii) joint evaluation synthesis on FAO's and IFAD's engagement in pastoral development; (viii) proposed dates for sessions of the Evaluation Committee in 2017; and (ix) other business.
7. The Chairperson indicated that some agenda items had been reordered to enable key IFAD staff on duty travel to participate in discussions on specific agenda items via video conference. The agenda items would thus be discussed as follows: (iii) project performance assessment of the Environment Conservation and Poverty Reduction Programme in Ningxia and Shanxi in the People's Republic of China; (iv) country programme evaluation for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; (v) proposed dates for sessions of the Evaluation Committee in 2017; (vi) country programme evaluation for the Islamic Republic of The Gambia; (vii) evaluation synthesis on non-lending activities in the context of South-South Cooperation; (viii) joint evaluation synthesis on FAO's and IFAD's engagement in pastoral development; and (ix) other business.
8. The provisional agenda was amended to include, under other business, a proposal by IOE to include the submission of the revised harmonization agreement between

IFAD's independent evaluation and self-evaluation methods and systems to the Evaluation Committee session in October 2016; and as suggested by the Netherlands, an item concerning the name of the committee. The agenda contained in document EC 2016/92/W.P.1, amended to include two items under other business (to be issued as EC 2016/92/W.P.1/Rev.1), was adopted by the Committee.

Agenda item 3: Country programme evaluation for the Islamic Republic of The Gambia

9. The Committee discussed the country programme evaluation for the Islamic Republic of The Gambia covering the period 2004 to 2014, as contained in document EC 2016/92/W.P.2, and noted that this was the first CPE undertaken by IOE in The Gambia since the start of IFAD operations there in 1982.
10. Project portfolio performance in The Gambia was rated moderately satisfactory in terms of relevance and gender equality and women's empowerment, and moderately unsatisfactory with regard to effectiveness, efficiency, rural poverty impact, sustainability, and innovation and scaling up. The Committee expressed serious concern over the limited achievements of the IFAD-supported operations, and noted that performance had been affected by weak institutions, frequent and unpredictable staff turnover, over-reliance on one ministry, weak partnerships and a volatile policy environment. Members were concerned that in some instances, IFAD activities led to counterproductive results such as increasing women's drudgery, and called for proper supervision of operations.
11. The Committee appreciated the positive reception of all the evaluation recommendations by Management and the Government of The Gambia, and their commitment to develop a new country strategy, establish strong and comprehensive partnerships, strengthen project management performance, improve sustainability and enhance support for gender, as reflected in the signed agreement at completion point (ACP).
12. In response to a member's question as to whether IFAD should consider withdrawing from The Gambia, Management and other members reiterated that IFAD's mandate was to work in such areas and contribute to rural poverty reduction and capacity-building. The positive and strong partnership between the Government and IFAD presented an opportunity for continued engagement, and members encouraged Management to find ways to work better and more effectively in difficult country environments.
13. With regard to country presence and whether it could make a difference in The Gambia portfolio, Management informed the Committee that the programme would be managed from the IFAD Country Office (ICO) in Dakar to ensure close follow-up and better coordination with partners who have been running operations in similar contexts.
14. The Committee raised a question as to why The Gambia portfolio had not been evaluated before, and why supervision had not resulted in corrective action earlier on. IOE clarified that the CPE had been delayed to ensure synchronization with the development of the new country strategy. Management responded that a practice of self-assessments and action plans was now implemented, with in-built early warning systems for areas that required action.
15. On whether IOE could carry out another review of The Gambia's country programme, perhaps in three years, and how to ensure timely feedback generally, beyond the use of the selectivity framework, IOE noted that this was part of the self-assessment activities undertaken by the regional divisions of PMD. The revision of the harmonization agreement would be important to ensure uniform criteria and ratings between self-assessment and independent evaluations.

Agenda item 4: Country programme evaluation for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

16. The Committee discussed document EC 2016/92/W.P.3, the country programme evaluation for the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The CPE covered operations during the period 2008-2015, including lending and non-lending activities, and the performance of the country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP).
17. Members welcomed the CPE and thanked IOE for an excellent evaluation report that raised pertinent issues. They noted the clearly positive results in project performance, especially the scaling-up effort, and the strong partnerships with other international financial institutions and agencies. The CPE reflected a successful partnership between IFAD and Ethiopia, with the portfolio and COSOP performance rated satisfactory, and non-lending activities moderately satisfactory.
18. The Committee expressed appreciation for the CPE recommendations, which called upon the country programme to focus on fewer thematic areas for enhanced quality of programmes, use a programmatic approach to lending and sharpen the focus on non-lending activities. The Committee noted that Management and the Government of Ethiopia had endorsed the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the CPE, and appreciated their pledge to implement the recommendations as indicated in the signed ACP. Management informed the Committee that the recommendations would be captured in the design of a new COSOP to be presented to the Executive Board in December.
19. The Committee commented on the last country programme evaluation's recommendations, specifically, limiting the thematic areas in the portfolio, and addressing the weak monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process, and requested further clarification on how Management would tackle the recommendation on developing a long-term programmatic approach. Management responded that interventions and focus areas were agreed upon with the Government and that, in this case, IFAD would focus on irrigation, rural finance and pastoral development for greater effectiveness, as highlighted by the evaluation.
20. The Committee welcomed the positive results in gender mainstreaming. Management confirmed that household methodologies were being applied in relevant projects. On the question of marketing of farm products, Management clarified that while no specific intervention on marketing was foreseen, IFAD would invest in irrigation in areas where there were market opportunities, as an entry point for access to markets. Management also confirmed that some IFAD projects in Ethiopia were actively involved in the Re-greening Initiative.
21. The Committee requested more information on how the M&E system would be strengthened to capture lessons learned and better inform policy dialogue, and encouraged Management to enhance the systematisation of lessons learned into all areas of intervention. Management highlighted that M&E and knowledge management were areas of continued interest and efforts were being made to strengthen them through more technical support and the close collaboration afforded by country presence, and that a plan was under way to create a knowledge platform in Ethiopia. This would contribute to policy dialogue and ensure sustainability of benefits.
22. The Committee questioned whether the ICO had the capacity to meet all expectations in relation to policy dialogue, knowledge management and other non-lending activities as well as the lending activities. Management agreed that expectations were high, but that decentralized ICOs so far were having a greater impact on engagement with governments and other partners.

Agenda item 5: Project performance assessment of the Environment Conservation and Poverty Reduction Programme in Ningxia and Shanxi in the People's Republic of China

23. The Committee reviewed document EC 2016/92/W.P.4, the project performance assessment (PPA) of the Environment Conservation and Poverty Reduction Programme in Ningxia and Shanxi in China, and the Management response thereto. Members thanked IOE for the good evaluation report and noted that this evaluation had been undertaken in the context of a statement of intent between IOE and the Ministry of Finance to support evaluation capacity-building in China.
24. The Committee questioned the added value of the project, which had made a moderate contribution to overall poverty reduction and environmental conservation in remote and environmentally fragile areas, considering the scale of government investments overall. Project performance had been negatively affected by the long time span of 12 years between design and completion and the broad geographical stretch of the project across two provinces, 12 counties and a large number of villages.
25. The Committee welcomed the response to the PPA, which indicated that Management agreed with the recommendations made on targeting, partnerships and M&E. The Committee noted that Management was already taking action on the recommendations by upgrading the M&E systems and tools used by IFAD projects to integrate more realistic key performance indicators, developing an M&E training curriculum to enhance capacity at the project and national level, and ensuring a more central role for the logical framework in the self-evaluation process throughout the project cycle to ensure alignment with the intervention logic and the theory of change. Management also welcomed the PPA recommendations on targeting and partnerships, and highlighted the fact that these were already being incorporated and acted upon in the country programme.
26. Members expressed concern that the project completion report (PCR) overstated achievements and understated challenges and shortcomings, unlike the IOE evaluation. Members raised a query on attribution, and how this was put into perspective in impact evaluation, especially given the marked difference between the self-evaluation and the IOE evaluation. Members highlighted the need for self-evaluation to be more objective and accurate and to contribute to appropriate and timely decision-making. One member underlined the need to maintain an appropriate level of diversified expertise in supervision missions, and to avoid employing national consultants as supervision team leaders. Management acknowledged the disconnect between the PCR and the IOE ratings, stating that since then, deliberate efforts were being made to minimize such disconnect.
27. Regarding the long time span between design and implementation and the slow rate of implementation, Management informed the Committee that in APR it was now the practice to endorse a maximum project length of six years. Management also indicated that the discussions currently under way with the Government of China for the 2016–2020 COSOP reflected the PPA's recommendations regarding engagement with the active poor, enhanced partnerships and focused geographical coverage. In addition, Management confirmed that none of the last four projects approved for China exceeded five years. Management was also working with the Government to ensure that a central agency was established to coordinate efforts in the various provinces and manage the knowledge generated by the projects.
28. The Committee asked how IFAD was approaching discussions with the Government of China about the feasibility of participatory approaches and poverty targeting, especially given that the Management response had highlighted targeting of the active poor and not the very poor, IFAD's primary target. Management expressed the view that despite China's rapid development, the country still faced a huge task of poverty reduction and eradication. Management pointed out that China was a

rapidly changing country that required flexibility in the approach to engagement. To this end, IFAD was constantly involved in discussions with the authorities to ensure the most appropriate approaches to targeting and other issues.

29. Management confirmed that the added value of IFAD interventions in upper middle-income countries such as China lay in the global knowledge and innovations that came along with project implementation, which had the capacity to contribute to policy dialogue.

Agenda item 6: Evaluation synthesis on non-lending activities in the context of South-South Cooperation

30. The Committee considered document EC 2016/92/W.P.5, the evaluation synthesis on non-lending activities in the context of South-South cooperation, and noted that the report was timely and responded to the request made by members under the Consultation on the Ninth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources.
31. The Committee welcomed the recommendations of the evaluation synthesis regarding the need for conceptual clarity and practical guidance at the corporate level for IFAD's support to South-South cooperation (SSC); better mainstreaming of SSC into country programming; increased in-house coordination arrangements and interdivisional collaboration; and partnership with the Rome-based agencies (RBAs). On the recommendation to systematically build up a catalogue of rural development solutions, the Committee noted that Management could explore options to partner with the RBAs where such platforms already existed.
32. With regard to the importance of collaboration with the RBAs and other United Nations agencies and international financial institutions on South-South and triangular cooperation (SSTC), Management clarified that several efforts were already under way, such as the recently concluded China-RBA roundtable on SSC held in June in Xi'an, China, and the planned Dubai expo on SSTC in October 2016.
33. The Committee appreciated IFAD's efforts to promote SSTC since 2008 through support to peer learning and generation of good practices as an important element of development cooperation. The Committee noted Management's response to the evaluation synthesis, and the work under way to strengthen IFAD's internal organizational architecture, in particular by designating the Global Engagement, Knowledge and Strategy Division as the corporate focal point for SSTC. This division would work closely with PMD; Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Office; and the Communications Division.
34. In response to a view expressed by Management, the Committee discussed whether it was necessary for evaluation synthesis reports in general to include recommendations for IFAD Management. The Committee reiterated that recommendations were an important part of evaluation synthesis reports and advised that recommendations and Management's response thereto remain a part of all evaluation syntheses. However, members requested IOE to ensure that the recommendations made were strategic and added value beyond the recommendations contained in reports on which the synthesis was based.
35. The Committee encouraged Management to clarify the objectives, and bring about a common understanding among IFAD staff and Board representatives on the rationale and approaches to SSTC. Management underlined that it would prepare a document providing an overall definition, and outline the objectives and approach to SSTC, for review by the Board, possibly in December. Management informed the Committee that a revised COSOP template was in place to ensure that all new country strategies articulated IFAD's approach to SSTC through both the lending and the non-lending activities. Management emphasized the importance of both lending and non-lending activities in the implementation of SSTC, although the evaluation synthesis had primarily examined the Fund's non-lending activities. The Committee called upon Management to establish a proper results-oriented

monitoring system that could capture not only the outputs but also the outcomes of SSTC-related activities.

36. Members asked how the benefits of SSTC in the context of middle-income countries (MICs) would be included within the strategy on engagement with MICs currently under preparation. Members noted that through the strategy, MICs could be motivated to engage even more actively in SSTC efforts.
37. One member regretted that the synthesis report did not fully reflect the principles of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, which, while recognizing the particularities of SSC, also highlighted that SSC and North-South cooperation shared a set of principles and common goals for development effectiveness, including the agreement to step up efforts to untie aid. IOE's suggestion that IFAD's support to SSC could also consist in "disseminating opportunities for MICs and their private companies to invest in agricultural development in third countries" was therefore not consistent with Busan. The Committee also noted the lack of comparison with other forms of cooperation such as North-South cooperation; the failure to illustrate the role of the BRICS New Development Bank in supporting SSTC; and level of detail contained in the introductory part of the report. In response, IOE pointed out that the inclusion of such historical context was necessary given the long existence of SSC.
38. On a different topic, a member requested information on the next evaluation of IOE. IOE reminded the Committee that the evaluation function at IFAD had been peer-reviewed in 2009/2010, and this had resulted in the revised IFAD Evaluation Policy 2011, which was currently in effect. IOE indicated readiness to embark on a new review of the evaluation function in IFAD, if requested by IFAD's governing bodies.

Agenda item 7: Joint evaluation synthesis on FAO's and IFAD's engagement in pastoral development

39. The Committee reviewed the joint evaluation synthesis on FAO's and IFAD's engagement in pastoral development, contained in document EC 2016/92/W.P.6. Members warmly welcomed the FAO Office of Evaluation, Management team and staff who had come to participate in the discussions.
40. The Committee welcomed the high-quality of the first joint evaluation conducted by FAO and IFAD on the topic of pastoral development and its timeliness, in light of the growing fragility of pastoral systems. Members noted that the report presented an opportunity for both organizations to identify areas for possible collaboration, given the importance of pastoralism as an area for promoting sustainable and inclusive agricultural and rural development in many developing countries.
41. Members noted the evaluation's findings, such as the importance of ensuring pastoralists' mobility, the challenges to better rangeland and water management in the context of climate change, the need for greater integration of gender concerns in the activities of both organizations, the need to clearly distinguish between pastoral and livestock development, and the need for monitoring and institutional learning.
42. The Committee pointed out that the evaluation did not compare the results of the two agencies, and supported the view that future joint evaluation reports should generate differentiated recommendations and lessons for each institution. IOE noted this point and agreed to take it into consideration in future evaluations.
43. The Committee also welcomed the focus by Management on risk management strategy as opposed to risk reduction for the way forward, as recommended by the evaluation. Specifically, the approach to develop contextual risk management and resilience strategies with the involvement of local resource persons was appreciated. The Committee took note of Management's commitment to explore ways to reinforce its engagement in pastoralism, including the need for a new and

comprehensive policy, internal capacity-building and learning about pastoral systems and pastoralism to further enhance design and implementation of relevant programmes.

44. In view of the need for solid principles for engagement in pastoralism, members emphasized the need for IFAD to develop operational guidelines, not just a "how-to-do note", to ensure effective implementation of its pastoralism-related activities. Members also pointed out that pastoral activities were not limited to arid and semi-arid areas, but were also practised in mountainous areas. In this regard, Management noted that people-centred development was IFAD's priority.
45. While appreciating Management's perspective on the importance of promoting advocacy by pastoralists and for pastoralists, the Committee highlighted that both FAO and IFAD were in a position to actively increase their engagement in policy dialogue at the international and national levels.

Agenda item 8: Proposed dates for sessions of the Evaluation Committee in 2017

46. Given that the RBAs' calendar was already very full, proposed dates for Evaluation Committee sessions in 2017 were approved as presented in document EC 2016/92/W.P.7.

Agenda item 9: Other business

47. The Committee approved the inclusion of the submission of the revised harmonization agreement between IFAD's independent evaluation and self-evaluation methods and systems to the Committee's session in October 2016. A revised version of the document "Agenda of the Evaluation Committee in 2016" would be posted on the Member States Interactive Platform under the ninetieth session of the Evaluation Committee. The revised agenda would include the additional item to be discussed at the October session and also the previously approved additional session of the Evaluation Committee, to be held in November 2016.
48. Due to time constraints and the need for expanded discussions, the item raised by the Netherlands regarding the name of the Committee was deferred to the ninety-third session of the Committee in September 2016.
49. In closing the session, the Chairperson thanked all members for their active participation in the fruitful deliberations, as well as IOE, Management, staff, the Secretariat, messengers and interpreters for their support. The Chairperson especially recognized the active and valuable contribution of the representative of France to the Committee, and took the opportunity to bid all members farewell as he, too, would be returning to his capital.