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Investing in rural people

IFAD Management response to the evaluation synthesis on IFAD's support to scaling up of results

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Evaluation Committee — Ninety-sixth Session
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For: Review

IFAD Management response to the evaluation synthesis on IFAD's support to scaling up of results

1. Management welcomes the Independent Office of Evaluation's (IOE) evaluation synthesis report (ESR) on IFAD's support to scaling up of results and is pleased that the report reflects most of the progress made and evolution of thinking on scaling up in IFAD.
2. However, given the nature of the evaluation synthesis and the time frame covered, the ESR could not draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the new approach put in place by IFAD during 2015/2016 as a result of the Tenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD10) commitment on scaling up. Nonetheless, Management notes that the recommendations of the synthesis are in line with the new scaling up approach – as defined in IFAD's Operational Framework for Scaling Up Results, issued in December 2015 – and they are already being implemented.
3. While the Operational Framework is intended to provide structured and consistent guidance to IFAD country teams on how to mainstream this approach into operations, both systematically and throughout the project cycle, Management acknowledges that operational staff awareness and consensus with regard to the new approach need to be strengthened, as recommended by the ESR.
4. A detailed response to each set of recommendations is presented here below:

Recommendation 1. Strengthen the country programme and project cycle to enhance scalability.

- (a) Elaborate a scalability assessment and a pathway to scaling up in country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) as well as in project designs. Until further insights into scalability and evidence of sustained benefits emerge, COSOPs and projects should be selective, prioritizing areas where the prospects for success and sustainability are considered high and are aligned with IFAD's strengths and comparative advantages.

Agreed. Management is fully committed to using the procedures and processes that are in place to ensure that the scalability of IFAD operations is properly assessed and enhanced.

According to the Operational Framework, from the outset (country strategy and project design) and throughout the project cycle, scalability will be assessed and scaling-up pathways defined to ensure that successful projects are not a one-time intervention, but stepping stones towards a wider and sustainable impact on poverty. The pathways identified to implement the scaling-up strategy are meant to include non-lending activities (policy engagement, partnership-strengthening and knowledge management) that are instrumental for establishing, among other things, the fiscal and financial space most badly needed to attain the expected scale in a sustainable manner.

The Operational Framework has introduced a number of questions to be answered at each step of the project cycle to assess scalability. More specifically, box 6 of the operational framework “Questions to consider before project scale-up” provides the basis for a scalability assessment. Sustainable scalability is also to a large extent assessed during the quality assurance process through the questions asked for the purpose of rating the scaling-up process.¹

In addition to the above, as part of the Development Effectiveness Framework, Management is pursuing several initiatives that will help enhance both the way project results are measured, and the delivery and monitoring of non-lending activities at the country level.

- (b) Assess scalability conditions during implementation (including potential constraints deriving from project design and implementation and from public policies) and share findings with potential champions in the government and with other partners (e.g. donors, private entities, community organizations and their federations).

Agreed. As noted above, the Operational Framework provides for scalability assessment throughout the project cycle, including during implementation. Supervision and implementation support are important knowledge sources for building consensus through engagement with rural communities, government officials at different levels and other development partners, both public and private.

- (c) When there are promising scaling-up opportunities, continue IFAD engagement beyond project completion, through further financing phases, partnerships and policy dialogue, so as to strengthen ownership by the government and other development partners, fine-tune the approaches and facilitate the adoption of proven approaches by larger programmes, public strategies and policies.

Agreed. Management agrees with IOE that scaling-up is a lengthy process, typically lasting beyond a one-time IFAD intervention. As indicated in the Operational Framework, scaling up requires carefully laid out and supported pathways, and these usually cover a longer time horizon. Along with the provisions of the Operational Framework, and aligned with the ESR recommendation, Management will ramp up ongoing efforts to promote the scaling up of successful interventions along well-defined pathways that could cover subsequent financing phases, and would ensure creation of the spaces needed to enable scaling up on a sustainable basis. Moreover, as required in the Framework, the pathways will be defined with intermediate objectives to measure whether they are moving in the right direction.

Recommendation 2. Build stronger consensus and incentives in-house to support scaling up. In order to clarify the concept of scaling up and motivate staff, IFAD should promote exchanges between operational staff and exposure to concrete scaling up experiences (e.g. through country visits).

Agreed. Management fully agrees with the recommendation and is committed to building stronger awareness around the scaling up methodology

¹ For example:

“Extent to which the project design clearly identifies the specific models/interventions to be scaled up, based on evidence which demonstrates that tested models/interventions are effective and efficient. How realistic is the model for taking the project to scale? Have the risks to scaling up been identified correctly and mitigated?”

“Extent to which the project has identified, described and assessed the main pathways and the key drivers (government, private sector, development partners and project beneficiaries) that will provide scalability and sustainability beyond the project’s life.”

“Extent to which the project has adequately identified the right institutions and assessed their capacity to take the programme forward, including the potential for leveraging additional partners, resources or policy changes to reach the desired scale.”

as defined in the Operational Framework. Training events will be held through the Country Programme Manager Academy to facilitate and promote exchanges among staff on scaling up. An e-learning scheme is also being developed to complement face-to-face learning. Management will also ensure that learning events are pursued to showcase and reflect on the successes and challenges related to scaling up.

Recommendation 3. Set targets based on evidence on scaling up pathway preparation rather than generic potential. It will be important to make the assessment more objective. At the project completion stage, the assessment needs to focus more on the concrete steps (e.g. analysing evidence of scalability, sharing lessons, networking) that have been taken to encourage development partners' interest and commitment to scaling up, and on the agreements made with the partners and timeframe to implement them.

Agreed. The Operational Framework in the section "Self-evaluation and scaling up" proposes a set of questions that focus on concrete assessments rather than "potential". The Operational Programming and Effectiveness Unit of the Programme Management Department is taking steps to better reflect this approach in the project completion review guidelines, and to ensure that the assessment of scaling up at completion is more focused on the concrete steps taken in developing the scaling up pathway. In this connection, the review process put in place since December 2015, to enhance the quality of the project completion reports, includes a more rigorous review of the performance ratings.

Recommendation 4. IOE should rate innovation and scaling up separately. To date, evaluation reports have assessed innovation and scaling up with a single rating for the two, in conformity with the past when IFAD merged the two notions. However, as noted in the Brookings review and in the 2015 Operational Framework, the two concepts, though related, do not coincide. For better conceptual clarity, and in order to enhance comparability between self-assessment and independent evaluations, there should be separate ratings for innovation and for scaling up.

Agreed. Management welcomes this recommendation, and IOE's decision to align with the self-evaluation systems in this regard. In fact, Management agrees that while innovation and scaling up are closely related, the two concepts are different, and the same assessment may not necessarily apply to both.