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IFAD Management response to the evaluation synthesis report on IFAD's country-level policy dialogue

Note to Evaluation Committee members

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For: **Review**

IFAD Management response to the evaluation synthesis report on IFAD's country-level policy dialogue

1. Management welcomes the evaluation synthesis report (ESR) on IFAD's country-level policy dialogue prepared by the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE). The ESR represents an important effort by IOE to understand IFAD's approach to policy dialogue (or, as IFAD more precisely terms it today, policy engagement) and to analyse its performance in a structured and coherent manner. Management finds that the report is relatively balanced, and that it offers some interesting and nuanced data on outcomes.

2. On the other hand, Management would also like to highlight methodological limitations as a result of which the ESR has not sufficiently recognized the progress made in the last four years to: conceptualize and put into practice an IFAD-specific understanding of policy engagement; build in-house capacity for policy engagement; monitor activities and performance; and manage the knowledge that has emerged. While the lessons learned by other development agencies that were included in the report provide interesting insights, a more thorough review of those learned by IFAD would have further enriched the report.

3. While Management believes that the learning opportunity to further strengthen IFAD's policy engagement agenda could have been enhanced had the final report further incorporated Management's comments, it is unquestionably welcomed as a contribution to our learning on a topic that is increasingly significant to the institution, yet inherently complex – from both a conceptual and operational perspective.

Recommendations

4. Management takes note of the four recommendations of the ESR, and in broad terms agrees with all of them. More nuanced responses on each of them follow.

    Recommendation 1: Strengthen attention to policy dialogue in country strategic opportunity programmes (COSOPs).

5. Agreed. Management agrees on the need to strengthen attention to policy engagement in the COSOP, and, indeed, this has been one of the priorities of the policy desk in the Policy and Technical Advisory Division (PTA) since its establishment in 2013. The recently published knowledge product on incorporating policy engagement into a COSOP[1] pays particular attention to this issue. It offers both concrete suggestions on developing a strategy for policy engagement and specific recommendations regarding the various elements that should make it up.

6. Management fully endorses the statement that "Ultimately, policy dialogue needs to be seen as an opportunity to broaden the impact of IFAD's programmes and operations", and it is precisely for this reason that one of the recommended elements of a strategy for policy engagement is "an identification of the broad thematic areas in which it is expected that IFAD/IFAD-supported projects will pursue a policy agenda under the COSOP, viewed in terms of their contribution to the achievement of the strategic objectives".

7. However, it is also important to recognize that, while the goal of the policy engagement agenda is to contribute to achievement of the COSOP's strategic objectives, the intrinsic nature of nationally owned policy processes (involving multiple stakeholders – politically complex) means it is often beyond IFAD's control to influence the higher levels of the policy theory of change. As such, the COSOP

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[1] "How to: Incorporate policy engagement into a COSOP".
www.ifad.org/documents/10180/8d00110e-c165-4bac-971a-2c8eab7b4a9d

can work as an accountability tool for policy engagement at the output level; it usually works less well at outcome and development objective levels.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the capacity and incentives of country programme managers (CPMs)/country programme officers (CPOs) in connection with policy dialogue.

8.   Agreed. As pointed out in the recommendation, the recently published guidebook on policy engagement[2] (which is a compendium of four more-specific knowledge products) will be of value to CPMs and CPOs in their policy activities, as well as to design team members for COSOPs and projects. IFAD's operations academy initiative will provide an opportunity for broader dissemination of these tools. In addition, training in topics such as partnership-building should be linked to policy engagement training, so as to encourage CPMs and CPOs to work in policy processes with other relevant stakeholders, including development partners.

9.   The involvement of CPMs and CPOs in policy activities is an integral part of their work as managers of IFAD's country programmes, and as such it should certainly be taken into account in their performance assessment. Having said this, progress on policy dialogue is not likely to be appropriate as a basis for staff performance assessments because opportunities for policy work vary country by country, and because many factors influence the success of activities – including elements often beyond the control of individual staff members.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the monitoring and reporting of policy dialogue activities.

10.   Agreed. Policy-related activities that take place during supervision and implementation support should be documented. In fact, they often are, through the aides-memoires that provide the basis for discussion between the IFAD team and government and the follow-up "management letters" from directors of IFAD's regional divisions to the borrower. There is no doubt, however, that – more broadly – monitoring and evaluation of policy engagement needs to be more systematic. To this end, PTA and the Operational Programming and Effectiveness Unit are working together on a project to facilitate monitoring and reporting of country-level activities and their results. A revision of the methodology of the client survey, which is used as a tool to assess the effectiveness of IFAD's policy engagement, is also envisioned and is expected to further strengthen monitoring of progress. Moreover, specific indicators for policy engagement have been included in the revised Results and Impact Management System (RIMS) framework, which will better capture policy engagement in projects with dedicated policy components.

Recommendation 4: Revisit and strengthen the approach to assessing policy dialogue at the country level in independent evaluations.

11.   Agreed. Management welcomes IOE's commitment to improve its approach to assessing policy dialogue and, more broadly, policy engagement at the country level.

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[2] "Country-level policy engagement in IFAD: Guide book".
www.ifad.org/documents/10180/b360d3a9-e8db-4de4-9af7-babc08075953