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Investing in rural people

Minutes of the ninety-seventh session of the Evaluation Committee

Note to Evaluation Committee members

Focal points:

Technical questions:

Oscar A. Garcia
Director
Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2274
e-mail: a.garcia@ifad.org

Dispatch of documentation:

William Skinner
Chief
Governing Bodies
Tel.: +39 06 5459 2974
e-mail: gb@ifad.org

Minutes of the ninety-seventh session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The ninety-seventh session of the Evaluation Committee was held on 12 July 2017. These minutes cover the Committee's deliberations during the session.
2. The minutes will serve as the basis for the oral report provided by the Evaluation Committee Chairperson to the Executive Board. Once approved by the Committee, the minutes will be shared with the Board.

Agenda item 1. Opening of the session

3. The Chairperson, Mr Rishikesh Singh, welcomed members, observers, the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE), Management representatives and IFAD staff to the session. In particular, he welcomed Japan, which had been appointed by the President to replace Norway on the Evaluation Committee until April 2018, further to the approval of Japan's nomination by the Executive Board through a vote by correspondence.
4. The session was attended by Committee members for France, Ghana, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria and Switzerland. Representatives of Algeria, China and the Dominican Republic attended as observers. The session was also attended by the Director, IOE; Deputy Director, IOE; Associate Vice-President, Programme Management Department (PMD); Chief, Operational Programming and Effectiveness Unit, PMD; Director, Asia and the Pacific Division (APR); Country Programme Manager, APR; Director, Western and Central Africa Division (WCA); Country Programme Officer, WCA; Portfolio Advisor, WCA; Secretary of IFAD, a.i.; and other IFAD staff.
5. Ms Mariyam Fazna, Project Director, Programme Implementation Unit, Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture of the Government of the Republic of Maldives, via video link, took part in discussions on the project performance evaluation for the Post-Tsunami Agriculture and Fisheries Rehabilitation Programme. Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Monsieur Léopold Mulumba Mfumu Kazadi, Secretary General for Agriculture, and His Excellency Monsieur Albert Tshiseleka Felha, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to IFAD, participated as observers of the discussion on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSCPE). Her Excellency Mónica Robelo Raffone, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Nicaragua to the United Nations organizations in Rome, participated as an observer of the discussions on the CSPE for Nicaragua.

Agenda item 2. Adoption of the agenda

6. The provisional agenda comprised the following items: (i) opening of the session; (ii) adoption of the agenda; (iii) project performance evaluation of the Post-Tsunami Agriculture and Fisheries Rehabilitation Programme in the Republic of Maldives; (iv) country strategy and programme evaluation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo; (v) proposed dates for sessions of the Evaluation Committee in 2018 and 2019; (vi) country strategy and programme evaluation for Nicaragua; (vii) evaluation synthesis report on IFAD's country-level policy dialogue; and (viii) other business.
7. The provisional agenda was amended to include, under other business, IOE's comments on the revised performance-based allocation system (PBAS) formula.
8. The Committee adopted the agenda contained in document EC 2017/97/W.P.1, amended to include one item under other business (to be issued as EC 2017/97/W.P.1/Rev. 1).

Update on the International Conference on Evaluation organized by IOE, and on IFAD's chairing of the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG)

9. Prior to considering the agenda items, the Director, IOE, shared a brief update on his chairmanship of the ECG in 2017. On 8 June, IOE had hosted the annual meeting of the ECG, at IFAD for the first time, at which a high-level panel discussed the role of independent evaluation in the transformation of multilateral development banks. Prior to this, IOE had hosted an international technical conference on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for Evaluation (ICT4Eval): Using Innovative Approaches to Development Evaluation. The conference discussed the latest innovative approaches to the use of ICT in development evaluation and featured best practices.

Agenda item 3. Project performance evaluation of the Post-Tsunami Agriculture and Fisheries Rehabilitation Programme in the Republic of Maldives

10. The Committee reviewed document EC 2017/97/W.P.2, Project performance evaluation of the Post-Tsunami Agriculture and Fisheries Rehabilitation Programme in the Republic of Maldives. This was the first independent project-level evaluation conducted in the country.
11. Members noted that the programme had been designed in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, with the objectives of restoring agriculture and fisheries sectors to pre-tsunami levels and improving livelihoods. The programme contributed to ocean resources management in Maldives and to sustainable fishing at the national policy level. Due to the post-emergency nature of the programme, the design was done hastily and proved to be weak. The programme had to be adjusted several times during implementation, thus limiting its effectiveness.
12. The Committee noted that Management appreciated the candid evaluation and agreed with the findings and recommendations. Management acknowledged that IFAD's principal role was to support steady, long-term recovery and development in post-emergency situations, rather than engagement in relief operations. Moreover, current IFAD-supported interventions had to be based on a participatory, high-quality design and targeting strategy, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation during implementation. Lessons learned from the experience of the programme had been internalized and were consistent with the IFAD policy on crisis prevention and recovery and the 2011 Guidelines for Early Disaster Recovery.
13. The Government of Maldives had also agreed with the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, in particular that the programme should have focused on the restoration of development rather than on immediate relief from the disaster situation.
14. Members discussed engagement in post-disaster emergency situations and expressed the view that IFAD had to focus on its mandate and work in partnership with the Rome-based agencies (RBAs) and other organizations in such situations. While there would always be political pressure to engage in emergency situations, it was IFAD's responsibility to ensure proper design, well-planned activities and interventions that would contribute to long-term and sustainable recovery.
15. In response to a question on why UNOPS had supervised the project at the start, Management explained that IFAD was not doing direct supervision then. Members noted that with IFAD shifting to direct supervision, and with decentralization, it was now better placed to provide better implementation support and thus better results.
16. An IFAD grant had been used to carry out policy dialogue activities, while an expected external grant had not materialized and thus could not be disbursed.
17. Members thanked IOE for the evaluation and the important issues raised on design, targeting and implementation, and thanked Management for positively responding to the recommendations and using the lessons learned to inform future operations.

Agenda item 4. Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo

18. The Committee reviewed the CSPE for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (document EC 2017/97/W.P.3). This was the first such evaluation for the country and covered the period 2003-2015, comprising two COSOPs, five projects, some 20 IFAD grants and non-lending activities, including policy dialogue, knowledge management and partnerships.
19. The Committee thanked IOE for the evaluation, and Management and the Government for endorsing its findings and recommendations, as indicated in the agreement at completion point.
20. The evaluation provided an opportunity for IFAD to learn from its experience operating in a country with fragile situations. The evaluation was timely, as it would inform preparation of a new country strategy, taking into account the new framework for IFAD's engagement in fragile situations, as well as country priorities.
21. The evaluation found that the COSOPs were very well aligned with government policies and IFAD strategic frameworks for the period under review.
22. Although the fragility context had not been sufficiently taken into account in project design, rapid impact actions such as rehabilitation of roads, schools and health centres led to immediate positive effects on the access of rural people to education and health services. Distribution of seed and agricultural tools, combined with agricultural extension, increased production in project intervention areas.
23. On the other hand, the long-term rural poverty impact was affected by the low efficiency and effectiveness of the projects, owing to weak implementation capacities, overambitious and complex design, and spread-out activities in a context of weak public and private services.
24. The Committee reiterated the need for Management to ensure simple project designs in fragile situations, in keeping with the recently approved policy for engagement in areas with fragile situations. It urged Management to find ways of balancing simple designs against ambitious and high-quality objectives. In addition, the aspect of differentiated support was highlighted – based on the needs of different IFAD target groups in different areas.
25. The Committee advised that in such geographically large countries with fragile situations and limited infrastructure, focus on smaller areas would yield better results than spreading operations thin.
26. Members noted the positive impact of country presence on the implementation of projects. While management costs were found to be very high, a member noted that in some contexts this was justifiable to "leave no one behind" in accordance with the 2030 Agenda. Working in close partnership with other United Nations agencies and organizations was important in enhancing results in areas of fragility.
27. Responding to a question about the exit strategy, Management clarified that this referred to exit from a project, not from the country. IFAD was working closely with the Government to find solutions to the various challenges highlighted in the evaluation, such as poor performance, which in turn affected the level of resources allocated to the country. Despite the great need, poor portfolio performance had led to a significant reduction in the resources allocated to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and this was one of the priorities to address through the joint portfolio review with the Government.
28. Representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo thanked IFAD for its operations in the country, and IOE for the evaluation. They endorsed the recommendations and said that these would help them focus on improving their operations. They acknowledged that fragility in the country had a negative impact

on project implementation, and expressed a commitment to take the necessary actions to ensure that suspension of the IFAD portfolio would be lifted.

Agenda item 5. Proposed dates for sessions of the Evaluation Committee in 2018 and 2019

29. The Committee approved the proposed dates for its sessions in 2018 and 2019, as contained in document EC 2017/97/W.P.4.

Agenda item 6. Country strategy and programme evaluation for Nicaragua

30. The Committee reviewed the country strategy and programme evaluation for Nicaragua, contained in document EC 2017/97/W.P.5. This was the first CSPE for Nicaragua since the start of IFAD operations in 1979. The evaluation covered a period of eighteen years, including five projects, six regional grants and two COSOPs – approved in 2005 and 2015.
31. Portfolio performance was positive overall, with a significant contribution to rural development in the country. IFAD's technical capacity and strong methodological specialization in areas such as family farming were recognized by the Government. However, there was still a need to: further support market integration for family farmers and indigenous peoples and government efforts in climate change adaptation; strengthen effectiveness and efficiency; and improve monitoring and evaluation systems at the project level.
32. The CSPE found that the objectives of the projects were in line with government strategies, targets were surpassed, and technology transfer had been promoted. Some challenges were identified, such as low disbursement rates and low outreach to the indigenous population on the Caribbean coast.
33. Management fully accepted the findings and recommendations of the evaluation and will work with the Government to further address the issues identified.
34. The representative for Nicaragua thanked IOE for the evaluation and noted that it had generated mutual knowledge and lessons to guide the country in planning the next COSOP. Close attention would thus be paid to gender equality, climate change mainstreaming and strengthening monitoring and evaluation. As reflected in the agreement at completion point, the Government was committed to implementing the evaluation recommendations in the time frame provided.
35. The Committee thanked IOE for a good evaluation report, and Management and the Government for their endorsement of the findings and recommendations.
36. The Committee raised a number of questions and both IOE and Management responded accordingly:
- (a) Regarding how cooperatives were strengthened, Management said that diverse kinds of support were provided, including, but not limited to, legal and organizational issues and business plan preparation.
 - (b) On why technical support was viewed as an innovation, IOE clarified that the evaluation referred to certain aspects, such as provision of technical assistance to farmers economically and cost-effectively; creation of farmers' associations empowered to set priorities for technical assistance, be involved in selection of the service provider and assess its quality; and provision of technological transfer packages. Moreover, under technical assistance, IFAD has supported the institutional strengthening of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples on the Caribbean coast.
 - (c) Regarding the client satisfaction survey, this was conducted by the projects, not by IFAD.
 - (d) Regarding the experience of IFAD with project cofinancing beyond its financial implications, it was noted that this aspect was not covered by the evaluation.

37. Management indicated that multiple cofinancing was one factor behind low disbursement rates. A corporate plan to improve the pace of disbursements was already in place and under implementation, with promising signs of improvement.
38. On the outcome of regional grants in which Nicaragua had been a participant, there were positive results, in particular, with the UN Women grant for entrepreneurship among rural women, and another managed by the Guatemala Exporters Association (AGEXPORT).
39. As reflected in the agreement at completion point, some projects were now dedicated to climate change adaptation, supported by Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP) financing. Increasing attention was being paid to climate change and adaptation through regional grants as well.
40. In response to a question on the content of evaluation reports, IOE said that, at each Evaluation Committee session, a range of different types of evaluations was provided. These included project performance evaluations, evaluation synthesis reports, country strategy and programme evaluations and other types as anticipated in the workplan and budget.
41. Regarding the translation of documents into all languages, IOE cited the IFAD Evaluation Policy, which stated that the country programme reports were prepared in the language of the country and the executive summary provided in the other official languages.
Agenda item 7. Evaluation synthesis report on IFAD's country-level policy dialogue
42. The Committee discussed the evaluation synthesis report on IFAD's country-level policy dialogue and Management response, contained in document EC 2017/97/W.P.6/Add.1.
43. The Committee noted that IFAD increasingly recognized the importance of policy dialogue and, in particular, its potential contribution to the realization of the IFAD goal to move large numbers of rural people out of poverty. As such, policy dialogue was important because it created an enabling environment to support the performance and development results of projects, and it could also support the scaling up of proven successful approaches and their results. Accordingly, policy dialogue has been central to IFAD9 and IFAD10 commitments, and to the IFAD Strategic Framework 2016-2025, with a slight shift in focus to policy engagement. The synthesis focused on country-level policy dialogue and covered the period 2010-2015.
44. The synthesis found that most country strategies included objectives for policy dialogue, mainly focusing on: establishing or supporting policy discussion forums and platforms for various stakeholders, with an emphasis on enabling smallholder farmers to be heard; and contributing to the preparation of national policies, strategies or regulation in support of rural poverty reduction.
45. Some of the constraints identified included: the invisibility of policy dialogue, because informal policy dialogue work was not documented; the absence of a real action plan for policy dialogue at the country level; and limited human and financial resources for this activity.
46. Management welcomed the evaluation synthesis report, which was relatively balanced, contained lessons from external organizations, and thus made a useful contribution to learning on policy engagement. Management was committed to strengthening county-level policy engagement, making IFAD's approach more consistent and ensuring that the outcomes were more measurable.
47. The Committee expressed appreciation for the evaluation synthesis and endorsed its recommendations. In particular, the importance of IFAD as a donor and not as a

- participant in the development processes of a country, providing technical cooperation and engaging in sectoral policies, was raised.
48. Members also noted the importance of training and capacity-building of IFAD staff to position them to carry out policy engagement effectively. The IFAD Guidebook on Country-level Policy Engagement was welcomed as a step in the right direction.
 49. In the framework of sectoral policy evaluations and investment in agriculture in particular, the Committee on World Food Security had developed responsible agricultural investment (RAI) principles. A member remarked that IFAD could play a significant role in disseminating these principles for implementation at the national level.
 50. Regarding the opinion that IFAD was sometimes not viewed as a prime partner for engagement in policy dialogue, a member suggested that RBA collaboration might be explored to ensure that the messages of the three agencies were heard and integrated into country-level policies. IOE remarked that in some sectors, such as rural finance and small-scale irrigation, IFAD had very long and good operational experience, and the relevant knowledge to directly support governments in their efforts to further enhance access to rural finance or facilitate irrigation policies.
 51. A member noted that policy engagement was in a way linked to decentralization. IFAD's role at the country level was more than just to disburse funds, and engaging in policy dialogue contributed to creating an enabling environment for project implementation. IFAD should position itself as an active participant, beyond being a donor, by using the instruments of loans and grants to engage more in policy dialogue and leverage partnerships for greater influence. Management agreed that decentralization was key to IFAD's participation in policy dialogue, and reiterated the plan to build capacities through the operational academy, and strengthen monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management.
 52. Some members noted that IFAD could play an active role in policy dialogue through the existing system and participation in sectoral working groups. However, its role in policy analysis needs to be clarified; in this area, perhaps IFAD could work through partnerships, without necessarily taking the lead. IOE noted that this was in line with the theory of change in the evaluation, where the initiatives on policy dialogue were closely related to partnership-building and knowledge management.
 53. Management emphasized the need to ensure a convergence of views among diverse partners prior to embarking on policy engagement with governments. A member requested that more attention be given in future evaluations to partnerships and the role IFAD can play in bringing together other stakeholders with the government, including the private sector. IOE said that an evaluation synthesis report on partnerships, with special emphasis on private-sector partnerships, was part of the approved work programme and would be ready for discussion in 2018.
 54. The Committee noted that there was still room for improvement in country-level policy dialogue, such as the aspect of informal dialogue and its role in building confidence and trust with governments and other partners. Management agreed with this view, and noted that IFAD provided a supporting role to governments and farmers. Some steps were already being taken to further improve policy engagement, such as: (i) integration of specific activities in COSOPs; (ii) reporting on the extent of ongoing policy activities; and (iii) building capacities through preparing tools at project and country levels to better track policy engagement activities and report against the new RIMS indicators.
 55. One member remarked that the report seemed to ignore the fact that IFAD's presence at the country level was very thin. He welcomed the emphasis on policy engagement, which was broader and more inclusive, ensuring that staff at different levels and with different skills could contribute. Regarding the participatory

approach with smallholder farmers to capture their views, IOE informed the committee that 49 per cent of the evaluations reviewed had taken that type of participatory approach and the opportunity for those voices to be heard.

56. IOE also reiterated that policy dialogue did not take place exclusively through non-lending activities, but through lending activities as well. Activities such as COSOP preparation, project design and supervision missions provided opportunities for direct engagement with government counterparts and for enhancing the potential for increased impact of interventions.

Agenda item 8. Other business

57. The Director, IOE, presented comments on the revised PBAS formula as had been shared at the meeting of the PBAS Working Group on 11 July. Some members took the opportunity to reiterate their support for the scenario 3-D proposed by Management as having the right balance between performance and needs, and catering sufficiently to other aspects such as areas with fragile situations.
58. The Secretary of IFAD, a.i, informed members that another meeting would be arranged for the PBAS Working Group to facilitate consensus on the proposed revised formula.
59. The Chairperson thanked all participants for their contributions to the lively discussions. He also thanked the interpreters and declared the session closed.