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Investing in rural people

## Response of IFAD Management to the evaluation synthesis report on what works for gender equality and women's empowerment – a review of practices and results

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For: Review

## Response of IFAD Management<sup>1</sup> to the evaluation synthesis report on what works for gender equality and women's empowerment – a review of practices and results

### Overall

1. Management welcomes the evaluation synthesis report (ESR) by the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) on "What works for gender equality and women's empowerment – a review of practices and results". It is pleased that the report is consistent with IFAD's approach as expressed in its corporate policy on gender equality and women's empowerment.
2. Notwithstanding Management's reservations about the nature of evaluation syntheses and how they are distinguished from other evaluations conducted by IOE, this evaluation synthesis provides useful findings on the relevance, effectiveness and impact of interventions that have successfully targeted women and empowered them in various ways.
3. It thus complements IOE's corporate-level evaluation (CLE) of IFAD's performance with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment (2010), which found that the Fund systematically addressed gender equality and women's empowerment in its design, but there was room for improvement in that staff and implementation units were not consistent and clear in the measures they proposed to address inequality.
4. Management in particular welcomes efforts to define the characteristics of transformative practice.

### Findings

5. Management is pleased that the report underlines that IFAD is making good progress in implementing its corporate policy on gender equality and women's empowerment. This is consistent with the findings of UN Women in its recent reports on the UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), which recognizes that IFAD is making excellent progress against most indicators covered in the action plan.
6. As mentioned, the CLE found that the Fund systematically addressed gender equality and women's empowerment in project design. At the same time, it indicated that there was room for improvement during implementation, for example in building the capacity of project management units and IFAD staff to address issues related to reducing inequality and to collecting gender-disaggregated data for monitoring progress and learning.
7. Since the 2010 CLE, Management has put in place a number of instruments and processes to address these concerns, including strengthening review of gender issues in supervision missions and reports, in-house training of staff in these issues and adoption of more differentiated approaches to gender mainstreaming based on country and project contexts. The success of these measures is underlined in the 2016 Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE), which finds that more than 90 per cent of IFAD operations are either moderately satisfactory or better in promoting gender equality.<sup>2</sup>
8. IFAD Management is currently revising its organizational architecture towards a clear, responsive and implementation-conducive institutional structure to further mainstream gender, climate change and nutrition through a composite lens.

<sup>1</sup> The Programme Management Department sent the final Management response to the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on 3 March 2017.

<sup>2</sup> <https://webapps.ifad.org/members/eb/118/docs/EB-2016-118-R-8.pdf>.

Management has made corporate commitments in these three cross-cutting areas that are of significant importance to IFAD's operations, irrespective of their technical thematic focus. There is now also a growing understanding of the interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of these themes. Mainstreaming of these core priorities in IFAD's lending operations suggests moving away from free-standing projects or components that treat gender, climate or nutrition in a mutually exclusive manner.

#### Methodology and process

9. The gender ESR has drawn on a sample of IOE evaluations of IFAD-supported projects that were designed in the period 2001-2005. In this regard, it is important to underline that these projects were designed before the adoption of IFAD's first corporate policy on gender, at a time when IFAD was still articulating its approach to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Though IFAD had a Gender Plan of Action covering the period 2002-2006, the tools to properly implement the plan, including guidelines for project supervision and the arms-length quality assurance mechanisms for project design, were introduced after that.
10. Thus the findings presented in the ESR on gender, though useful, should be interpreted with a degree of caution. Moreover, given the extensive progress IFAD has made in recent years in mainstreaming gender, it is important to highlight that the findings in the ESR might not fully capture current approaches to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in IFAD operations. For instance, in 2016, the quality assurance group rated 89 per cent of the projects as moderately satisfactory or better at entry for gender.<sup>3</sup>
11. On another issue, while information from external research and sources has been included in the ESR, a more comprehensive analysis incorporating the benchmarking exercise undertaken with the experiences of other multilateral development banks on gender in the agriculture sector would have been useful. This would have helped IFAD Management learn lessons of relevance to IFAD's context from the work of other development actors.
12. Management appreciates the in-house learning workshop on gender transformative pathways organized in the course of preparing the ESR to stimulate dialogue and reflection. It used the theory of change to introduce gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) into specific thematic areas such as natural resource management, agricultural and livestock production, value chain development, land and water resources, and rural finance and rural institutions.

#### Learning

13. While the comparison of past experiences and conceptualization of GEWE in specific contexts has its limitations, as indicated above, the review is useful in highlighting IFAD's long experience and progress in targeting and empowering women. The case studies (annex V) provide excellent illustrations and a good opportunity for sharing lessons learned. It would be useful to extract such case studies promptly and systematically from all IOE evaluations and share them on a large scale.

#### Recommendations

14. Management takes note of and agrees with the five recommendations of the ESR on gender. A detailed response to each recommendation is presented below.
15. Recommendation 1. Conceptualize and integrate the gender transformative approach for use throughout the organization for IFAD10. Agreed. Management fully agrees with the need to conceptualize the gender transformative approach and develop a shared understanding of processes and practices. IFAD has a track record of supporting gender equality and women's

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<sup>3</sup> See 2016 RIDE.

empowerment from corporate strategy to operations, including in its management of human resources. For instance, in the IFAD Strategic Framework 2016-2025, gender is identified as one of the five principles of engagement, which is a reflection of the importance IFAD places on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment at the highest level.

16. Moreover, several key indicators with corresponding targets on gender are included in the IFAD10 Results Measurement Framework, which ensures that the organization devotes due attention to the topic and is held accountable for its actions and performance. Regular monitoring and reporting is conducted on performance related to gender to guide decision-making by both Senior Management and the governing bodies, particularly through the annual RIDE, which includes a specific annex covering IFAD's performance on gender.
17. Going forward, increasing efforts will be made to improve the understanding of and capacity to mainstream gender issues, in particular in their correlation to nutrition and climate change through the Country Programme Manager Academy.
18. In line with the Sustainable Development Goal agenda, IFAD set targets not only to increase the proportion of projects in which gender is mainstreamed, but also to make interventions more transformative. Under IFAD10, it is suggested that 15 per cent of projects should be gender transformative and, on completion, 90 per cent of projects rated as partial gender mainstreaming (moderately satisfactory = 4) or better.
19. Moreover, IFAD is committed to ensuring that women account for at least 35 per cent of all staff positions in the P-5 category or above in the IFAD10 period. Finally, at the corporate level, IFAD is making efforts to quantify the administrative budget allocated annually to gender issues, which is an additional way to ensure continued attention to the topic.
20. Clear definitions, benchmarks and indicators are also needed for reporting under IFAD10. The evaluation synthesis is a useful first step towards a definition or operationalization of the concept of "gender transformation". Further efforts are needed and IOE is invited to join this process of conceptualization.
21. Recommendation 2. Develop explicit theories of change to underpin targeting strategies for different groups of women, together with indicators to monitor them at the point of design, and offer tailored interventions based on available good practices.  
Agreed. Management agrees with the use of theories of change, in general, as an instrument to better design and implement IFAD-supported projects. Theories of change, in general, allow for more explicit articulation of the necessary steps from inputs to achieving desired outcomes and impacts – and, in particular, to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.
22. Moreover, implementation of IFAD's development effectiveness framework and strengthening of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity, through the Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR) grant initiative, are particularly timely in training IFAD staff and building the capacity of project staff and others in developing countries in the application of theories of change for better gender and other results on the ground.
23. Recommendation 3. Establish systematic M&E of disaggregated benefits and GEWE outcomes at corporate and project levels.  
Agreed. Management agrees that there is a need for better M&E and documentation of results, lessons and good practices of gender outcomes in self-evaluation processes. Several initiatives are underway to fully implement this important recommendation from the ESR, including the one outlined above.

24. In addition, IFAD is currently refining its Results and Impact Management System (RIMS) – for discussion with the Board in April 2018 – which includes strengthening the gender indicators regularly monitored at the project level and reported for enhanced results management and learning. The Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) measures the empowerment, agency and inclusion of women in agriculture dimensions. Key elements of the WEAI are being carefully built into the design of project impact assessments, being done as part of the IFAD10 initiative on impact assessment, to better attribute results to IFAD operations.

25. IFAD also developed two separate methodologies in 2013 to: (i) conduct ex ante analysis of gender sensitivity in IFAD loans; and (ii) identify distribution of the regular budget for gender-related activities.

26. Recommendation 4. Report consistently on GEWE outcomes and impacts in GEWE evaluations and include sound contextual analysis to explain results (IOE).

Agreed. This recommendation is addressed to IOE. As such, Management welcomes the proposal for independent evaluations to better capture gender outcomes and impact, including deeper explanations of the proximate causes of good or less-good performance. This will contribute to promoting accountability and learning throughout the organization.

27. Recommendation 5: Replicate good practices covering the three GEWE policy objectives and strengthen working with men.

(a) Practices that worked well, but are not yet common, should be promoted (e.g. value chains, marketing, off-farm employment).

Agreed. All IFAD-supported operations have a focus on specific sectors, and within those sectors, gender-specific approaches have been developed. There are good experiences in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in all sectors, in particular in rural finance, improving agricultural production and access to markets, and diversification of income-generating opportunities.

(b) Labour-saving technologies and working with men are not common practices yet, but available evidence suggests that they can be highly effective. Practices to influence men and traditional leaders and practices to address women’s time poverty should be widely integrated into IFAD’s interventions.

Agreed. Reducing rural women’s workload is one of the three pillars of IFAD’s gender policy. The GEWE approach can be strengthened in infrastructure development – from roads, water and sanitation, and irrigation to energy and warehouses. Only when women have more available time will they be able to engage more in economic activities and community matters. The involvement of men is a priority for IFAD, as demonstrated in its efforts to promote participatory methods targeting all household members. IFAD has pioneered “household methodologies”, which have been included in the design of more than 40 new projects.

(c) Practices that are common, but so far have yielded mixed results, should be improved based on the available international practices. IFAD should critically review some commonly held beliefs and assumptions about gendered benefits and promote services that are better tailored to the strategic needs of women (e.g. inclusive rural finance, infrastructure, functional skills training).

Agreed. Interventions and services that are tailored to the strategic needs of women can strengthen their economic and social empowerment.

- (d) Some practices are highly relevant, but not yet effective or common (e.g. promotion of income-generating activities, land rights), often because they are meeting contextual limitations (social and cultural values, institutional and legal frameworks). For those, the assumptions and influencing factors (in their theories of change) that have been limiting their effectiveness and wider application need to be carefully reviewed. The wider application of those practices needs to be accompanied with adequate strategies to address the systemic issues that may limit their effectiveness.

Agreed. IFAD is trying to encourage reflections on the contextual circumstances of any development intervention. However, within the well-defined set-up of an investment project, it might not be possible to give enough attention to the review of systemic issues unless the project is accompanied by a research programme.

- (e) Policy engagement and scaling up successful GEWE practices are key to enabling transformative change. There are some good practices already, but they need to be more widely understood and applied within IFAD.

Agreed. IFAD is continuously collecting evidence from its operations to further define drivers and pathways for scaling up GEWE and how those can be set in motion and sustained in a project. Potential gender-sensitive innovations suitable for scaling up need to be identified at the design stage and monitored throughout.