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Investing in rural people

Minutes of the ninety-ninth session of the Evaluation Committee

Note to Evaluation Committee members

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Minutes of the ninety-ninth session of the Evaluation Committee

1. The minutes of the ninety-ninth session of the Evaluation Committee held on 26 October 2017 cover the Committee's deliberations during the session.

2. The minutes have been approved by the Committee and will be shared with the Executive Board as the basis for the Chairperson's oral report to the Board.

Agenda item 1. Opening of the session

3. The session was chaired by Mr Des Alwi (Indonesia), on behalf of Mr Rishikesh Singh (India), who was unable to attend.

4. The session was attended by Committee members for France, India, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Representatives of Algeria, China and the Dominican Republic attended as observers. The session was also attended by the Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE); Deputy Director, IOE; Associate Vice-President, Corporate Services Department, and Officer-in-Charge, Programme Management Department (PMD); Chief, Operational Programming and Effectiveness Unit (OPE), PMD; Regional Director, East and Southern Africa Division (ESA); Country Director, ESA; Country Officer, ESA; Director, Policy and Technical Advisory Division (PTA); Officer-in-Charge, Near East, North Africa and Europe Division (NEN); Country Programme Manager (CPM), NEN; Officer-in-Charge, Office of the Secretary; and other IFAD staff.

5. Mr Inácio Tomás Muzime, Counsellor and Alternate Permanent Representative of the Republic of Mozambique, participating as an observer in the discussions on the country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) for the Republic of Mozambique, shared the Government's perspective. His Excellency Hisham Badr, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to Italy and Permanent Representative to IFAD; Dr Ahmed Shalaby, Agricultural Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to IFAD; and Mr Khaled El Taweel, Alternate Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to IFAD, participated as observers in the discussions on the CSPE for the Arab Republic of Egypt, and shared their Government's perspective.

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) CSPE for the Republic of Mozambique; (iv) results-based work programme and budget for 2018 and indicative plan for 2019-2020 of IOE; (v) provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2018; (vi) CSPE for the Arab Republic of Egypt; (vii) evaluation synthesis report (ESR) on gender equality; (viii) strengthening the strategic role of the Evaluation Committee; and (ix) other business.

7. The Committee adopted the agenda contained in document EC 2017/99/W.P.1 (to be issued as document EC 2017/99/W.P.1/Rev. 1).

Agenda item 3. Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Republic of Mozambique

8. The Committee discussed the CSPE for the Republic of Mozambique, together with the Government's views on the evaluation reflected in the agreement at completion point, document EC 2017/99/W.P.2. Members welcomed the CSPE covering the lending portfolio from 2010 to 2016, noting that it was the second one for Mozambique, the first one having been completed in 2009.

9. The evaluation found that the value chain development focus of the portfolio was in line with national strategies. It identified areas for closer attention, such as the need to: implement appropriate measures to include food-insecure households; strengthen attention to natural resource and environmental management; focus on

support to accessible financial services; and reinforce analysis of gender equality issues in project areas.

10. The Committee commended IOE for the impressive quality of the report, and welcomed the findings and recommendations presented, as well as Management's agreement with these findings and recommendations. The finding that, through value chain development, the programme had focused more on surplus farmers and less on food insecure households led members to emphasize the recommendation to focus on poor rural people and more vulnerable groups, including women, youth and people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Management noted that this and the other recommendations would be covered through the comprehensive targeting strategy to be included in the country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP) in preparation for the period 2018-2023.
11. Management also clarified that it did not necessarily have to wait for IOE evaluations to make required adjustments to projects, as these were possible, and made, during implementation to address any arising issues and to refocus projects.
12. Regarding the possibility that the Executive Board contribute to the COSOP formulation process, Management noted that this could be done through representatives' respective bilateral organizations within the various countries of IFAD operations, through COSOP informal seminars and during review discussions at formal Board sessions.
13. IOE also emphasized that it had consulted diverse development partners in Mozambique and that they, too, face similar challenges. Moreover, IOE confirmed the strong Rome-based agency (RBA) collaboration efforts in Mozambique, compared with other countries.
14. The Government's representative thanked IOE for the evaluation report and welcomed the findings, conclusions and recommendations. He noted that the recommendations would be taken into consideration by the Government and IFAD in preparing the new COSOP.

Agenda item 4. Results-based work programme and budget for 2018 and indicative plan for 2019-2020 of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

15. The Committee reviewed IOE's results-based work programme and budget for 2018 and indicative plan for 2019-2020 (document EC 2017/99/W.P.3), and welcomed the changes made to reflect comments provided to the preview document at the 98th session.
16. Members expressed support for the budget and programme of work and appreciated the inclusion of collaboration with other RBAs. Members raised some questions to which IOE responded as follows:
 - In the context of the Cameroon CSPE, IOE has interacted and will co-host a national workshop with the evaluation offices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP). While CGIAR was an important partner, it would not take part in the collaboration on the Cameroon evaluation, because this did not coincide with its approach to country programme evaluations.
 - IOE would work with the Secretariat to explore ways to explicitly show changes against the preview version of the budget document for members' ease of reference.
 - CSPEs are conducted based on the country selectivity framework, and are synchronized with COSOP formulation processes to enhance accountability and learning.

- For 2019, fragile situations would be included in the programme of work as requested, and as reflected in the indicative plan. IOE emphasized that fragility was an issue not only at national levels, but at subnational levels as well. In addition to the five annual CSPEs, IOE conducted project-level evaluations and some of these were in countries with fragile situations.
 - IOE would update the budget figures based on the exchange rate for presentation of the final version of the document to the December Board session.
 - The reduction of project performance evaluations from 10 to 8 would not impact negatively on the critical mass of evaluative evidence required to provide accountability information, but would instead ensure a strengthened evidence base through better evaluation methodologies.
17. One member urged IOE to include an evaluation of IFAD's visibility and engagement in global forums in its future work programme and budget.
18. It was also noted that the ESR on IFAD's support to technical innovation for rural poverty reduction – identified in consultation with Senior Management and the Evaluation Committee – would specifically focus on those innovations provided as part of extension services to improve production and productivity. The synthesis is important, given the key role of innovation in the IFAD business model, and that innovation and scaling up were part of IOE's evaluation criteria.
- Agenda item 5. Provisional agenda of the Evaluation Committee for 2018
19. The Committee reviewed the provisional agenda for its sessions in 2018 as contained in document EC 2017/99/W.P.4, as well as the tabled version revised to show that the corporate-level evaluation (CLE) on IFAD's financial architecture would be presented in the June session and not in September.
20. Members noted that the agenda had been developed in accordance with the requisite terms of reference and rules of procedure, and the Evaluation Policy. The agenda contained a mix of different IOE evaluation products to enable members to discuss the critical elements that promote IFAD's accountability and learning.
21. One member noted that the second phase of the harmonization agreement between the independent and self-evaluation functions of IFAD was not included. IOE remarked that given the planned external peer review of IFAD's evaluation function in 2018, the second phase of the harmonization agreement had been postponed to ensure that it benefited from the results of the external peer review. An update would be provided to the Committee in 2018.
22. A revised agenda for 2018 would be posted to include the update on the harmonization agreement, as well as other changes discussed at the session.
- Agenda item 6. Country strategy and programme evaluation for the Arab Republic of Egypt
23. The Committee reviewed the CSPE for Egypt (EC 2017/98/W.P.5), which contained the agreement at completion point reflecting the Government's views on the evaluation. This was the second CSPE in the country, covering two COSOPs over the period 2005-2016. In this period, lending terms for the country moved from highly concessional to intermediate, and then to ordinary.
24. The findings of the CSPE showed that IFAD had consistently focused on the relevant rural development issues, in line with government priorities, and had positively contributed to increased agricultural productivity through new irrigation and cropping systems.
25. The Committee noted that Management agreed with the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. Management took note of the issues that needed improvement, such as streamlining activities to ensure more focused

interventions, gender equality and dissemination of the knowledge generated through project implementation. Management was already in the process of addressing the recommendations through new project designs and the planned establishment of a subregional hub in Egypt.

26. In his remarks, the government representative for Egypt thanked IOE for the evaluation results and for close collaboration during the process. He expressed appreciation for the strong and valuable partnership and for IFAD's substantial contribution to the rural development sector. The Government welcomed the recommendations made, and agreed with the need for IFAD's work to be aligned with and supportive of Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2 on poverty and hunger eradication; and to: focus on agriculture, research and extension, and climate-smart agriculture; enhance the coordination structure; and strengthen knowledge sharing, learning and innovation. The Government also welcomed the decision to establish a subregional hub in Cairo.
27. The Committee appreciated the good quality of the report and the clarity of the recommendations, and urged Management to sharpen poverty and geographical targeting and to ensure that the poorest people and areas were targeted through rigorous poverty analysis.
28. One member expressed concern about the less satisfactory performance on gender equality and sought to understand whether this was due to limited government support. Management clarified that there was strong buy-in from the Government to sharpen targeting and enhance the gender dimension, but some reluctance to borrow for capacity-building. This situation was changing, and the shift to a programmatic approach would provide an opportunity to address gender and other issues.
29. Given the changes in food prices over the period, the evaluation had not been able to discern any contribution by IFAD to nutrition and food security during the period under review.
30. In response to a question on poverty impact, it was noted that there had been positive poverty impact in the new lands, where IFAD improved the existing settlements through concentrated investments. The settlement rate had increased, and there were emerging community activities such as new businesses. There had also been impact in terms of increased cropping intensity.
31. IOE and Management noted that, while Egypt had a Country Office, the CPM had only been outposted recently, hence the limited focus on non-lending activities. Management recalled the CLE on decentralization, which provided evidence that partnerships and other non-lending activities such as knowledge management and learning were stronger in countries with decentralized offices and CPMs.
32. It was also noted that bigger projects did not necessarily result in efficiency gains. Thus there was a need to emphasize that bigger projects would only be efficient if they were also more focused.

Agenda item 7. Evaluation synthesis report on gender equality

33. The Committee reviewed the ESR on gender equality, document EC 2017/99/W.P.6, together with Management's response.
34. The synthesis identified gender-transformative practices that could inform IFAD interventions towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, and proposed a working definition for gender-transformative approaches. Key lessons arising from the synthesis included the need to integrate gender-transformative approaches in project design and to support implementation of multiple, complementary practices and participatory approaches to facilitate gender-inclusive outcomes and changes in gender roles.

35. The Committee congratulated IOE on the excellent report and welcomed the findings and recommendations. They appreciated the detailed nature of the report and its comprehensive coverage of the gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) policy framework.
36. The Committee also thanked Management for its commitment to integrating GEWE into IFAD's operations consistently for over 10 years, and commended the policy evolution over this period. Responding to a question on what "gender-transformative approaches" really meant and how, when and in which document the agreed definition would be captured, Management noted that necessary commitments had been included in the mainstreaming paper presented to the Consultation on the Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD11). An integrative framework would be prepared by mid-2018 that would include a revised definition of transformative approaches, as well as the mainstreaming of climate, environment, youth and nutrition issues, and more user-friendly tools for practitioners.
37. Regarding the proposal by one member to attach a GEWE conditionality to funding for Member States, Management noted that it was preferable to build ownership of these approaches by partner governments to ensure effective implementation and sustainability of results. Through the targeting policy, IFAD was in a position to influence the nature of beneficiaries and ensure that more women and other vulnerable groups were targeted. Additionally, through enhanced knowledge management and sharing of the positive results of gender empowerment emerging from project implementation, partner countries would be encouraged to take the relevant policies and actions on board.
38. Members and Management expressed surprise at the finding that inclusive financial services and infrastructure were more common, but less effective, in promoting gender transformation. Management noted that, from its perspective, performance of financial inclusion projects handled by women far exceeded performance of similar projects handled by men or mixed groups. IOE reiterated that the definition of a gender-transformative approach endeavoured to identify the root causes of inequality and discrimination – beyond the number of women participating in IFAD-financed projects – and the effectiveness of transformative approaches. IOE expressed willingness to discuss the results of financial services to women further.
39. Management expressed agreement with the findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in the ESR, and informed the Committee that these were already being implemented. For instance, key indicators with corresponding gender targets were included in the IFAD10 Results Measurement Framework and were reported on through the annual Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness. Further efforts would be made to improve capacity to mainstream gender issues in correlation with nutrition and climate change, as well as to increase gender-transformative projects. Management would also ensure the use of theories of change for better design and implementation of projects; and was already taking measures to: strengthen monitoring and evaluation of disaggregated benefits and gender and women's empowerment; consistently report gender outcomes and impacts; and replicate good practices covering the three GEWE policy objectives.
40. The Committee also noted that the ESR was unique to the rural and agriculture sectors and suggested that it should be widely shared. There were similar studies on gender mainstreaming from other international financial institutions (IFIs) and development organizations, such as the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, but these looked at different types of interventions. The Committee also noted that while other IFIs were doing some work on gender practices, IFAD was much more advanced. Nonetheless, there was no room for complacency – hence the call to Management to implement the recommendations

made. In this context, IOE noted the importance of integrating the content of the ESR in the ongoing IFAD11 discussions.

41. As recommended by a member, IOE said that it was pursuing ways to further disseminate the content of the ESR and promote its uptake among development practitioners and partners. The report had already been presented to the RBAs, and IOE had participated in seminars at WFP and FAO that were replicating the methodological approach of this systematic review, as well as its findings, on conceptual transformative approaches.

Agenda item 8. Strengthening the strategic role of the Evaluation Committee

42. Based on the tabled matrix of issues and actions to strengthen IFAD's governance, approved by the Board at its 121st session in September (EB 2017/121/R.32), and the Committee's terms of reference, members discussed how to strengthen the Committee's strategic role by improving its reporting to the Executive Board.
43. The Committee recognized the importance of the minutes as the official record of its meetings, but expressed the view that current reporting, in which the Chairperson read a long document to the Board, was not the best option. They noted that it was important that the Committee agree on the critical messages arising from each session, package these succinctly, and deliver them clearly to the Board for a greater impact and contribution to the decision-making process.
44. One member emphasized that, for greater ownership, the report to the Board needed to be prepared by members and the Chairperson, and not be an extract of the minutes prepared by IFAD staff.
45. Going forward, members were encouraged to share more of their views on strengthening the Committee's strategic role. These, together with the results of the benchmarking exercise with other IFIs and United Nations agencies – to look at how their subsidiary bodies operated and reported to their respective boards – would be included in a working document to be reviewed by the Board during its next retreat in 2018. The Convenors and Friends and other subsidiary bodies would also share their views.
46. The Office of the Secretary would provide an update on this process to the Committee at the March 2018 session.

Agenda item 8. Other business

47. There being no items for discussion under other business, the Chairperson expressed appreciation to all participants for their contributions to the session deliberations, and to the interpreters and all support staff for a successful session.