
Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme for the Republic of Guinea-Bissau

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Action: The Executive Board is invited to review the comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme for the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

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Comments of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the country strategic opportunities programme for the Republic of Guinea-Bissau

I. General comments

1. In 2022, the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) carried out its first country strategy and programme evaluation (CSPE) in Guinea-Bissau, covering the period 2008–2022, one country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP), one country strategy note, three loans and two grants.
2. Despite the progress made by the country, poverty and inequality remain persistent in Guinea-Bissau, which is currently on the World Bank's list of fragile countries for 2024. Political crises, instability and weak institutions hamper economic growth and social progress. In this context, IFAD has focused on regions where the poorest populations live. The most significant results have been access to basic social infrastructure, improved production capacity for rice-growing households and strengthened organizations.
3. The agreement at completion point, signed by IFAD and the Government in February and March 2023, indicates full acceptance of all the CSPE recommendations, as follows: (1) include or clarify the following important aspects in the strategic priorities or orientations: natural resource management and adaptation to climate change, knowledge management and institutional strengthening; (2) support the Government in ensuring effective coordination of interventions in the agriculture sector; (3) pursue support for the development of agricultural systems in humid areas; (4) step up sustainable support for strengthening community-based farmers' organizations; and (5) continue support aimed at reducing gender inequalities.
4. The new COSOP for Guinea-Bissau 2025–2031 proposes two strategic objectives: (1) to improve productivity and resilience of production systems oriented towards food and nutrition security; and (2) to increase rural households' income from participation in value chains.
5. The new COSOP takes into account the conclusions of the CSPE, with regard to: (i) continuing support for the development of agricultural production systems in humid zones, including the three southern regions already supported; (ii) strengthening the institutional capacities of the Government and farmers' organizations; and (iii) supporting the development of agricultural value chains and taking into account the management of natural resources and adaptation to climate change. Overall, the COSOP reflects the main points of the CSPE recommendations.
6. Building on ongoing operations until 2026 – the Economic Development Project for the Southern Regions (PADES) extension and the Nutrition and Climate Resilience Project (REDE) – and the orientations in the new COSOP, IFAD has a great opportunity to (i) strengthen and redefine its added value, considering the current fragility context of Guinea-Bissau; (ii) promote agricultural innovations, enabling smallholders value chain activities and access to markets; and (iii) develop strategic alliances for institutional strengthening at various levels.

II. Specific comments

7. **Fragility drivers.** The new COSOP includes an analysis of fragility in the agriculture sector, with responses and actions to mitigate fragility drivers (see appendix V). This analysis complements the Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP) review by identifying key fragility drivers, such as political factors and weaknesses within public institutions and rural organizations. However, it does not cover fragility drivers related to environmental degradation,

climate change, gender inequalities or youth unemployment, as these areas are addressed in the SECAP review with guidance provided in the document. Furthermore, the COSOP's risk analysis matrix (table 2) highlights significant fragility risks, including: (i) inefficiencies in government system preparedness, resource allocation and adherence; and (ii) a lack of coordination among sector ministries and challenges in mobilizing skilled personnel. While the mitigation measures involve actions that could be supported by IFAD through non-lending activities, these actions are neither included in the COSOP guidance nor referenced in the results management framework.

8. **Value chain approach.** To reduce rural poverty and strengthen community resilience to climate change, strategic objectives 1 and 2 (section III.B) and the theory of change (section III.A and appendix XII) of the new COSOP emphasize improving rice productivity, enhancing the resilience of production systems, promoting nutrition and food security, and increasing incomes. These objectives will be pursued by facilitating access to agricultural inputs, rural infrastructure, markets and financial services, and by strengthening technical and organizational capacities, aiming to boost productivity and competitiveness. However, the new COSOP lacks sufficient detail on: (i) adapting its approach to include poor rural households in agricultural value chains; (ii) fostering an effective local or national organizational system for delivering agricultural services (including seeds), financial services and market access; (iii) addressing seed policy and legislation, alongside research inertia; and (iv) improving smallholder access to financing. The proposed approaches appear conventional and do not fully account for the fragility contexts in a systematic way.
9. **Targeting and differentiated strategies.** The COSOP appropriately prioritizes rural households living below the poverty line, particularly those in coastal regions, as well as women, female heads of household, youth and people with disabilities (section III.C). While this aligns with the CSPE recommendations to focus on the poorest and most marginalized groups, no specific orientation is provided on the mechanisms and strategies needed to reduce gender inequalities, particularly concerning land access and security for women and young people, and improving access to agricultural finance. The COSOP mentions no specific strategic document to be developed subsequently to explicitly orient gender and youth issues.
10. **Sustainability and climate resilience.** IOE notes that enhancing the resilience of production systems to climate change is specifically highlighted in strategic objective 1 of the new COSOP, which aims to improve the productivity and resilience of production systems focused on food security and smallholder nutrition. Appendix IV of the document provides a detailed SECAP analysis; however, it lacks specific guidance on effective actions or interventions to promote the sustainability and climate resilience of agricultural production systems. Key areas needing attention include soil erosion, salinization, acidification, saline intrusion in rice-growing areas and yield declines caused by rainfall deficits and drought conditions.
11. **Knowledge management.** Unlike the previous COSOP and the country strategy note, IOE observes that knowledge management (section IV.E) is explicitly addressed in the new COSOP, which proposes developing a new strategy early in its implementation phase. This strategy is intended to be enriched with data from project-level knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation systems, and the West and Central Africa multi-country office. The COSOP indicates that the knowledge management strategy will offer specific guidance on environmental safeguards, climate change adaptation, policy engagement and rural development dialogue. IOE suggests that the knowledge strategy to be developed explicitly address the extent to which knowledge management will contribute to scaling up innovations and successful outcomes, and how it will support policy dialogue and decision-making to benefit smallholder farmers. The same holds true for promoting

knowledge management beyond the country programme to encourage mutual learning among various stakeholders in the agriculture sector.

12. **Institutional strengthening.** In section IV.C, IOE notes that the recommendation to enhance the institutional capacities of both public and non-public players has been incorporated, with implementation based on a needs assessment for capacity-building and an accompanying action plan. Strategic objectives 1 and 2 of the new COSOP also include provisions for strengthening the productive and organizational capacities of producers and rural organizations. In alignment with the CSPE findings, aspects of legal recognition of rural organizations for their institutionalization deserve further orientation, as this is a crucial factor for mobilizing funding and engaging in dialogue with the Government, particularly in a context where decentralization reform has progressed slowly. Additionally, the COSOP does not specify approaches to promote the professionalization and empowerment of rural organizations, which are essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the benefits achieved.

III. Final comments

13. IOE acknowledges the efforts made in preparing the new COSOP and the degree to which specific recommendations from the CSPE have been considered and followed up. However, given the context of fragility, IOE notes that the COSOP does not sufficiently emphasize institutional and organizational strengthening, which are essential in such settings, nor does it adequately address the development of strategic and operational partnerships to tackle these critical issues. Additionally, there is limited clarity regarding orientations aimed at: (i) enhancing the effectiveness of the knowledge management system; (ii) reducing gender inequalities and promoting youth employment in the agriculture sector; and (iii) strengthening the roles of rural organizations in resilience-building. IOE remains available to provide any necessary clarification and support.