The evolution of the independent evaluation function at IFAD

Independent Office of Evaluation

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AfDB	African Development Bank
ARRI	Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations
CLE	corporate-level evaluation
CLEE	Corporate-level evaluation on IFAD's Institutional Efficiency and Efficiency of IFAD-funded Operations
CPE	country programme evaluation
DSPP	Direct Supervision Pilot Programme
ECG	Evaluation Cooperation Group
ECU	Evaluation Communication Unit (of IOE)
EKSYST	Evaluation Knowledge System
ESR	evaluation synthesis report
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FPPP	Field Presence Pilot Programme
IEE	Independent External Evaluation
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	international financial institution
IOE	Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
OE	Office of Evaluation and Studies
PCRV	project completion report validation
PPA	project performance assessment
PPE	project performance evaluation
PRISMA	President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
WFP	World Food Programme

President's introduction

IFAD has a long and proud history of independent evaluation. From the very first days of the Fund, our Member States, governing bodies and Management recognized that the strength of IFAD's future performance would depend on having a robust evaluation function. Over the years, this gradually evolved from a unit that was internal to IFAD Management to one that became fully independent in 2003 within IFAD's organizational architecture.

Today, IFAD remains the only United Nations specialized agency with an independent office of evaluation with a direct reporting line to the Board, and IFAD's Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) has become more robust, reflecting the increase in demand for transparency and measurable results.

The importance of independent evaluation cannot be overstated. It is fair to say that the way IFAD operates today is a direct result of IFAD's first Independent External Evaluation in 2004-2005. This evaluation, and those that followed, resulted in concrete operational changes, such as shifting to direct supervision, increasing its country presence and improving IFAD's operating model and institutional efficiency. These changes were all in direct response to the findings of IOE evaluations.

The existence of IOE allows IFAD to consistently improve its business model at the same time as strengthening its

investment in rural people. By ensuring that evaluation is both transparent and independent, IOE contributes to IFAD's credibility as a partner in development. Independent evaluation allows us to see the progress we are making, while also helping us to learn as we go and to implement improvements in a timely fashion.

KANAYO F. NWANZE
President of IFAD

Foreword

Evaluation is facing new challenges. Over the past several decades, there have been dramatic shifts in the way countries achieve economic growth, and try to sustain it while making the environment a priority, to the benefit of our future generations. The changes have been driven by new actors and new ideas, in which new initiatives, including but not limited to private sector and market-oriented development initiatives, have become increasingly prominent. Evaluation practice needs to keep pace with such changes, first and foremost by adapting to the increasing global demand for results that are delivered quickly and are credible and useful. This requires nimble, reactive and flexible institutions, which understand the important role played by evaluation.

As Director of IFAD's Independent Office of Evaluation since October 2014, I have appreciated the Fund's solid commitment to improve its operations by understanding results and impact through evaluation. The path to better results is inextricably linked with better evaluation; as such, the evaluation function in IFAD has contributed significantly to the improvement of the Fund's policies and strategies. The evolution of the evaluation function, spanning over more than four decades, has required the institution to take a hard and honest look at itself, to understand what worked well, what did not work well and, most importantly, why.

Today, the Independent Office of Evaluation is at the forefront, among international financial institutions and United Nations special agencies, funds and programmes, in evaluation methodologies and practice, and is well positioned to becoming a driving influence in increasing the impact of IFAD's operations.

The IFAD Executive Board and Evaluation Committee deserve a special mention. They firmly believe that an independent evaluation function is an asset for the organization, especially in the context of implementing the 2030 development agenda. I am grateful for their constant support and strategic guidance.

I would like to express my appreciation for the constructive dialogue with IFAD's Management in general and with President Kanayo F. Nwanze in particular, as it strengthens a culture of transparency, learning and results-orientation that is critical to fulfill the Fund's mandate.

This publication is particularly timely, as 2015 is the International Year of Evaluation, a year when many development actors are joining efforts to make evaluation a sharper tool that can better hone development approaches and pave the way for better results.

In closing, I would like to thank all IOE staff, past and present, for their

commitment in ensuring that independent evaluation at IFAD can make a difference to better livelihoods, leading to an inclusive and sustainable transformation of the rural sector.

OSCAR A. GARCIA
Director
Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

1 Introduction

Why evaluation?

Over the years, evaluation has become an increasingly critical function in multilateral and bilateral development agencies, including international financial institutions (IFIs) and United Nations organizations. It is through evaluation that assessments and analyses of operations and strategies are conducted, with a view to better understanding what is working well, what is not working well and, most importantly, the factors that have an impact on performance.

Historically, the Member States, governing bodies and Management of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) – a unique institution that is both a specialized agency of the United Nations and an IFI – have always taken evaluation very seriously. Since it was established in 1978, the Fund has always devoted resources to monitoring and evaluation, even when projects had just started and there was still little to evaluate. The pathway leading to the current institutional setting, where there is a fully-fledged Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE), has been marked by several steps which have progressively strengthened IFAD's capacity to assess its operations and, gradually, better understand its results. Evaluation has now become a very potent mechanism for change in IFAD, leading to numerous reforms and remarkable institutional changes that have helped the Fund improve its institutional and operational effectiveness.

IFAD's new strategic vision for the post-2015 agenda, to *invest in rural people for economic, social and cultural impact, leading to a sustainable and inclusive rural transformation*, requires a profound reflection on the role played by evaluation. IFAD's unique mission is to focus on rural poor people; it must therefore be equipped with means to better target its interventions and reach these poor people, in particular those who are marginalized, including women, indigenous peoples, and youth, who have a much harder time lifting themselves out of poverty. Besides, IFAD is using public money to advance an international public good, which is the eradication of rural poverty in developing countries, and it must be held accountable as an institution for its effectiveness in delivering on this mandate. To this end, IFAD recently committed to lifting 80 million people out of poverty and reaching 90 million rural women and men with its programmes by 2015: this is an ambitious commitment, and IFAD needs to make efforts to measure progress towards achieving it.

As such, evaluation has an extremely important role to play. It can indeed help IFAD to better target poor rural people through its operations, understand the activities that can make a real and lasting difference, and most effectively disseminate successes and lessons learned for improved learning, leading to a more conscious economic and social change, achieved through rural transformation. To this end, it needs to remain

independent, be impartial, fair and, most importantly, credible.

Why independent evaluation?

Evaluation is a very powerful instrument for **accountability** – the responsibility and answerability of institutions for delivering on their mandate. It is also a vital tool for **learning** – making sure that evaluation results and lessons feed back into the strategies and programmes of the institution and beyond. In fact, evaluation is about change and about how, globally, such change is achieved. The world has just adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which frame the international development agenda for the next 15 years. They contain far-reaching commitments to eradicating poverty, malnutrition and hunger, and getting all children to school. If the world cannot evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and actions that are put in place to achieve these outcomes, then there is no point in creating and implementing them. That is why evaluation is so important, particularly in this historical moment, as a powerful vehicle for reform.

All development agencies have established evaluation systems within their structure, to review projects and programmes, strategies and policies. They rely on **self-evaluation** systems, i.e. a set of tools and mechanisms to monitor and assess results in which the institutions themselves reflect on their own achievements and assess successes and shortcomings.

Numerous institutions and organizations have been building evaluation mechanisms that are **independent,** and they have been doing this either through external assessments or by establishing fully-fledged evaluation units. This is particularly true in the case of IFIs, which need to report to donor countries on how they are utilizing their financial resources. Independent evaluation can supplement or strengthen self-evaluation, but it can also provide a completely different perspective on what works and what does not work. Independence increases the credibility of evaluations and is seen by governing bodies and the public at large as an assurance that the institution is working to improve itself and its results.

At the same time, most development organizations have understood that the independent evaluation function does not necessarily have to be external: keeping it internal to the organization allows it not to operate in isolation, as operations and evaluation functions are enriched when there is continuous dialogue and cross-fertilization of knowledge and experience. The importance IFAD assigns to evaluation is clearly demonstrated by the two complementary evaluation functions it established at the institutional level: a self-evaluation system - embedded in the Fund's Programme Management Department, allowing the institution to monitor progress towards achieving project objectives - as well as a fully independent evaluation office, which undertakes evaluations of IFAD-funded projects, programmes, policies and strategies, and reports directly to the Executive Board. IFAD has also recognized the clear need to harmonize such self- and independent evaluation systems to ensure that they generate comparable information for reporting purposes – to institutional management and governing bodies, setting up specific harmonization agreements.

Full independence is achieved in IOE at two levels: structural independence is guaranteed by the evaluation architecture and the institutional setting in which IOE operates. Behavioural independence, in turn, includes all the policies related to the individuals who are involved in conducting evaluations. For instance, IOE has established a *conflict of interest policy for the consultants* it hires, as well as g*uidelines to avoid conflict of interest for evaluation officers*. Both types of independence allow evaluation to avoid any type of conflict of interest and to conduct transparent, impartial and credible evaluations.

Such level of credibility and transparency is achieved also through the support given by IFAD Management to the independent evaluation function, increasingly recognized as an effective tool to continuously strengthen the Fund's mandate and to improve, through its recommendations, the design of projects and country strategies and programmes.

The history of evaluation at IFAD is, to put it simply, a story of success. The evaluations produced by IOE have enabled IFAD to be transparent in recognizing achievements and shortcomings. They have also contributed to accountability and learning, and helped managers to maximize IFAD's effectiveness as a development agency and served the Executive Board in setting the organization's policy priorities. The World Bank and some IFIs were the precursors to the independent evaluation function in IFAD. They contributed to the body

of knowledge about evaluation and to the development of a fully independent evaluation function at IFAD. Today, IOE is recognized by peers and country partners as an effective provider of evidence-based independent analysis, anchored in robust evaluation methodologies.

Why this publication?

This publication documents and traces the history of the independent evaluation function in IFAD since 1978, summarizing some of its major contributions to improving accountability and learning for better performance.

This publication is particularly timely, as 2015 has been declared the International Year of Evaluation.[1] The aim of this designation is to advocate and promote evaluation and evidence-based policy-making at international, regional, national and local levels. This was further emphasized by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution adopted in December 2014 (A/RES/69/237), which stressed the importance of building capacities for the evaluation of development activities at country level and acknowledged the United Nations Evaluation Group's (UNEG) endorsement of 2015 as the International Year of Evaluation.

As mentioned previously, 2015 is the year when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be replaced by a new set of internationally agreed goals, the SDGs. While the MDGs drove a global vision

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[1] 2015 was declared as the International Year of Evaluation at the third international conference on national evaluation capacities organized in São Paulo, Brazil, form 29 September to 2 October 2013, by EvalPartners, a global movement to strengthen national evaluation capacities. For more information: http://mymande.org/evaly-ear/Declaring_2015_as_the_International_Year_of_Evaluation.

on human development and facilitated its implementation and monitoring, a comprehensive evaluation of what has been achieved has not been carried out so far. In part, this is because the country-level building blocks for such a review were not available. It is now widely acknowledged that national development policies and programmes should be informed by evidence generated by country-led monitoring and evaluation systems, rather than donor-led ones, while ensuring policy coherence at regional and global levels.

Under the leadership of UNEG, the International Year of Evaluation brings together diverse stakeholders into a movement designed to mobilize the energies and enhance the synergy of existing and new monitoring and evaluation initiatives at international and national levels. Its guiding principles are inclusion, innovation and strategic partnership.

As with most of the evaluation partner agencies, IOE has also been active throughout the year with events, special publications, videos and other opportunities to promote evaluation for better accountability, learning and results. One example is the November 2015 technical seminar on "Enhancing the evaluability of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2): 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture'", jointly organized by the four agencies based in Rome, which include the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), IFAD, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the CGIAR (formerly known as the Consultative

Group on International Agricultural Research), which will be an opportunity to understand how SDG2 could be assessed, identifying actions needed to enable evaluations through the United Nations system, other international organizations or national evaluation systems.

This publication is another example of a product developed for the International Year of Evaluation.

2 Key historical steps

The evaluation office: evolution and structure

Shortly after IFAD was established in 1977, IFAD Management established an internal evaluation function (in 1978). However, at that time, evaluation was combined with monitoring and was part of IFAD's Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. The Unit reported to the Assistant President of the then Economic and Planning Department and was headed by a Chief of Unit. Its focus was mainly on mid-term evaluations during project implementation. The Unit did not take part in full-scale evaluations because IFAD-supported projects were in their early stages of being implemented.

Perspectives on the establishment of the evaluation function at IFAD

Based on a conversation with Osvaldo Feinstein, former IFAD staff member at the Office of Evaluation and Studies from September 1989 to March 1998

During its first years of existence, IFAD was committed to developing a fully-fledged monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function. The M&E Division reported to the Assistant President of the Project Management Department, and its main activity was to develop an M&E function within IFAD-assisted projects by establishing dedicated M&E units. During its initial years, the Division played two roles: (1) contributing to the design of the M&E units at project level, based on demands from the regional divisions; and (2) developing M&E guidelines for the design of the units. In this second area, IFAD's Division produced manuals and guidelines on M&E for agricultural development projects. These publications have been useful not only for IFAD but for the development community at large.

In 1988, during the interim period between the first two directors (Ram Malhotra until 1987 and Pierre Spitz after 1989), a study was conducted on the M&E experience of IFAD in all the regions. Two key conclusions of that study were that the M&E units were not functioning well in any regions; and that the M&E design at project level had a fundamental inconsistency: monitoring was meant to be linked to Management, whereas the evaluation function had to be independent from project management. Therefore, the project-level M&E units had an inconsistent mandate: they had to work very closely with project management, but at the same time they had to be independent. The study found that a few M&E units performed well in the monitoring function but failed on the evaluation side, whereas another set of units performed well in the evaluation function, but failed on monitoring.

A key recommendation was that the two functions – monitoring and evaluation – be separated.

The study also pointed out that there was an evaluation capacity constraint. It therefore recommended that evaluation capacity be developed. As a consequence, IFAD's Office of Evaluation and Studies designed a technical assistance grant for PREVAL, a Latin American programme approved in 1997 to enhance evaluation capacities in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. PREVAL was partly replicated in Africa, and was the first programme in the world fully dedicated to evaluation capacity-building in a specific region.

M&E at IFAD was launched more than 30 years ago, and the Fund was a world pioneer in this area. When IFAD started conducting evaluation missions, stakeholders (government, beneficiaries, management, etc.) were not very keen on being evaluated. The whole development community did not fully realize the potential of such a tool. The situation today has changed remarkably, and IFAD has played a pivotal role in increasing the awareness of the importance of evaluation and in promoting the strengthening of evaluation capacities.

In 1982, the Unit was transformed into the Monitoring and Evaluation Division, reporting to the Assistant President, Economic Policy Department. This arrangement lasted until 1994, when the Rapid External Assessment of IFAD[2] was made during the negotiations of the Fourth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources. One of the recommendations put forward in the assessment was that the evaluation function be separated from monitoring. Consequently, the Office of Evaluation and Studies (OE) was established, which was independent of operations and was incorporated into the Office of the President, thus reporting directly to IFAD's President. The recommendation was in keeping with the extensive debate in the 1980s among development organizations on the value of independent evaluation. By

then, the staff had grown and was headed by a Director.

[2] See http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/whatwedo/key/rea_1994.pdf.

Heads of the office

Directors

- Mr **Oscar A. Garcia**, Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation, from 2014 to present

- Mr **Luciano Lavizzari**, Director of the Office of Evaluation and Studies, then Independent Office of Evaluation, from 1999 to 2012

- Mr **Pierre Spitz**, Director of the Monitoring and Evaluation Division from 1989 to 1994, then Director of the Office of Evaluation and Studies, from 1994 to 1998

- Mr **Ram Malhotra**, first Head of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and then Director of the Monitoring and Evaluation Division, from 1979 to 1988

Deputy Directors

The position of Deputy Director was introduced by the Board in 2004.

- Mr **Ashwani K. Muthoo**, from 2011 to present
- Ms **Caroline Heider**, from 2005 to 2006
- Ms **Mona Bishay**, from August to September 2004

Evaluation and the Rapid External Assessment of IFAD

The Assessment found that IFAD's evaluation function had contributed new thinking on participatory approaches to evaluating rural poverty and related environmental issues. It had also initiated common approaches to evaluating the experiences of mutual interest. These activities had contributed to IFAD's widely recognized intellectual leadership. However, it lacked the capacity for follow-up action. In this regard, the Assessment had a number of suggestions for improvement, including:

- A more active programme of thematic studies, growing on the growing stock of project evaluations and, in due course, of country portfolio evaluations;

- Increased dissemination to external audiences;

- More attention to the impact of evaluation experience on policy, formulating guidelines, and operations; and

- Learning more systematically from the evaluation experience of others, including bilateral donors.

It stated that such strengthening requires upgrading of the evaluation function, as well as more staff. It also requires direct reporting to the President of IFAD and to the Executive Board.

In order to respond to the Rapid Assessment's emphasis on learning and dissemination of knowledge, in 1994 OE established an online repository of evaluation products and lessons learned available for download. The repository, called the Evaluation Knowledge System (EKSYST), enabled project planners, designers, implementers and evaluators to draw on IFAD's experience in rural poverty alleviation, be it from a particular country or region, or by type of activity or theme. This initiative was undertaken under a broader framework to develop an experimental evaluation website, known as IFADEVAL. The evaluation website was inaugurated by the President of IFAD (Mr Fawzi Hamad Al-Sultan) at the Global Conference on Knowledge for Development in the Information Age, held in Toronto in June 1997. In his address to the Conference, President Al-Sultan confirmed the Fund's intention to become a knowledge organization that is, in the words of the Rapid External Assessment "the world's leading repository of information on rural development and the world's most influential adviser in this challenging complex activity." Both initiatives were discussed in the Workshop on Knowledge Generation for and by the Rural Poor, organized by OE for the Conference and attended by 70 participants. IFAD's booth was visited by around 300 visitors, including the President of Uganda and the President of the World Bank.

OE and the Global Conferences on Knowledge

In 1997, IFAD co-sponsored the Global Conference on Knowledge for Development in the Information Age, which was held in Toronto, Canada and organized jointly by the Government of Canada and the World Bank. The Conference brought together almost 1,500 participants, including senior government officials, members of the United Nations community, non-governmental organizations, knowledge builders, industry and business leaders, and other personalities and experts from around the world. The Conference focused on three themes: (i) understanding the role of knowledge and information in economic and social development; (ii) sharing strategies, experience and tools in harnessing knowledge for development; and (iii) building new partnerships that empower the poor with information and knowledge.

OE was responsible for organizing IFAD's participation in the conference. Among other activities, OE organized a workshop entitled "Knowledge generation for and by the rural poor", at which four IFAD initiatives were presented: the IFADEVAL website; the local action-research-based Integrated Participatory Seasons' Observatories System (IPSOS); FIDAMERICA; and the Knowledge Network on Grass-Roots Initiatives in Land Reform and Tenurial Security.

In March 2000, OE again acted as the focal point for the Fund's participation in the Second Global Knowledge Conference which was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. IFAD's objective was to build awareness about and showcase the importance of nurturing, capturing and disseminating the knowledge and innovations of rural people in the development process. To this end, an international competition was held throughout all IFAD projects to scout for the best knowledge and innovations of rural people.

To further strengthen knowledge management, a new dissemination and communication approach was developed, culminating in the establishment of an Evaluation Communication Unit (ECU) in 1999. The Unit's primary task is to disseminate IOE's evaluation knowledge derived from evaluation exercises and related activities, enhancing IOE's profile as a knowledge producer to reach out and share evaluation learning. The Unit designs targeted dissemination strategies, if needed, for specific evaluations, and is continually exploring the use of innovative communications techniques, strategies and instruments to improve IOE communications and learning tools. The 2002 Consultation on the Sixth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources urged IFAD Management to create an independent evaluation function. In accordance with the Evaluation Policy approved in 2003, the Office of Evaluation and Studies became independent of IFAD Management in the evaluations it was to conduct. The name was changed to the Office of Evaluation, and the Director of the division would directly and exclusively report to IFAD's Executive Board, which has overseen independent evaluations since then. This landmark decision made IFAD the only United Nations specialized agency,

programme and fund with an independent office of evaluation.

In 2010, an administrative instruction by the Vice President was issued, introducing new three-letter acronyms for all IFAD divisions. For the Office of Evaluation the name was also changed to IFAD Office of Evaluation (IOE). And in 2011, with the revised Evaluation Policy, the name was changed again to the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (the acronym remained the same, IOE) – the name it carries to this day. The significant rationale behind this change was to capture the broad spirit of independent evaluation at IFAD, as well as to be consistent with the nomenclature used in other IFIs that have a similar independent evaluation outfit – for example the Independent Evaluation Group in the World Bank and the Independent Evaluation Department in the Asian Development Bank.

Perspectives on the role of the Deputy Director in IOE

By Ashwani K. Muthoo, Deputy Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

The Executive Board of IFAD decided to establish the position of IOE Deputy Director in December 2003, soon after the first Evaluation Policy was adopted. IOE is the only division of IFAD that has an institutionalized Deputy Director position. Having a Deputy Director position aligned IOE's internal organizational architecture with the independent offices of evaluation in other IFIs.

The Board took the decision to establish the IOE Deputy Director position because when IOE was transformed into a division reporting directly to the Board – in other words, a division independent from IFAD Management – the Board realized that the role of Director would need to evolve, as compared to the role of the former Directors of IOE or other IFAD division directors.

Therefore, the Deputy Director position was created to support the Director in managing IOE, such as in mentoring staff, developing and implementing the annual work programme and budget, and methodology development and internal quality assurance of key evaluation products. Moreover, the Deputy Director is responsible for preparing the Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations, IOE's flagship report, and conducting corporate-level evaluations, products that require added seniority and experience over and above what may be provided by IOE lead or senior evaluation officers.

The Deputy Director represents Director IOE, as and when requested, in internal and external events and platforms ensuring that IOE representation is maintained at the senior level commensurate with the importance of such events and platforms. Finally, the Deputy's role is also to provide continuity in the management of IOE, given the tenure of the Director IOE is limited to one, non-renewable term of six years.

In 2010, IOE became a full member of the Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG), a group composed of the evaluation offices of ten multilateral development banks and the International Monetary Fund. The ECG was created to harmonize evaluation standards by developing and disseminating common approaches to evaluation. IOE is the only independent evaluation office among the United Nations specialized agencies, programmes and funds that is an ECG member. IOE qualified for membership on the basis of its independence from IFAD Management and the size, diverse membership and status of IFAD as both an international financing institution and a specialized United Nations agency. In order to be admitted as a member, IOE had to undergo a thorough peer review (the only done by the ECG thus far), which was carried out in 2009/10 and served as a springboard for

IFAD's evaluation function to improve in subsequent years.

IOE is also a founding member of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), an interagency professional network that brings together the evaluation units of the United Nations system and affiliated organizations. Its mission is to promote the independence, credibility and usefulness of the evaluation function and evaluation across the United Nations system, to advocate for the importance of evaluation for learning, decision-making and accountability, and to support the evaluation community in the United Nations system and beyond. As an example of its strong relation with UNEG, for the first time, IOE hosted UNEG's extra-ordinary Annual Meeting at IFAD headquarters in September 2013. The purpose of the meeting was to finalize UNEG's strategy for the coming years.

A decisive partnership with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Before partnering with IOE, SDC had already established an evaluation-based partnership agreement with the then Operations Evaluation Department of the World Bank. The driving force was the search for synergies that could go beyond the evaluation of projects and contribute to organizational learning in the partner institutions.

A similar model was replicated with IFAD, in May 2001, when the first SDC/IFAD agreement – Partnership on development effectiveness through evaluation – was signed. The three-year agreement was extended to a second phase in 2004, a third phase in 2009, and a fourth phase in 2013. Each partnership phase has seen modifications in the objectives. However, the core priorities have always been to:

- Invest in innovations to test new methodologies, models and approaches to evaluation
- Support the development of IFAD's self-evaluation capabilities
- Promote learning and knowledge exchange with SDC, IFAD and others.

The partnership has encouraged IOE to conduct rigorous assessments of the performance and impact of IFAD operations, as well to produce a number of flagship products such as: the Evaluation Policy; the Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI), an annual report which consolidates the evaluations of IFAD operations; and the Evaluation Manual, which includes evaluation methodologies and processes for project and country programme evaluations. These and other products are described in the sections that follow.

With the change of name to IOE in 2011, the Evaluation Committee of IFAD's Executive Board was requested to perform in-depth reviews of IOE's strategies and methodologies. Up until then, the Committee, which was established in 1987, had been mandated to assist the Executive Board by undertaking in-depth reviews of evaluations and studies, relieving the Board of such tasks.

What is the Evaluation Committee?

Established in 1987, the Evaluation Committee is a permanent subsidiary body of the Executive Board which performs in-depth reviews of selected evaluation issues and the IOE's strategies and methodologies. It discusses selected evaluation reports and also makes suggestions for including evaluations of particular interest to the Committee in the IOE annual work programme.

The Committee is composed of nine members from the 36 members on the Executive Board; four members from List A, two members from List B and three members from List C.*

The Chairmanship of the Evaluation Committee rests permanently between Lists B and C.

The Evaluation Committee members are elected by the Executive Board itself for a three-year term of office. The Committee meets formally four times a year. The Committee may also hold informal meetings if and when required.

The Evaluation Committee has undertaken annual country visits where IOE conducted country programme evaluations.** The objectives of the visits were to gain first-hand knowledge and experience of the work of IFAD in the country and provide more informed guidance on strategic, operational and evaluation matters to the Executive Board, IFAD Management, and IOE. Starting in 2014, the visits of the Evaluation Committee have been changed into visits by selected Executive Board Members, enabling a broader involvement of Member States representatives in the work of IOE. Since then, the Executive Board has undertaken visits to Tanzania in 2014 and Morocco in 2015.

* IFAD classifies its Member States into three groupings: "List A" – members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); "List B" – members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC); and "List C" – developing countries.

** Examples of the countries visited since 2000 by the Evaluation Committee include: Syria (2001); Indonesia (2004); Mexico (2006); Mali (2007); Philippines (2008); India (2009); Mozambique (2010); Brazil (2011); Ghana (2012); and Viet Nam (2013).

The Evaluation Committee: A bridge between IFAD Member States, Management and the Independent Office of Evaluation

By Mr Vimlendra Sharan, Minister (Agriculture) and Alternate Permanent Representative of the Republic of India to the United Nations food and agriculture agencies in Rome and Chairperson of IFAD's Evaluation Committee (from June 2015 to April 2018)

It would be erroneous to judge an organization's policies and programmes by their intentions, rather than their results. Well-run organizations and effective programmes are those that can demonstrate the achievement of results. Results are derived from good management, and good management is based on good decision-making. Good decision-making depends on good information, and good information requires good data and careful analysis of the data. These are all critical elements of evaluation. Evaluation, when done properly and independently, holds a mirror to any organization, helping it improve and grow.

Seen in this light, the work done by the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) is indeed praiseworthy. IOE's constructive criticism of IFAD's programmes and the recommendations emanating from its various evaluation products have contributed immensely to IFAD's growth story.

Functioning as a bridge between the Membership, Management and IOE, the Evaluation Committee - (EC) through its detailed analysis and deliberation of evaluation products from IOE and Management's views thereon - has helped the Executive Board and the Management take timely and appropriate decisions towards strengthening of the organization, and has helped integrate evaluation findings into programmes and policies of IFAD. EC members, also being members of the Executive Board, carry their understanding from the EC meetings to the Board, thus making the Board deliberation better informed and results-oriented. This role of the EC is of as much importance if not more than its supervisory role over IOE.

EC's work has benefitted from deep understanding and commitment of its members. The compulsions of List representation and fair rotation amongst Member States within lists does impinge upon quality of membership at times, but that is a reality the organization has to live with. That said, my personal experience over the last three years, first as member and now as Chair, has convinced me of EC's utility and importance in IFAD's development and growth. It has also convinced me of the need for ensuring a high level of independence for IOE - constrained neither by budget nor the absorptive capacity of the organization, but guided by the touchstone of quality over quantity. At the EC we have always insisted on IOE concentrating on formulating strategic recommendations.

An evaluator's work is like that of a tailor, who takes measurements afresh every time he stitches, no matter how often an individual goes to him, thus producing a perfect

fit on each occasion. Similarly, each evaluation study must look at the organization afresh in light of ever changing contexts and implementation strategy, to ensure the perfect fit of its evaluation products. IOE has to be that tailor, measuring the organization with a keen eye, every time a new evaluation product is developed, and EB through EC, the judge on whether the measurements done have been accurate or not. As Chair of EC, it has been and will be my endeavour to work in tandem with other members of the Committee to nudge IFAD to willingly submit itself to regular measurement of its results and mapping of these results against the programme and policy intentions; while at the same time ensuring that IOE remains a tailor par excellence in effecting these measurements and analysing them.

Methodology, policy and manual

One of the main objectives of IOE was to ensure that IFAD could formulate an effective evaluation policy and that the adopted principles of independent evaluation, learning and accountability were embedded in IFAD. This would require:

- Creating instruments that would enable IOE and IFAD to measure impact at the operational and country levels;

- Ensuring that rigorous methods were in place in IOE, and that the formulation of a new evaluation methodology would enable results to be consolidated and recommendations to be carried out.

Evaluation Policy

IFAD's first Evaluation Policy was approved by IFAD's Executive Board in April 2003 and paved the way for an independent evaluation function to be introduced, which included IOE's direct reporting line to the Executive Board.

In 2009/10, the ECG conducted a *Peer Review of IFAD's Office of Evaluation and Evaluation Function*. This is the first and only peer review ever done by the ECG

and it covered the Office of Evaluation (OE), the IFAD Evaluation Policy, the Management's self-evaluation system and the oversight function of the Evaluation Committee. The ECG found that the Evaluation Policy "provides a sound framework for an effective, independent evaluation function" and that "a number of evaluation products, including the Independent External Evaluation of IFAD and corporate-level evaluations such as the direct supervision, country presence and rural finance evaluations, have had strategic impacts at the corporate level." Also, "the country programme evaluations and the Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations are widely viewed as useful products."

The review made a series of recommendations for IOE that further harmonized IFAD's evaluation function with those of other IFIs. One change was for IOE to discontinue the resource-intensive project evaluations and introduce project completion report validations and project performance evaluations on a selective basis. These and other changes to IFAD's evaluation system were incorporated in the revised Evaluation Policy, which was approved by the Executive Board in 2011.

Independence of IFAD's evaluation function: key provisions in the Evaluation Policy

- The Director reports to the Executive Board rather than to the IFAD President.

- The Director of IOE shall be appointed by the Board for a single, non-renewable period of six years.

- The work programme and budget are prepared independently of IFAD Management and presented directly to the Executive Board and Governing Council for approval.

- The President has delegated his authority to make all human resource decisions related to the Independent Office of Evaluation to its Director.

- The Director is authorized to issue evaluation reports to IFAD Management, the Fund's governing bodies and the public at large without seeking the clearance of any official outside of IOE.

Evaluation Manual

IFAD is one of the few multilateral and bilateral organizations that has a comprehensive Evaluation Manual on methodology and processes. The Manual was published in 2009, and its primary purpose is to ensure consistency, rigour and transparency in independent evaluations. It presents the key processes for designing and conducting project and country programme evaluations, which currently are the type of evaluation most widely undertaken by IOE. It also takes into account a number of important changes that were triggered by IFAD's Action Plan for Improving Its Development Effectiveness, including: the Strategic Framework 2007-2010; the innovation and knowledge management strategies; the targeting policy; the advent of IFAD's new operating model (including direct supervision and implementation support and enhanced country presence), the new quality enhancement and quality assurance mechanisms; self-evaluation activities (including the introduction of a corporate results measurement framework); and the introduction of the results-based country strategic opportunities programme (RB-COSOP).

IOE has developed a second edition of the Evaluation Manual, which will be published in end 2015 and implemented starting in 2016. The objective is to carefully consider the changes that have occurred since 2009 within and outside IFAD that have a bearing on independent evaluations by IOE and to introduce necessary adjustments to IOE methods and processes, within the broader framework of the IFAD Evaluation Policy approved by the Board in May 2011. It will also serve as a basis for revising the harmonization agreement between IOE and IFAD Management, to ensure that the Fund's

independent and self-evaluation systems
are aligned.[3]

Reflections on the journey of the office of evaluation from a studies-oriented unit into a fully-fledged independent outfit

By Mona Bishay, former IFAD staff member, Deputy Director of the Office of Evaluation and Studies in 2004 and then Director of the Near East, North Africa and Europe Division until 2008

How to maximize the value-added from independence

During my experience as an evaluator in IFAD, I worked in the division when it was still reporting to the IFAD Management and then after it became independent. When independence arrived in 2003, it had a significant impact on the Office: in fact, it empowered evaluators. After independence, evaluators still had to think twice about what they write, and act with great institutional consideration and care, but they were enabled to delve more deeply into what was happening on the ground. This is really the cornerstone of accountability, and there is no learning without accountability: an institution cannot learn unless evaluation can say it as it is.

Since the advent of evaluation independence until the time I left the Fund in 2008 – after my function as Director of the Near East, North Africa and Europe Division – I witnessed mounting credibility of the evaluation function and evaluators gaining more appreciation in the institution, in particular with the country programme managers. This was achieved because the institution's confidence in the evaluators' impartiality and professionalism has been greatly enhanced and as they and their operational partners succeeded in opening up rather than working in silos.

How to gain credibility and respect? As a starting point in any evaluation, and before highlighting the weaknesses, evaluators need to emphasize what has worked on the ground. They should start from the positive achievements and successes of a project/ programme/strategy/policy, and give credit where credit is due, that is to IFAD's operations staff and their country partners who worked together to achieve the success. Moreover, evaluators need to thoroughly understand the country and local socio – economic context and appreciate the constraints faced by operations on the ground. This comes, among other things, by fully interacting with partners and stakeholders and giving enough time to the evaluation missions in the field. Poverty reduction is

[3] The harmonization agreement between IOE and IFAD management allows IFAD's self-evaluation and independent evaluation methodologies to be aligned in terms of assessment criteria, rating scales and timing of reports, all of which feed into the development of new guidelines on project self-evaluation and independent validation. Without a harmonization agreement, no comparative analysis can be conducted on the respective findings and ratings. Two such agreements were made, in 2006 and 2011, and a new agreement is under preparation and will be implemented in 2016.

the art of the possible, nothing is carved in stone. Therefore, evaluators need to fully appreciate the difficulties embedded in specific contexts, as these may require tailored and specific perspectives.

Another essential element for evaluations' credibility and usefulness is to propose few, doable and realistic recommendations based on a system of prioritization of what are more important for the poor, for the country, and for IFAD.

How rigor and structure have improved the evaluation function

During its first years, the Office of Evaluation and Studies was considered, by many, as a more research/studies oriented outfit. Evaluators did not have to follow a unified methodology for project evaluation. Internationally agreed evaluation criteria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, etc.) were indeed being used but not in a systematic manner, and it was difficult, if not impossible, to aggregate findings across evaluations. In fact, there was no rigorous, across the board, attempt to assess performance using criteria such as impact, sustainability, gender, innovation and performance of IFAD and partners. However, these criteria are now part and parcel of what IFAD has become. Therefore, very soon, evaluators realized they could not ignore such dimensions to develop a realistic view on the development effectiveness of the organization as a whole.

Following the independence of IFAD's evaluation function, the Office developed an evaluation policy and a rigorous evaluation methodology – set forth in the Evaluation Manual – which initially was inspired by the work done by peer organizations such as the World Bank and others, but was conceived and developed to be very IFAD-specific. This is clearly reflected for instance in the mandatory requirement to assess performance by evaluating the rural poverty impact criterion and its five sub-domains (household income and assets; human and social capital and empowerment; food security and agricultural productivity; natural resources and the environment; and institutions and policies), but also gender, innovation and scaling up, in addition to the conventional evaluation criteria. That was a big leap forward for IFAD, as it allowed the institution to have a solid evaluation methodology that was perfectly tailored to its unique mandate.

There is another point that made the Office unique among United Nations organizations: the implementation of an evaluation rating system. There are many problems associated with ratings, but their implementation allowed the evaluation function to have more credibility and rigor, and in particular, to aggregate results and make them comparable over time and for various types of interventions.

Evaluation products

In the same way that the evaluation function and structure at IFAD have evolved, so have the evaluation products and related publications produced and disseminated over the years. As mentioned before, the early years focused on **mid-term evaluations** (since in the early years, projects had yet to be completed), which were undertaken at around the mid-life of project implementation and generally, but not always, related to the 50 per cent disbursement mark. Once time had passed and projects were nearing completion, **completion evaluations** were introduced. They were conducted after the finalization of the project completion report that was prepared by the borrower or by the cooperating institution. These evaluations were generally conducted 6-18 months after a project's closing date. **Interim evaluations** were also introduced as a compulsory step before embarking on a second phase of a project, or before launching a similar project in the same region. The findings, recommendations and lessons learned from these evaluations served as the basis for the design of subsequent interventions. Three to five years after a project had closed, ex post evaluations were conducted to assess the sustainability of the project's interventions.

Once a body of projects in a country had been completed, **country portfolio evaluations** were introduced in 1991, following a decision of the Executive Board, as a way of drawing lessons from all IFAD-financed projects in that country. They were not intended to evaluate each project but to provide comparative information on the most essential aspects of project performance and to develop strategic and operational orientation for IFAD's future project pipeline in the country. **Thematic studies and evaluations** were also introduced to examine IFAD's experience related to a specific aspect or theme that cross-cut a particular country or region. Focused evaluations were also used to concentrate exclusively on one component or aspect of a project/ programme or group of projects in a particular country.

The creation of the Independent Office of Evaluation resulted in a rethinking of many types of evaluations being produced, in terms of their ability to enhance IFAD's development performance by measuring impact at the operational and country levels, to enrich the body of knowledge to be shared among partners and the development community, and to enable IFAD Management and country borrowers to agree on and carry out evaluation recommendations. A number of radical changes took place.

Country programme evaluations (CPE) – now called country strategy and programme evaluations – replaced the country portfolio evaluations in 1999, which led to a number of improvements, especially in the development of new COSOPs, which remain the major vehicle for IFAD's engagement at the country level. IOE introduced c**orporate-level evaluations (CLEs) in the 1990s** to assess the results of IFAD-wide corporate policies, strategies, business processes or related organizational aspects. They generate findings and recommendations that can be used to formulate more effective corporate policies and strategies, or to improve business processes and organizational

architecture. Two corporate-level evaluations in particular – the 2005 Direct Supervision Pilot Programme and the 2007 Field Presence Pilot Programme – led to the introduction of direct supervision of projects and the establishment of IFAD country offices. These are two of the most significant adjustments to IFAD's business model since its foundation. (These evaluations will be described in further detail in chapter 3.) At least one corporate-level evaluation has been conducted every year since they were introduced.

Workshops held in relation to corporate-level and country programme evaluations

When a CPE is finalized, IOE always holds a **national round-table workshop**, organized in partnership with the government and which takes place in the country where the evaluation was conducted. Its objectives are to (i) discuss the main issues emerging from the CPE; (ii) provide inputs for the preparation of the evaluation's agreement at completion point; and (iii) provide an opportunity to reflect on key issues for the forthcoming results-based country strategic opportunities programme (RB-COSOP).

The **first CPE was conducted by the Monitoring and Evaluation Division in Yemen in 1992**, and the national workshop (then called "round-table conference") took place in February 1994. It was attended by some 60 participants, including representatives of ministries and government authorities, as well as of cooperating institutions, such as the World Bank. The workshop was found to be highly beneficial for IFAD's engagement in Yemen, stimulating for instance: (i) an enhanced policy dialogue based on an objective evaluation of progress made on a country-wide basis; (ii) a strong promotion of IFAD's action in the country; and (iii) the building of a national-level support to IFAD programmes.

The **first workshop held in Africa took place in Khartoum in March 1995, as a follow-up to the CPE of The Sudan**. Some 70 participants attended, which illustrated the importance given by the Government of The Sudan to the portfolio evaluation and its findings. The IFAD delegation was led by the Executive Board Director from Bangladesh and included two staff members and a consultant. The initiative of requesting an Executive Board Director to participate in the workshop proved to be very successful, as it stimulated interesting discussions, particularly with government officials. This positive experience led IFAD to promote a larger participation of Executive Board Directors at subsequent workshops.

The **Bangladesh CPE workshop, the first in the Asia and Pacific region, was held in Dhaka in May 1995**. There were about 75 participants, including policy-makers from the central government ministries, project directors and managers, donor representatives and non-governmental organizations. Ten grass-roots project

beneficiaries from five operational projects (of whom five were women beneficiaries) were also invited to attend the discussions. The IFAD delegation comprised five Evaluation Committee members (Bangladesh, Cameroon, Panama, Switzerland and the United Kingdom), which provided an invaluable opportunity for close interaction among decision-makers of the Executive Board as well as the policy-makers of recipient countries.

The **first CPE workshop held in Latin America and the Caribbean took place in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in November 1996** and was attended by five members of the Evaluation Committee (Bangladesh, Egypt, Gabon, Germany and Panama) as well as several high-level authorities from the Government of Honduras, representatives from the Inter-American Development Bank and others.

Ever since, IOE has been organizing national workshops to present all of its CPEs to country representatives.

For **CLEs**, final workshops are not held systematically, but two of the most significant events to date were:

The **international round-table workshop for the presentation of the CLE on the Direct Supervision Pilot Programme (DSPP), held in Bangkok, Thailand, in July 2005**. The workshop's objectives were to discuss the evaluation's overall results and seek the views of the participants on the draft agreement at completion point. It was attended by representatives of IFAD management and staff, project and government authorities involved in the DSPP, IFAD cooperating institutions and others.

The **stakeholder workshop for the CLE on the Field Presence Pilot Programme (FPPP), held in Rome, Italy, in June 2007**. The workshop brought together all IFAD field presence staff for the first time in the history of IFAD, project directors, government representatives, IFAD Management and staff, members of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Executive Board on Field Presence, representatives of international organizations, members of the evaluation team and the FPPP evaluation senior advisers, and others. The current IFAD President also attended the event in his then capacity as IFAD Vide President and delivered his remarks on the topic during the discussions.

Both of these evaluations and their influence on IFAD's operating model will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

Since 2011, IOE's approach to project evaluations consists of undertaking **project completion report validations (PCRVs) and project performance assessments (PPAs) – now called project performance evaluations (PPEs)**, rather than interim and completion evaluations, which were extremely costly and time-consuming. PCRVs consist of a desk review of the project completion report and other available reports and documents. The PCRV performs the following functions: i) independent verification of the analytical quality of the project completion report; ii) independent review of project performance and results; and iii) extrapolation of key substantive findings and lessons learned for further synthesis. PPEs assess project results based on the report validation and a field mission. Undertaken after an IFAD-funded operation has been completed, both evaluations assess results and impact to promote accountability and learning, but only PPEs generate recommendations that can inform other projects that IFAD funds.

IOE launched its first **impact evaluation** in **2013**, evaluating a project in Sri Lanka. Impact evaluations are intended to assess the performance and impact of an IFAD project in a more quantitative and rigorous manner and provide recommendations for future operations. It applies mixed methods and triangulates from different sources. Compared to other IOE evaluations, it benefits from a larger set of primary data collected through a qualitative and quantitative survey. IOE conducted a second impact evaluation in 2014, in India, released in June 2015. Both evaluations will be explained further in chapter 3.

IOE also introduced **evaluation synthesis reports in 2012**. Such reports, which are more to be seen as knowledge products rather than evaluations in themselves, aim to facilitate learning and wider use of evaluation findings by identifying and capturing accumulated knowledge on common themes across a variety of situations. Synthesizing existing evaluation material, together with latest research thinking, allows evaluation evidence to be fed into the decision-making process in an effective way.

The **Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI)**, presented for the first time to the Evaluation Committee and the Executive Board in September **2003**, consolidates the evaluations of IFAD operations that IOE has completed, and has become IOE's annual flagship report. Aiming to provide an integrated perspective across all types of evaluations, the report highlights the results and impact of IFAD activities, discusses lessons learned, and draws attention to related systemic issues with a view to further enhancing IFAD's development effectiveness. In addition, the ARRI concentrates on the learning issues which are recurrently emerging in IOE's evaluations as areas that merit further attention. For instance, the 2014 ARRI dealth in-depth with the issue of project management whilst the 2015 ARRI focused on sustainability of benefits. To-date, IOE has published 13 issues of the ARRI, and it is one of the very few multilateral or bilateral organizations that produces such a report on an annual basis.

IOE dissemination products based on evaluations

Evaluation profiles

Evaluation Profiles are two-page summaries of the main conclusions and recommendations arising from each IFAD evaluation. They are primarily intended for IFAD Management, government ministers and key decision-makers who lack the time to read every full report. Profiles provide a sampling of evaluation results and an incentive for readers to delve deeper and follow up on interesting issues in the full report. They may also provide early warning of issues identified in an evaluation that require immediate attention. Available in print and online, profiles are written in a reader-friendly style and are prepared in the original language and in English.
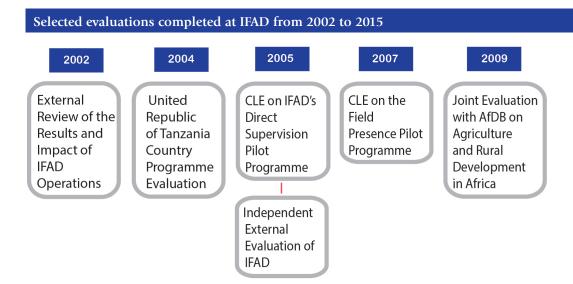
Evaluation insights

Insights focus on one learning issue emerging from evaluations, with the aim of generating further debate among development practitioners. Insights are produced for each country strategy and programme evaluation. They may also, be produced for corporate-level evaluations, evaluation synthesis reports, impact evaluations and project performance assessments.

Infographics

Infographics are graphic visual representations of information, data or knowledge meant to present information quickly and clearly. They are being increasingly used to illustrate development-related issues and are an effective tool to present a quick and visually appealing summary of evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. IOE produces infographics for the ARRI, CLEs, country strategy and programme evaluations, and evaluation synthesis reports.

3 Key evaluations that inspired change at IFAD

Over time, IOE evaluations have contributed to remarkable institutional changes in IFAD. They have served to promote accountability through measuring and reporting on results. They have also generated lessons and made key recommendations for improving IFAD operations. Ten of the most important evaluations done since 2000 are described in the pages that follow.

Selected evaluations completed at IFAD from 2002 to 2015

2002

External Review of the Results and Impact of IFAD Operations

2004

United Republic of Tanzania Country Programme Evaluation

2005

CLE on IFAD's Direct Supervision Pilot Programme

Independent External Evaluation of IFAD

2007

CLE on the Field Presence Pilot Programme

2009

Joint Evaluation with AfDB on Agriculture and Rural Development in Africa

2010-2012

CLE on IFAD's Capacity to Promote Innovation and Scaling Up

CLE on IFAD's Performance with regard to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

CLE on IFAD's Private-sector Development and Partnership Strategy

2013

CLE on IFAD's Institutional Efficiency and Efficiency of IFAD-funded Operations

Impact evaluation of the Dry Zone Livelihood Support and Partnership Programme in Sri Lanka

2014

CLE on IFAD Replenishments

2015

CLE on IFAD's Engagement in Fragile and Conflict-affected States and Situations

CLE on IFAD's Performance-based Allocation System

The First Session of the Consultation on the Sixth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources, held on 21 February 2002, approved the proposal for an **External Review of the Results and Impact of IFAD Operations**. The objectives of the external review were to report on (a) the results and impact achieved by IFAD-supported operations, and (b) the established methodologies and processes for assessing the results and impact of IFAD-supported projects and other changes introduced to enhance IFAD's focus on results.

The review confirmed that IFAD had predominantly targeted its financial and policy-dialogue interventions at the most disadvantaged populations of the world's rural areas, finding clear indications among IFAD-funded projects of impact in poverty reduction. In its broad range of activities, IFAD had also promoted some widely recognized innovations, e.g. in microfinance, soil and water conservation, water users' associations, self-help groups and various forms of partnership-building. However, the review revealed, innovations had taken place without a systematic approach.

The review found areas in which project performance had to be improved. First, sustainability of benefits had been less than expected when loans were approved. Although some promising progress had also been achieved in the development of analytical tools for impact assessment, the External Review Team considered that improvement in these areas depended on a strong culture of attention to performance, results and impact, rather than approval, disbursement and input. Finally, the review recognized the need for IFAD to strengthen its proximity to the field.

The **United Republic of Tanzania Country Programme Evaluation** conducted between 2001 and 2002 can be considered as another important example. It had a major role in sparking the enhancement of IFAD's operating model, in particular by underlining the need for IFAD to establish a more permanent country presence.

The absence of a country presence was found to be a significant constraint in IFAD's efforts to engage more coherently in policy dialogue, and ensure the necessary and timely implementation support to the Fund's operations. As the evaluation stated, "the lack of a more permanent and constant presence at the country level has prevented IFAD from participating regularly and proactively in discussions with donors and other groups on key policy issues. It has also made building local strategic partnerships more difficult […]. The absence of a field presence also hampers IFAD's efforts to provide implementation support and to take any follow-up action needed to ensure impact achievement and assessment. A more permanent field presence would, in sum, contribute to advancing IFAD's catalytic role, and it would allow the Fund to provide more implementation support and follow-up, strengthen monitoring and evaluation, undertake policy dialogue, build partnerships and cooperate more effectively in donor mechanisms."

The evaluation also brought to light the weaknesses of supervision activities conducted on behalf of IFAD by other institutions, in particular their focus on the delivery of physical outputs, on administration and budget/disbursement issues, and on procurement – rather than on implementation performance and

project impact. This observation triggered much reflection and debate among IFAD Management, and in the end served as a springboard for IFAD to shift to another project supervision model, streamlining its supervision processes to ensure that recommendations were adopted and that follow-up action was taken.

The 2005 **corporate-level evaluation (CLE) of IFAD's Direct Supervision Pilot Programme (DSPP)** and the 2007 **CLE on the Field Presence Pilot Programme (FPPP)** ultimately led to the introduction of direct supervision of projects and the establishment of IFAD country offices. Before the DSPP was launched, IFAD was not directly supervising the projects it funded. It used to delegate project supervision to selected cooperating institutions, such as the United Nations Office for Project Services. The overarching objective of the DSPP was to enable IFAD to acquire first-hand knowledge from supervision activities and to incorporate lessons learned from ongoing operations more effectively into its project design work. In 2005, when the CLE on DSPP was finalized, one important message clearly emerged: projects that were directly supervised performed better than projects that were supervised by cooperating institutions. The analysis also showed that direct supervision allowed the Fund to expand its catalytic objectives of innovation, policy dialogue and partnership development. There was also wide support by partners for IFAD to undertake direct supervision. The CLE therefore recommended that IFAD develop a comprehensive supervision and implementation support policy, which ultimately translated in 2006 into IFAD's decision to move to direct supervision of

projects – one of the most far-reaching changes since the establishment of the Fund in 1977. In fact, the evaluation's recommendation that IFAD undertake direct supervision and implementation support required an amendment to the Agreement Establishing IFAD, which was finalized in February 2006.

Similarly, the FPPP was a three-year programme launched in 2003 with the objective to enhance the effectiveness of IFAD operations by focusing on four interrelated dimensions: implementation support, policy dialogue, partnership-building and knowledge management. The CLE on the FPPP completed in 2007 assessed the performance and impact of the programme in achieving IFAD's overall objectives. While the focus was on the FPPP, the evaluation also examined the experience gained with two out-posted country programme managers (CPMs) in Panama and Peru and proxy field presence arrangements, in which IFAD normally recruits a consultant locally who can undertake a range of activities in support of the IFAD country programme, such as attending donor co-ordination meetings. The evaluation concluded that the country presence model tested by the FPPP had positive results: the CPM out-posting model, with the required delegation of authority to advance IFAD's objectives at the country level, emerged as a highly effective option. The evaluation paved the way for the establishment of a fully-fledged IFAD Country Presence Programme (CPP); specifically, it suggested that the FPPP be expanded to cover an adequate number of countries in all IFAD regions, including two to three sub-regional offices. Since then, IFAD has established more than 40 country offices and one regional office in East and

Southern Africa, increasing its presence where its beneficiaries need it most.

The **Independent External Evaluation of IFAD (IEE) was undertaken in 2004/5** before the Seventh Replenishment of IFAD resources. Its objective was to determine IFAD's contribution to rural poverty reduction, the results and impact it had achieved on the ground, and the relevance of the organization within the international development community. The IEE was the first truly independent and comprehensive evaluation in the Fund's history, with an unprecedented level of transparency and interaction between stakeholders. The evaluation concluded that IFAD's overall portfolio performance was similar to that of comparable multilateral development organizations and that only half of the projects evaluated had made more than a modest impact. Projects scored poorly on sustainability and innovation, and the evaluation underlined the need for IFAD to increase its efficiency and become a more systematic promoter of innovations that could be scaled up and replicated by other partners for wider impact on poverty.

The changes triggered as a result of the IEE were most visible in the area of operations and IFAD's business model. For example:

■ The **2007-10 Strategic Framework** was introduced as a Corporate Planning and Performance Management System with explicit links to the IEE – a series of tools and processes aiming to better focus, align and manage the quality of IFAD's work. In addition, a set of corporate management results were defined, each of them with key performance indicators.

■ By the time of the **2011-15 Strategic Framework**, the text on strategic reorientation remained in line with the IEE recommendations, to: assume a greater leadership role among actors engaged in supporting agriculture, food security and rural poverty reduction; scale up the programmes and operations it supports in partnership with both public- and private-sector actors; expand its policy engagement with its developing Member States, both with governments and with farmers' organizations and civil society; and enhance its knowledge broker and advocacy role.

■ The development of the Strategic Framework enabled a **new Results Measurement Framework** to be prepared. Initially this was reported through the existing Portfolio Performance Report, but by the end of 2007 this was replaced by the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness. This met several objectives. It furthered the process of self-evaluation, gave a broader perspective on corporate performance using the IEE as a benchmark for many of the measures, and provided improved information to the Executive Board for its strategic deliberations.

■ The **Results and Impact Management System (RIMS)**, which had been developed in parallel with the implementation of the IEE, was expanded to cover organizational effectiveness and efficiency, and the framework included a plausible results chain. The approach is highly ambitious compared with other IFIs.

■ New systems of **quality enhancement (QE) and quality assurance (QA)**

were established with arms-length independence and management from the Office of the Vice President.

- Work on **Knowledge Management (KM)** took a systematic turn after the IEE recommendations. A KM strategy was approved in 2007, which led to quite steady progress, with KM officers appointed in all five regional divisions; some KM staff appointed in country offices; birth of an IFAD-wide community of practice; some grants at regional level; and launching of a joint 'Share Fair' with WFP and FAO. In 2011 the President created the Office of Strategy and Knowledge Management, to further IFAD's efforts to contribute to and develop analytical publications to share the wealth of knowledge and experience accumulated through its regional and country operations.

The **African Development Bank (AfDB)-IFAD joint evaluation on Agriculture and Rural Development in Africa (completed in 2009)** was the first joint evaluation between the two organizations to review the agricultural and rural development policies and operations of AfDB and IFAD in Africa. The joint evaluation was important not only for the partnership between AfDB and IFAD, but also because it established the basis on which IOE was able to develop good practices for undertaking joint evaluations. The evaluation of development initiatives is often limited by a single focus on the work of individual organizations. However, valuable lessons can be learned by taking advantage of the synergies that come from looking across organizational boundaries. Although institutional barriers can potentially limit

any organization's ability to realize these synergies, the AfDB-IFAD joint evaluation was groundbreaking in setting the stage for a more synergistic approach across organizations to evaluating agriculture and rural development. Since the AfDB-IFAD joint evaluation, IOE has undertaken a joint evaluation synthesis with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on FAO's and IFAD's engagement in pastoral development.

The **CLE on IFAD's Institutional Efficiency and Efficiency of IFAD-funded Operations (CLEE), completed in 2013**, covered not only the efficiency of IFAD operations, but also institutional efficiency in a number of critical areas: the management of human resources, results and budgets; information and communication technology; oversight and support functions; leadership and decision-making; and governing bodies. Given its scope and coverage, it has probably been one of the most complex and far-reaching evaluations conducted by IOE to date, and it is widely recognized as the first evaluation of its kind among multilateral and bilateral development agencies. The CLEE resulted in the development by IFAD Management (and adoption by the Board in 2013) of a comprehensive Action Plan to Enhance IFAD's Efficiency. For each recommendation of the CLEE, a structured list of actions, with the related timeline and indicative costs, was developed.

From the Action Plan

CLEE recommendation 7: Instil an institutional culture of accountability and performance, and strengthen reporting for results

The CLEE emphasized that continued improvement of IFAD's accountability framework for high-quality results and performance will underpin efforts to make IFAD's impact more efficient… Development of a comprehensive accountability framework for IFAD is currently under discussion with the governing bodies, and Management is committed to ensuring that relevant elements of accountability identified by the CLEE are addressed in a consistent manner. Accordingly, Management is committed to the following actions.

Action	Timeline and indicative cost
Revise the IFAD accountability framework to incorporate CLEE recommendations	Completion by end 2014
Define delegation of authority to address CLEE recommendations	End 2014
Improve the data and information base for IFAD's Results Measurement Framework	Continuous

For example, the CLEE concluded that recommendations involving staffing and organizational changes would require additional resources, and that a capital budget may be necessary to fund the information and communications technology (ICT) investments needed to improve long-term administrative efficiency. The CLEE also noted that proposed actions to increase operational selectivity may result in budget flexibility in the medium term. The estimated costs in the action plan therefore consider associated recurrent costs (staff-related and for ICT maintenance), capital costs (mainly for investment in ICT systems) and one-time adjustment costs (mainly for the set-up and rationalization of IFAD country offices, and process improvement).

The **2013 CLE on IFAD Replenishments**, released in early 2014, assessed past replenishment processes and generated options to inform the consultation of the Tenth Replenishment of IFAD Resources, which took place in 2014. The evaluation pointed out that periodic replenishments are critical to ensure IFAD's financial sustainability and also provide a platform to ensure accountability for results and collective reflection on IFAD's policy and strategic priorities. At the same time, while replenishments will remain IFAD's main source of funding in years to come, the report found that IFAD should intensify efforts to mobilize financing from other sources. The report also recommended that IFAD and its Member States consider whether longer replenishment periods beyond the current three-year cycle

would contribute to greater institutional effectiveness. The evaluation found that IFAD's Results Measurement Framework could be simplified and include a more explicit theory of change, which would allow the understanding of the building blocks – for example, assumptions and resources – required to achieve rural transformation. It also highlighted the usefulness of developing a longer-term strategic vision for the organization and the need to rethink IFAD's governance structure through, for instance, re-examining the way IFAD groups its Member States, i.e. the "List" system, to reflect changes in the international architecture.

The **first impact evaluation of an IFAD-supported programme or project** took place in **2013**, as a part of IFAD-wide commitments for the Ninth Replenishment period (2013-2015). The programme evaluated was the Dry Zone Livelihood Support and Partnership Programme in Sri Lanka. This evaluation was in response to the growing pressure on multilateral development organizations to measure and report on their results and impact, and with better and stronger evidence. Compared to other types of evaluations, impact evaluations are based on more rigorous and quantitative methods, including use of counterfactuals (e.g. control or comparison groups) to overcome attribution issues.

The evaluation made use of the entire range of project-level evaluation criteria outlined in IFAD's Evaluation Manual.

For the first time at IFAD, extensive primary data collection and analysis were undertaken, including a qualitative survey (30 key informant interviews with project staff and relevant government officers, and 41 focus group discussions with beneficiaries), and a quantitative survey of over 2,560 households – both project and comparison households. In this way, the impact evaluation enabled IFAD to assess impact more accurately and concretely, and provide an in-depth understanding of its causalities in the results chain. Conducting an impact evaluation made it clear how critical such evaluations can be to strengthening IFAD's organizational accountability and learning, so as to inform decision-making and improve the performance of future operations.

In 2014, IOE undertook its second impact evaluation in India, of the Jharkhand – Chhattisgarh Tribal Development Programme, a programme launched in 1999 and concluded in 2012 that targeted households in villages, hamlets and habitations with tribal communities and a scheduled caste population.[4] In order to verify the causal relationships between the programme and observed changes and to estimate the attribution of impact, the evaluation used a mix-method approach, applying quantitative quasi-experimental and qualitative participatory methods and conducted an impact survey using *propensity score matching* techniques.[5] There are only a limited number of impact evaluations that IOE can conduct, for

[4] The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are official designations given to various groups of historically disadvantaged people in India. The terms are recognized in the Constitution of India and the various groups are designated in one or other of the categories. During the period of British rule in the Indian subcontinent, they were known as the Depressed Classes.
[5] In the statistical analysis of observational data, propensity score matching (PSM) is a statistical matching technique that attempts to estimate the effect of a treatment, policy or other intervention.

budget and timing reasons. IFAD itself is also committed to the conduction of a number of impact evaluations, which are going to be highly relevant to validate IFAD's commitment to lifting 80 million people out of poverty by 2015. It is important to note that the projects selected by IOE for impact evaluations are different than the ones covered by IFAD Management.

IOE conducts impact evaluations independently, and has developed rigorous methodologies and techniques for this purpose. It also plays a role in developing standards that can be useful for the impact evaluations conducted by IFAD Management. Impact evaluations by both IFAD Management and IOE are highly relevant, and their complementarity will ensure that an organization like IFAD stays at the cutting edge of impact and results assessment methodologies, and that it is able to measure and improve its development effectiveness and the impact of its operations.

In 2014, IOE conducted a **corporate-level evaluation on IFAD's Engagement with Fragile and Conflict-affected States (FCS) and Situations**. The objectives of the evaluation were to: assess the performance of IFAD's engagement in FCS and identify factors that lie behind current performance; and generate a series of findings, lessons learned and recommendations to assist Management and the Executive Board in deciding on strategic and operations directions for the future. The evaluation found that IFAD has a critical and distinct role to play in addressing the problems of fragile states which, in turn, are key to achieving a range of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including the elimination of poverty, the promotion of sustainable agriculture and productive employment and peaceful and inclusive societies. At the same time, the evaluation found that the existing policy framework for FCS is fragmented, lacks a clear focus on fragility and conflict and fails to provide guidance on how IFAD should tailor its support to specific contexts. It recommended drafting an overarching policy that defines a set of principles to guide how IFAD engages with FCS and to revisit the Fund's official definition of fragility, to help bring clarity to staff, Member States and other development partners on the focus and priority areas of work.

Finally, IOE will complete, by the end of the year, a **corporate-level evaluation on IFAD's Performance-based Allocation System (PBAS)**, the system, launched in 2003, through which the Fund allocates resources for financing country programmes using a formula that incorporates measures of country need and country performance, similar to other major multilateral development banks. The overarching purpose of this evaluation is to undertake an independent assessment of the PBAS – a key policy instrument and critical component of the organization's operating model – to help IFAD further improve the allocation of its resources to developing Member States for rural poverty reduction.

4 Emerging trends and the role for evaluation

Today, all the major regional and global development organizations have independent evaluation functions to some degree, and it would be unimaginable for the work of a public institution not to be subject to some form of evaluation. As we have seen, IFAD is no exception, and its evaluation office, IOE, has undoubtedly been a catalyst for change and reform, and its contribution to the work of IFAD is evident and unmistakable.

In general, for an evaluation office, understanding the global drivers of the development agenda, as well as those of the institution the office is part of, is essential to ensuring the quality of evaluations. Based on these global and institutional drivers, evaluation topics must be strategically chosen and the resulting recommendations made applicable to future work and priorities.

How are the thematic areas and the countries where IOE will conduct evaluations chosen, and how does evaluation at IFAD shape its own priorities, year after year? How does IOE make sure the evaluations it conducts are always relevant and useful, and that they follow the latest trends in development evaluation?

Institutional drivers and priorities

During the years that have elapsed since IFAD's Evaluation Manual was first published in 2009, a number of changes have taken place at IFAD, with respect to its priorities and its operating model. Changes in priorities include:

- A new engagement by IFAD and its partners to scaling up results for enhanced impact, i.e. replicating high-impact and innovative approaches at large scale;

- A stronger emphasis on policy dialogue and the engagement of the private sector;

- The recognition of the importance of value chain development;

- An increase in institutional efficiency; and

- More attention to thematic areas such as gender, the environment, adaptation to climate change and nutrition.

With regard to the operating model, some changes that have occurred in IFAD as a result of reforms have clearly had a direct implication on the evaluations that IOE conducts. For instance:

- The direct responsibility for supervision and implementation support of IFAD-funded projects;

- An increased country presence, through the establishment and consolidation of new and existing country offices;

- Improved country strategies (results-based country strategic opportunities programmes, or RB-COSOPs);

- Upgraded quality assurance and quality enhancement systems; and

- The creation of a separate department for strategy and knowledge, including a division of Strategic Planning and Impact Assessment and one on Global Engagement and Research.

These changes have clearly shaped IOE's priorities as well as its work programme and budget cycles, and will continue to do so. With a new institutional strategy in IFAD articulated around the concept of inclusive and sustainable rural transformation, in selecting the themes and areas to evaluate, IOE needs to take into consideration the essential challenges that the organization faces and where evaluation – particularly independent evaluation – can have an impact. How are all these changes reflected in the evaluations conducted by IOE? How does IOE make sure it is dynamically adjusting its work programme and priorities?

IOE has developed a **selectivity framework** to ensure full transparency on the selection of topics. First tabled in 2013 at the Evaluation Committee and launched in the 2014 work programme and budget document, the selectivity framework includes criteria and guiding questions that allow for a more transparent process in selecting projects for evaluation. The framework also contains guiding questions for selecting themes and corporate areas that IOE proposes to evaluate each year. Questions include: Is the theme an area of interest/priority for IFAD stakeholders? Is the theme in line with IFAD's strategic priorities and replenishment commitments? Does the evaluation address a knowledge gap in IFAD? How would the evaluation contribute to IOE's strategic objectives?

With such a framework guiding the selection of topics, countries, themes and corporate areas to evaluate, IOE can ensure that the proposed evaluations are timely and relevant, as their results are expected to inform future policy and strategy development issues that are high on IFAD's agenda, as well as project design and implementation.

New trends in evaluation of relevance to IFAD

In addition to "keeping the finger on the pulse" of current development priorities that are relevant and useful for evaluations, IOE contributes to the internal policy and strategy debate at IFAD to make sure it mainstreams and internalizes evaluation approaches in a way that fosters corporate reflection and improves performance, results and impact. IOE does so by continuously following the new trends in international development evaluation and by adopting those that can make a difference in IFAD's operations. What follows is a review of the most salient trends.

Building a stronger results culture

In the 1990s, the United Nations system as a whole adopted results-based management (RBM) to improve its effectiveness and accountability. By focusing on 'results' rather than 'activities', RBM helps United Nations agencies to better articulate their vision and support for expected results and to better monitor progress using indicators, targets and baselines.

A results-oriented policy without a **strong results culture** is difficult to put into practice in a meaningful way – i.e. for decision-making and learning. Building such a culture requires a corporate commitment and willingness to learn from results. Results-oriented policies cannot be limited to data collection, targets and indicators: qualitative information, analysis and evaluations must complement results measurement to understand how and why results were (or were not) achieved.

IOE will continuously contribute to strengthening IFAD's results culture by supporting IFAD's self-evaluation system. The self- and independent evaluation systems are harmonized within IFAD, based on agreements that are periodically revised and updated. Such harmonization must take place from project to corporate level, in terms of processes and products, and must be continuously revised in such a way that guarantees comparable evaluation criteria used by the self-evaluation system and by IOE.

The results culture within IFAD can also be strengthened through the promotion of better **impact assessment techniques and methodologies**. While it is clear that an independent office such as IOE can have only limited opportunities to conduct impact evaluations, given its size and budget, it can still play a significant role in developing standards for impact evaluations that it carries out in conjunction with IFAD and in assessing their quality. One standard has to do with the importance of using both quantitative and qualitative methods,

i.e. the "mix-method approach", in the same evaluation to provide information on the environmental, political or social context of interventions as well as essential insights into 'why' or 'how' an intervention succeeded or failed. Although there is growing attention to quantitative methods (e.g. randomized control trials, statistical surveys), the need to use qualitative methods (e.g. key informant interviews, focus group discussions) for assessing results of "softer" interventions (e.g. capacity-building, empowerment, promotion of participation) is now also being recognized as equally important.

IOE will continue investing in a better impact evaluation system of IFAD's interventions for better evidence, leading to better decision-making.

Improving the learning and feedback loops

The learning potential in the evaluation process kicks in right from the start – lessons and insights are generated as evaluators ask questions, probe issues and present findings for discussion with partners and stakeholders. International evaluation expert Michael Quinn Patton argues that research on evaluation demonstrates that "intended users are more likely to use evaluations if they understand and feel ownership of the evaluation process and findings [and that] they are more likely to understand and feel ownership if they've been actively involved. By actively involving primary intended users, the evaluator is preparing the groundwork for use."[6] This

[6] Patton M. Q, Utilization Focused Evaluation, 2008.

requires striking a right balance between involvement and the need to preserve evaluation independence.

Efforts are made by IOE to ensure that appropriate feedback loops are established and learning opportunities developed, so that findings and conclusions from evaluations feed into ongoing work and can inform and renew corporate reflection – for example, the Management Response, an instrument that enables IFAD Management to give its views on the main findings and its agreement, or otherwise, on the recommendations from corporate-level and project performance evaluations. Another example is the agreement at completion point, which is prepared at the end of a country strategy and programme evaluation, and includes the agreement of IFAD Management and the concerned government to adopt and implement evaluation recommendations within specified time frames. The status of the adoption of the evaluation recommendations agreed by IFAD Management and, in the case of country strategy and programme evaluations, also by the government concerned, is monitored through the President's Report on Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions (PRISMA), which is submitted to the Executive Board.

To maximize the learning potential, IOE takes a participatory approach. As stated in the Evaluation Policy, a core learning partnership (CLP) is established for most evaluations, which is composed of the main stakeholders of the evaluation. The CLP members contribute from the outset and throughout the different stages of the evaluation.

Moreover, for the sake of enhancing transparency and learning, in 2013 IOE has made publicly available the IFAD's independent evaluation ratings database, which includes all the ratings on the performance of IFAD-supported operations evaluated since 2002. The broader aim of disclosing such evaluation data is to further strengthen organizational accountability and transparency (in line with IFAD's Disclosure and Evaluation Policies), as well as enable others interested (including researches and academics) to conduct their own analysis based on IOE data. The ratings provide the foundation for preparing IOE's flagship report, the Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD operations.

In the future, an even greater focus on learning and on improving the learning loops will enhance the quality of the evaluations and build ownership among key partners in the evaluation process and its outcomes. To this end, IOE will increase opportunities for learning that are both internal and external to the organization through such initiatives as learning events, knowledge management workshops and other participatory events.

Participation of the private sector

Funding from governments and philanthropic grants is insufficient to solve the problems of the bottom billion. Therefore, the international community is urging institutions and governments to recognize the importance of innovative forms of development. Among these, public-private partnerships, very familiar to IFAD through its "4P approach" – Public-Private-Producers Partnerships, are increasingly recognized as important

solutions, as much as other mechanisms, such as prizes for innovation and private equity funds that support the development of new enterprises that aim for the social good, in addition to financial returns.

IFAD is moving decisively into the engagement of the private sector in IFAD-funded operations, as expressed by several initiatives such as the 4Ps approach, the innovation and scaling up and the renewed emphasis on value chains. This new reality poses a number of challenges and requires significant adjustments to the way development evaluation is undertaken in terms of methodologies and processes. First of all, evaluation outfits have to adopt new, tailored methodologies and indicators for assessing the role and contribution of the private sector in the development efforts promoted by multilateral organizations. This means understanding what the private sector brings in and what methodologies and indicators can be used to evaluate and assess their contribution and participation. Another challenge relates to staff skills and experience. International organizations, including their evaluators, need to learn how to work with the private sector. This requires institutions to train and develop their staff, not only to work with the private sector but to evaluate operations that include private sector components.

The third challenge is the need to adjust self-evaluation systems. In multilateral organizations, and IFAD in particular, there are areas to improve the capacity to assess the private sector performance, in terms of indicators and assessment capabilities. Evaluators will need to keep pace with changes in the context, including the

data revolution and the information economy, and they will need to adjust to the new speed to develop credible and useful evaluations.

Expanding joint evaluations

Development co-operation agencies have recognized that they need to work together in a better way, coordinating their work to prevent duplication and maximize synergies. Joint evaluations are one way to address evaluation questions and impacts that go beyond the results of one individual agency. They also enable those involved in the evaluation – agencies, partner countries, consultants, etc. – to share knowledge and learn from each other, increase ownership of the evaluation findings, and make follow-up on recommendations more likely. When joint evaluations involve partner institutions, they also help to align evaluations with national needs.

IOE intends to increase its cooperation with other multilateral and bilateral agencies by conducting far-reaching joint evaluations with other evaluation outfits in the context of aid effectiveness, donor coordination and harmonization, and will selectively participate in joint evaluations of importance to IFAD. This will include joint evaluations conducted with the other United Nations agencies based in Rome, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

In 2013, IOE signed a joint statement of intent with the evaluation offices of FAO, WFP and the CGIAR for strengthening collaboration in evaluation of the Rome-based agencies dealing with food security,

agriculture and rural poverty alleviation. The purpose of the statement is to provide the broad framework to institutionalize collective efforts in promoting closer collaboration in evaluation among the three United Nations agencies and to share and promote good practices with respect to challenging aspects of evaluating food and agriculture work in development and humanitarian context, achieving efficiency gains.

Focusing on theory-based evaluations

In the recent developments in evaluation, there has been a proliferation of theory-based approaches and numerous variations within each approach. One such approach is the **theory of change**, which is used to explain the **causal pathway** of how and why a given change will happen in a particular context and under specific circumstances. A theory of change defines all building blocks required to bring about a given long-term goal. This set of connected building blocks is then depicted graphically on a map known as a *pathway of change/change framework*.

Theories of change differ from the classic, widely used logical frameworks (also known as logframes) to the extent that logframes describe the logical pathway that a programme or project deals with, creating a neat, orderly structure that identifies activities, outputs, outcomes and impact, which makes it easier to monitor implementation. Theories of change go beyond what logframes do and articulate the assumptions about the process through which change will occur, specifying the ways in which all of the required early and intermediate outcomes related to achieving the desired long-term change

will be brought about and documented as they occur.

Theory-based evaluation uses theories of change to explore the *how* and *why* of programme success or failure, producing information that does not emerge in traditional process and outcome studies. Theory-based impact evaluation, in particular, outlines the theory of how the intervention is expected to lead to the intended impact, enabling the evaluation to test the underlying assumptions along the causal chain.

The use of theories of change is a fairly recent phenomenon in IFAD and therefore explicit theories of change may not be available in existing project and programme designs. In some cases, if deemed necessary, IOE will allocate sufficient time, effort and resources to design theories of change starting from existing logframes, in particular when conducting project-level and impact evaluations.

Enhancing the stakeholders' participation in evaluations

Evaluation in development is becoming gradually more participatory. In IFAD, **participatory evaluation**, in this sense, is an approach that entails the active involvement of those with a stake in a given project or programme: IFAD Management and staff, recipient governments, cofinanciers, and the ultimate beneficiaries and their organizations. In participatory evaluation, these stakeholders are involved, for instance, in deciding how to frame the questions used to evaluate a programme/project and how to measure outcomes and impact. They are also

given an opportunity to provide inputs at an early stage of an evaluation, so their concerns and priorities are captured (e.g. in the form of key questions) in the design of the evaluation.

IOE will continue to conduct evaluations based on stakeholders' participation and at the same time ensure that the independence of the evaluation's analysis and final judgments are not compromised. In doing so, IOE will better understand how the beneficiaries define and characterize their own development processes at the individual, household and village levels, and how people in communities define the meaning of "empowerment." In this way, IOE will also value the livelihood impacts that are most important to them and be able to identify whether certain people/groups have not been properly targeted (or have been excluded) by the project/programme's interventions.

Moreover, IOE will continue its effort towards **evaluation capacity development**, with a view to further contributing to the development of evaluation capacities for agriculture and rural poverty alleviation interventions in the countries where IFAD operates. IOE will focus its efforts on strengthening and expanding partnerships, as a key to improving evaluation capacities and development effectiveness at the country level, particularly in the agriculture sector. As an example, in 2013, the Government of China (Ministry of Finance) and IOE signed a Statement of Intent to forge a partnership for cooperation of evaluation capacity development. The objective

of establishing the partnership was to contribute to development of evaluation capacities for agriculture and rural poverty alleviation interventions in China. Against this backdrop, a half-day evaluation methodology seminar was organized by IOE in Beijing on 16 July 2014, the main objective of which was to share knowledge on IOE's evaluation methodology and processes in assessing agriculture and rural development operations.

Professionalizing the evaluation function

Over time, evaluation has acquired distinctive characteristics as a discipline in its own right, offering a well-defined body of knowledge, a set of specialized skills and clearly delineated ethical guidelines.

IOE will continue developing the **professionalization** of the evaluation function in IFAD by promoting standards needed to achieve excellence in evaluation practice, such as a streamlined evaluation policy and a clear and updated evaluation manual, with efficient and standardized evaluation methodology and process guidelines.

It will also work to:

- expand the supply of high-quality evaluation training, for instance through evaluation capacity development in the countries where IFAD operates;

- accelerate the harmonization of ethical, quality and capability standards, for instance by adopting specific job descriptions for evaluators, at various levels, alongside with the related core competencies to develop within the

framework of the United Nations
system; and

■ increase the autonomy of its evaluators,
protecting their independence and
setting specific ethical values and
standards.

Undoubtedly, the evolution and changes
that this profession has undergone in the
last decades are far from being over and
there is a lot of evaluation capacity (i.e.
human capital, such as skills, knowledge,
experiences and insights) that still needs to
be strengthened. Since the promulgation
by the United Nations Secretary-General
of the Regulations that govern the
evaluation of United Nations activities
in 2000,[7] and the publication in 2005
of the Norms for Evaluation in the UN
System[8] by UNEG, several international
development agencies, including IFAD,
have improved their operations and results
through institutional reflection induced by
evaluation. IOE will continue to provoke
meaningful institutional reflection at IFAD
through evaluation, in order for IFAD to
be able to realize its mandate – to invest
in rural people for economic, social and
cultural impact, leading to a sustainable
and inclusive rural transformation – in the
most efficient, timely and sustainable way.

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[7] Document ST/SGB/2000/8 of 19 April 2000 (http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/408/45/PDF/
N0040845.pdf?OpenElement).

[8] http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/21.

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