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IFAD's Management Response System

The Agreement at Completion Point Process

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Preface

The Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation (SADEV) is a government-funded institute that conducts and disseminates evaluations of international development cooperation activities. SADEV's overriding objective is to contribute to the achievement of the goals of Swedish development cooperation.

Evaluation activities at SADEV are conducted along two major strands. The first of these involves the organisation of international development cooperation, and focuses on issues such as the management and monitoring of executive organisation, the choice of modalities, donor coordination and the internal efficiency of donor organisations. The second area is concerned with the short- and long-term impact of development assistance on global poverty. Results of SADEV's evaluations are published in series, which are available electronically from SADEV's website, and in hard copy.

This evaluation makes an assessment of the relevance and effectiveness of the management response system at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). A management response system determines the procedures for dealing with completed evaluations, and such a system is a vital tool for promoting the effectiveness of evaluations in aid organisations.

This evaluation contains an analysis of both the programme logic and the application of the management response system within IFAD. The report presents conclusions about factors that are considered crucial in order for the IFAD management response system to be both effective and relevant, based on an assessment of a sample of evaluations and responses produced by IFAD.

This report is part of a larger study about management response systems, which also incorporates the management response systems of Sida and EuropeAid. This evaluation should be of interest to managers in aid organisations engaged in designing management response systems.

June, 2008

Lennart Wohlgemuth
Director General

Executive summary

Background

This report sets out the findings of an evaluation of the effectiveness and relevance of the management response system at IFAD – known as the “agreement at completion point” (ACP) system. A management response system can be understood as a way of “linking evaluation findings to future activities” (OECD/DAC 1992:133). It governs the procedures dealing with a completed evaluation and is intended to facilitate the process of making evaluations an integral part of an organisation’s learning and decision-making processes.

The introduction of the ACP system at IFAD dates back to the end of 1999. However, it was not until 2003, when the Evaluation Office was granted full independence by the executive board and the Evaluation Policy was approved, that the ACP system became fully effective. As stipulated in the Evaluation Policy, the overall reason for introducing the system was to “ensure that knowledge gathered through evaluation is internalised by the organisation and its various partners”.

The ACP is intended to clarify and deepen the understanding of evaluation recommendations, to make the recommendations more operational, and to generate a response from the stakeholders, indicating how they intend to act upon the recommendations within the framework of an action plan that assigns responsibilities. The ACP should also highlight evaluation insights and learning hypotheses for future discussion and debate.

The ACP is a joint process – an agreement between IFAD management and the partner government with which IFAD is collaborating. This feature is unique in management response systems used in aid organisations.

Evaluation objectives

This evaluation’s main objective was to make an overall assessment of the performance of the ACP. In particular, the evaluation had the following key objectives: 1) to document the various components of the ACP system and to obtain a deeper understanding of how the management response system is designed; 2) to assess how well the ACP system achieves its intended objectives; and 3) to assess how relevant the ACP system is to IFAD and its partners.

Evaluation methodology and scope

The evaluation reconstructs the underlying programme theory of the ACP system. An analysis follows, in which the constituent parts of the system are assessed, both logically and empirically. The assessment is made against two evaluation criteria: *effectiveness* and *relevance*. *Effectiveness* of the management response system refers to the extent to which its objectives have been achieved. These objectives exist at two levels: the implementation of the system (the outputs), and its intermediate effects (the

outcomes). *Relevance* refers to the extent to which the management response system is adapted to suit its objectives and the priorities of the organisation.

The evaluation covers the period 2003-2006 and includes an analysis of evaluations at the project level, the country programme level, and the corporate level. The assessment is based on consultation that was undertaken with numerous stakeholders that are involved in the ACP document analysis, in-depth analysis of key documents, and process reviews of four evaluation and response processes.

This evaluation is part of a more comprehensive SADEV evaluation of management response systems in aid organisations, which reviews the response systems of Sida and EuropeAid, in addition to the IFAD response system evaluated here. The findings of the three case studies have been synthesised in a separate report that draws general conclusions about how and the extent to which a management response system can be made effective and relevant.

Conclusions

This evaluation shows that the underlying programme theory of the ACP system is logical, and that it provides a coherent framework through which the stated objectives of the system can be achieved. A number of conclusions have been made about the effectiveness of the system:

- 1 The ACP process has been implemented effectively in terms of its outputs. All completed evaluations during the period 2003-2006 have an ACP document attached, and have been disclosed on the IFAD public website in accordance with the IFAD evaluation policy. The implementation statuses of agreed actions of the ACPs from 2002 and onwards have been followed up in the various PRISMA reports.
- 2 The management response system also achieves most of its objectives at the outcome level:
 - a IFAD's management response system incorporates the necessary components for creating awareness of the evaluation findings and recommendations among stakeholders. The opportunity for key stakeholders to participate in the evaluation and response processes ensures that both IFAD management and partner representatives are aware of at least the main recommendations of the evaluation.
 - b The system has not always enabled stakeholders to reach consensus about future activities. Although the workshops are important in bringing relevant stakeholders together to discuss and reflect upon different opinions, the content of the ACP document is often determined in advance. The workshops appear to contribute to an increased consensus only in a minority of cases.
 - c Commitment to making evaluation recommendations actionable and implementing them is formally achieved when IFAD management and the partner government sign the ACP document. Although this is an important step, the formal agreement does not guarantee commitment by the signatories, especially on behalf of the partner government.

- d The objective of enhancing transparency and holding IFAD management accountable for response actions is largely fulfilled. An effective accountability mechanism – the PRISMA – is in place to ensure the accountability of IFAD management. The executive board can easily cross-check the extent to which the evaluation recommendations have been acted upon. There is a high degree of transparency since the ACP document is published together with the evaluation report, and is made public. The objectives and the deliverables of the system are clear, as are the responsibilities of the actors that are involved.
 - e The overall purpose of the ACP system is largely achieved, since evaluation has been brought closer to the decision-making bodies in IFAD, and its place in key strategic documents such as country strategies has been assured. The ACP system is adapted to fit the policy and programming cycles of IFAD, and ensures that evaluations are used when new projects, programmes or policies are being designed or formulated.
- 3 However, with regard to the partner government, the ACP system cannot ensure that evaluation knowledge is taken into consideration. Partners show less interest in the evaluation, and their participation in the evaluation and response processes is often limited. The partner government is usually less committed to implement the agreed response activities, and the management response system has not succeeded in holding the partner accountable to the same extent as IFAD management.

The objectives of the ACP system, and the way it is structured, are relevant to IFAD and its priorities. The various intermediate goals of the system are logical and coherent, and should contribute to the overarching goal of internalising evaluation findings in future programming. However, the ACP system is only relevant in cases where management and the partner government are fully committed, and participate in the response process.

Given the emphasis of IFAD's system on engaging with partners and making them committed to implementing agreed actions, the relevance of the ACP system could be further improved if the follow-up tool assessed, to a greater extent, agreed response actions directed to partners. Further, ways in which the ACP system can increase the degree of ownership of the recommendations by partner governments should be explored. An incentive structure needs to be implemented that provides real incentives for partners to respond to evaluation recommendations and to implement the agreed actions.

Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Evaluation objectives and rationale for evaluation.....	2
1.2	Evaluation design and criteria.....	2
1.3	Data collection methods.....	3
2	IFAD's evaluation system.....	4
2.1	Independent evaluation function	4
2.2	The role of IFAD's executive board and the evaluation committee	5
2.3	Evaluation types and work programme	5
2.4	The core learning partnership.....	7
3	IFAD's management response system	8
3.1	Background	8
3.2	Characteristics of the ACP system.....	9
3.2.1	Issues paper and the final stakeholder workshop.....	9
3.2.2	The ACP document	9
3.2.3	The PRISMA.....	10
3.3	Administrative procedures of the ACP process	11
3.4	Purpose of the ACP system - the programme theory.....	12
4	The system in practice.....	15
4.1	Involvement of stakeholders	16
4.2	The stakeholder workshop.....	18
4.3	The agreement at completion point – the ACP.....	20
4.4	The follow-up of agreed actions – the PRISMA	23
5	The effectiveness and relevance of the ACP system.....	25
5.1	Effectiveness at the output level - the implementation of the system.....	25
5.2	Effectiveness at the outcome level - achievement of system objectives	26
5.2.1	Awareness of evaluation findings.....	27
5.2.2	Consensus among stakeholders about how to proceed.....	27
5.2.3	Shared commitment of key stakeholders	27
5.2.4	Enhanced transparency and accountability.....	28
5.2.5	Knowledge gathered through evaluation is internalised by IFAD and its various partners	29
5.3	Relevance of IFAD's management response system	29
6	Summary and conclusions	31
	References	34

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACP	Agreement at Completion Point
ARRI	Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations
AsDB	Asian Development Bank
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CE	Completion evaluation
CLE	Corporate Level evaluation
CLP	Core Learning Partnership
COSOP	Country Strategic Opportunities Paper
CPE	Country Programme Evaluation
CPM	Country Programme Manager
DSPP	Direct Supervision Pilot Programme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GOI	Government of Indonesia
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture (Indonesia)
MoFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Ghana)
MTR	Mid-Term Review
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NEP	New Evaluation Process
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OE	Office of Evaluation (IFAD)
PI	Asia and the Pacific Division (IFAD)
PMD	Programme Management Department (IFAD)
PRISMA	President's Report on the Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Actions
RIMS	Results and Impact Management System
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UWADEP	Upper West Agricultural Development Project (Ghana)

1 Introduction

Evaluation within aid organisations is generally undertaken with a dual purpose: i) to learn how to improve, and gain a deeper understanding of, reviewed activities; and ii) to promote organisational accountability. Evaluation seeks to determine what does and does not work and the reasons why. If these questions are answered, evaluations can promote accountability, inform decision-making and allow organisations to improve in order to achieve their objectives. The extent to which an evaluation is successful in contributing to these objectives depends upon a number of factors, including how effectively an organisation uses the evaluation results, and the extent to which the organisation is able to learn from evaluation findings.

In order to facilitate the process of making evaluation an integral part of the organisation's learning and decision-making processes, most organisations have introduced a formal system that will govern the procedures dealing with a completed evaluation. These processes are usually called "management response systems", and can be understood as a way of "linking evaluation findings to future activities" (OECD/DAC 1992:133), and of increasing the extent to which evaluation findings are integrated into policies and programmes. At a very broad level, management response systems are intended to increase the use of and value added by each evaluation report.

The introduction of management response systems within aid organisations in the last decade should be seen in light of both the attention that has been given to results and results-based management (one of the cornerstones of the Paris Declaration) and the fact that international aid flows have increased. As aid volumes have increased rapidly over the past few years, aid organisations in general have come under greater pressure to demonstrate results, and to be accountable to executive boards or to national governments that provide their funding.

This evaluation describes and analyses the management response system of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). IFAD is a specialised agency of the United Nations, and was established as an international financial institution in the late 1970s. Through low-interest loans and grants, IFAD works with governments to develop and finance programmes and projects that enable rural poor people to overcome poverty. In monetary terms, IFAD is a relatively small development actor. In 2006 IFAD provided US\$2.9 billion to 186 programmes and projects (IFAD 2006d).

The management response system at IFAD – the Agreement at Completion Point (ACP) system – is a process in which the actors agree on actions to be taken as a result of an evaluation, by whom they should be taken, and when. Throughout this

evaluation, the Agreement at Completion Point system is referred to interchangeably as the 'management response system', the 'ACP process', and the 'ACP system'.¹

1.1 Evaluation objectives and rationale for evaluation

The main objectives of this evaluation are to gain deeper understandings of: 1) how the management response system is designed; 2) how well it achieves its intended objectives; and 3) how relevant it is to IFAD and its partners.

This evaluation is part of a larger study on management response systems in which the response systems at Sida (Hanberger and Gisselberg 2005) and EuropeAid (Hanberger 2008) have been assessed, in addition to the IFAD response system, under this evaluation. The findings of the three case studies have been synthesised in a separate report, which draws general conclusions about how, and the extent to which, a management response system can be made effective and relevant (Bandstein and Hedblom 2008).

IFAD was chosen as a study object on the basis that its management response system incorporates many interesting features that allowed for relevant comparison. In particular, IFAD was chosen because: 1) its management response system had been in place for several years, which made an assessment possible; 2) the specifics of the IFAD evaluation system and the independence framework under which the evaluation unit operates are unique; and 3) IFAD is part of the UN system and therefore differs from the other two organisations under the broader study, in terms of how it operates within the international aid architecture.

1.2 Evaluation design and criteria

The present evaluation is designed as a 'programme theory' evaluation. A programme theory (also referred to as a logical framework) aims at clarifying the goals of a programme (in this case the management response system) and assumptions about how the goals are reached – that is, the necessary inputs and actions. In general, the theory builds on logical reasoning about the nature of problems and how these are tackled (Leuw 2003; Rossi *et al* 2004).

This evaluation initially reconstructs the underlying theory of IFAD's management response system. An analysis follows, in which the constituent parts of the system are assessed, both logically and empirically. The assessment is made against two evaluation criteria: *effectiveness* and *relevance*.

The *effectiveness* of the management response system refers to the extent to which its objectives have been achieved. These objectives exist at two levels: the implementation of the system (the outputs), and the system's intermediate effects (the outcomes). By identifying the outputs of the system, an assessment can be made about the extent to which the response process follows stipulated guidelines and policies. The objectives, at the level of outcomes, are seldom stated explicitly, and must instead be derived from official documents, such as policies or strategies, or from interviews with key staff. This study reconstructs the logics of IFAD's

¹ Throughout this evaluation, the evaluation team has received outstanding assistance from the Office of Evaluation and the Programme Management Department at IFAD.

management response system and its intended outcomes, and then assesses the extent to which the outcomes have been achieved.

Relevance refers to the extent to which the management response system is adapted to suit its objectives and the priorities of the organisation. Two questions are considered in assessing relevance:

- To what extent are the objectives of the management response system valid, given the priorities of the organisations?
- Are the activities and outputs of the system consistent with the attainment of their objectives and intended effects?

1.3 Data collection methods

A number of data collection methods were used in the study to allow for triangulation of the results. These were:

- Focus group interviews with staff from the Office of Evaluation (OE) and the Programme Management Department (PMD) at IFAD. Each group comprised staff from the same department or level of the organisation.
- Individual interviews with key people involved in designing the management response systems, or who had extensive experience of the system.
- Document analysis of key documents, such as IFAD policies, evaluation reports and response documents.
- In-depth study of four evaluation and response processes. Each process was followed up with both document analysis and interviews with relevant stakeholders from within IFAD and from the partner government and implementing organisations.

2 IFAD's evaluation system

All evaluations at IFAD are initiated and managed by the Office of Evaluation (OE). In brief, the overall purpose of the evaluation function is to promote accountability and learning in order to improve the performance of the Fund's operations and policies. The accountability feature of evaluation is much emphasised in the evaluation policy; it is considered a "... necessary first step in the learning process" (IFAD 2003: 2).

IFAD adheres to the internationally recognised principles of the OECD/DAC, and, accordingly, assesses activities against the evaluation criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, relevance and impact. In addition, the OE has developed its own methodological framework for project evaluations.² As an organisation within the UN family, IFAD also participates in the UNEG network, and is guided by the principles laid out in "Norms and Standards for the Evaluation in the UN System", as stipulated by the UNEG (UNEG 2005).³ The norms and standards are not legally bearing on members or organisations, but they are nevertheless important, since IFAD is a member of the UNEG network.

2.1 Independent evaluation function

The OE was granted independent status in 2003, when the executive board of IFAD approved a new policy for evaluation activities in the organisation. The policy clearly imbues the OE with significant independence. Some of the key features of the independence framework, as interpreted from the Evaluation Policy, are:

- The OE reports directly to the executive board, as opposed to reporting to the president/executive director of the organisation.⁴
- Evaluation activities are separated from line management.
- The OE's budget is separated from IFAD activities.
- The director of the evaluation office has authority to manage all human resources employed in evaluation, including consultants.
- The director of the OE can formulate the OE's work without interference from either IFAD management or the president of IFAD.
- The OE director is not eligible for re-employment within the organisation.

The OE remains part of the organisational structure of IFAD, and the physical office is located at the IFAD headquarters in Rome. The independence framework dictated in the Evaluation Policy gives the OE considerable freedom in the manner in which it

² <http://www.ifad.org/gbdocs/eb/ec/e/34/EC-2003-34-WP-3.pdf>

³ United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

⁴ In contrast with other UN organisations, and other aid organisations: this is a crucial feature of the independence framework of OE.

conducts analysis and proposes recommendations. The OE is mandated to undertake all evaluations of IFAD operations and is responsible for making the final assessment about the accuracy of the analysis from which recommendations are drawn (IFAD 2003:6).

2.2 The role of IFAD's executive board and the evaluation committee

The executive board of IFAD has a number of duties in relation to the OE. The board receives all evaluation reports from the OE without the reports being subject to changes by either the president of IFAD or the management department. The board should also assess the quality and impact of evaluated projects and programmes, approve policies of the evaluation function and approve the budget and the work programme of the OE (IFAD 2003: iv). IFAD has established a sub-committee to the board – the “evaluation committee” – which reviews strategies and methodologies of the evaluation function and discusses selected evaluation reports. The objective of this sub-committee is to assist the executive board in informing itself about learning generated from evaluations and in obtaining a better understanding about the overall quality and impact of the projects in IFAD's portfolio. The sub-committee is also responsible for ensuring that the OE carries out its work in an efficient and effective manner. The evaluation committee reports to the executive board three times a year (IFAD 2004c).

2.3 Evaluation types and work programme

Different types of evaluations are conducted by the OE to cover the many activities of the organisation. The evaluation types have different purposes, and are expected to meet certain organisational needs. Each year the OE prepares a two-year rolling work programme, which includes a mix of the evaluation types. The work programme is determined in consultation with staff from IFAD's management department, and its content is dependent on the objectives and priority areas for a given year (IFAD 2003). Each evaluation type corresponds to a specific objective within the organisation, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Evaluation type and objective of evaluations

Type of Evaluation	Evaluation Objective
Corporate level evaluation	Assess the effectiveness of IFAD operational policies, processes, and practices, and provide the building blocks for revisiting existing policies or for formulating new ones.
Thematic evaluation	Examine specific aspects, themes and processes of IFAD's operations and policies. They are designed to assess the effectiveness of IFAD's processes and approaches and to contribute to increasing the Fund's knowledge about selected issues and subjects.
Country programme evaluation	Provide direct and concrete building blocks for revisiting existing, or formulating new, country strategies. New country strategies have to relate to the most recent country programme evaluation when being presented to the executive board for approval. ⁵
Project evaluations:	
1 Completion evaluation	Assess project achievements and identify lessons learned. A project completion evaluation is conducted after the finalisation of the project.
2 Interim evaluation	Justify a second phase of a project and improve the design and implementation of subsequent interventions. Mandatory before the second phase of the evaluation.

Source: IFAD 2003:Annex III and <http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/whatwedo/index.htm>

Due to the different purposes and needs of the evaluation types, each type is directed towards different levels of management and particular IFAD staff. Corporate level evaluations and thematic evaluations, while they affect the entire organisation, are primarily intended to meet the needs of senior management when designing new corporate policies and strategies. The main users of the results from country programme evaluations and project evaluations are the regional divisions within the PMD, and in particular, the responsible country programme manager for the particular country.

During the period 2003-2006, the OE produced 59 evaluation reports. Of these, 39 were project evaluations (32 interim evaluations and 7 completion evaluations), 10 were country programme evaluations, 4 were corporate level evaluations, and 6 were thematic evaluations.⁶

The OE summarises the results and impact of IFAD operations annually, which are presented in the Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (the ARRI). IFAD is in the process of developing a system of self-evaluation, in which the operational departments will conduct self-assessments of the performance of their projects. This system is intended to complement evaluation activities undertaken by the OE (IFAD working paper I: 1-2).

⁵ If a country programme evaluation has been recently carried out, the key conclusions should be reported, with the country programme evaluation ACP included as an appendix to the country strategy (along with the summary of follow-up that has been undertaken by the CPM): *Guidelines for preparation and implementation of a Results-based Country Strategic Opportunities Programme Version 1; 18 December 2006; IFAD.*

⁶ Statistics provided by OE, 6 July 2007.

2.4 The core learning partnership

A distinct component of the evaluation process, which is central in IFAD's participatory evaluation approach, is the Core Learning Partnership (CLP). The main objective of the CLP is to bring together relevant evaluation stakeholders at the outset of a new evaluation, so that they can contribute to the process throughout the different stages of the evaluation (IFAD 2000: 2).

At the beginning of the process, the CLP helps flag issues and information sources for the evaluation. After the completion of the independent evaluation report, the CLP discusses the evaluation findings, deepens the understanding of the findings and recommendations, and eventually works out the operational implications of evaluation recommendations and the division of labour and responsibilities for their implementation among the various stakeholders involved.

(IFAD 2003)

The composition of each CLP is likely to differ, depending on the type of evaluative activity, the country involved and the nature of the intervention being examined. However, since the overall objective is to bring together a core group of stakeholders that can effectively participate in the evaluation, the CLP will comprise representatives of the PMD, the partner government, the OE, and project-level staff.

To determine the extent to which the OE agrees with comments made by the CLP on the evaluation, and its recommendations, the OE has introduced a system of tracking comments and responding to them. This system is referred to as an "audit trail".

3 IFAD's management response system

3.1 Background

The management response system at IFAD is referred to as the “ACP system”. The ACP system begins with the writing of an “Issues Paper”, and ends with the “President’s Report on Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Action” (PRISMA) being submitted to the executive board. The system, as it is manifested today, was formally introduced in 1999, when the OE launched the “New Evaluation Process” (NEP) (IFAD 2000). The NEP emphasised revitalising the learning aspects from evaluations, in order to increase the effectiveness of IFAD’s policies and programmes. The overriding rationale for introducing the NEP was to create a stronger link between the lessons from evaluations and their implementation in the organisation. In order to accomplish this, the NEP recognised that the users of evaluation recommendations must have a far greater level of involvement and participation in both the evaluation and response processes than had been the case previously:

... OE’s New Approach to Evaluation emphasises the need for evaluation to finish not merely with a publication, but with an understanding among the evaluation’s partners to adopt specific findings and recommendations.

(IFAD 2000)

While the reporting arrangements and the independence framework were copied from the World Bank, the ACP system, with its various components, was designed specifically for IFAD.⁷

Although the response system of 1999 contained most of the features that characterise the ACP system of today, it did not perform effectively.⁸ It was not until April 2003, when the OE was granted full independence by the executive board, that the ACP system became fully operational, with all of its various components in place. Since then, all evaluations at all levels have been required to pass through the ACP process. The reports are to be published along with the ACP documents, which include the response from IFAD management and the partner government to evaluation findings and recommendations (IFAD 2003).

⁷ “The evaluation system is not copied from the World Bank. What is copied is the reporting arrangement; the independence framework – not the methodology, and not the ACP or the CLP. These are OE specifics, whereas the model is based on the World Bank Independent Evaluation Group model. That is in terms of the evaluation policy, in terms of staffing, reporting lines, preparation of the work plan and budget, in terms of issuance of reports, disclosure of documents.” (Ashwani Muthoo 27 July 2007).

⁸ “Back then [in 1999] we did not have a system of tracking; we did have a follow-up, but no tracking system. It was not presented to the board ... the origin of the ACP system was concomitant to the approval of the full evaluation status of our division.” Fabrizio Felloni 3 July 2007).

3.2 Characteristics of the ACP system

The ACP system is an important sub-component of IFAD's evaluation system, as it provides a link from evaluation findings to future activities. The OE has an important role to play in this process, but the IFAD evaluation policy clearly indicates that IFAD management and partners are responsible for implementing recommendations from evaluations, and for reporting on their implementation status to the executive board. The ACP system is designed to make uptake as effective as possible (IFAD 2003).

3.2.1 Issues paper and the final stakeholder workshop

This study has identified a number of components, or activities, upon which the ACP system is built, and which are crucial to its functioning. When an evaluation team completes its field mission and has produced the first draft evaluation report, the OE develops an "Issues Paper", which is distributed to the CLP for comments and amendments. The Issues Paper is essentially a summary of the main recommendations of the evaluation. It highlights issues that will be the topics for discussion during the stakeholder workshop, and is intended to facilitate efficient and effective discussion of evaluation results.

The stakeholder workshop is another distinct feature of the evaluation process at IFAD. All evaluations, irrespective of their level, involve some form of workshop at the end of the evaluation process. These workshops are greater in scale and scope for higher-level evaluations than project level evaluations. The workshop for a project evaluation is usually of half a day to a full day in duration, whereas thematic and corporate level evaluations are longer (the length and scope, again, depending upon the nature of the evaluation).⁹ Participants range from fifteen, to over 100 for evaluations that are important to stakeholders.¹⁰ The workshops of country programme evaluations, thematic evaluations and corporate level evaluations are generally more highly attended than workshops concerning a project evaluation. However, interim project evaluations often receive a great deal of attention (IFAD working paper II).

3.2.2 The ACP document

The final ACP document contains the responses of IFAD management and the concerned partner government to recommendations made in evaluations undertaken by the OE.

The ACP illustrates the stakeholders' understanding of the evaluation, findings and recommendations, their proposal to implement them and their commitment to act upon them. OE will participate in this process to ensure a full understanding of its findings and recommendations.

(IFAD 2003)

⁹ Focus group interview, OE, 27 September 2007.

¹⁰ "The standard pattern for workshops entails a plenary session during which the purpose of the workshop is explained and the findings and recommendations of the evaluation are presented, followed by breakout sessions for each of the issues, and finally a plenary during which breakout groups report back." (IFAD Working Paper II)".

The main objectives of the ACP are to:

- i. clarify and deepen the understanding of evaluation recommendations;
- ii. document the recommendations that are found acceptable and feasible and those that are not, and make the former more operational;
- iii. generate a response from stakeholders about how they intend to act upon the recommendations within the framework of an action plan that assigns responsibilities and deadlines; and
- iv. highlight evaluation insights and learning hypotheses to facilitate future discussions and debate.

(IFAD 2003)

3.2.3 The PRISMA

All actions that are agreed in the ACPs are followed up annually by the management department, and the follow-up conclusions are presented to the executive board. This is done through the “President’s Report on Implementation Status of Evaluation Recommendations and Management Action” (the PRISMA). The OE is not involved in this process, but it does provide comments on the report contents. The PRISMA is primarily a reporting tool, which provides the executive board with information about the status of the actions agreed in response to evaluations undertaken in the previous year. It does not assess the quality of either the recommendations or the follow-up actions.

The PRISMA report aims to support accountability and learning as stated in the IFAD Evaluation Policy. It also offers an opportunity for IFAD Management to respond to the broader issues featured in the evaluations conducted.”

(IFAD 2007a)

The concept of the PRISMA report was introduced in 2003¹¹ and has since been made more comprehensive and imbued with greater analytical content. At the time of this evaluation, the ACP actions were grouped according to thematic area, evaluation type, and nature of the evaluation. Table 2, below, exemplifies what the PRISMA document could look like for a country programme evaluation: this is from a 2006 evaluation of the country programme for Bangladesh.

¹¹ The concept of the PRISMA was introduced when the OE became independent in 2003. The first PRISMA report was submitted to the executive board in August 2004, summarising recommendations from evaluations completed in 2002. PRISMA, 2004: 1.

Table 2 Example of follow-up from PRISMA 2007:

Country	Evaluation	Level	Nature	Theme	ACP Agreed Action	PMD Follow-up
Bangladesh	CPE	CTRY	STR	STR	The partners agreed that they will clearly state their overall goals and jointly select a limited number of objectives that they commit to reaching in collaboration with the available resources within a specific time period. These will be set down in the next IFAD country strategy for Bangladesh	The new country strategy, approved by the Board in April 2006, contained a limited number of strategic objectives (5).
Bangladesh	CPE	CTRY	STR	INF	The partners agreed that rural infrastructure to reduce rural poverty will be one of the main strategic thrusts of the future collaboration between GOB and IFAD.	The new country strategy, approved by the Board in April 2006, includes a strategic objective to develop pro-poor rural infrastructure.

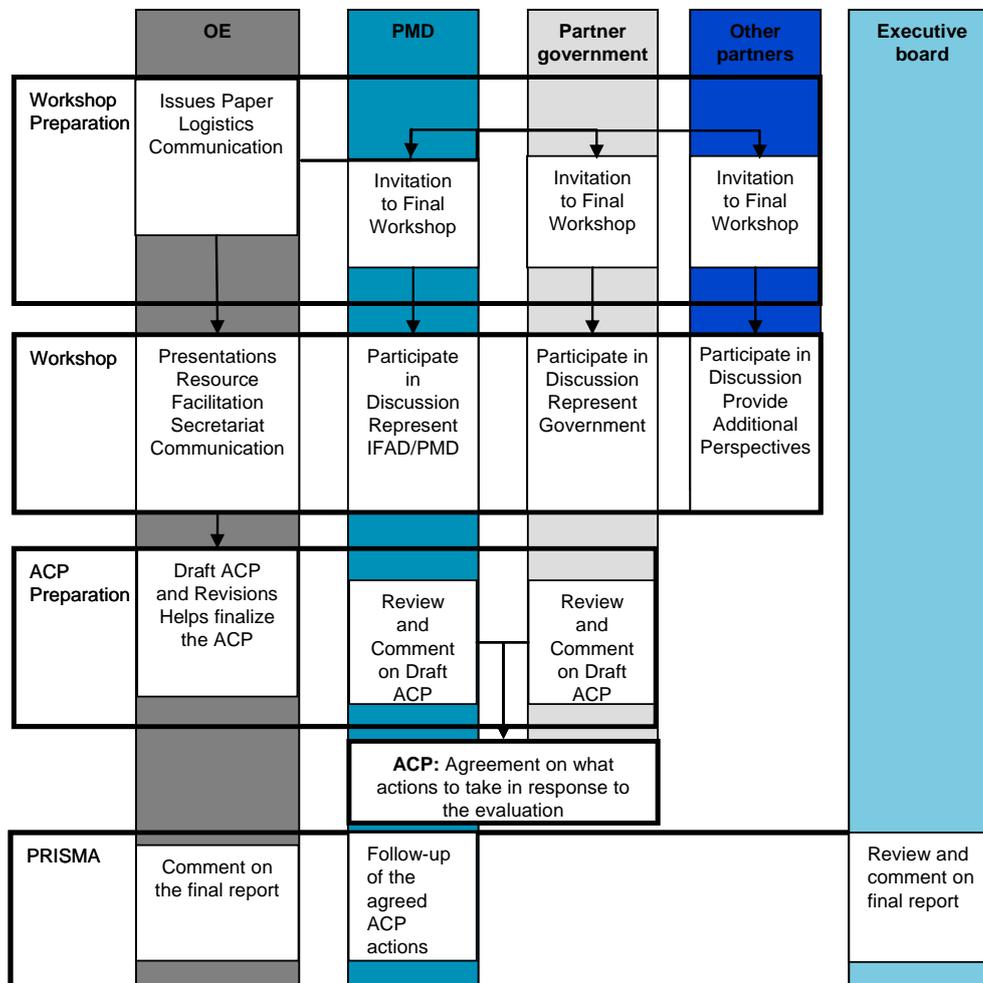
CPE = Country Programme Evaluation, CTRY = Country, STR = Strategic, INF = Infrastructure Development

3.3 Administrative procedures of the ACP process

The OE is responsible for administering the response process until when the ACP document is signed. The OE drafts the Issues Paper, organises the final workshop, drafts the ACP document based on workshop discussions, and drafts the ACP document before it has been reviewed and signed by the partner government and IFAD management (IFAD working paper II). The ACP is agreed between IFAD management and the partner government, and the annual follow-up, provided through the PRISMA, is the responsibility of the PMD. The OE comments upon the analysis and the content of each PRISMA report (IFAD 2003: 13).

The critical administrative routines of the ACP process are summarised in Figure 1, below:

Figure 1 The ACP process at IFAD, adapted from IFAD working paper I: 2



3.4 Purpose of the ACP system - the programme theory¹²

The ACP process is intended to contribute to a number of changes in both individual and organisational behaviour at IFAD. Through the programme theory, assumptions about how the different steps in the process are linked to these changes or results are made explicit. An interpretation of the programme theory is presented in Figure 2, below.

This reconstruction indicates that the ultimate purpose of IFAD’s management response system is to garner commitment from the main evaluation stakeholders to ensure that knowledge gathered through evaluations is internalised by the organisation and its various partners.¹³ This overall goal is to be achieved through

¹² The reconstruction of the programme theory is based on three documents: IFAD 2003, IFAD 2000, and IFAD Working Paper I; The reconstruction of the programme theory concerning the PRISMA report was based on interviews with Fabrizio Felloni and Ashwani Muthoo of the OE; a focus group interview with four staff from OE; and an interview with Teresa Rice, PMD.

¹³ Interview, OE staff.

activities that: a) create awareness of the main evaluation recommendations; b) encourage stakeholders to reach consensus about what actions to take; c) promote the commitment of IFAD management and the partner government to taking action; and d) enhance the transparency of IFAD-funded activities and make management accountable for implementing the agreed actions.

The different activities of the ACP process are carried out consecutively, beginning with the draft Issues Paper, which is shared with members of the CLP for comment and amendment. The Issues Paper is designed to create an *awareness* of the main findings and recommendations among the key evaluation stakeholders.

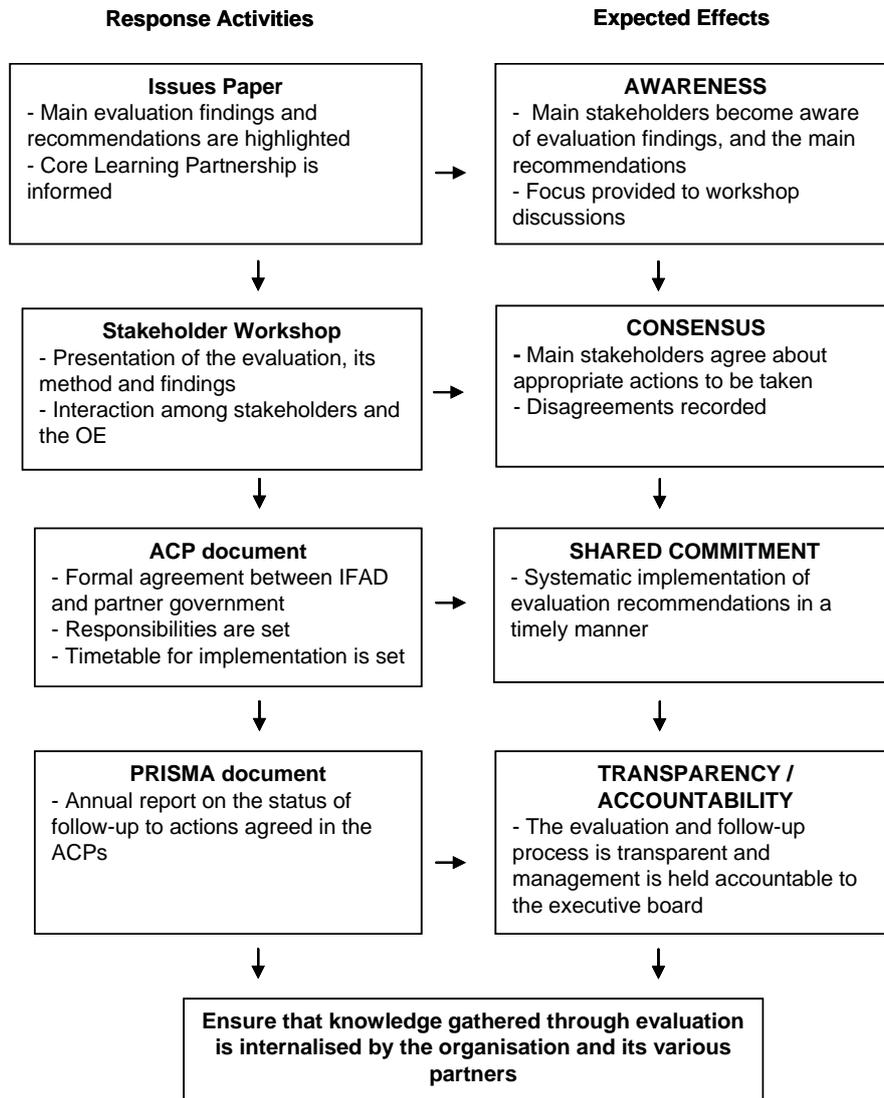
The stakeholder workshop is designed to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are brought together to discuss the evaluation, the recommendations and the methods, based on the topics in the Issues Paper. The ACP process assumes that the participants are well prepared for the workshop, and that the workshop is designed and facilitated in a way that enables full participation, and open and honest dialogue (IFAD working paper I). The objective of the workshop is to clarify the recommendations, and to stimulate discussion over what actions to take. The ACP process assumes that, at the conclusion of the workshop, the main stakeholders understand the evaluation and the methods used, and have had the opportunity to contribute to discussions that will determine actions that will be taken. As a direct result of the workshop, and the assumptions upon which it rests, the main stakeholders are assumed to have reached a *consensus* about what actions to take.

The ACP document is central in the programme theory, as it articulates the response to the evaluation and stipulates what actions to take, by whom, and by when. The ACP document is assumed to trigger a *commitment* by IFAD management and the partner government.¹⁴ Both the partner government and IFAD have full ownership of the ACP document and the actions should be agreed jointly.

Each year the PMD reports on the extent to which the agreed actions have been implemented, and this report forms the basis for the PRISMA. Hence, the PRISMA report adds *transparency* to the overall evaluation process, and is assumed to enhance *accountability*. It is a control mechanism that is the final product of the ACP process.

¹⁴ "It was basically supposed to ensure that there is a commitment by the main stakeholders in the implementation of the evaluation recommendations. In the past ... we realised, even if stakeholders agreed on the main findings and recommendations from evaluations they would not systematically implement them in a timely manner." Ashwani Muthoo, OE, 27 July 2007.

Figure 2 Interpretation of the programme theory of the ACP system



Two particular factors are critical in the ACP process, in order to achieve its objectives: (i) the involvement of a CLP that is comprised of key stakeholders that dedicate sufficient time to the entire process, are active throughout the various stages of the evaluation, and participate in discussing the evaluation recommendations and formulating actions to be taken; and (ii) the adherence of the OE to the principles of the Evaluation Policy, which states that the CLP should contribute to the entire evaluation and response processes.

4 The system in practice

The assessment of how IFAD's management response system works in practice is based on experiences of IFAD staff collected from both individual and focus group interviews, and on a review of evaluation and response processes. One focus group interview was undertaken with staff from the OE, and another was undertaken with country programme managers from the PMD. In addition, two former OE staff members, and seven country programme managers or senior managers, were interviewed individually.

Four evaluations and their corresponding ACP processes were reviewed in order to elicit a detailed understanding about how the ACP system works in practice. Other than IFAD staff, government representatives, evaluation consultants and staff from implementing organisations were interviewed when this was possible. The four evaluations were selected through a stratified random selection process. One corporate level evaluation, two country programme evaluations, and one project evaluation were selected randomly. The evaluations were selected from those evaluations that were completed in the period 2004-2006; the selected evaluations are listed in Table 3:

Table 3 Selection of four evaluation reports

Title of Evaluation	Evaluation Type	Year
Direct Supervision Pilot Programme, DSPP	Corporate level	2005
Indonesia	Country Programme	2004
Bangladesh	Country Programme	2006
Upper West Agricultural Development Project in Ghana, UWADEP	Interim (project)	2006

Source: IFAD 2004b, IFAD 2005b, IFAD 2006b, IFAD 2006c

The assessment is structured around the key features of the ACP system: 1) the involvement of stakeholders; 2) the final stakeholder workshop; 3) the agreement at completion point; and 4) the follow-up of agreed actions (the PRISMA exercise).

As the effectiveness of the response system is dependent upon the involvement of relevant stakeholders, it is important to assess how, and to what extent, stakeholders are participating in the evaluation and response processes.

4.1 Involvement of stakeholders

The involvement of CLP members in the evaluation and response processes varies greatly, depending on the evaluation type and the stakeholders' levels of interest in what is being evaluated. The degree of involvement of stakeholders also depends on the extent to which the OE allows them to contribute to the evaluation process and to form consensus about how to respond to evaluations. Both the OE and the relevant stakeholders are responsible for creating an active CLP.

The effectiveness of IFAD's management response system rests upon the assumption that stakeholders actively participate in the evaluation and follow-up processes. A majority of the interviewees acknowledged that key stakeholders are *invited* to participate in the processes. One country programme manager described the process as having many elements of a joint process, in the manner in which the responsible evaluation officer interacts and shares information with the evaluation stakeholders (Interview). A former staff member of the OE described the manner in which the OE shares information with the PMD:

PMD people always know when it is the most important critical moment that they should provide their comments; at the approach paper, during the evaluation process they receive different working papers, after the field visit we meet them again – this time we provide them with the emerging findings so far, an early warning note, and then at the end when the main report is being prepared.

(Interview)

While the OE appears to communicate well when it seeks comments, it is the responsibility of CLP members to provide these comments, and to provide them in a timely manner. However, some PMD staff claim that the evaluation process is rarely participatory: “We are invited to comment but nobody listens to the comments” (Interview). Another interviewee was more blunt:

They [the OE] do establish the Core Learning Partnership which are a bit of a sham frankly ... If it is a country evaluation or a project evaluation, a country programme manager puts forward his views. They are generally ignored. At the end of it all, they [the OE] write what they like.

(Interview)

Due to its independent status, the OE has full discretion to determine the content of an evaluation. For instance, the OE may disagree with CLP members about the validity of the evaluation results and may therefore decide to exclude certain comments from consideration. This is further emphasised by the evaluation policy, which states that the OE must have a certain margin in making its own assessment in relation to how the operational department considers the evaluation findings. The audit trail system, mentioned in chapter 2.4 above, is intended to facilitate OE's

response to comments by the operational department: the OE will express its agreement or disagreement with comments it receives, and will elaborate specific actions that it deems relevant to address the specific issues raised in comments.

The case studies confirm that stakeholders engage in the evaluation and response processes to varying degrees. The CLP of the evaluation of the Indonesia programme made a very limited contribution throughout the evaluation process. Some staff members involved in the evaluation barely knew of its existence. The country manager for Indonesia was an inactive CLP member, and there appear to have been problems in the way information was shared between CLP members on the one hand, and the OE and the evaluation consultants on the other. The evaluation team leader undertook the evaluation with little input from CLP members. However, the Indonesia country programme evaluation was one of the first evaluations undertaken after the Evaluation Policy was approved in 2003. This may have affected communication among the actors involved and the expectations they had of the process.

In the Bangladesh case, the active involvement of the CLP was restricted to the evaluation officer and the responsible country manager, who followed the process closely. The Bangladesh manager expressed no significant issues with or objections to either the evaluation process or to how it was managed by the OE. However, there was minimal involvement by stakeholders from the government of Bangladesh or of any other member of the CLP from the partner side. The comments and feedback provided by these stakeholders were limited and weak (Interviews). A number of actors were interested in specific parts of the evaluation that were relevant to their particular projects, but this interest was not sustained over the entire evaluation process. Overall, the evaluation followed standard procedures, and none of the interviewed stakeholders expressed significant disagreements with the findings and conclusions of the evaluation (Interview).

In the interim evaluation of the Upper West Agricultural Development Project (UWADEP) in Ghana, the involvement of CLP members comprised comments on the evaluation outline and methodology, and participation in the final workshop. Despite the OE's attempts to solicit CLP members to respond to the draft evaluation report, no comments were received before the final workshop (Interview).

During the evaluation process, the consultants carried out the evaluation without significant input from the CLP. The evaluation consultants expressed their views freely, and they formulated a critical assessment of the project. Several workshops were held with stakeholders from the region in which the evaluated project was carried out. These stakeholders included NGOs, local government representatives, and farmers' organisations. The workshops were arranged by the evaluation team in consultation with IFAD staff and the government agencies affected by the project. The evaluation team played an important role in ensuring a wide range of participants but it was criticised for lacking knowledge about the wider context of the project (Interviews). The OE was also criticised for its management of the evaluation, and for its practice of sharing findings throughout the process with staff from IFAD's Western Africa Division. Notwithstanding these criticisms, it is relevant to note that

CLP members would have had the opportunity to influence the process to a greater extent if they had participated more actively.

The CLP in the Direct Supervision Pilot Programme (DSPP) evaluation made a strong contribution to the overall evaluation process, and increased management's ownership of the recommendations. The PMD understood when it was supposed to provide comments, and all interviewees described the overall process as highly interactive. Further, the team of consultants undertaking the DSPP evaluation was well known and highly respected among all stakeholders. Several team members were very familiar with IFAD's business and had prior experience in working with the organisation. A significant difference from the three other cases was that here the CLP comprised only IFAD staff.

It is evident that the active involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation process depends upon their interests and stakes in the project or programme. As expressed by two interviewees: "The people that are the most active are the ones that are most directly responsible for the project or programme" (Interview); and people "who have a major stake in the evaluation spend a lot more time than maybe representatives from cooperating institutions do" (Interview). If an evaluation is of less relevance or interest for IFAD staff members or partner representatives, they are less likely to participate actively, and the OE consequently assumes greater responsibility for the entire evaluation process (Interview). As evaluation results are usually more relevant for IFAD staff than for the partner government, CLP members from IFAD are often more active in the process.

The level of involvement of stakeholders also depends upon the type of evaluation. For larger evaluations, such as corporate or country level evaluations, the stakeholders are more involved (Interviews). These higher-level evaluations also attract more attention (at least from IFAD staff) than project level evaluations, although interim evaluations often have an interested CLP (Interviews). Evaluations in which there is disagreement about the recommendations, and those which draw critical conclusions, appear to receive more attention from, or active involvement of, the stakeholders (Interviews). For project level evaluations, the quality of the CLP often depends upon the quality of the personal relationship between the evaluator and the CPM (Interview).

4.2 The stakeholder workshop

Most interviewees recognise the importance of stakeholders meeting each other and discussing the various issues arising from evaluations. In this regard, the workshops contribute to a conceptual use of evaluations. Nonetheless, the extent to which discussions contribute to consensus and shared commitment is often limited.

Overall, IFAD staff believe that the workshop is a useful and well organised exercise (Interviews). The workshops are seen as good opportunities and forums for discussion (Interviews). Moreover, staff at the OE emphasise that the workshops are important venues to promote the visibility of IFAD – an opportunity for the

organisation to reach out to partner organisations and to engage in policy dialogue (Interviews). The OE's role goes beyond the role of the facilitator.

Our [the OE's] participation in these events is very proactive and very engaging. We are participating, not only in the working groups, but we are very much engaged in the plenary discussions by making presentations on the evaluations and providing clarifications. If other people have different views, we respect those, but we also have our views which are anchored in the evaluations.

(Interview)

The four case studies confirm these views, but they also indicate that the workshops have a limited effect in facilitating consensus among all stakeholders, and in engendering commitment to implementing agreed actions. The Indonesia country programme evaluation was a highly controversial process; stakeholders emerged from the workshop with a low level of acceptance of the evaluation methodologies and the findings of the evaluation. According to interviewees, the workshop provided little room for the expression of different interpretations of the findings of the evaluation, and it was not a forum that enabled open discussion. The workshop included a large stakeholder representation of approximately 70-80 people, including representatives from IFAD senior management, the OE, the evaluation committee of the executive board, the team leader of the evaluation team, government representatives, NGOs, and others within the donor community. The evaluation was highly critical about the performance of IFAD, and made some strong recommendations, which the PMD disagreed with. According to the OE, the workshop provided a good platform for discussion, which contributed to an increased understanding of the evaluation and about how to formulate follow-up actions. According to the OE, the PMD is very active at workshops in which there are divergent opinions:

We have many examples, including Mali, but also evaluations in Indonesia and Tanzania where we came out with very tough analysis and also recommendations that they didn't agree with, and they mobilized very major efforts, with the government, with the projects, with the donor community. This mobilization takes place around the workshop, where they rightfully so, try to influence other stakeholders to buy into their views. And we are there with our own independent views and it becomes a much more vibrant and engaging platform for discussions.

(Interview)

At the workshop of the Bangladesh evaluation, all major stakeholders (almost 100) participated in the workshop discussions. However, the workshop was more a forum for communicating and disseminating results than for reaching consensus about how to proceed.

The workshop that was organised in Bangkok for the DSPP evaluation appears to have had a limited influence on how the ACP document was formulated. The evaluation process itself was highly interactive, but it is doubtful whether the workshop added much substance to the ACP. There were few alterations to the draft

ACP document; the finalisation of the ACP after the workshop was perceived as a formality.

In contrast with the above cases, the workshop of the evaluation of the UWADEP project was useful in enabling the stakeholders to form an understanding of the key contents and messages of the report. As mentioned above, the CLP was relatively inactive during the evaluation process, and the first comments on the draft evaluation report were provided at the workshop. Nonetheless, the workshop appears to have been a vibrant forum, in which both the representatives of the government of Ghana and of IFAD management were frank and open about the main problems identified, and about what could be done to solve them. More importantly for the future of IFAD funding in the region, however, was the simultaneous preparation of a new country strategy for Ghana. The evaluation team was invited to discuss the findings directly with the group of advisors for the country programme. This workshop was part of the strategy process – additional to the evaluation process – but it increased the extent to which lessons from the evaluation were used by IFAD and its partner organisations in strategy preparations.

Due to the large size of the workshops and the limited time devoted to them, it is unrealistic to expect that they will result in making all recommendations operational and in engendering full commitment by all stakeholders. In particular, partner government commitment has proven difficult to achieve (Interview). The workshops are nonetheless considered important, in that all stakeholders are gathered and provided with the opportunity to express their views. Some respondents considered that, by discussing the evaluation jointly, the comments made might also be more sincere (Interview). Staff from the OE have experienced more positive outcomes from the workshops, in terms of both making the recommendations practically actionable, and in making people committed to carrying them out, than have staff from the PMD (Interviews).

The OE was criticised for not taking into consideration the comments made during workshop discussions: “At the workshop our comments are often ignored and sometimes not even factual corrections are made.” (Interview). However, according to the ACP process, the evaluation should be finalised by the time the workshop is held, so amendments are not made after this event.

4.3 The agreement at completion point – the ACP

All evaluations result in a formal agreement at completion point between IFAD management and the partner government. Although this is crucial, the formal agreement does not guarantee sincere commitment, especially from partner governments.

PMD staff consider that the inclusion in evaluations of a formal agreement about how to proceed improves both the functionality of evaluations and the results that can be achieved in future programmes: “The ACP is a very good instrument because it obliges people to agree on the main recommendations and the way forward” (Interview). According to the OE, the ACPs accurately reflect the discussions of the

workshops, and the final texts respect the tone of the discussions (Interviews). In the four ACP processes that have been studied in detail, the number of stakeholders involved in formulating the ACP actions, and their degrees of commitment in implementing them, differ substantially.

The ACP in the Indonesia country programme evaluation became a diluted process (Interviews). IFAD management and the Indonesian government did agree upon an ACP, but according to informants, the signatories did not take it particularly seriously. This lack of commitment to the agreement resulted in a weak ACP document.

The ACP was a synthesis of what was agreed upon at the workshop. And I suppose that it was a synthesis even though it didn't include anything – nothing was agreed upon.

(Interview)

The evaluation created considerable controversy within IFAD. Informants indicated that the evaluation made the OE's work more visible to IFAD staff members. It was therefore an important evaluation in that regard, and also because it had a strong influence on how the OE refined its operations and further defined its methodology.

In the Bangladesh evaluation, there were no major objections to the suggested actions contained in the draft ACP, and only minor amendments were made prior to its finalisation. As few comments were received from the affected parties, the OE assumed that all parties at least tacitly agreed to the recommendations. The ACP actions referred mainly to the proposed focus for the new country strategy. Some of the recommendations were to be made operational through the strategy preparations.

The ACP for the DSPP evaluation built upon numerous interactions between IFAD management and the OE. This resulted in an agreement at completion, which contained five clear and relevant key actions to be taken, with each action assigned time frames for implementation. The ACP actions are almost identical to the recommendations that were put forward in the evaluation report (Interviews, ACP document). The evaluation, and the resulting ACP, attracted a real commitment from IFAD management.

The ACP basically was drafted by the office of evaluation and was negotiated and discussed with the president of IFAD and the assistant president of operations. Once they agreed on the ACP it was presented to the executive board. The ACP in this case was presented to the board for their endorsement. This being such a major change in the operating model of IFAD, management couldn't make that change unilaterally without getting the board's endorsement. In that sense it was a very far-reaching evaluation, a very successful evaluation.

(Interview, OE)

During the ACP preparations of the UWADEP project evaluation, the main stakeholders participated actively. For the ongoing project, it was agreed that the regional directorate of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture would take immediate action to complete the project successfully. IFAD, together with the Ministry of Food

and Agriculture, agreed on a number of concrete measures to be taken with reference to the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. Thus, the ACP process can be seen to have made the recommendations operational, and it outlined the responsibilities of the parties and suggested the timing for the implementation of the actions.

Notwithstanding that the ACP is an agreement between IFAD and the government, and that these organisations “own” the ACP, the OE has a vital role in facilitating a process that enables both IFAD management and the partner government to assume that ownership. The OE usually drives the process of preparing the draft ACP. Both IFAD management and the government can disagree with the recommendations, although, according to the OE, the ACPs rarely include any clear statements of disagreement (Interviews). However, the active involvement of the OE in formulating ACP actions has attracted criticism. According to some PMD staff, the actions would be more relevant if IFAD management and the partner government were responsible for formulating the response: “Only recently I think we realised we left too much of the definition of the ACP to the evaluators” (Interview). Since the partner government and the PMD are in a better position to contextualise the findings of the evaluation, these parties generally feel that they are in a better position to elaborate relevant actions (Interviews). The actions of the ACPs are sometimes beyond the control of the PMD and the partner government, and these actions are often formulated vaguely, which limits their usefulness, as they are not sufficiently operational (Interviews, ACP documents). In order to be capable of being implemented the actions need to take into consideration the practical aspects of implementation:

We've had recommendations that are completely impossible to implement. The recommendation made sense but in reality there are sometimes structural limitations to their implementation.

(Interview)

Conversely, interviews at the OE suggested that those within the OE believe that the PMD and the partner governments often have few ideas about what actions to take as a result of an evaluation (Interviews).

Another, related problem is obtaining real commitment from the parties to the process of implementing evaluation recommendations. A signed ACP document may not be sufficient in itself to ensuring this commitment. Since the ACP is not a legally binding document, partner governments are generally less committed to implementing agreed actions than is IFAD management (Interviews):

Many of the recommendations, or some of the recommendations, are also intended for them [government] to implement. It is not only for the management. I think that we still have an unfulfilled challenge in that area – how to make the government feel more ownership, how to follow up with the governments on the implementation of evaluation recommendations.

(Interview)

Notwithstanding these difficulties in garnering commitment from stakeholders, all evaluations nonetheless result in a formal agreement at completion point, between IFAD management and the partner government.

4.4 The follow-up of agreed actions – the PRISMA

Since 2004 the implementation status of the actions that were agreed upon in the ACPs have mostly been followed up as stipulated in the PRISMA and new country strategies. The PRISMA has enhanced accountability and increased the attention paid to ACP recommendations by IFAD management. However, there is scant evidence to suggest that partner governments are becoming more committed to follow up ACP recommendations. The PRISMA remains an internal IFAD reporting tool.

In 2003, IFAD introduced the PRISMA as a tool for following up the implementation status of ACP actions. The extent to which the PRISMA has contributed to improving the implementation of ACP actions differs according to the type and process of the evaluation. In the Indonesia country programme evaluation, 29 recommendations, of both a strategic and operational nature, emerged from the ACP. At the time the PRISMA for this evaluation was undertaken, the new country strategy for Indonesia had not been formulated, which considerably hampered the implementation of the actions. The PMD acted upon some actions even before the country strategy was formulated, and some were followed up directly through project activities. The remaining actions were to be directly or partially followed up in the new country strategy. However, the new country strategy is not due to be finalised until 2009, and few of the agreed actions have to date been implemented.

In the Bangladesh evaluation, the government and IFAD jointly agreed to 11 actions on the strategic level. According to the PRISMA, most of the actions appear to have been at least partially implemented. The new country strategy was approved by the board of IFAD in April 2006; this would account for the successful implementation of the recommendations (IFAD 2007a). Since the ACP is attached to the country strategy, IFAD management and the board can cross check the extent to which the recommendations have been followed, at any time.

The DSPP evaluation proved to be a timely evaluation from the PMDs perspective, and the evaluation fed directly into the process of the development of a new corporate policy on “Supervision and Implementation Support” (IFAD 2007b). The first recommendation of the ACP was to develop such a policy, which confirms management’s commitment to making use of the evaluation findings. The ACP included five key recommendations, and a number of additional sub-recommendations. The 2007 PRISMA included 20 recommendations resulting from the ACP of the DSPP evaluation, all of which were directed to IFAD management. Since the evaluation received a great deal of attention within IFAD, and its results were directly used in the preparation of a new policy, the follow-up was less critical in ensuring the implementation of the actions.

As a result of the UWADEP evaluation (and additional reviews), an entirely new project has been initiated in the northern region of Ghana. Consequently, the follow-up in the PRISMA has been restricted to the overall recommendations of the evaluation; the more specific actions concerning how to improve the project have

been excluded. The PRISMA concludes that the more general actions have all been implemented as part of the new project. The evaluation findings were further followed-up in the design document of the subsequent project, which includes a discussion about how the new project should address the weaknesses of the previous project (IFAD 2006e: 5).

The introduction of the PRISMA has resulted in enhanced accountability of IFAD management (Interviews, 2006a; and IFAD 2007a). The PMD now pays more attention to the evaluation recommendations, and IFAD staff take the ACP more seriously, since it requires programme managers to respond to *how* the recommendations were implemented (Interviews). According to the OE, the PRISMA analysis has also contributed to changes in how the evaluation recommendations are proposed and articulated; they are now more precise and concrete (Interviews). Another effect of the PRISMA exercise is an increase in the number of general recommendations that focus on the larger context, such as the thematic and policy levels. These are considered useful to the overall organisation, although individual country programme managers usually prefer more specific recommendations (Interviews). IFAD country programme managers find the PRISMA useful as long as it does not result in too many recommendations to implement: "For an individual manager it helps you focus on the important things, but it is time consuming" (Interview).

Another way to follow up ACP actions is in the country strategies, when these are prepared after the completion of an evaluation. The latest ACP is attached to the new country strategy, and the executive board is able to cross check the extent to which the actions were implemented or followed. Annual reviews of these strategies are normally conducted jointly between IFAD and the partner government, and discussions are held frequently with all stakeholders to assess whether all parties are on track to meet strategy targets (Interviews). Apart from these reviews, IFAD does not have any other tools for following up recommendations directed towards partner governments, although the country manager will be informally aware about actions that are being taken at the country level (Interviews). The enhanced element of accountability that the PRISMA brings to the response process does not apply to government counterparties.

According to IFAD staff interviewed for this evaluation the main advantage of the overall ACP process is that it ensures that evaluations are acted upon and are not simply shelved (Interviews). Without a follow-up instrument, the results and recommendations from evaluations may be completely ignored: "That to me is the value added of the process" (Interview).

5 The effectiveness and relevance of the ACP system

This section presents an assessment of the ACP system, considered against the evaluation criteria of *effectiveness* and *relevance*, as defined in chapter 1.2, above. The assessment of *effectiveness* considers actual implementation and the extent to which the intermediate and overarching objectives have been achieved. The *relevance* criterion assesses the extent to which the management response system is adapted to suit both its objectives and the priorities of IFAD. It takes into consideration both the validity of the objectives, and the consistency of the activities and outputs with the attainment of these objectives.

5.1 Effectiveness at the output level - the implementation of the system

The management response system at IFAD has been implemented effectively, in the sense that a CLP is created for all evaluations, and that each evaluation process concludes with a final stakeholder workshop, in which the main evaluation findings and recommendations are discussed. All completed evaluations during the period 2003-2006 have had an ACP document attached, and these have been disclosed on the IFAD public website in accordance with the IFAD evaluation policy. The implementation statuses of agreed actions of the ACPs from 2002 onwards have been followed up in the various PRISMA reports.

The content of the PRISMA report has been substantially developed since its introduction in 2003.¹⁵ The first PRISMA provided only a short overview of completed evaluations and a limited analysis of the extent to which the ACP actions had been implemented. Subsequent reports have extended the level of analysis, and include more detailed follow-up. ACP actions are now synthesised and classified according to: i) level, ii) nature, and iii) theme.¹⁶ The thematic review, in particular, has become more detailed in recent PRISMA reports. In 2006, implementation status categories were introduced to further improve the follow-up. Assessed against these criteria, 74 per cent of all agreed actions from all evaluations undertaken during 2004 had been fully implemented, and 21 per cent were awaiting a response.¹⁷ The information provided in the PRISMA 2007 was even more detailed. A total of 166 actions (approximately 60 per cent) were reported to have been fully incorporated into new operations, strategies and policies. This ratio is higher for actions applicable to the IFAD corporate level, and slightly lower for recommendations extended to

¹⁵ The concept of the PRISMA was introduced when the OE became independent in 2003. The first PRISMA report was submitted to the IFAD executive board in August 2004, summarising recommendations from evaluations completed in 2002. PRISMA 2004: 1.

¹⁶ Level (i.e. whether it is at the project or country level, or if the recommendation is directed to government or IFAD); nature (i.e. whether it is an operational or strategic recommendation); theme (i.e. whether it is a recommendation that concerns gender, rural finance, decentralisation, or other topics).

¹⁷ Of the remaining ACP recommendations, 2 per cent were "partially followed up" and 3 per cent were deemed "not applicable".

IFAD at the country level.¹⁸ The analysis in the earlier PRISMA reports is less rigorous and is not capable of providing the above information regarding implementation rates (IFAD 2004a).

The analysis of implementation rates is entirely constructed from country managers' own follow-up assessments. Neither the OE nor the executive board are able to cross-check the extent to which actions have been implemented at the country level. Since independent verification of activities at the country level does not occur in practice due to obvious practical issues, any verifications undertaken can be seen as ultimately hypothetical, as they are not field-based.

In recent years, the PRISMA has devoted less attention to actions of an operational nature, because these actions generate less generalised knowledge and lessons. From 2006, the PRISMA can no longer be regarded as merely a management tool to monitor and report on actions taken in response to ACP actions. The report now also identifies areas in which systemic IFAD-wide responses are needed (IFAD 2006a; IFAD 2007a).

It is questionable whether information about systemic implementation failures or ineffective support on an aggregated level can be extracted from the PRISMA analysis. Recommendations of an evaluation are aimed at improving the evaluated project, programme or policy, and may not be valid when synthesised and generalised in this way.

5.2 Effectiveness at the outcome level - achievement of system objectives

A prerequisite for being able to meet the objectives of IFAD's management response system is that the stakeholders actively participate and contribute to the evaluation and response processes. The empirical evidence indicates that stakeholders that are directly responsible for a project or programme are generally more active CLP members. Higher-level evaluations, such as corporate level or country programme evaluations, attract more attention than project level evaluations. In practice, the involvement of IFAD staff is often limited to commenting on the evaluation methodology and draft evaluation reports, and participation in the final workshop. Depending on the substance of the comments provided, and on the workshop discussions, this level of involvement may be sufficient for achieving system objectives (see chapter 3.4 above for a description of system objectives). However, the involvement of partner government representatives is more limited, and usually involves participation only in the final workshop. Furthermore, there is little involvement of CLP members in the process of formulating the actions to be taken in response to the evaluation.

Whether or not stakeholders participate actively in the evaluation and response processes depends mainly on the stakeholder's interest and stake in the evaluated project and programme. Limited stakeholder involvement can also be explained by the fact that the OE sometimes does not sufficiently transfer the responsibility of steering the evaluation and response process to the CLP. This evaluation has found

¹⁸ PRISMA 2007.

that an element of tension exists between the OE and the PMD in terms of formulating ACP actions. The IFAD evaluation policy requires that the OE defend its evaluation analysis. The PMD and the partner government should, in turn, contest the evaluation analysis, and explain their views on the findings, conclusions and recommendations. IFAD management and the concerned partner government are responsible for the final content of the ACP document, and can disagree with any recommendation made by the OE. This limited CLP involvement affects the extent to which system objectives can be achieved.

Based on the empirical findings, a number of conclusions can be drawn about how well the objectives of the management response system (as in the programme theory) are achieved:

5.2.1 Awareness of evaluation findings

IFAD's management response system incorporates the necessary components for creating awareness of the evaluation findings and recommendations among stakeholders. Three key components of the management response system ensure stakeholder awareness of at least the main recommendations of the evaluation of both IFAD management and partner representatives: 1) the opportunity for key stakeholders to participate in the CLP; 2) the preparation of the Issues Paper; and 3) the workshop discussions.

5.2.2 Consensus among stakeholders about how to proceed

The system's focus on joint responsibilities could enable stakeholders to reach consensus about future activities. Although the workshops are important in bringing relevant stakeholders together to discuss and reflect upon different opinions, the content of the ACP document is often determined in advance. The limited time available for the workshops, and the large scale of the events (often more than 100 delegates are invited) make consent and agreement on future actions problematic and potentially artificial. The workshops appear to contribute to an increased consensus only in a minority of cases. Achieving consensus is rendered more difficult still, since many stakeholders, in particular government representatives, do not participate actively during the evaluation process.

Achieving consensus depends to a large extent on the quality of interaction during the entire evaluation process and on the type of evaluation that is being undertaken. The corporate level evaluation of the direct supervision pilot programme, in which the CLP comprised solely IFAD staff, was an example of an active and effective CLP. Self-evidently, CLPs that exclude partner representatives carry a greater potential for achieving consensus.

5.2.3 Shared commitment of key stakeholders

Stakeholder commitment to making evaluation recommendations actionable, and to implementing them, is formally achieved when IFAD management and the partner government sign the ACP document. Although this is an important step, the formal agreement does not ensure the commitment of the signatories. As mentioned above, stakeholders may not always participate and contribute to the evaluation process as it is stipulated, especially partner representatives.

In order to generate commitment, it is also important that senior staff from both IFAD and the partner government with decision-making authority participate both in the workshop and in the formulation of ACP actions. The OE usually ensures that relevant staff members and partner government representatives participate in workshop discussions, but the ACP system has not entirely succeeded in engaging these parties in the process of formulating ACP actions. The OE drafts the ACP document, and IFAD management and the partner government can suggest alterations and disagree with the suggestions. In practice, however, the draft ACPs receive few comments and rarely include any clear statements of disagreement.

Notwithstanding that the ACP documents are signed, and that the stakeholders have formally agreed to carry out the actions, there is evidence that some ACP actions may be beyond the control of either or both of IFAD and the partner government. Such cases demonstrate that the parties have not taken responsibility for ensuring that the actions are capable of being implemented. It also indicates that the OE sometimes has too much control over the formulation of actions. Stakeholder commitment may increase if the OE delegated the responsibility for formulating the ACP to the two main stakeholders, rather than relegating them to merely commenting on the proposals made by the OE.

5.2.4 Enhanced transparency and accountability

The objective of enhancing transparency and holding IFAD management accountable is largely fulfilled. A high degree of transparency exists, since the ACP document is published together with the evaluation report, in a public forum. The objectives of the system, its deliverables and the responsibilities of the relevant actors are clear. This further contributes to a transparent response system.

An effective accountability mechanism – the PRISMA – is in place to ensure the accountability of IFAD management. The executive board can easily cross-check the extent to which the evaluation recommendations have been implemented. The introduction of the PRISMA has resulted in IFAD's operational department giving more attention to evaluation recommendations, and in that department's increased involvement in the development of ACPs. Country programme managers must now take ACP actions into account in designing new projects. If they do not, they must explain to the board why the design deviated from the actions.

The ACP system is less effective in enhancing the accountability of the partner government than it is of IFAD management. The performance of the partner government is not explicitly followed up through the PRISMA.¹⁹ Supervision of the implementation of actions directed to partner governments is undertaken through communication between the responsible country programme manager and partner government representatives. This type of follow-up does not follow the formal process that is required for recommendations directed to IFAD management.

¹⁹ Implementation is followed up through non-project activities.

5.2.5 Knowledge gathered through evaluation is internalised by IFAD and its various partners

The overall purpose of the ACP system is achieved to some extent, since evaluation has been brought closer to the decision-making bodies in IFAD, and evaluation has been established as an element of key strategic documents, such as country strategies. Consequently, evaluation results usually feed into new decisions.

However, with regard to the partner government, the ACP system cannot ensure that evaluation knowledge is taken into consideration. Partners show less interest in the evaluation than other stakeholders, and their participation in the evaluation and response processes is often limited. Consequently, commitment to implementing the agreed actions is not achieved. This failure is reinforced by the fact that the PRISMA does not explicitly follow-up the implementation of actions directed toward the partner government. With limited commitment and the lack of a tool to ensure effective implementation, the extent to which the ACP system can ensure that knowledge gathered through evaluation is internalised by the partner government is limited.

Some elements of the ACP system could potentially contribute to learning in a more general way, such as stakeholder involvement and the joint discussions about evaluation results. A majority of the stakeholders value the platforms for discussion that the workshops offer. However, they also agree that evaluations rarely contribute to new knowledge, but rather tend to confirm what is already known. Nonetheless, individual country programme managers perceive that evaluations – and the ACP system itself – give them confidence in formulating new country strategies or projects.

5.3 Relevance of IFAD's management response system

The objectives of the ACP system, and the way the system is structured, are relevant to IFAD. The various intermediate goals of the system are logical and coherent, and they should contribute to the overarching goal of internalising evaluation findings in future programming. However, the ACP system maintains its relevance and effectiveness only when IFAD management and the partner government are fully committed to, and participate in, the response process. If discussion is inadequate when actions are being formulated, the ACP loses legitimacy and becomes less relevant to the actors within the process.

The ACP system plays a strong role as a mechanism for enhancing accountability and in ensuring that evaluations receive a formal response. Given the emphasis of IFAD's system in engaging partners and engendering their commitment to implementing the agreed actions, the relevance of the accountability function could be further improved if the follow-up tool was more capable of assessing agreed response actions directed to partners.

The ACP system also provides a direct link from the evaluation findings and recommendations to decisions about improving the reviewed intervention. The system is relevant as a tool to increase the use of evaluation in decision-making, since it is adapted to fit the policy and programming cycles of IFAD. It ensures that

evaluations are used when new projects, programmes or policies are being designed or formulated

The attempt to include partners in the response process is unique to the ACP process, and this element is absent in management response systems of most other aid organisations. While this consultation hinders the achievement of the ACP objectives of achieving consensus and commitment, it is nonetheless a necessary element in ensuring that the system is relevant to the overall objectives of IFAD.

6 Summary and conclusions

The ACP system has been in operation since 1999, and became fully operational in 2003 when the PRISMA was introduced concomitant with the approval of the evaluation policy. The system and its various components have been subsequently updated and refined. Interviewees at the OE indicated that the ACP document is a living document, which has been constantly amended and improved throughout its existence.

In some respects, the present study might be premature, as changes in organisational procedures take some time to permeate an organisation and be reflected in changed organisational behaviour. As discussed in the first chapter of this report, management response systems are created and designed to maximise the use of evaluations, and they are therefore an important tool for creating an evaluation culture in an organisation. Such systems are not created overnight, and the five years that IFAD's system has been operational may not be a sufficient period for achieving its fully effective operation. Nonetheless, as the direct and intermediate results of the system are likely to appear earlier, it is relevant to conduct this assessment of IFAD's management response system at this time.

This evaluation shows that the underlying programme theory of the ACP system is logical, and provides a coherent framework through which the stated objectives of the system can be achieved. The ACP process has been effectively implemented in terms of its outputs, and the management response system achieves most of its objectives at the outcome level with respect to IFAD. The overall objective, "to ensure that knowledge gathered through evaluation is internalised by the organisation and its various partners", is supported by the various response activities. However, the ambition to include partners has hindered the achievement of both consensus about what actions to take in response to an evaluation, and engendering the commitment of both IFAD and the partner government to carry out the actions. Increased attention needs to be given to how the system can increase the level of ownership of the recommendations that affect partner governments. An incentive structure needs to be implemented that encourages partners to respond to evaluation recommendations and to implement the agreed actions. Nonetheless, it is commendable that IFAD has attempted to involve partners to such a large extent – particularly in light of the focus on alignment and harmonisation emphasised in the Paris Declaration on Effectiveness. The participatory process and the focus on joint agreement facilitate an environment that is conducive to learning. This is a unique feature of the ACP system that needs to be further developed.

As a result of the PRISMA tool, increased attention is now being given to evaluation recommendations and to the implementation of ACP actions. However, the present ACP system does not have a mechanism that allows for subsequent verification of the implementation of evaluation recommendations at the country level. Furthermore, there exist no means by which the executive board of IFAD can assess

whether the evaluation recommendations have subsequently been implemented. This issue requires considerable resources, and no doubt political commitment, to address. At present, neither the executive board, the OE nor the PMD are capable of providing this type of verification.

Independent evaluation function

It has been evident throughout the process of this evaluation, that the approval, in 2003, of the independence of the OE caused turmoil within IFAD. Parts of the organisation were unfamiliar with the evaluation methodology that the OE introduced to assess the performance of the projects and programmes. Some within IFAD also questioned whether the relevance of the evaluation results would be compromised if the OE was detached from the organisation.

Prior to the OE's independence, there appears to have been more cooperation between the OE and the PMD. Several PMD staff members were critical of what they saw as the OE now participating less in the project development cycle of IFAD's new operations.

Nonetheless, this study has shown that the operational departments of IFAD do value the independent views and perspectives that evaluation brings. The independence framework that the OE is built upon has many merits – especially in terms of the legitimacy that it delivers to IFAD. The evidence provided in this study suggests that the existence of an independent evaluation office has contributed to a greater awareness of evaluation at IFAD. The mere existence of an independent evaluation office has required the PMD to reflect about its operations and work processes. IFAD's improving self-evaluation system is a direct result of this development.

Further, an independent evaluation office delivers the possibility that evaluation is perceived as a tool for keeping the organisation accountable. As a direct consequence of its independence, the OE is able to undertake evaluations that can confront established practices within IFAD.

At the same time, independent evaluation may not sufficiently consider the context of the evaluated activity, and indeed often focuses more on accountability than the learning aspects of evaluation. Evaluation experts disagree about how to most effectively facilitate learning from evaluation, and therefore about the appropriate level of independence of the evaluation function.

Independent evaluation function and the ACP process

The independence framework that characterises the ACP system does sometimes create tension between the OE and the main stakeholders in evaluation processes. The OE is sometimes criticised by PMD staff for assuming too much responsibility for the response process, and in particular for formulating ACP actions, since the OE has no role in implementing them. While this criticism may be well founded in cases in which the evaluation unit has left insufficient latitude for IFAD management and the partner government to formulate their responses, it is nonetheless quite natural that the party being assessed is reluctant to accept an assessment provided by "an outsider". It is arguably healthy that the operational department questions the

relevance and validity of some of the recommendations of the OE, and that the evaluation findings are robustly discussed.

IFAD's management response system is both effective and relevant, although improvements are needed, as discussed in this report. Clearly, the ACP system has increased the attention given to evaluation within IFAD, and has brought evaluation closer to the decision making process.

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Interviewees

Abdouli, Abdelhamid	Country Programme Manager, Near East and North Africa Division, IFAD, 26 September 2007
Alam, Hashibul	Government of Bangladesh. Response by email 7 January 2008
Ayariga, Roy	UWADEP, project manager, 4 December
Båge, Lennart	President, IFAD, 15 November 2007
Bartoloni, Rossella	Former Associate Country Programme Manager, PMD, IFAD, Response by email, 12 December 2007
Béavogui, Mohamed	Director, Central and Western Africa Division, PMD, IFAD, 12 December 2007
Blench, Roger	Evaluation Team Leader (Consultant), 30 November 2007
Boirard, Hubert	Country Programme Manager, Africa Division, (focus group), 26 September 2007
Brett, Nigel	Country Programme Manager, Asia Division, IFAD, 25 September 2007
Carbon, Michael	Associate Evaluation Officer, OE, IFAD (focus group), 17 September 2007
Cuna, Luigi	Consultant, PMD, IFAD, 25 September 2007
Felloni, Fabrizio	Evaluation Officer, OE, IFAD, 3 July 2007 and focus group, 17 September 2007
de Gregorio, Carla	Consultant, Asia and the Pacific Division, PMD, IFAD, 25 September 2007
Heider, Caroline	Director Evaluation Office, WFP (former deputy director OE, IFAD), 26 September 2007
Heinemann, Edward	Action Plan Secretariat, PMD, 3 July 2007
Keating, Mark	Evaluation Officer/Information Officer, OE, IFAD, 19 April 2007

Khadka, Shyam	Senior Portfolio Officer, PMD, IFAD, two interviews, 25 September 2007, 22 November 2007
Manssouri, Mohamed	Country Programme Manager, Western Africa Division, 30 November 2007
Marzin, Sylvie	Country Programme Manager, Africa Division Africa Division, IFAD, (focus group), 26 September 2007
Mathur, Shantanu	Coordinator, Grant Programme, Technical Support Division, IFAD, 25 September 2007
Meschinelli, Alessandro	Technical Advisor, Technical Support Division, 27 September 2007
Murtiningtyas, Endah	Director of Bureau for Food, Agriculture and Water Resources, Government of Indonesia, Response by email, 3 January 2008
Muthoo, Ashwani	Senior Evaluation Officer, OE, IFAD, three interviews, 4 July 2007, 27 July 2007, 30 November 2007, and focus group, 17 September 2007
Nahar, Jebun	Project manager, Micro-finance and Technical Support (MFTS) Project, 10 December 2007
Olsson, Gunilla	Head of Action Plan Secretariat, PMD, IFAD, two interviews, 3 July 2007, 15 November 2007
Omar, Rasha	Country Programme Manager, Asia Division IFAD, 4 December 2007
Palmeri, Chase	Country Programme Manager, Asia Division IFAD (former Evaluation Officer, Office of Evaluation, IFAD), 22 November 2007
Pedersen, Henning	Country Programme Manager, IFAD, 17 December 2007
Prayer Galletti, Mattia	Country Programme Manager, Asia Division IFAD, 4 December 2007
Rice, Theresa	Portfolio Officer, PMD, IFAD, 27 September 2007
Slade, Roger	Evaluation Team Leader (consultant), 13 December 2007
Thu Le, Thuy	Evaluation Officer UNIDO (Former research Analyst OE, IFAD), 5 December 2007
Torralba, Miguel	Evaluation Officer, OE, IFAD (focus group), 17 September 2007
Uustalu, Ann	Swedish MFA, IFAD Evaluation Committee, 22 November 2007

- Wang, Youqiong Country Programme Manager, Asia Division, IFAD, 26 September 2007, and by email, 11 December 2007
- Willebois de, Ides Director, Eastern and Southern Africa Division, PMD, IFAD, 25 September 2007

