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profile

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IFAD's Support to Scaling Up of Results
Evaluation Synthesis

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) defines scaling up as ''expanding, adapting and supporting successful policies, programmes and knowledge, so that they can leverage resources and partners to deliver larger results for a greater number of rural poor in a sustainable way" (IFAD Operational Framework for Scaling up 2015).

Past evaluations and institutional reviews have concluded that scaling up is critical for IFAD in order to better deliver its mandate to reduce rural poverty.

IFAD introduced the notion of scaling up as a strategic priority in 2002. However, the full development of the scaling-up concept only came in 2010 with the Brookings Review and was further refined in the 2015 Operational Framework. The 2010 Review and the 2015 Operational Framework are to be credited for bringing better theoretical and conceptual clarity to scaling up. The 2010 Brookings review exposed IFAD to the existing knowledge and literature on scaling up and an opportunity to engage in international fora on this topic.

Overall, the current conceptualization of scaling up is sound and draws from evaluative evidence and past project case studies. Two qualifications can be made. First, the item of scalability analysis deserves more emphasis (not all interventions may be successfully scaled up, or they may require specific conditions or additional interventions). Second, in the IFAD project cycle there are critical nodes and potential challenges to scaling up, notably: (i) keeping design focused against the wide range of needs in the field; (ii) limited availability of evidence during the early stage of a project cycle; (iii) mobilizing adequate resources for non-lending activities; and (iv) the need to support scaling up after project completion, when attention typically concentrates on new lending opportunities.

Staff "buy-in" is essential to implement the operational framework on scaling up. Operational staff recognize an improvement in conceptual clarity compared to the past. However, they also caution against three possible risks: (i) keeping the discussion at a too-theoretical level; (ii) concentrating on universal, mandatory application of scaling up rather than focusing on fewer operations with the best prospects for and evidence of success; and (iii) maintaining a single-minded focus on scaling up, which might draw attention away from innovation, itself an important part of IFAD's mandate.

Almost all the country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) produced since 2010 have made reference to scaling up, but few have articulated a strategy for it. COSOPs showed good intentions and compliance with requirements, but few presented dedicated analysis of scaling-up opportunities and specified plans. Only two included fully developed scaling-up strategies.

About half of the country programme evaluations and project performance assessments conducted since 2010 report cases of scaling up. Most of the scaling-up cases observed (95 per cent) consisted of an attempt to broaden project geographical coverage to new areas. Other forms of scaling up were also observed. In fact, in 41 per cent of the recorded scaling-up cases, there were examples of project interventions informing public strategies or policies. Finally, in 16 per cent of the observed scaling-up cases, an IFAD-funded project had been adopted by a larger programme, funded either by the government or a donor.

According to the evaluations reviewed, scaling up was three times more prevalent in countries where IFAD had an office: scaling up featured in 62 per cent of the evaluations in countries with IFAD presence, compared to only 21 per cent in countries without IFAD presence. Country offices may have enhanced IFAD's visibility and the quality of interactions with development partners, leading to enhanced interest from the government and international donors in supporting and reinforcing the results achieved by IFAD-funded projects.

Government ownership, sustainability, non-lending activities, country presence and IFAD's leadership and extended engagement are among the key enablers for scaling up identified by past evaluations. Ultimately, scaling up rests upon the decision of other development partners – and notably governments, which can facilitate access to funding from international donors. While "fiscal space" contributes to scaling up, it does not emerge as a necessary condition: government ownership appears to be of higher importance. This explains why many scaling-up cases were observed in low-income countries where fiscal space is constrained. Governments could in fact facilitate support from other donors. Ownership is often tied to individual champions rather than to the full ministerial apparatus.

IFAD has the opportunity to spark the interest of development partners in its operations, and foster ownership and willingness to scale up. This is where non-lending activities are crucial. The review of the evaluations suggests that one of the most important risks to be avoided is that projects work in isolation, without establishing a dialogue with local and national governments, non-governmental organizations and other international agencies operating in the same area or thematic sub-sector.

Scaling up happens when other partners converge in supporting certain interventions and approaches. This requires extended support from IFAD, often through several project phases. Partners need to be convinced of IFAD's own buy-in in first place. Even when interventions seem "promising", they may need more fine-tuning or improvements, requiring further support from IFAD before they are ready to be scaled up. Moreover, IFAD needs to be engaged when there is a need to protect the quality of design and implementation under high disbursement and outreach pressure.

Key recommendations

- **Recommendation 1. Strengthen the country programme and project cycle to enhance scalability.** This includes: (i) prioritizing areas where the prospects for success and sustainability are considered high and are aligned with IFAD's strengths and comparative advantages; (ii) sharing findings with potential champions; and (iii) continuing engagement so as to strengthen ownership by other partners and to fine-tune and facilitate the adoption of proven approaches.

- **Recommendation 2. Build stronger consensus and incentives in-house to support scaling up.** In order to clarify the concept of scaling up and motivate staff, IFAD should promote exchanges between operational staff and their exposure to concrete scaling-up experiences.

- **Recommendation 3. Set targets based on evidence of scaling-up rather than generic potential.** At the project completion stage, the assessment needs to focus more on the concrete steps that have been taken to encourage partners' interest and commitment to scaling up, as well as on the agreements made with partners and timeframe to implement them.

- **Recommendation 4. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD should rate innovation and scaling up separately.** The two concepts, though closely related, are different and the same assessment may not necessarily apply to both. For better conceptual clarity and in order to enhance comparability between self-assessment and independent evaluations, there should be separate ratings for innovation and for scaling up.

Further information:

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