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Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation Democratic Republic of the Congo

In 2016, the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD led the first country strategy and programme evaluation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), covering the period 2003 to 2015. The DRC has a wealth of natural resources and significant potential for agricultural development, but is nevertheless one of the world's poorest countries, and most rural households are food-insecure.

Decades of poor governance and conflict have led to a collapse of the agriculture sector. During the period covered by the evaluation, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) financed five projects focused on reviving agricultural production to enable projects over the long term to provide services to farmers; to prioritizing road access to improve the circulation of goods and people as well as access to markets. During the same period, IFAD funded 13 regional grants involving the DRC and 7 country grants worth US\$2.3 million. The grants primarily offered technical support to projects.

Main evaluation findings

IFAD's country programme in the DRC has shown courage in addressing rural poverty in a particularly difficult socio-economic, political and institutional context of fragility. The political and strategic alignment of the country programme is appropriate, but the geographical targeting of the portfolio is too dispersed. At the same time, social targeting, based mainly on self-targeting

through the producer organizations supported by the projects, is not sufficiently precise and carries a real risk of excluding vulnerable people such as women, indigenous people, the landless and youth. Moreover, the country context of fragility and accompanying risks are not sufficiently taken into account in the analysis of the operating context, strategies and approaches, or partnerships. Furthermore, gender, environmental and climate change issues are not sufficiently taken into account in the country strategy and programme.

The programme's short-term impact on agricultural productivity, food security, household incomes and human and social capital is quite significant as a result of the strategic decision to focus on quick-impact actions in a highly precarious initial situation. Rehabilitating basic social services and infrastructure had an immediate impact on people's access to education and health care services. The programme had outstanding quantitative results in terms of organizing producers and using them as the main point of entry for supporting the revival of agriculture.

Nevertheless, low levels of effectiveness and efficiency for both projects and non-lending activities placed constraints on country programme impact. Portfolio effectiveness was severely impacted by: poor planning and management capacity among project teams dealing with complex projects and procedures; poor technical and financial capacity among local enterprises and public services; and the downward revision of quantitative targets for all projects, including the number of beneficiaries targeted, to make them more realistic given the challenges encountered and the very slow pace of progress. Portfolio efficiency was undermined by very high operating costs as a result of project areas that were vast and difficult to reach, and by administrative bottlenecks as a result of weak government institutions. Government resources available to agricultural and rural development services are very limited, making them less effective in supporting project implementation and affecting the sustainability of results.

In 2010 the portfolio came under direct supervision by IFAD, and in January 2012 a permanent resident country programme manager was installed in DRC. IFAD and the Government have intensified supervision and support in implementing the portfolio, and taken some steps to improve efficiency, such as replacing staff, and providing training and advisory support to Project Management Units (PMUs). The establishment of a country office in Kinshasa and the progressive development of the country team are important steps and should allow for greater attention to policy dialogue and knowledge management, which, until now, have had only moderate success.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO AT A GLANCE

Population: **77.3 million (2015)**

Rural population: **44.3 million (57%) (2015)**

Population growth (annual%): **3.1% (2015)**

Gross domestic product growth (annual): **6.9% (2015)**

Poverty headcount ratio at USD1.90 a day: **77.2% (2011 PPP)**

Life expectancy at birth: **58.7 (2014)**

Human development index: **0.433 (ranked 176th out of 188 countries) (2014)**

Total number of projects financed by IFAD since 1980: **8**

Total project funding approved: **US\$224 million**

Sources: World Bank, United Nations Development Programme

Key recommendations

- **Adjust and strengthen the institutional mechanisms for management of the country programme.** The evaluation recommends focusing all project management functions within the PMU and to put in place technical assistance within the PMU that is focused on results management and required technical fields. The Liaison Office should no longer be involved in financial or project staff management. IFAD should strengthen its country office fiduciary management skills to better support the PMU. The Government should strengthen the involvement of the ministry and the provincial inspectorate of agriculture in steering, monitoring and strategic decision making at the project level, in line with decentralization.
- **Strengthen the strategic relevance and impact of the country strategy and programme.** IFAD should allocate sufficient time and resources, and make use of the extensive research conducted by other development partners, to strengthen the analysis of the causes of rural poverty and the linkages between them and fragility in order to better take them into account in the formulation of the new country strategic opportunities programme. The evaluation recommends concentrating all projects and grants on a limited number of provinces, remaining there for a sufficient time (10 to 20 years of actual work), and reducing the individual geographic coverage of projects to one province.
- **Increase efficiency and effectiveness of the portfolio.** The Government and IFAD should formulate simple and flexible projects that can be quickly adjusted according to changes in the socio-economic context at national and provincial levels. The evaluation recommends, as part of the identification studies, including a rigorous analysis of risks in targeted areas of intervention in order to develop an adequate risk management strategy. The Government and IFAD should hold regular joint reviews of the portfolio to provide any corrective action or reorientation that might be necessary.
- **Strengthen the relevance and effectiveness of non-lending activities.** To raise its voice at the political level, the country programme should strengthen its partnerships with other major donors in the DRC (e.g. African Development Bank, Belgian Technical Cooperation, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Bank). Policy dialogue should concentrate primarily on the provincial level, notably on adapting the National Agricultural Investment Plan to the provincial context, with particular attention to emphasizing the potential of small family farms. The Government and IFAD should ensure the incorporation of projects into provincial agricultural investment plans. IFAD should improve the integration of projects and non-project grants to ensure complementarity, in particular on cross-cutting issues that call for specialized technical support. The Government, with the support of IFAD, should actively seek development partners that can support the improvement of social services in the project areas, in addition to supporting rural productive sectors financed by IFAD.

Further information:

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