

Evaluation Capacity Development

Seminar on Evaluation Methodology, Beijing, 16 July 2014

Main discussion points

1. **Background.** IOE and the Ministry of Finance (China) signed a Statement of Intent in September 2013 on evaluation capacity development in China.¹ In this context, IOE organised a seminar in Beijing to discuss selected opportunities and constraints in evaluating agriculture and rural development interventions.
2. The seminar was chaired by Mr Kees Tuinenburg, OIC IOE, and around 45 participants attended the discussions - including colleagues from the IFAD Management, representative of the Government of China, consultants, academic and research institutions, and multilateral organisations. The Evaluation Committee Chairperson (Indonesia), and the Chinese Executive Board Director to IFAD were also present. Two power point presentations were made to stimulate the discussions, respectively, by Ashwani Muthoo (IOE Deputy Director) and Jicheng Zhang (M&E Officer in the International Trade Centre).
3. **Objectives of the seminar.** The objectives of the seminar were to: (i) discuss with participants some key, cross-cutting methodological challenges in evaluation; and (ii) capture inputs that could inform the preparation of the revised IFAD/IOE Evaluation Manual (which will be issued in 2015).
4. **Main points.**
 - (i) **Indicators or key questions.** Currently, the IFAD/IOE manual contains a set of key guiding questions that need to be answered to determine ratings for each evaluation criteria (e.g., relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, etc). However, participants encouraged IOE to reflect whether the new manual should include such questions (enhanced, as needed), or a set of clear indicators to guide the users in assessing the performance across the various criteria adopted.
 - (ii) **Guidance for ratings (i.e., rating rules).** Currently, the manual does not include specific guidance (or rules) for users on how to assign ratings by criteria (for example, what would constitute a rating of 4 for relevance, what would constitute a 5 for effectiveness, etc). The rationale for this is because – at the time of developing the manual (2008) – it was felt that evaluators should be allowed freedom to exercise their judgement (based on triangulation and a wholistic examination of evidence), before assigning a rating to any criteria. More specific guidance could, however, make the rating process mechanical.
 - (iii) **Customisation/tailoring of evaluation criteria and questions.** Participants took note that IOE uses internationally recognised criteria for evaluation. However, participants underlined the need to ensure that the criteria and corresponding key

¹ At present, China is the only country where IOE has such a Statement of Intent. See the Statement at the following link - <http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/partnerships/china.htm>

questions/indicators in the manual are customised/tailored depending on the project, programme, policy or strategy being evaluated. It was also agreed that, while the manual should include a set of criteria and guiding questions/indicators for evaluation, the customisation/tailoring should take place during the preparation of the approach paper at the outset of each evaluation.

- (iv) **Designing evaluations with local context in mind.** Evaluations should be designed and implemented by taking into account local cultures, sensitivities and contexts (e.g., social and institutional). In particular, the evaluation key questions and data collection methods need to be carefully adapted accordingly. For example, in some cultures/context, it might not be appropriate (especially for men) to ask women beneficiaries specific questions about the intervention.
- (v) **Use mixed methods.** Participants underlined the importance of using both quantitative and qualitative methods in evaluation. In particular, though there is growing attention to quantitative methods (e.g., RCTs, statistical surveys, etc), the need to use qualitative methods (e.g., interviews with key informants, focus group discussions) for assessing results of “softer” interventions (e.g., capacity building, empowerment, promotion of participation, etc) was considered essential.
- (vi) **Assessing poverty impact using the income indicator.** The international community (including IFAD) has adopted benchmarks for assessing poverty impact using income (i.e., US\$ 1/d and US\$ 1.25 day) as an indicator. Participants mentioned that Governments also might have their own (national) benchmarks for income, which could be different from the aforementioned one. Therefore, they asked which benchmarks should be used in evaluation. In this regard, at least within the IFAD context (e.g., during a PPA or CPE), one approach is for evaluation to assess and report impact on incomes, using both the IFAD benchmarks as well as the benchmarks adopted by national governments.
- (vii) **Evaluation in the overall programme management cycle.** Participants underlined the importance of embedding evaluation at different stages in the overall programme management cycle (e.g., at the time of design, mid-term, etc). While this is essential, IOE will need to carefully reflect on this to ensure the independence of its evaluation function is not compromised. However, it is clear that IOE should play a role at the time of project/strategy design in feeding lessons from previous evaluations, as well as supporting operations in ensuring design includes a coherent logical/results framework that is easily evaluable down the line.
- (viii) **Gender.** Participants underlined the importance of systematically evaluating gender equality and women’s empowerment in projects. IOE clarified that it introduced a dedicated evaluation criterion on gender in 2010 , and the new manual will include this criterion as well.
- (ix) **Examples/case studies.** IOE was advised to add case studies/examples (e.g., by evaluation criterion) to facilitate the implementation of the manual by the users.

- (x) **Use of technology in evaluation.** The advantages of using information technology – as a complementary tool - for evaluation purposes was highlighted (e.g., use of photography or remote sensing (Geographic Information Systems) to capture changes in reforestation, etc.).
5. Other issues were also raised, such as: (i) the advantages for IOE to collaborate with evaluation offices in other IFIs/UN organisations in the development of the new manual; and (ii) the need to consider the overall project/programme/strategy/policy costs as one of the criteria for prioritising evaluations by IOE.
 6. In conclusion, participants acknowledged the value of organising a seminar on evaluation capacity development, back to back with a CPE national roundtable table workshop. In the Chinese context, the seminar was considered a key activity related to knowledge sharing, which is a priority for the IFAD-China partnership in general.
 7. The seminar also illustrated the importance for IOE to listen to in-country partners in the course of developing the new evaluation manual. In this regard, we will need to reflect how IOE can, in a cost-effective manner, collect the views of other in-country partners (e.g., national evaluation associations in developing countries) before the manual is finalised in 2015. Finally, IOE was encouraged to do more evaluation capacity development work in China and in other IFAD developing member countries.