

THE GAMBIA CPE NATIONAL ROUND-TABLE WORKSHOP
Banjul, 3 December 2015

**Statement of Mr Ashwani K. Muthoo, Deputy Director of
the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE),
delivered on behalf of Mr Oscar A. Garcia, Director IOE**

Honourable Madam Vice President of the Gambia;

Honourable Minister of Finance; and

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Mr Oscar Garcia, Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD, I would like to welcome all of you and thank you very much for participating in today's National Roundtable Workshop on the evaluation of IFAD's programme in The Gambia.

I am truly honoured and pleased to participate in this workshop and would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Government of The Gambia, in particular to the Honourable Madam Vice President for gracing us with her illustrious presence today. I also thank the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs for taking time to being with us as well. Both your presence is surely a reflection of the importance the Government attributes to its long standing partnership with IFAD.

I would like to thank the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs for their invaluable support and collaboration throughout this country programme evaluation process and for co-organizing today's workshop. Similarly, appreciation is due to the Ministry of Agriculture for the support they kindly provided during the evaluation process, as well as the authorities of Basse and Sinchu Gudo, for the field visit which will take place tomorrow and Saturday to the IFAD-funded Participatory Integrated-Watershed Management Project (PIWAMP).

A word of appreciation is due to my dear colleagues, Mr Ides de Willebois, Director of IFAD's West and Central Africa Division; and Mr Moses Abukari, Country Programme Manager for the Gambia. They have both travelled from Rome and are here with us today, representing the IFAD Management. Mr de Willebois and Mr Abukari have been very supportive throughout this country programme evaluation, which is a demonstration of their keen interest to learn from the past, as a means to further strengthen performance in the future. In fact, they were open right from the very beginning when the idea to undertake this first country programme evaluation in the Gambia was floated.

I would also like to thank Ms Louise McDonald, Lead Evaluator of the Independent Office of Evaluation, who was responsible for this evaluation, and Ms Herma Majoor, Lead

Consultant, and Ms Siga Jallow, National Consultant, who ably contributed to this comprehensive work. Other members of the team were Ms Liz Kiff, Mr Thierry Mathieux and Ms Cécile Berthaud.

Just as a background, the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD is an integral division in the organizational architecture of the Fund. However, our independence as an office is primarily derived by the fact that we report functionally directly to IFAD's Executive Board. IFAD is, in fact, the only United Nations Specialized Agency, Programme or Fund to have such an Independent Office of Evaluation, which has contributed to promoting accountability and learning in the organization. The mandate of our office is to undertake evaluations of projects, country programmes – such as for example the country programme evaluation in The Gambia - and corporate policies, with the aim of assessing results achieved, and generating lessons for further strengthening the performance of IFAD-financed operations.

The purpose of the Gambia country programme evaluation we will be discussing today is to provide building blocks that can assist the Government, IFAD and other concerned partners in developing the next country strategy - COSOP - and projects financed by IFAD in The Gambia. The objective of the workshop is to have an opportunity to discuss the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation and reflect on their

implications, providing valuable inputs for the preparation of the Agreement at Completion Point. For those of you who are not familiar with the concept, the Agreement at Completion Point is a short document summarizing the main evaluation recommendations, which the Government of The Gambia and IFAD Management will agree to adopt and implement within a certain timeframe.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last decade, The Gambia has experienced a declining trend in poverty, with the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increasing from US\$578 million in 2004 to US\$914 million in 2013, though with erratic patterns. Nevertheless, poverty is still pervasive, and the country's Human Development Index positions The Gambia at 172 out of 187 countries. Though the contribution of the agricultural sector to the country's GDP has decreased from 28 to 20 per cent over the last decade, it still employs about 65 per cent of the national labour force. In 2011, agricultural production was low due to a drought year, and 2014 has again been difficult. Though no area in The Gambia is yet observed to be in an emergency or famine, this year the crisis is predicted to reach more than 4 million people. The nutrition situation is also worrying, with stunting between 14 and 30%.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Gambia and IFAD have developed a strong partnership for poverty alleviation over more than 30 years. Since 1982, IFAD has supported 10 projects and programmes for a total cost of US\$196 million, of which IFAD contributed US\$73.1 million. The support has focused on helping the Government strengthen and empower farmers through their organizations and communities, with an emphasis on managing watersheds; promoting access to markets and linkages to value chains; creating rural financial and credit service; livestock development; and research, extension and training.

The Fund has formulated one country strategy – the COSOP – in 2003, partially updated in 2012, and the country programme evaluation we will discuss today is the first to be conducted in The Gambia by the Independent Office of Evaluation, covering the period from 2004 to 2014.

I will now highlight only a few findings from the evaluation, since my colleague Louise McDonald will give you a more comprehensive presentation shortly.

The evaluation finds that in general, IFAD's country programme in The Gambia was well designed in some of its components such as the promotion of innovations, for instance the setting up of alternative energy sources (biogas and improved cooking stoves), the digitalization of community

maps and the recruitment and training of volunteer extensionists. IFAD's project portfolio has incorporated, in its design, a strong focus on gender, through which women have increased their productivity and incomes, and have become more empowered. The portfolio has also concentrated on the development of value chains, which was included in the design of IFAD-financed projects and was in line with the Government policies and strategies.

Overall, the design of the projects was consistent with the beneficiaries' needs, IFAD's strategic objectives and the Government's objectives, strategies and policies by addressing food security, employment creation and poverty reduction.

Notwithstanding these strengths, the evaluation finds areas that deserve further attention.

Firstly, the evaluation finds that the portfolio performance was found to be weak in its effectiveness - the extent to which the programme achieved its objectives. Though many outputs were achieved, it was only in crop production that objectives were reached to a reasonable extent, whereas the achievement of rural finance activities was much poorer.

Secondly, the programme lacked an adequate targeting strategy, and was weak in including a description of how geographical targeting should be used to focus on pockets of

poverty, and therefore did not adequately tailor interventions to the needs of the beneficiaries.

Thirdly, sustainability of benefits is found to be an area for improvement. In general, sustainability has been limited by lack of ownership and engagement by beneficiaries in the planning, implementation and maintenance and oversight of project activities and infrastructure, two essential factors in order to sustain the gains made by projects. High staff turnover especially in the Ministry of Agriculture and IFAD-supported projects has also constrained effectiveness and sustainability ratings.

Last, but not least, value chain activities – although well planned in the programme design – were not properly linked with agricultural production or building on agricultural knowledge. The capacity of beneficiaries was not sufficiently built in order for them to be able to store and process locally and transport their products to markets, enjoying the opportunity for higher prices and incomes.

In conclusion, I invite you to absorb the inputs provided by this independent evaluation and engage frankly and constructively in a dialogue to explore ways to enhance the collaboration between IFAD and the Government of The Gambia for preserving agriculture as a major source for economic growth and rural poverty reduction.

Let us find together ways to make the IFAD partnership with the Government of The Gambia stronger, for enhanced development effectiveness. I thank you for your attention.