

# **Niger Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation National Workshop**

**(virtual) 15 April 2021**

## **Introductory Statement by Mr Indran Naidoo, Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD**

- Honourable Minister of Agriculture [DR ALAMBEDJI ABBA ISSA ]
- High Commissioner, "Three N" Initiative
- Secretary General, Ministry of Agriculture,
- Director General for Programming and Development, Ministry of Plan
- Distinguished representatives of the Government of Niger, Representatives of IFAD, international organizations and partner institutions,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to inaugurate this virtual National Workshop, co-organized by the Government of Niger and the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD, in collaboration with the West and Central Africa Division of IFAD. This is final step of the Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation in Niger, and we hope to have a productive discussion.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Government of Niger, in particular to the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Infrastructure, for their invaluable support and collaboration throughout this evaluation.

I would also like to recognize the support of the IFAD Programme Management Department, starting with Mr Donal Brown, Associate Vice-President, and Ms Nadine Gbossa, Director of IFAD's West and Central Africa Division.

My appreciation also goes to the IFAD Country Director ad interim for Niger, Mr Pathe Sene, who has recently taken over from Mr Jakob Tuborgh, and to Mr Lawan Cherif, Country Programme Officer.

Finally, I would like to thank the evaluation team, led by Mr Fabrizio Felloni, Deputy Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD, and supported by a team of national and international consultants: Mr James Gasana, Ms Khaoula Rivière, Mr Amor Bayouli, Mr Chaibou Dadi and Mr. Adamou Fodi. Ms Cristina Spagnolo provided great administrative support to the team and to the organization of today's event.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me highlight the importance of the independent evaluation function. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD undertakes impartial and evidence-based evaluations of projects, country programmes and corporate policies, to assess the results achieved and to generate lessons to enhance the impact of IFAD's projects on people's lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Eighty-three per cent of the population in Niger lives in rural areas. In 2018, agriculture represented 39 per cent of GNP, and was the backbone of the economy. Niger is exposed to several sources of

fragility, such as climate-related risks and drought, and security threats, for example, along its borders with Mali and Nigeria.

Since 1980, IFAD has financed 15 projects in Niger, totalling US\$ 765 million in loans and grants.

Our evaluation, which covers the period 2011-2020, found that the country programme funded by IFAD (with co-financing by other agencies, such as the African Development Bank, Italy, Norway, the Global Environmental Facility, OPEC, FAO and WFP) has helped to improve the resilience of rural households and communities. Interventions on rain-fed and irrigated agriculture, and support to better access to quality seeds and fertilizers, have contributed to increasing yields and reducing exposure to climate risks.

Another area of success has been the regeneration of local vegetation, and the rehabilitation of land through simple techniques that local communities are now able to master and maintain. Projects have combined environmental restoration activities with 'food-for-work' initiatives. This has created incentives for communities to engage in activities that are labour intensive but provide collective benefits in the long term.

The country programme has devoted increasing attention to fostering access of smallholder producers to agricultural markets. To this end, the projects financed the construction and rehabilitation of feeder roads, and market infrastructure. This is expected to increase farm-gate prices for smallholder producers.

However, at the time of the evaluation, only a third of the planned market infrastructure had been completed, while costs had increased beyond targets. Therefore, it would be important to conduct a cost-benefit analysis for such infrastructure investments, before scaling up these initiatives.

Instead, in the course of the period evaluated, emphasis and resources reduced on providing basic services to the communities (such as access to drinking water, sanitization, and functional literacy). Yet, basic services and small activities are importable from an equity perspective as they are in high demand from women, landless households and other particularly disadvantaged groups.

Finally, I would like to highlight three important recommendations of the evaluation.

1. First, there is a need to re-establish a balance between the emphasis on large infrastructure investments for economic development poles, on the one hand, and the emphasis on basic infrastructure to cater for the immediate needs of rural communities, on the other.
2. Second, we need to ensure that activities to support agricultural development, natural resource management and adaptation to climate change are well integrated in the portfolio, and take into account the importance of managing conflicts between different users of natural resources.
3. Lastly, IFAD needs to strengthen its participation in the consultations with the government and other development

partners. The IFAD-funded programme provides valuable lessons on how to reduce risks in fragile agro-ecological environments, and improve access of small producers to markets. It is important to capitalize on these ground-level experiences in order to fine-tune rural development policies.

As evaluators, we have provided an impartial assessment of IFAD's programme in Niger. Now, with your support and active participation, we can gain a better understanding of future opportunities and ways to overcome constraints. I look forward to a fruitful discussion.

Thank you for your attention.