

7 September 2022

Wilton Park dialogue:  
Transformational  
change towards a  
sustainable future

## Statement of the Director IOE

### Building strategic alliances that enable transformational action

#### *Opening session*

**Indran A. Naidoo, PhD**

Thank you, Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) is honored to be given this opportunity to partner with Wilton Park on this very important dialogue, the 3<sup>rd</sup> in a series which we have supported. I am pleased to make some observations to inform our conversations over the next 3 days.

The sheer physicality of climate change has moved it away from being solely the subject of lectures and textbook discussions. It is now a very tangible and concerning reality. As we all know, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that climate change is occurring at a faster pace than previously projected, and that life on earth faces catastrophic consequences unless drastic and immediate action is taken. Given

such magnitude, climate change is now a topic in the portfolio of several evaluation offices across the UN system and international financial institutions.

We need to understand what adaptation and mitigation efforts are in place. To this end, and given the magnitude of the task at hand, efforts – such as this one – to stimulate the emergence of knowledge coalitions, become ever more important. Clearly, transformative solutions are needed to avoid catastrophic consequences.

Transformation is a relative and context-specific concept. While there is no universal definition of transformation, the definition that reflects best practice is the one of the Transformational Change Learning Partnership. There is general agreement that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires transformational changes at scale that address root causes and systemic drivers of poverty, exclusion and pollution. Incremental change will not suffice, as Agenda 2030 calls for radical, even revolutionary change of human systems and their interaction with the planet.

The question naturally arises as per what this means for evaluators, given that a key part of evaluation is to improve quality and make changes. Evaluation can play an important role in a journey towards transformation by capturing and presenting evidence of said transformation. In this context, evaluators are increasingly called upon to answer questions about effects on norms and systems. In order to understand how interventions, programmes and policies support lasting system change, evaluators need to engage with

strategic and aggregate-level evaluations and understand how systems-level change can be evaluated. We can't continue to evaluate projects as if they exist in a vacuum. We must take a systems approach to ensure that interventions actually make a difference.

As professionals, we need to embrace and understand new content and methodologies that provide both real time information on change and impact. There is no gold standard, and methods should feed the question. We need to frame the issue in the context of the multi-disciplinary world that we live in. One-size-fits-all approaches are not going to solve the problem. The notion of one expert evaluator delivering results, over a multidisciplinary team means that issues of complexity are not addressed. One needs to consider the environment and ensure downward accountability. This is not easy given evaluation's typical project-level focus, and its tendency towards upward accountability.

Many governments face significant challenges to incentivize sustainable climate adaptation responses. Ensuring an evidence base for holistic CCA solutions that build climate, environmental and developmental resilience together is critical for ramping-up climate finance and environmentally sustainable policies and practices. Evaluations could and should be looked upon as having the potential to play a critical role in this regard.

Agriculture, and smallholder agriculture, is arguably among the sectors most impacted by climate change. Smallholder agriculture accounts for 75 per cent of global farmland and provides more than

80 per cent of the food consumed in the Global South. The importance of agriculture to human life notwithstanding, assessments that specifically address the vulnerability of smallholder farmers to climate change remain limited, although extensive information is available on the projected impacts of climate change on agriculture and on the adaptation measures needed to minimize those impacts.

Against this backdrop, the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) recently carried out a 'Thematic Evaluation of IFAD's Support for Smallholder Farmers' Adaptation to Climate Change'. The Thematic Evaluation found that there is a need to develop climate adaptation solutions that simultaneously promote not only climate resilience, but also environmental and economic resilience. Where that is not feasible, we should aim to 'do-no-harm' or better, with the necessary offsets to compensate for the damage that is being done to the ecosystems. The transformative change that the evaluation is looking for is the shift in governments' and international agencies' paradigm of agricultural interventions, moving from an anthropocentric approach to one which is more environmentally-focused.

It must be recognized that several evaluation offices have stepped up to meet the challenge at hand, and are now addressing transformational change in their evaluations. Consequently, a growing number of evaluation reports discuss progress towards the transformative global impact of major climate change mitigation and adaptation actions and measures. These undertakings are

increasingly benefitting from a strong connection and a mutually reinforcing role between research and evaluation.

The findings of these efforts need to be shared, discussed and widely disseminated. Research and advocacy are both important if we are to achieve real and tangible results. To this end, IOE remains active across multiple networks and knowledge platforms to building strategic alliances that enable transformational action. In addition to being an active member of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), Evaluation Cooperation Group (ECG) and Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI), IOE has facilitated and proactively engaged in transformative climate action dialogues in multiple fora, including the gLOCAL Evaluation Week, the International Research Group for Policy and Programme Evaluation (IntEval), the European Evaluation Society Biennial Conference, the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) International Conference, the Asia Pacific Evaluation Association, and COP 26.

IFAD and its IOE remains committed to using evaluative evidence and methodologies to advance a transformative climate agenda aimed at achieving a sustainable future. We need to be self reflective to bring about change.

Thank you, Chair.