

profile

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IFAD gets closer to the ground

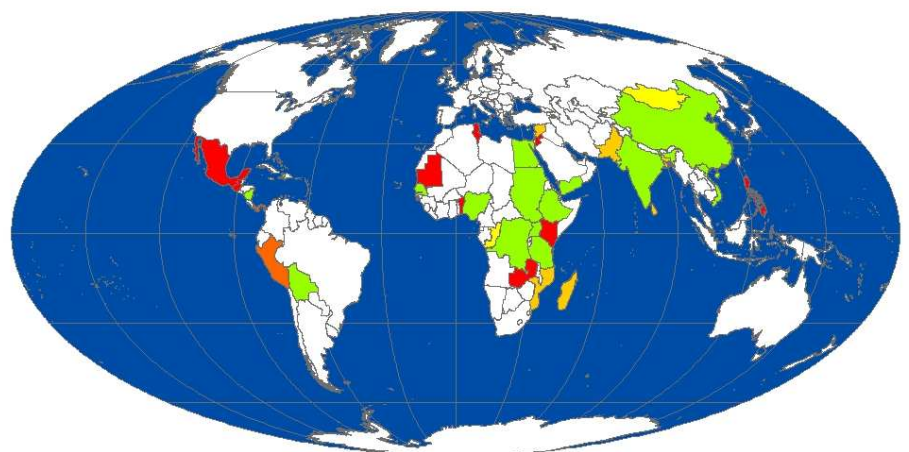
In December 2003, IFAD's Executive Board approved the three-year Field Presence Pilot Programme (FPPP) covering 15 countries with IFAD operations in all geographic regions. Among the main objectives of the FPPP was to bring IFAD closer to the ground, and to generally improve the Fund's effectiveness, especially in four inter-related areas - namely implementation support, policy dialogue, partnership building and knowledge management. IFAD's Office of Evaluation recently evaluated the FPPP, covering also the other forms of country presence established by the Fund in the past, such as the outposting of country programme managers (CPMs) and 'proxy' field presence¹.

Main results

In general, the evaluation found significant positive results – especially in terms of the Fund's overall effectiveness in the four inter-related areas mentioned above - in countries with any type of permanent presence as compared to those without any. In fact, the evaluation noted that IFAD's effectiveness was even greater in those cases where permanent country presence had been established two or more years ago. This is consistent with the broad finding from the FPPP evaluation benchmarking study – aimed at learning from the approaches and experiences of other development organizations to country presence - which revealed that country presence and overall decentralization in other organizations has contributed in an important manner to enhancing their own overall development effectiveness. However, at the same time, the evaluation concluded that the FPPP *per se* could have paid greater attention to experimentation with alternative models to country presence, as was initially envisaged under the programme. Moreover, the pilot had far-reaching objectives, which were not commensurate with the level of resources deployed. Finally, the evaluation concluded that the question is not whether IFAD should or not enhance its country presence, but rather focus on determining the most cost-effective form of country presence that the Fund should pursue in the future. The evaluation was not able to provide a bold indication of the most cost-effective form of country presence, and therefore could not recommend mainstreaming IFAD country presence arrangements for the time being across the board.

What is the ideal form of country presence for IFAD?

The evaluation found the best results in those cases where IFAD has an outposted CPM residing permanently in borrowing countries. Although, admittedly, the sample of CPMs outposted at present is small, the best results are achieved with outposted CPMs, especially but not only in terms of knowledge management. One key factor for the success of the outposted CPM model is that they have been provided the same level of authority as for those CPMs stationed at IFAD headquarters. Thus, s/he is concretely empowered to take key decisions more rapidly on the ground, follow-up on implementation issues, in addition to being closer to development actions of concern to IFAD. But, the evaluation also found potential



- **FPPP countries:** Bolivia, China, Congo DR, Egypt, Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, Yemen
- **Satellite countries:** Congo Brazzaville, Gambia, Mongolia
- **Proxy countries:** Bangladesh, Madagascar, Mozambique, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria
- **Countries with outposted country programme managers:** Panama, Peru
- **Comparator countries:** Benin, Guatemala, Jordan, Kenya, Mauritania, Mexico, Philippines, Tunisia, Zambia

tradeoffs to CPM outposting. For example, having regular IFAD staff outposted from the headquarters to the field has consequences for the overall organizational structure and operating model of IFAD. Moreover, the relationship between outposted CPMs and headquarters needs to be clearly defined, including what their contribution would be to key processes and activities undertaken at headquarters. The evaluation found that the country presence model experimented under the FPPP and the proxy field presence arrangements are also useful, even though there is need to introduce specific measures to further improve their performance (e.g., by providing them with deeper delegation of authority, and clarifying and communicating to partners their role in relation to the CPM and co-operating institutions, as applicable). However, one of the main conclusions of the evaluation is that more experimentation with different forms of country presence is required in order to determine the most cost-effective model of country presence for IFAD to consider. Related to this, in fact, the evaluation concluded that the question that IFAD and its governing bodies need to address is not whether IFAD should or should not have a country presence, but rather focus on identifying the most cost-effective form that presence needs to entail.

Regional or sub-regional offices?

IFAD has experimented with a “satellite model”, where the field presence officer in one of the 15 FPPP countries also covers IFAD operations in a neighboring country. This may be considered a form of sub-regional office. The evaluation found the satellite model to be effective when it came to project implementation support. It was less successful in promoting policy dialogue or partnerships, which require continuous engagement that can be best provided by staff residing permanently in the concerned country. The CPM outposting can be considered another form of sub-regional office, as they often are responsible for covering more than one country. Notwithstanding the aforementioned, it is evident that IFAD’s experience with regional or sub-regional offices so far has been limited. In spite of that, the evaluation believes that the opportunities for experimenting with a regional or sub-regional office is worth exploring in the near future, given also that other development organizations covered through the benchmarking study found that such structures have several advantages (e.g., lower administrative costs as compared to establishing permanent presence in a variety of countries, wider opportunities for knowledge sharing among staff designated to regional/sub-regional offices) and could effectively complement other forms of country presence.

More effective management on country presence in IFAD

The evaluation found some key shortcomings in relation to the management of the FPPP, which need to be addressed to ensure an even better performance and overview of IFAD country presence arrangements in the future. Firstly, the sharing of knowledge among IFAD staff, field presence officers and others under the FPPP was unstructured and limited. This is crucial and needs to be systematized, especially given the Fund’s short experience with country presence issues in general. Secondly, the consultancy contract arrangements that have been used to recruit some of the field presence officers (both under the FPPP and proxy arrangement) do not provide adequate job security and continuity that is required for IFAD’s country presence to be effective. Instruments need to be devised that would allow IFAD to directly hire - as staff - national officers on more permanent contracts, which would also give them a more distinct IFAD identity and a better compensation package. Thirdly, the evaluation revealed that greater attention needs to be devoted to collecting performance data related to the implementation of the country presence initiatives, as this would facilitate any periodic reporting and in particular the self assessment planned in 2010. Likewise, under the FPPP, due to a variety of reasons (e.g., usage of alternative sources of funding for field presence), it was extremely challenging to gain an accurate and complete overview of the costs associated with IFAD’s country presence. This is an area that needs consideration as well. Having said that, it is revealing that costs were merely one of the factors that motivated most of the organizations covered under the benchmarking study in moving forward in establishing their own country presence. Their overarching consideration was the contribution country presence could make to further deepening their development effectiveness.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The FPPP should be transformed into a new Country Presence Programme (CPP) that would consolidate the evidence around the emerging positive results and determine the most cost effective forms of country presence for IFAD. The CPP would consist of two distinct tracks:**
 - (i) **Continuation of the implementation of all 15 FPPP country initiatives; and**
 - (ii) **Systematic experimentation with alternative country presence models, including: (a) outposting additional CPMs with the required seniority in countries with sizeable operations; and (b) establishing on a selective basis sub-regional offices.**
- **A self-assessment should be undertaken of the CPP (including the FPPP) by the management in 2010 to serve as the basis to develop IFAD’s comprehensive country presence policy.**

ⁱ Proxy field presence is established in those countries not included in the FPPP. It entails recruiting a local person through a consultancy contact issued by IFAD, with specific terms of reference to contribute to advancing the particular objectives of IFAD at the country level.

Further information:

Corporate-level Evaluation of IFAD’s Field Presence Pilot Programme, Report #1893, July 2007, Office of Evaluation, IFAD, Via del Serafico 107, Rome 00142, Italy. The full report, insights and profile are available online at www.ifad.org/evaluation; email: evaluation@ifad.org.