

## **Mali Country Programme Evaluation**

### **National Roundtable Workshop**

#### **Speaking Points - Mr Ashwani Muthoo, Acting Director, Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD**

- Honourable Minister of Economy, Finance and Budget
- Honourable Minister of Agriculture
- Honourable Minister of Livestock and Fisheries
- Honourable Minister of Employment and Professional Training
- Honourable Commissioner, Food Security Commission
- Mr Secretary General, Ministry of Agriculture
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

#### **A. Introduction to the Evaluation, IOE and the purpose of the workshop**

- First of all, I would like to welcome you and thank you very much for participating in today's National Roundtable Workshop on the Mali country programme evaluation. I am really pleased to see so many participants from very diverse organizations and backgrounds, which I am sure will enrich the debate and exchange we shall have during the course of the day.
- I am personally very glad to be able to return again to Mali, as I have truly fond memories of my previous visits here, in particular in 2007 when I accompanied the Evaluation Committee of IFAD's Executive Board to this splendid country on their annual field visit. I was also here in 2009, when the Government of Mali generously hosted an Africa-wide regional conference that IFAD organised jointly with the AfDB on a critical evaluation done by the two organisations on agriculture in Africa, which also aimed to identify opportunities for better partnership between the Fund and the Bank. So, I am very pleased to be here.
- At the outset, I would like to clarify that 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 directly to the Executive Board of IFAD and not to the Management of the Fund. The mandate of our office is to undertake

evaluations of projects, country programmes – such as for example the country programme evaluation in Mali - and corporate policies, with the aim of assessing results achieved, and generating lessons for further strengthening the performance of IFAD-financed operations on the ground. In particular, the purpose of the Mali country programme evaluation is therefore to provide building blocks that can assist Government, IFAD and other concerned partners in developing the next country strategy and projects financed by IFAD in the country.

- As some of you may know, this is the second country programme evaluation done by the Independent Office of Evaluation in Mali. The first one was completed in 2007. To some extent, having conducted two country programme evaluations in the same country in a relatively short period of time, may be considered as an indicator of the importance IFAD attributes to its partnership with Mali in combating rural poverty in the country.
- The main objective of the workshop today is to have an opportunity to discuss with you the main findings and recommendations from the Mali country programme evaluation, and reflect on their implications for the future co-operation between IFAD and Mali. In particular, the workshop will provide valuable inputs towards the preparation of the evaluation's Agreement at Completion Point. The Agreement at Completion Point is a short document that will be formulated soon after the workshop, containing the main recommendations from the country programme evaluation that Government of Mali and IFAD Management agreed to adopt and implement within specific timeframes. As per IFAD's Evaluation Policy, the Agreement at Completion Point will be signed by the designated representative of the Government and IFAD's Associate Vice President for Programmes.
- Moreover, as per a recent decision taken by IFAD Governing Bodies, country programme evaluations inclusive of the corresponding Agreement at Completion will be discussed in IFAD's Executive Board at the same time when the Fund submits the next country strategy and programme for the approval of the Board, which in the case of Mali is likely to happen sometime next year.

## **B. Highlights from the Mali CPE**

- Later this morning, my colleague Fabrizio Felloni, Senior Evaluation Officer and lead evaluator for the Mali country programme evaluation, will deliver a power point presentation on the main findings and recommendations from the evaluation. Hence, at this stage, I will confine myself to highlighting only a few findings from the evaluations, as a more comprehensive presentation will shortly be made by my colleague.

- This Mali country programme evaluation covers the period 2007-2012. The evaluation found that the period was marked by steady economic growth in general in the country. At the same time, however, the surge of conflicts in the North of Mali has posed several challenges to the country and its institutions, which has also affected the implementation of projects supported by IFAD. This reality has been carefully considered in the assessment by the evaluation of past projects and related activities financed by IFAD. The country context - in particular the issue of conflict - needs to be at the forefront in any discussion related to the priorities and co-operation between the Fund and Mali moving forward.
- Notwithstanding the complexity of the country context, the country programme evaluation generally finds that overall the cooperation between the Government of Mali and IFAD has improved, as compared to the assessment made by the previous country programme evaluation in 2007. This is a reflection of the hard work and dedication of partners in the country as well as the IFAD management, which merits to be underscored.
- Specifically, with regard to the portfolio of projects funded by IFAD, the evaluation found that projects have been adapted to the national decentralization framework and the related funding mechanisms in Mali. This was a cause for concern identified by the 2007 country programme evaluation, and it seems that IFAD and its main partners have actively worked towards finding a feasible solution in this area.
- Another promising evolution has taken place in the area of rural finance, which the previous country programme evaluation underlined as a constraint for small farmers in improving their productivity, food security and incomes. The focus of the portfolio has changed towards building more sustainable financial institutions that are managed professionally. In addition to that, rural finance interventions of IFAD are now better inserted in the national micro finance strategies of the country.
- The evaluation also noted that IFAD has established wider and more solid partnerships with Government agencies, international organisations and donors (notably with the World Bank and the African Development Bank) and has been participating in donor coordination mechanisms. This is another significant improvement since 2007.
- There are however two areas that require attention in the future where performance can be improved. These are the efficiency of operations, and sustainability of benefits. Both have been affected by the difficulty of implementing projects in the North of the country where operational costs are higher, qualified contractors difficult to recruit and retain, and conflicts

risk jeopardising the achievements made so far. Therefore, the areas of efficiency and sustainability merit added attention in the future.

- One final area I would like to highlight raised by the country programme evaluation that requires reflection is the geographic coverage and priority of IFAD-financed operations in Mali. In the past, IFAD has primarily worked in assisting the Government address rural poverty in the fragile regions in the North of Mali, a region often affected by droughts and conflict. However, at the same time, the CPE underlines that poverty rates and population density tend to be higher in the South of the country, as compared to North. This raises the question where can the greatest value for IFAD-financed resources be derived from?
- In this regard, there is therefore need for greater discussion on where and how can an organization like IFAD -with its specific mandate and relatively limited amount of resources – best contribute to the Government’s own efforts of improving the lives of small farmers and other rural poor people in the country. I would like to leave you with two questions that we might wish to discuss during the day: (1) what should be the geographic priority of IFAD’s future interventions in the country taking into account the country context; and (2) how can IFAD support the Government better address and adapt to the risks of conflict and drought in the North of the country?
- In conclusion, I would like to express a heartfelt appreciation to the Government of Mali, in particular to the Ministry of Agriculture, for their invaluable support and collaboration throughout this country programme evaluation process, and especially in the organization of today’s workshop. Also, I thank my colleagues and friends in the West and Central Africa Division of IFAD for their inputs, openness and constructive approach towards this CPE.
- Thank you.