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Influential Evaluations: *Illustrations from Multilateral Development Organizations*



Investing in rural people

Evaluations can guide decision-making and are therefore vital for improving the quality and results of development work. Influential evaluations in multilateral development organizations are those that contribute to significant change and reform for better development effectiveness.

There are at least four types of influential evaluations, which can be distinguished based on their use: *instrumental*, in which the evaluation findings are used to change the evaluand or the conditions that it is working under; *conceptual*, in which the findings are used to gain conceptual knowledge; *informative*, in which the findings are used to acquire information; and *strategic*, in which the evaluation findings are used for advocacy (Levington (2003) and Højlund (2014)).

There is ample evidence that evaluations can indeed play a central role in shaping policy and thematic priorities and improving the performance of operations and results on the ground. In this article I will review some influential evaluations based on their instrumental use. Additionally, I will provide an example of a strategic evaluation based on its use for advocacy purpose.

In IFAD, the most influential type of evaluations are the corporate-level evaluations done by the Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE). Corporate-level evaluations include evaluations of IFAD policies, strategies, operations and business processes. Over time, they have provoked far-reaching and systemic institutional change and transformation, contributing to better development effectiveness and results on the ground.

The main objective of corporate-level evaluations is to strengthen IFAD's accountability framework and learning loops for enhanced rural transformation and better livelihoods. While IOE selects the topics for corporate-level evaluations, it ensures they are also a priority to the IFAD Management and its Governing Bodies. This is essential to ensure the full support and cooperation of key stakeholders and the ultimate users of corporate-level evaluations.

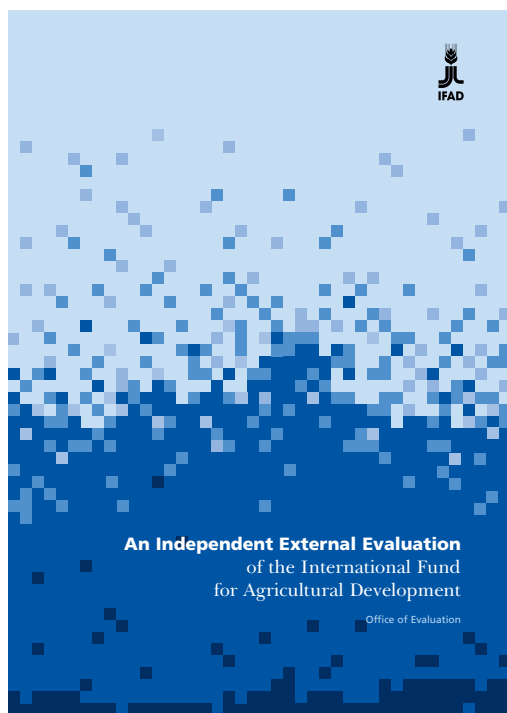
Depending on the topic covered and whether previous evaluative evidence is available, a corporate-level evaluation in IFAD takes on average from one year to eighteen months to complete. All corporate-level evaluations are presented to the Executive Board, together with a Management Response. The Executive Board, as the main user of evaluations, usually spends adequate time to review and discuss such evaluations, and to provide its strategic guidance on the way forward. All final reports, inclusive of IFAD's Management Response, are fully disclosed and made publicly available.

In the past decade, three corporate-level evaluations stand out for having had a major impact on IFAD policies, strategies, business processes and operating model. These include the Independent External Evaluation of IFAD (2004/5), and the corporate-level evaluations on the Direct Supervision Pilot Programme (2004/5), and the Field Presence Pilot Programme (2006/7).

The Independent External Evaluation (IEE) was the first evaluation of its kind in IFAD, since the organization started its operations in 1978. The IEE involved the entire organization over a period of about 18 months and allowed staff and Member States to take stock and reflect on the relevance of IFAD's mission and results, as well as its impact in reducing rural poverty. While the IEE concentrated on the results and impact of IFAD's activities, it also sought to assess the

effectiveness of key corporate and management processes, through which IFAD's policies, programmes and projects have been developed and implemented.

The IEE was closely managed by IOE, but carried out by an external team of consultants. The Director of IOE provided a written progress report on the implementation of the evaluation at the Executive Board sessions that were held throughout the evaluation period. This was important to keep Member States informed of the status of the evaluation and to discuss key issues that were unfolding during the IEE. A steering committee, composed of representatives of nine IFAD Member States, was established to serve in an advisory capacity to the Director of IOE. The IEE benefited from the advice, guidance and comments provided by the steering committee, which endorsed the terms of reference for the IEE that were prepared by the Director of IOE, selected the team of consultants and provided comments on all draft IEE reports. It also ensured greater ownership by Member States in the process, and also made sure they duly followed-up to the IEE's recommendations by the Management.



The main outcome of the IEE was the development by Management of an Action Plan to Enhance IFAD's Development Effectiveness, approved by the Board, which laid the foundation for important structural and organizational changes, the introduction of new corporate policies, and the streamlining of internal process and procedures. The Action Plan introduced a new strategic framework for the period 2007-2010 to orient the Fund's investments for rural poverty reduction. Such framework included: (i) a targeting policy to ensure IFAD's resources were channelled to the most needed; (ii) the establishment of a quality assurance group in the Office of the President and Vice President responsible for *quality at entry* of new projects and programmes; (iii) the issuance of an annual report on development effectiveness; and (iv) the setting up of guidelines for results-based country strategies. These and other measures have, over the years, contributed to the improvement of results on the ground, as reported by IOE in its Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations.

In 1997, the Governing Council adopted a resolution on *Loan Administration and Supervision of Project Implementation*, together with a five-year plan of action, whereby it decided that 15 IFAD-initiated projects were to be directly supervised and administered by IFAD during a five-year period. The overarching objective of this "Direct Supervision Pilot Programme" was to enable IFAD to acquire first-hand knowledge from supervision



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activities and to incorporate lessons learned from on-going operations more effectively into its project design work. Prior to the launching of the Direct Supervision Pilot Programme, IFAD was not directly supervising the projects it funded. It used to delegate project supervision to selected cooperating institutions, such as the United Nations Office for Project Services.

The corporate-level evaluation on the Direct Supervision Pilot Programme was completed in 2005. One important message that clearly emerged from the evaluation was that projects directly supervised performed better than those that were supervised by cooperating institutions. The analysis also showed that direct supervision allowed the Fund to expand its catalytic objectives of innovation, policy dialogue and partnership development. Therefore, wide support was expressed by partners for IFAD to undertake direct supervision.

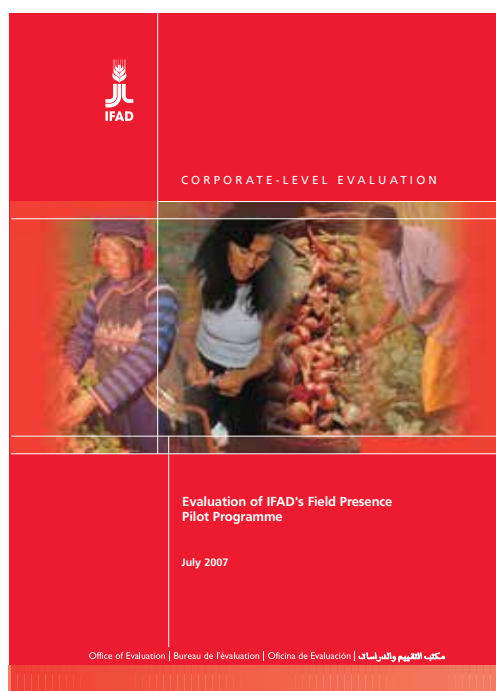
The corporate-level evaluation therefore recommended IFAD to develop a comprehensive supervision and implementation support policy, which ultimately translated in 2006 into IFAD's decision to move to direct supervision of projects, which can

be considered one of the most far-reaching changes since the establishment of the Fund in 1977. In fact, the implementation of this evaluation recommendation required an amendment to the Agreement Establishing IFAD, by the Governing Council in 2006, which is reflection of the significant change this corporate-level evaluation induced.

Similarly, the Field Presence Pilot Programme was a three-year initiative launched in 2003 with the objective to enhance the effectiveness of IFAD operations by focusing on four interrelated dimensions: implementation support, policy dialogue, partnership-building and knowledge management. Until the Field Presence Pilot Programme was launched, IFAD did not have any permanent in-country presence or country office. All its activities, such as project design and supervision, were managed by the staff based at its headquarters in Rome.

The corporate-level evaluation on the Field Presence Pilot Programme, completed in 2007, assessed the performance and impact of the programme in achieving IFAD's overall objectives. While the focus was on the Field Presence Pilot Programme in 15 countries, the evaluation also examined the experience gained at the time with the only two out-posted country programme managers (CPMs) in Panama and Peru.

The methodology included, *inter-alia*, a review of IFAD's work in 15 countries that were not covered by the Field Presence Pilot Programme, thus allowing the evaluation to assess performance in the countries with and without country presence. Moreover, to enhance the evaluation's evidence base and given that the evaluation was undertaken on three to four years after the pilot was launched, it also included a comprehensive benchmarking study. The aim of the latter was to learn from the efforts and experience of other multilateral and bilateral organizations and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that had already set up offices in recipient countries.



The evaluation concluded that the CPM out-posting model, with the required delegation of authority to advance IFAD's objectives at the country level, emerged as an effective option and paved the way for the establishment of a fully-fledged IFAD Country Presence Programme. Since then, IFAD has established around 40 country offices and one regional office in East and Southern Africa, increasing its presence where its beneficiaries need it most. In sum, the corporate-level evaluation on the Field Presence Pilot Programme, similar to the evaluation on the Direct Supervision Pilot Programme, laid the basis for sweeping transformation of IFAD's organizational architecture and business model.

Moving away from IFAD's experience to reflect the experience of other multilateral and bilateral development cooperation agencies, the **independent joint evaluation of the implementation of the Paris Declaration** conducted in 2011 can be considered a very good example of an influential evaluation, based on its strategic use as an advocacy tool¹.

The evaluation looked at how the principles of aid effectiveness were put into practice by international development partners and what results this was having in developing countries². The outcomes of this important international joint evaluation, conducted in two phases (Phase 1: 2007-8; Phase 2: 2009-11), included a synthesis report, 22 country-level evaluations, 18 donor studies and seven thematic reviews.

1 The participating countries were: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Cambodia, Cameroon, Colombia, Cook Islands, Ghana, Indonesia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Philippines, Samoa, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Vietnam and Zambia; and the participating development partners were: ADB, AfDB, Australia, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Sweden, UK, and UNDG (IFAD, UNAIDS, UNECA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNIFEM).

2 The principles of the Paris Declaration are the following: national ownership, alignment with country strategies, harmonization of donors' actions, managing for development results and mutual accountability. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>



The first phase of the evaluation contributed constructively to the policy debates on aid effectiveness, including the Accra Agenda for Action. The second phase of the evaluation made a synthesis of country and donors headquarter evaluations, plus thematic studies and the evaluations of the first phase. The recommendations to policy makers in both, partner countries, as well in donor countries were presented at the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness that took place in Busan, Republic of Korea in 2011.

Managing the evaluation process over four years was a major undertaking involving governments and evaluation departments of 28 countries. In this particular evaluation, the process was as important as the end results, with the recommendations emanating from the synthesis report. The establishment of an international reference group, a management group and several national advisory groups allowed for a wide dissemination and advocacy of the Paris principles, but also of international good practices, in conducting independent evaluations. The common approach and methodology allowed for a better understanding of the challenges of implementing the principles of aid effectiveness in very diverse country contexts while reinforcing the principle of mutual accountability. Additionally, as in the case of IOE evaluations, the joint evaluation benefited from an independent assessment of the evaluation undertaken by Michael Quinn Patton from the Evaluator's Institute that certified the credibility of the report by reviewing its data collection instruments, protocols

and processes, as well as the report's findings and technical notes.

In conclusion, there are three further aspects of influential evaluations that are worth highlighting to ensure their usefulness and credibility. Firstly, the timeliness of topics chosen is essential, so that evaluations can help the organization at the correct juncture. If an evaluation is done too early or too late, it is not likely to have the same impact on organizational development and its overall activities.

Secondly, the evaluations must be linked to further institutional or policy making processes, such as the formulation of a new policy on the topic or planned transformations to the operating model. This will allow evaluation lessons and recommendations to feed more immediately into specific processes of awareness raising, reform and change for better development impact.

Thirdly, in all cases the evaluations were perceived to be of good quality, with sound methods and methodology. Experience has also shown that it is important for external reviewers with distinguished credentials to be associated with corporate-level evaluations. Their role is to review key evaluation deliverables and to prepare a short final report attesting to the quality of the evaluation in terms of the methodology adopted, process followed and final outcomes. In this regard, IOE systematically mobilizes the valuable insights and inputs of prominent evaluators and development practitioners.

For evaluations to be influential, among other issues, they must be used, address critical areas of importance to major stakeholders, be delivered in timely manner, and build on the end users' inputs and concerns to change the conditions under which the evaluand is working. The examples provided are an illustration that evaluations can guide decision-making and are critical for improving the quality and results of development work of multilateral organizations, as well as for

advancing the understanding and implementation of internationally agreed principles on topics such as aid effectiveness.

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