

Cambodia Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation National Workshop, Phnom Penh, 24 January 2018

Statement by Mr Fabrizio Felloni Deputy Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD

Ms Khalida Bouzar, representing Associate Vice President,
Programme Management Department of IFAD,

Excellencies and distinguished representatives of government
agencies and partner institutions,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured and pleased to be part of this workshop, which is the final step of the country strategy and programme evaluation. First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Royal Government of Cambodia, in particular the Ministry of Economy and Finance for their collaboration on this evaluation and for co-organizing today's workshop. Special thanks also go to the IFAD-financed projects under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development Secretariat for excellent cooperation throughout the evaluation process, especially for making arrangements for the field visits and patiently responding to the queries by the evaluation team.

I would then like to thank Ms Khalida Bouzar, representing the Associate Vice-President of the Programme Management

Department of IFAD. Much appreciation also goes to the IFAD country team for Cambodia for their collaboration and assistance: Mr Benoit Thierry, Country Programme Manager, and Mr Meng Sakphouseth, Country Programme Officer.

Lastly, I would like to thank Ms Fumiko Nakai, Senior Evaluation Officer of the Independent Office of Evaluation, who led the evaluation in collaboration with a team of consultants, and Ms Laure Vidaud and Ms Cristina Spagnolo, Evaluation Assistants who have been handling administrative and logistical arrangements.

Before touching on selected issues from this evaluation, allow me to share with you a brief background on our office. The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD is a unit in the organizational architecture of the Fund reporting directly to the Executive Board of IFAD (comprising of representative of member countries of IFAD) and independent of Management.

The mandate of our office is to conduct impartial and evidence-based evaluations of projects, country strategies and programmes and corporate policies, with the aim of assessing results achieved, and generating lessons to further strengthen the performance of IFAD-financed operations on the ground. While independent, these exercises are conducted in consultation with the main stakeholders.

Today, we will be discussing the key findings and recommendations of the country strategy and programme evaluation, the first one undertaken for the Kingdom of Cambodia. The discussion will serve to validate and fine tune, as needed, the evaluation's agreement at

completion point. This is a short document containing the evaluation's recommendations together with agreed follow-up actions and it will be signed at the end of the workshop today by the representatives of the Royal Government of Cambodia and IFAD. I understand that IFAD and the project staff and the partners of the country programme will continue with discussions tomorrow to further elaborate follow-up action plans in more detail.

When IFAD started operations in 1996, Cambodia was in a phase of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. Over the last two decades, the country and its rural context have changed dramatically. Economic growth has been strong. Poverty has declined from 53.2 per cent in 2004 to 13.5 per cent in 2014, although a large share of the Cambodian population has moved only slightly above the poverty line and there are significant movements in and out of poverty. Furthermore, there has been a rise in non-agricultural income opportunities for rural households, such as garment factories and the construction industry. This has led to increasing labour shortages in rural areas.

With a focus on poor rural households, the main areas of IFAD's support have included agricultural training and extension services, decentralization of public service delivery, group revolving fund and rural infrastructure. Recently, there has been more attention to access to markets and value chain development for smallholder farmers, as well as resilience to climate change.

A series of projects from around 2000 effectively supported the Government's "decentralization and deconcentration" policy by

channelling investments for agriculture and rural development through decentralized structures and providing provincial departments and sub-national administrations with opportunities for "learning by doing".

The portfolio has also contributed to improved agricultural productivity and diversification, although it has been a challenge to move towards more demand-driven modalities of farmer training and extension, as opposed to traditional standardized training packages.

According to the evaluation, consistent attention to gender issues across projects has contributed to enhancing women's access to economic opportunities as well as women's participation in public spheres.

IFAD's strategy and design for the projects shifted in an effort to adapt to the country and rural contextual changes. However, there were also some limitations on which we can reflect for the future. First, the portfolio remained largely static until around 2010 with the repetition of largely similar approaches – forming groups of poor rural households, and providing agricultural training and extension services combined with group revolving-fund support. Second, there was inadequate reflection on increasing labour shortage in rural households. For example, the projects continued to provide training in labour-intensive technology.

Among the main recommendations from the evaluation are as follows. First, to develop and operationalize a two-pronged strategy

to support agricultural commercialization geared to relatively advanced smallholder farmers, and coping strategies of poor households. Second, to balance investment in human capital and rural organizations with tangible items. Third, to pursue more strategic planning and use of IFAD financing to strengthen partnerships with farmer organizations and associations. Fourth, to explore options for supporting regulatory services in agriculture in future pipeline development. And lastly, for IFAD to work with the Government to strategize and facilitate mobilization of other partners to invest in smallholder agriculture development.

I am sure that the discussion today will be useful for reflecting on the future cooperation between IFAD and the Royal Government of Cambodia and I look forward to your active participation.

I thank you for your attention.