

OVERVIEW

I. Introduction

- 1. Background** The book, “Evaluation for Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Transformation,” * published in the World Bank Series on Evaluation and Development, provides an overview of evaluation practice at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). It was written by Oscar A. Garcia, Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE), and Osvaldo N. Feinstein, an Argentinian academic, practitioner and reference in the field of development evaluation. The book also includes input from other experts in evaluation practice.
- 2. Relevance** The Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD (IOE) provides assessments of IFAD’s policies, strategies and programmes, identifying the factors which play a role in tackling poverty alleviation in rural areas. Evaluations make note of what works, what does not, and why. IOE’s long experience in this regard and the Fund’s use of evaluation results are increasingly relevant as the international development community intensifies its focus on measuring and improving efforts to eradicate poverty in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 3. Focus** This book shows how evaluation practice has progressively strengthened IFAD’s capacity to develop, assess, and improve its operations. It looks at how independent evaluation has evolved to reflect, respond to, and inform changing expectations of development assistance, and how evaluation products and methodologies, both at IFAD and elsewhere, have benefitted from key reviews and lessons learned. The book concludes with reflections on some of the challenges that lie ahead and how independent evaluation can continue to evolve and enhance the impact of development initiatives on people’s lives.
- 4. Time frame** The book spans the history of monitoring and evaluation at IFAD, focusing primarily on major developments between 1983 and 2015, when IOE conducted more than 400 evaluations at the country, corporate, thematic and project levels. In that time, evaluation at IFAD went from being a management-support function to a full-fledged independent evaluation outfit, with a direct reporting line to the Fund’s Executive Board.

II. Evolution of evaluation practice

- 5. Evolution** The publication summarizes key phases in the evolution of evaluation practice, both at IFAD and in the greater development community. It reflects on key structural features like the IOE Executive Board and the Evaluation Committee; important partnerships and external bodies, such as formation of the Evaluation Cooperation Group for development banks and the United Nations Evaluation Group; evaluation criteria and evaluation ratings;

*The book was published by Routledge, Taylor and Francis group and is available [here: https://bit.ly/2MtJkht](https://bit.ly/2MtJkht)

how methodology has been adjusted and amplified to reflect changing expectations and challenges, both in the field and among the available data and information. One of the key understandings that has emerged over time is the usefulness of mixing methods, such as combining the breadth of quantitative methods with the depth of qualitative views.

III. Methodology and thematic considerations

6. **Fundamental questions** The book discusses fundamental concepts in planning and carrying out evaluations, some of which, though specific to IFAD, are eye-opening in their scope. In evaluation, the gathering of evidence and formulation of questions are intrinsically linked to an understanding of how specific interventions lead to results and, thus, how those results can be measured for insight into the effectiveness of programmes, policies and strategies. For example, IOE considers dimensions such as rural poverty impact; innovation and scaling up; gender equality; natural resource management, and adaptation to climate change.
7. **Inclusiveness and sustainability** Just as social and economic development guidelines have evolved to include the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, evaluation practice, too, has been fine-tuned to reflect increasing focus on leaving “no one behind” in development, and achieving this sustainably. For example, the introduction of specific, gender-related criteria and indicators in IFAD’s Evaluation Manual, together with pivotal evaluations, contributed to IFAD’s adoption of a gender policy in 2012--and continues to influence the formulation of relevant projects and evaluations. The book highlights treatment of other key considerations, such as the special challenges facing indigenous peoples; the correction of previous assumptions about how pastoral communities function; the role of rural youth; natural resources management, and water conservation.
8. **Communication and knowledge** Fostering learning from evaluation results and the sharing of experiences and lessons is part of the role of IOE and is one of the themes discussed in the book.

IV. Challenges and Opportunities

9. **New challenges** IFAD’s mandate to contribute to sustainable and inclusive rural transformation is more relevant than ever. Its capacity to evaluate the results of its work and build on its impact will continue to play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of its interventions.
10. **Complex landscape** A more nuanced and complex development environment brings new challenges and opportunities for evaluators, who will need to sift through the numerous SDG indicators, navigate complex partnerships--including those with increasingly-active private-sector entities--and address continued inconsistencies and gaps in data among different sources. Information and communication technology offers numerous opportunities to improve

the speed and accuracy of communication, data-gathering and knowledge-sharing, though there are significant differences in the availability of specific technologies from one location to another and one situation to another. As the book details, IOE organized in 2017 an international conference on information and communication technologies for evaluation (ICT4Eval) to discuss recent ICT innovations which can be used in evaluation.

V. The Way Forward

11. **The evaluation lens** Through this book, IFAD's independent evaluation practice provides a unique view of development-evaluation initiatives, both at country-level and internationally. The adoption of the SDGs presents a common vision, and the SDGs provide guidance through targets and indicators. At the same time, they raise new questions about the most effective ways to measure progress and increase the impact of the work undertaken by IFAD and its partners in the United Nations, by governments and private-sector entities, and in communities around the globe. Finding the answers is an ongoing task and IFAD will need to be able to adjust its programmes, policies and strategies. The evaluation function, too, will need to continue to evolve, facilitating a constant and fluid process of accountability and learning. In short, the book demonstrates that evaluation at IFAD has evolved successfully, helping to enhance the Fund's effectiveness in promoting a more inclusive and sustainable rural transformation.