

ISSUES PAPER

23 October 2019

2019 ANNUAL REPORT ON RESULTS AND IMPACT OF IFAD OPERATIONS (ARRI)

Relevance of IFAD project interventions

1. Introduction

1. **Background.** Five fundamental evaluation criteria are used by most development organizations to assess project performance: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, and Impact. Some of these criteria have been the subject of earlier learning themes,¹ such as Sustainability and Efficiency. In December 2018, IFAD's Executive Board agreed upon "Relevance of IFAD project interventions" as the learning theme for the 2019 Annual Report on Results and Impact of IFAD Operations (ARRI).
2. **Objective and Rationale.** This Issues Paper² aims to unbundle the criterion of Relevance to identify key factors contributing to IFAD interventions meeting their development objectives. Many aspects highlighted in the 2018 ARRI as critical to project performance fall under the assessment of Relevance. These aspects will be closely examined, in particular, a thorough understanding of the country context (including government capacity) as well as the quality and appropriateness of project design to the country context and in mitigating risks.
3. In addition, the criterion of Relevance shows the highest disconnect between IOE and Management self-ratings. Therefore, by unpacking the key factors driving Relevance, this study will also contribute to further harmonize independent evaluation and self-evaluation systems. This learning theme is also timely for the evaluation community. OECD-DAC, the body which serves to harmonize evaluation criteria among multilaterals to foster comparison, is reviewing its definitions of evaluation criteria with an expected report in 2019.
4. **Methodology.** This learning theme issues paper: (i) compares the definitions of Relevance used in IFAD, and its key partner organizations; (ii) unbundles the Relevance criterion to gain a better understanding of its constituent parts; (iii) analyses ratings of Relevance and related criteria; and (iv) draws some lessons from the analysis, as well as proposes possible ways forward.
5. This issues paper is based on a desk review of evaluation and management reports, and key informant interviews. Given its focus on the constituent parts of the criterion

¹ In accordance with the Evaluation Policy, IFAD's Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) will prepare the ARRI, its flagship report. As in previous years, the ARRI will include a dedicated chapter on a major learning theme. The topic for the learning themes is agreed with the IFAD Executive Board, with the aim of deepening the analysis on selected issues that merit additional reflection and debate in order to enhance the performance of IFAD operations.

² This Issues Paper was prepared by Chitra Deshpande, Senior Evaluation Officer, and the independent consultant Willem Zijp with support from Valentina Di Marco, Mankan Koné, Lorenzo Moncada and Laura Morgia of IOE.

Relevance (quality of project design, targeting, and coherence with government policies and country context), it closely examine 34 projects that underwent IFAD's Quality Assurance (QA) review (which only began in 2008) and were evaluated by the end of 2018 (Annex 2). Statistical analysis on the ex-ante Quality Assurance ratings on project designs and ex-post evaluation ratings of these projects at completion was conducted. In addition, qualitative analysis was conducted including the development of select case studies from the project sample to draw key lessons. More detailed explanations for these analyses and the case selection are presented in the related sections.

2. Defining and Rating Relevance

6. **Definitions.** Over the last decade, IOE has used three different definitions of relevance outlined in table 1. The first ones are derived from the first and second editions of IFAD's evaluation manuals while the last was the result of the harmonization effort between Management and IOE. In 2017, IFAD Management and IOE agreed upon the use of a harmonized definition of Relevance.³ The main difference between these definitions of Relevance and the current one is IOE's earlier focus on inequality. It is now agreed that targeting is assessed, not inequality, although key informant interviews indicated that not all staff appear to be aware of the changes.

Table 1
Comparing IOE Definitions of Relevance

<i>First edition IFAD Evaluation Manual⁴ (2009)</i>	<i>Second Edition IFAD Evaluation Manual (2015)</i>	<i>Harmonization Agreement (2017)</i>
The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, institutional priorities and partner and donor policies. It also entails an assessment of project coherence in achieving its objectives.	The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, institutional priorities and partner and donor policies. It also entails an assessment of project design and coherence in achieving its objectives. An assessment should also be made of whether objectives and design address inequality , for example, by assessing the Relevance of targeting strategies adopted.	The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, institutional priorities and partner and donor policies. It also entails an assessment of project design, coherence in achieving its objectives, and relevance of targeting strategies adopted.

7. A better understanding of Relevance can be achieved by situating IFAD's definition in relation to those of other international development agencies. Thus, IFAD's definition was compared with that of the OECD/DAC (that plays a clearinghouse function in the debate about evaluation criteria), IFIs (World Bank, Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank), UN agencies (United Nations Development Program, World Food Program, Food and Agricultural Organization) and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research.
8. Twelve elements of Relevance were found across the ten international agencies compared as presented in table 2. The key elements found in the **definition of relevance**⁵ for the majority of international agencies were as follows with their frequency indicated: i) consistent with country needs (90 per cent); iii) consistent with partner and donor policies (80 per cent); ii) consistent with beneficiary requirements (70 per cent); iv) assess design and coherence to achieve development objectives (DO) (70

³ Agreement between IFAD Management and the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD on the Harmonization of IFAD's Independent Evaluation and Self-Evaluation Methods and Systems Part I: Evaluation Criteria. 23 February 2017.

⁴ Office of Evaluation: Evaluation Manual METHODOLOGY AND PROCESSES. Rome, April 2009.

⁵ This comparison looks at the key definitions only. Clearly, each organization has expanded views of their criteria in their literature, but including that would make the comparison unmanageable and meaningless.

per cent); and v) determine if project is still relevant under changed circumstances (40 per cent).

Table 2
Comparing Relevance definitions⁶

Key Elements of Relevance	International agencies										Total Frequency
	UNDP	IFAD ⁷	FAO	OECD DAC	WFP	CGIAR	IDB	World Bank	AfDB	ADB	
1) Consistent with Country Needs		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	90%
2) Consistent with Partner and Donor policies	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	80%
3) Consistent with Beneficiary Requirements	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				70%
4) Assess design and coherence to achieve DO	X	X	X	X	X		X	X			70%
5) Determine if project still relevant under changed circumstances	X		X	X	X						40%
6) Government capacity, fragility, risk	X	X	X					X			40%
7) Consistent with Institutional Priorities		X					X				20%
8) Assess Relevance of Targeting Strategies	X	X									20%
9) Consistent with global priorities			X			X					20%
10) Knowledge management, lessons learned	X							X			20%
11) Assess DO and design to address inequity	X										10%
12) Sufficient scale	X										10%
Applicability by Agency	75%	58%	58%	42%	42%	33%	33%	33%	8%	8%	

9. International agencies can be categorized by the percentage of the elements they include in their definition of relevance. While most of the agencies apply at least four of the elements (those listed above), United Nations agencies and the OECD/DAC offer the most comprehensive definition which include five to nine elements. International financial institutions (IFIs) apply fewer elements from four to two elements.
10. The minimalist approach espoused by the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank includes only two elements. Project relevance is defined only as being consistent with country needs and partner and donor policies. Taking such a limited perspective on Relevance and considering its generally good performance, raises the question of whether Relevance is still relevant as a criterion – a question that was raised

⁶ Not all organizations are equally succinct in their definition of Relevance, and it was sometimes necessary to consult their more detailed guidelines, while focusing on comparable elements.

⁷ Elements 5 and 6 are included in the core questions used to assess and rate relevance in IFAD's second edition of the Evaluation manual, but were more prominent in the first edition.

during the OECD/DAC discussions on evaluation criteria to which IOE is a participant.⁸ Annex 1 provides more details on the general discussion.

11. UNDP, IFAD and FAO offer the most comprehensive definitions of relevance. They also appear to be key champions of the poor, insisting on alignment with the needs of the poor for a project to be relevant. In contrast, projects do not need to specifically address the needs of the poor to be relevant, according to the definitions of three major IFIs (World Bank, AfDB and ADB). This Paper considers that distinction to be crucial in any discussion about project relevance. IFAD brings a unique perspective to the development debate, as it places the needs of the rural poor at the centre of Relevance, connecting a country's pro-poor policy environment with project quality and a government's implementation capacity.
12. The process of rating Relevance also reveals aspects of the criterion that are not explicit in the definition. For example, the fifth most prevalent element – "Determine if project still relevant under changed circumstances" – is not included by AfDB or IFAD. However, in rating Relevance, AfDB only gives a highly satisfactory rating for Relevance, if the continued relevance has been safeguarded. Similarly, when rating Relevance IOE assesses whether the project design or targeting strategy remained appropriate to the country context or the beneficiaries' needs.⁹ IFAD Management's Project Completion Report Guidelines (2015) also state that the review assesses "the relevance of project interventions at the time of project design and in today's context." This focus on maintaining relevance throughout the project's life makes the criterion more dynamic and suitable for assessing interventions in an increasingly complex world. This implicit aspect in IFAD's definition may also contribute to the disconnect in IFAD Management and IOE's ratings of relevance.
13. **IFAD's Performance in Relevance.** Relevance is rated only at project completion by IFAD Management in Project Completion Reports and by IOE in various types of evaluations. The overall ratings are presented annually on a cumulative three-year moving basis in IFAD Management's Results and Impact on Development Effectiveness (RIDE) report and in IOE's ARRI. The RIDE documents between 2007 and 2018 show consistently high ratings for project relevance, gradually improving both in overall ratings.¹⁰ This strong performance led to IFAD declaring that its Ninth Replenishment Consultation (IFAD9) Results Measure Framework (RMF) target had been met at 90 per cent, despite being below the target of 100 per cent. Consequently, Relevance was no longer assigned an RMF target from the Tenth Replenishment (IFAD10).
14. For IOE, Relevance remains a very important criterion which should continue to be monitored in the Results Measurement Framework (see ARRI 2017). While it is clearly an area of strength and consistently the top-ranked criterion for performance in the ARRI, recent IOE ratings are significantly lower than the high of 95 per cent in 2008-2010 with a flat trend between 2012 and 2017. Notably, in the latest period of 2015-2017, performance in Relevance is only 83 per cent moderately satisfactory and above and no projects were rated highly satisfactory as shown in Chart 1. In addition, the decline in the average rating of Relevance from 4.35 in IFAD9 (2013-2015) to 4.06 in IFAD10 (2016-2018) is statistically significant.

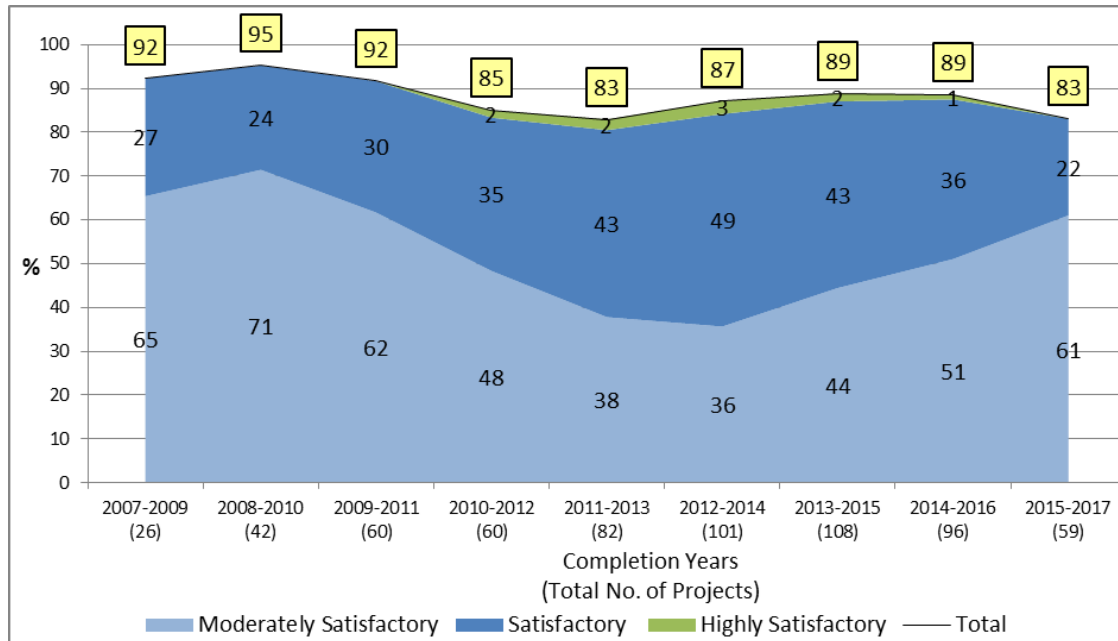
⁸ One perspective espoused by Caroline Heider, former Director Gender and Senior Vice-President, Evaluation of the World Bank is that relevance as a criterion is no longer relevant when asking if a project is aligned with priorities and policies of the target groups, recipient and partners since policies are written in ways that can justify a "whole slew of different activities" which makes meeting the bar not difficult. In addition, the world is increasingly complex with many more stakeholders. Therefore, a linear model such as a "critical path" is no longer useful and a systems-based approach is would be more effective.

⁹ As per the core questions for assessing and rating relevance in IOE's second edition of the Evaluation Manual.

¹⁰ IFAD Management's view of relevance as a strength which no longer requires corporate attention is also reflected in the RIDE reports. The RIDE reports from 2007 until 2012 provided useful explanations, and contained good and bad practice examples. From 2013, the RIDE was much reduced in size and scope, and the treatment of relevance was reduced drastically. Annex X summarizes the key trends in the ratings, and the key RIDE observations.

Chart 1

Project Relevance: Per centage of projects rated moderately satisfactory or better by three-year moving period



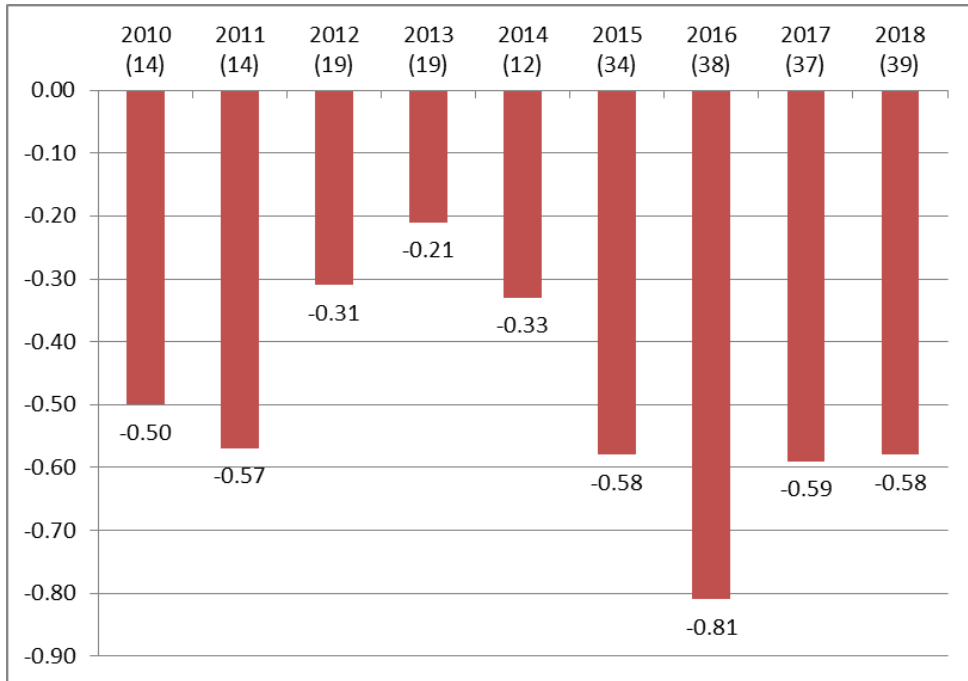
Source: IOE evaluation database (PCR/V/PPE), February 2019.

15. Despite IFAD's historically strong performance in Relevance, it is the criterion with the highest average rating disconnect with Management at -0.56. The average rating disconnect for Relevance as reported in the ARRI has ranged between -0.4 to -0.55, the latter in the 2007-2017 period. This is considerably higher than the overall average rating disconnect between IOE and the Program Management Department (PMD) for all criteria of -0.31 in the same period.
16. While the rating disconnect in Relevance has decreased since the introduction of the Harmonization Agreement in 2017, it remains the highest and is likely to be affected by changes to the project design process. Chart 2 presents an analysis of the disconnect in average ratings for Relevance based on the year the evaluation was conducted (versus the year the project completed). It shows that the disconnect was highest in 2016 (-0.81) after the publication of the second edition of the Evaluation Manual, but has reduced significantly since IOE and Management entered the Harmonization agreement. The Harmonization agreement resulted in Management including an assessment of the Relevance of targeting strategies under Relevance in the PCR assessments.¹¹ However, the disconnect remains significant indicating other contributing factors such as quality of project design which will be explored in the next section.

¹¹ <https://webapps.ifad.org/members/eb/120> (The 2017 EB).

Chart 2

Recent trends in the disconnect between Management and IOE ratings for relevance



Source: IOE evaluation database (PCR/V/PPE), February 2019.

17. In summary, virtually all IFI's recognize Relevance as the fundamental evaluation criterion. IFAD uses a more comprehensive definition than most, to guide its operations to address its unique mandate. IOE considers an examination of Relevance is needed, for three reasons: (i) the recent decline in satisfactory ratings; (ii) Relevance having the highest average rating disconnect between IOE and Management; and (iii) some recent project design changes that may negatively impact Relevance ratings. Most importantly, IOE considers Relevance a key evaluation criterion that links project quality (at design and during implementation) with the specific country context, hence the unbundling of this criterion below.
18. **Unbundling of Relevance.** Relevance is the foundational criterion for development interventions. It is rated highly in IFAD, but its rating needs to go beyond simply checking off alignment with IFAD's mandate and the priorities of the beneficiaries and borrower. The next question is to identify facilitating and constraining factors of relevant project interventions. For that, this Paper proposes the following conceptual framework presented in Table 3 to facilitate the discussion about project relevance in IFAD.
19. This framework presents four main features of Relevance for IFAD: i) empowering rural poor; ii) pro-poor policy environment; iii) project design; and iv) implementation capacity. They are derived from the key elements presented in table 2 and have been elaborated upon based on preliminary findings drawn from the literature review of evaluations, QA documents and interviews with IFAD staff. For example, empowering the rural poor relates to the assessment of relevance of targeting strategies and consistency with beneficiary requirements; pro-poor policy environment to consistency with country needs, partners and donor policies; project design with assessing design and coherence to achieve DOs; and implementation capacity to government capacity, fragility, risk. They translate these evaluative elements into aspects which need to be addressed throughout the project cycle.
20. In relation to these features, there are a number of facilitating factors which contribute to strong performance in Relevance which are found in the country context or the project quality and fall under the purview of government in part and IFAD. Country context includes the beneficiaries' priorities, government policies as well as capacities to design, implement and evaluate projects. Project quality includes the usual elements of:

responding to the rural poor with appropriate project interventions; ensuring that institutional arrangements are adequately understood and improvements are realistic and appropriate; managing risks; safeguarding people and the environment, as well as monitoring and managing for results. This conceptual framework will be used to guide the quantitative and qualitative analyses and to examine in-depth six cases drawn from the original sample of 34 projects in the next chapters.

Table 3
Conceptual framework for IFAD project relevance

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Country Context</i>	<i>Project Quality</i>
1) Empowering Rural Poor	Ensures that <u>rural poor are enabled and empowered</u>	Enabling and empowering the poor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solid Targeting, links with SECAL • Participatory process to formulate, monitor and adjust the log frame • Designing flows of funds that include decisive power of the poor • Beneficiary assessments during implementation
2) Pro-poor policy environment	Has the resolve and capacity to create and maintain a <u>pro-policy environment</u>	Enhancing the pro-poor policy environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use its convening power for research and agenda setting, create pro-poor partnerships • Ensure that the aggregate of relevant projects makes up a relevant portfolio
3) Project Design	Has the capacity and motivation to <u>design projects</u> that respond to the needs of the rural poor	Improving the quality of project design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a solid case for the relevance of the project • Ensure high quality, participatory targeting • Log frame include indicators on reduced inequalities
4) Implementation Capacity	Has <u>implementation capacity</u> , commensurate with the requirements of the project, while ensuring that objectives and components are restructured as circumstances change	Insisting on comprehensive institutional analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding relevant incentives, the political economy, key HR policies • Comprehensive approach to capacity building and maintenance

3. Main findings

21. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted to further understand what factors drive performance in Relevance and how they contribute to interventions meeting their development objectives. The methodology and findings of these analyses are presented below.

Quantitative Analysis

22. Statistical analyses were conducted based on ratings in IOE's all evaluation database¹² to identify the relationship between Relevance and other criteria. It includes a sample of 344 projects evaluated by IOE since the year 2000. These statistical analyses included correlation analyses¹³ between the ratings for Relevance and i) other evaluation criteria at completion; ii) Project Supervision Report (PSR) ratings during implementation; and iii) ex-ante Quality Assurance (QA) ratings (limited to the sample of 34 projects as explained in paragraph 5).

23. For the QA analysis, the sample included 34 completed projects which were both evaluated by IOE (at completion) and QA (at entry). The objectives of the correlation analysis between IOE and QA ratings were to: (i) explore the correlation between

¹² Version of 11 February 2019.

¹³ Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficients, including a test for statistical significance. The analysis is conducted with Stata. Note that given the limited size of the sample, the results (correlation coefficients) are sensitive to the number of observations on which the correlation is performed.

Relevance at completion (IOE ratings) and selected aspects rated at QA; and (ii) explore if/how the overall QA assessment predicts actual project performance at completion.

24. **Relevance is positively correlated with all other IOE evaluation criteria at completion.** Among IOE evaluation criteria, Relevance presents the highest average rating (4.4) and the lower variation (standard deviation of 0.77). Relevance appears to be correlated positively with all IOE evaluation criteria. Besides project performance and overall project achievement (which are correlated by definition as they are composite criteria), the strongest correlations are with effectiveness, sustainability, rural poverty impact and IFAD performance as a partner.
25. **Relevance has a weak but positive correlation with selected Project Supervision Report (PSR) ratings during implementation.** A correlation analysis¹⁴ of IOE ratings for evaluation criteria was done versus Management's final Project Supervision Report ratings¹⁵ given during implementation. Relevance is positively and statistically significantly correlated with the seven PSR criteria¹⁶ related to Relevance that were included in the analysis. Nevertheless, the correlations are weak. The strongest correlation is with "Likelihood of Achieving the Development Objective", meaning that projects which were assessed to be more likely to achieve their development objective (DO), tended to be rated better in terms of Relevance. The correlation with "Targeting & Outreach" is weak which is surprising since targeting is an important element that IOE takes into consideration when assessing Relevance. However, this may explain the limited improvement in the rating disconnect once targeting was incorporated into Management's definition.
26. **No statistically significant correlation was found between IOE and QA ratings.** IOE ratings are slightly negatively correlated with all the overall ratings of QA (including the overall quality). Although the correlation is not statistically significant, it indicates that the QA Review assessments do not necessarily predict the final project outcome. **This supports the importance of implementation and continued relevance.**
27. **In terms of meeting development objectives, IOE and QA ratings were aligned in most cases (62 per cent).** The sample was also analyzed in terms of whether the QA review considered them likely to meet their development objectives and whether IOE confirmed that the development objectives were met, as indicated by a satisfactory rating (4 or more) in overall project achievement. Overall, QAG and IOE were aligned in their respective ex-ante and ex-poste assessments of projects for 62 per cent of the projects. As shown in chart 3, 56 per cent of the projects in the sample were predicted to meet their DOs and did, while 23 per cent were predicted to meet their DOs but did not. At the same time, 15 per cent of projects were predicted not to meet their DOs and instead did, while 6 per cent were predicted not to meet their DOs and did not.

¹⁴ This analysis is based on a sample of 266 completed projects evaluated by IOE (at completion) for which PSR ratings are available. PSR ratings were downloaded from ORMS on October 23, 2018 and refer to the most recent supervision report available for each project.

¹⁵ The system of PSR ratings changed in 2018 resulting in a change in nomenclature for some criteria (e.g., Targeting & Outreach) and removal of others.

¹⁶ Targeting and Outreach, Institutions and Policy Engagement, Quality of Project Management, Human and social Capital and Empowerment, Quality of Beneficiary Participation, Responsiveness of Service Providers, Likelihood of Achieving the Development Objective.

Chart 3

Projects categorized by likelihood and actual project achievement (34 projects)

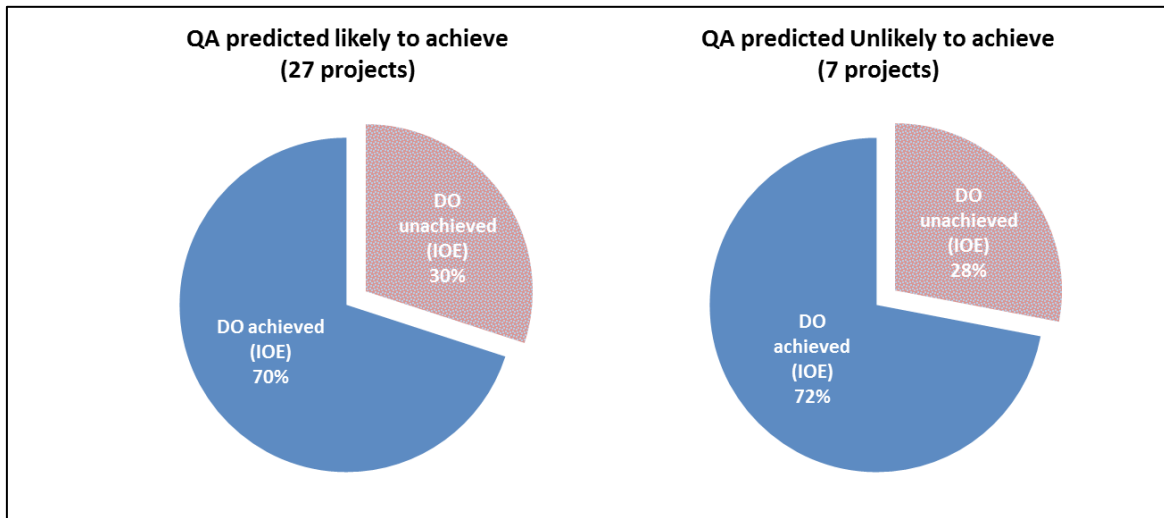
		IOE Overall project achievement		
		"achieved"	"unachieved"	Total
QA Likelihood of achieving development objectives	"likely"	56%	23%	80%
	"unlikely"	15%	6%	20%
	Total	71%	27%	100%

Source: IOE evaluation database (PCR/V/PPE), February 2019.

28. ***Ironically, a slightly higher proportion of projects deemed "unlikely" to meet their DOs actually met them according to IOE.*** Among the projects that were predicted to meet their DOs, it would be expected that the majority would indeed do that; while within the group of projects that are predicted not to meet their DOs, the majority would indeed fail. Chart 4 shows that this is the case for the group predicted to meet the DOs (in which 70 per cent of projects are actually successful at completion). In this case, QA and IOE were aligned in most cases when projects were predicted to meet their DOs. Nevertheless, the proportion of successful projects is slightly higher within the group of projects predicted not to meet their DOs (72 per cent). This means that the QA and IOE were not aligned in most cases when projects were predicted to not meet their DOs. **This suggests that there is no correlation between the prediction made at QA and a project's actual success. Alternatively, one may argue that "unlikely" judgements trigger additional efforts/design adjustments which positively contribute to project performance.**

Chart 4

Relative frequencies QA vs IOE within "likely" and "unlikely" groups



Source: IOE evaluation database (IOE vs QA database), February 2019.

29. In summary, the quantitative analysis shows the fundamental importance of Relevance which is positively and statistically significantly correlated to all evaluation criteria and especially with those critical to development effectiveness: effectiveness, sustainability, rural poverty impact. Also, Relevance is positively correlated with selected Project Supervision Report (PSR) ratings during implementation. Somewhat surprisingly, the IOE ratings are slightly negatively correlated with all the overall ratings of QA ratings (including the overall quality). This confirms that there is no correlation between the prediction made at QA and a project's actual success. The reasons for this will be explored further in the chapter on the cases studies.

Qualitative Analysis

30. The qualitative analyses based on the QA and IOE reviews of the 34 sample projects provide insight on key factors that constrain and facilitate better performance in Relevance. The qualitative analysis takes evidence from evaluations, QA recommendations from the period 2008-2010, when the sample projects were reviewed, as well as QA learning notes from 2008 to 2018.
31. **While QA ratings are not definitive predictors of project success, the QA recommendations indicate ex-ante issues with project design quality.**¹⁷ The first part of the qualitative analysis entailed comparing the issues raised by the QA review during the period (2008-2010) when the sample projects were assessed with issues raised by IOE on Relevance. The more frequent QA recommendations were: implementation arrangements, monitoring and evaluation (including the log frame), technical issues, governance, targeting, supervision, working with the private sector, complexity and economic analysis.
32. **The evaluations of the sample projects indicate a number of strengths and weaknesses related to performance in Relevance.** The key strengths centre around project interventions' relevance for rural poor people and the relevance of their objectives; alignment with IFAD's mandate and government policies; and targeting approaches with good poverty analysis. Also strongly represented were participation, flexibility, and integration into government structures. Key weaknesses included poor targeting with insufficient understanding of target group priorities; overly ambitious development objectives; and poor implementation plans. Additional weaknesses included M&E, and a poor understanding of the context, including market conditions, lack of recognition of regulatory frameworks and government structures, and poor risk management.
33. **Interestingly, ex-ante issues and recommendations raised by the QA review are remarkably similar to those identified by IOE found at project completion.** As they occur throughout the project cycle, they may be considered "persistent issues" undermining Relevance. Table 4 below categories these top persistent issues in terms of country context and project quality.

Table 4
Top "Persistent Issues", based on IOE and QAG data

<i>Key Country Context Issues</i>	<i>Key Project Quality Issues</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsiveness to needs of the poor • Lacking Implementation capacity • M&E • Private Sector and market integration • Rigidity in design and implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor targeting • Lack of institutional understanding • Complexity and over-ambition • Lacking readiness • Lack of cohesion reflected in poor log frame

34. **Of the persistent issues, the lack of institutional understanding and implementation capacity were especially prominent among the 34 sample projects.** Poor institutional understanding led to the design of a small project implementation unit (PIU) in the Liberia Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Project to cover a range of thematic and operational tasks, which proved too limited to implement the project satisfactorily. Together, these challenges made the targets set at design overly ambitious, particularly regarding the distribution of poultry and goats to farmers who would then care for and breed them. Similarly, the weak performance of key stakeholders in the Benin Rural Economic Growth Support Project, suggests an inadequate assessment of their strengths and weaknesses at design. The tripartite financing arrangement seemed overly ambitious and/or not appropriate for this context and the capacities of key stakeholders. The Mauritania Value Chains Development Program for Poverty Reduction was also quite ambitious, but rightly focused: the choice

¹⁷ In case these issues were addressed during implementation, they may have resulted in positive outcomes for projects initially considered unlikely to meet their DOs.

of the value chains was appropriate, as they were dominated by women and allowed the programme to reach almost the full number of households compared to the design target. However, the programme may not have sufficiently considered the institutional arrangements necessary for the innovative character of value chain development and intended to tackle too many value chains without a solid understanding of the institutional arrangements.

35. The evaluations also recognized a number of positive examples of implementation capacity and institution building that contributed to the sample projects being relevant and successfully meeting their development objectives. These examples are highlighted in box 2 below.

Box 2

Good practice examples relating to institutions and implementation capacity

- **India.** The institutional arrangements in the India North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas II contributed to the achievement of the project's results. Being embedded within the organisational structure of a national agency gave the project staff a certain weight in the region but also autonomy to operate.
- **Liberia.** The Liberia Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Project started addressing the weak implementation capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture at county and district levels through capacity building and contracting implementation agents. Weak organizational capacity at the community level was addressed by building the capacity of community agriculture facilitators and lead farmers and forming community organizations. This addressed the lack of training prospects at all levels by building capacity on how to deliver and/or make the most of extension services.
- **Viet Nam.** The Mid-Term Review of the Viet Nam Agriculture, Farmers and Rural Areas Support Project (TNSP) recommended adjusting the training approaches in its support for implementation capacity and making them more flexible to better fit local practices and knowledge in order to reach the poorer ethnic minorities better. Moreover, a differentiated approach for "market-ready" and "non-market ready" areas was introduced to better fit the different settings in the highlands versus the lowlands.
- **Tonga.** The Tonga Rural Innovation Project realized that an NGO with clear comparative advantage in community engagement and participatory planning to implement such a project, was pertinent because public agencies did not have enough implementation capacity in that matter. And so was the capacity building of town and district officers to empower local civil servants.

36. **Analysis of the project sample indicates that coherence between project components is an important contributor to project relevance as well.** In Bosnia, the Rural Livelihoods Development Project (RLDP) demonstrated a loss of relevance as a result of some disconnected elements that failed to come together into a cohesive project. The project was envisaged at design to follow a value chain approach with a focus on inclusive business development. The project was designed to replicate the success of its predecessors, the Livestock and Rural Finance Development Project (2008) and Regional Energy Efficiency Programme (2008). However, the success of the value chain approach relied on linkages between specific project value chains, which were lacking in the design. In addition, none of the components included guidance on value chain development as it specifically relates to integrating poorer households. During implementation, the project faced many challenges with the intervention logic, namely a lack of connectivity between the sub-components along the value chain. Matching grant provision was also not adequately connected to the capacity-building measures and value chain integration. Contrary to the QA recommendations, the project's logical framework was not revised at any time throughout the project and the project development objective remained unchanged. In essence, RLDP consisted of two projects following different approaches, using different methodologies, and conducting different baselines and impact studies.

37. The Georgia Agricultural Support Project (ASP) also exhibited issues with coherence in terms of the country context, policies as well as its internal logic. The components of Georgia ASP were a disjointed set of activities with little synergy amongst them resulting in unsatisfactory overall achievement. The geographic areas of interventions of these sub-components were also different. The drinking water component that aimed at bringing potable water to beneficiary houses was clearly not related to either of the two project objectives. The design of the proposed group leasing scenario did not adequately take into account the local context and the legal framework for leasing operation with MFIs. Notably, the IFAD Quality Enhancement (QE) and Quality Assurance (QA) Reviews had suggested that the group leasing model was unlikely to be feasible and its targeting strategy was at the risk of serving medium- and large-scale agro-processing companies only.
38. In sum, the quantitative and qualitative findings highlight the importance of implementation to Relevance and overall project achievement. Project designs need to be appropriate to countries' implementation capacities determined by institutional analyses. The original project design needs to be adapted as and when conditions change in the country context. This adaptation of project designs to changing conditions is an integral part of Relevance. Given this need for continued relevance, the next chapter presents case studies of six projects that were examined from their ex-ante QA review to completion based on the conceptual framework presented in table 3 and in relation to the persistent issues identified in this chapter.

4. Case Studies on Relevance

39. Given ex-ante project design is not the main determinant of project outcome and the importance of "continued relevance", case studies were prepared to examine project relevance throughout the project cycle. Six projects (see table below) were selected from the original sample of 34 projects that underwent both a QA review and IOE evaluation. The initial selection was based on their classification in terms of QA-predicted and IOE-assessed likelihood of meeting development objectives (see Annex 2). The final selection ensured diversity in terms of: ii) region; iii) country income status (MIC/LIC), context (e.g., fragility), and sector. As a result as presented in Table 5, there is at least one project which: QA found likely to meet DOs and did (Group 1 – Viet Nam and Albania); QA found likely to meet DOs but did not (Group 2 – Burkina Faso and Dominican Republic); QA found unlikely to meet DOs but did (Group 3 - Afghanistan); and QA found unlikely to meet DOs and did not (Group 4 - Eritrea). For each case study, the key Relevance features as presented in Table 3 are highlighted: i) Empowering rural poor; ii) Pro-poor policy environment; iii) Project design; iv) Implementation capacity.

Table 5
Six case studies

Six case studies							
Group		Group 1	Group 1	Group 2	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Project Information	Region	APR	NEN	WCA	LAC	APR	ESA
	Country	Viet Nam	Albania	Burkina Faso	Dominican Republic	Afghanistan	Eritrea
	Project	Pro-Poor Partnerships for Agroforestry Development Project (1477)	Mountain to Markets Program (1452)	Rural Business Development Services Program (1425)	Development Project for Rural Poor Economic Organizations of the Border Region (1479)	Rural Microfinance and Livestock Support Program (1460)	Fisheries Development Project (1518)
IOE Ratings	Relevance	4	3	4	3	5	4
	Overall achievement	5	4	3	3	5	3
QA ratings	Quality of Design	5	4	5	5	5	4
	Achieving DO	Likely	Likely	Likely	Likely	Unlikely	Unlikely

40. In each case the QA report, the IOE evaluation, the MTR, and a number of relevant COSOPs were consulted, and the CPM at the time of completion was interviewed.¹⁸ Several questions guided the case studies: (i) why did a well-designed project achieve, or not achieve its DO, and inversely, why did a poor design end up with satisfactory ratings overall; (ii) to what extent were the key dimensions of Relevance (beneficiaries, pro-poor policies, project quality and implementation capacity) helpful in the project's continued relevance. Particular attention was given to implementation capacity, risk management, institution building, and accountability for results.

Case 1. Project Design "Continued Relevance"

41. The **Pro-Poor Partnerships for Agroforestry Development Project in Vietnam** was predicted to meet its development objectives by the QA which was confirmed by IOE. Its development objective was to establish a framework for sustainable and profitable agroforestry development in Bac Kan Province that targets poor rural households. It specifically addresses the issues of isolation, hunger and malnutrition, and language barriers. The project provided empowerment with land titles, enabled women through capacity-building efforts, and assisted emerging rural entrepreneurs with grants.
42. The key feature of this project is perhaps not its overly ambitious design, or its complex targeting, but its impressive efforts to improve the project's relevance during implementation, and attempt to achieve the DOs in the course of implementation. For instance, the log frame was revised three times, each time providing significant, measurable improvements. The project built sustainable, relevant capacity, and introduced participatory and accurate reallocation mechanisms of the forestland titles.
43. IFAD's QA Review had initially highlighted the ambitiousness and complexity of the original design and proposed numerous steps to simplify and adjust it. Nevertheless, the project remained complex. Not less than six different outcomes (improved infrastructure, better farming skills, improved market access, secure land-use rights, pro-activeness in planting trees and improved awareness about innovative environmental services) were expected to be pursued. Moreover, two uncorrelated development paths were expected to promote "new ideas": linking farmers to enterprises and piloting Payment for

¹⁸ One of the costs of the recent reorganization is the loss of considerable numbers of experienced staff. It proved rather difficult to contact at least one CPM for each project, some of whom had already retired from IFAD.

Environmental Services activities and eco-tourism. It was not clear how to operationalize the design in practice. For example, at design, the logical framework listed dozens of outputs and very few quantified indicators. Technical assistance needs were identified for technical fields, not on crosscutting topics such as M&E. These weaknesses, together with the lack of details on key activities, were likely to have contributed to what the project implementation unit described as “feeling lost” during the initial years of implementation.

44. At design, the project was expected to target the upland poor of Pac Nam, Ba Be and Na Ri districts. However, the original design lacked an effective strategy to target the (remote) upland villages and the poorer households and landless within those villages. During the first two years, the project mainly focused on the Tay communities in the lowlands as these were deemed more reachable and approachable. Following recommendations of the MTR, the project revised the manuals and approach to focus on upland poor villages with poverty rates of more than 50 per cent.
45. One of the highly relevant decisions made after project launch was to simplify the set of activities (with the exception of those covered by the GEF grant), and to design each of the main activities as a participatory process, supported through a newly designed project manual. The simple design and easy-to-understand procedures of the Community Development Fund were appreciated. In close collaboration with the government, a significant number of project activities were decentralized, while building implementation capacity among local government agents. It greatly helped that the procedures of the Community Development Fund were easy-to-understand for most stakeholders, particularly given the many different languages spoken in the project area. This project may have been an example of “a solid project implementation unit and committed government can make a success out of a poorly designed project.”

Case 2. Empowering the Rural Poor

46. The **Afghanistan Rural Microfinance and Livestock Support Project (RMSLP)** was predicted unlikely to meet its development objective by the QA, but did, based on IOE's assessment. RMSLP's development objective was to provide sustainable access to smallholders, existing livestock owners and those who aspire to have livestock – with a focus on women, women-headed households, the creditworthy and Kuchis (pastoralists) - to appropriate microfinance services and technical livestock packages (health, management, processing and marketing) and the skills required to engage in new, more productive or more profitable economic, agriculture-based enterprises. Although the project design was overly ambitious the sound targeting diagnostics and implementation resulted in a positive final assessment.
47. The project introduced the Targeting the Ultra-Poor (TUP) scheme, which used a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methodology, including social mapping, wealth ranking and community interviews to identify beneficiary households. Targeting of the Ultra-poor was particularly relevant to the context as it graduated beneficiaries who were previously excluded from borrowing from Afghan banks and microfinance institutions, allowing them to access these institutions through the use of innovative models. RMSLP was to contribute to the promotion of the Government of Afghanistan's key policy promoting the use of Islamic financing. The piloting and development of *shariah*-compliant rural finance products was a key design feature which worked well and attracted significant attention in the Region.
48. The adoption of the BRAC model that targets the ultra-poor helped implementation and ensured that the targeted people actually benefited from the project. This approach was supported with a very good diagnostic stage, a targeting strategy, participatory mechanisms and gender awareness. Although the project was overly ambitious, it managed to successfully meet its development objectives through solid supervision focused on the key elements and M&E based on the solid diagnostics. The MTR also included a number of examples of accountability mechanisms to ensure the poor actually benefited.

Case 3. Project Design/Pro-poor policy environment/Empowering the Rural Poor

49. The **Albania Mountain to Markets Program(MMP)** was predicted to meet its development objectives by the QA. IOE's assessment was also positive in terms of overall achievement but unsatisfactory for relevance. MMP's development objective was to reduce rural poverty by improving the opportunities of the rural poor to participate and be employed in commercially competitive rural supply chains through increased access to markets, technical know-how and finance. The project aimed at strengthening the competitiveness of agriculture, arguing that sustained growth and poverty reduction were best achieved in the context of a liberal market economy, with development initiatives focusing on promoting market-driven and private-sector led employment and income opportunities for the rural poor.
50. **Project Design.** At design, the project was mostly relevant, and of reasonable quality. The logical framework at design was comprehensive and relatively simple, as all the project components' outputs contributed to the same purpose, thus significantly enhancing the project's relevance. However, a number of design as well as implementation issues remained. Unfortunately, the more structural issues were neither analyzed (a light MTR and no institutional analysis) nor were many key QA recommendations implemented. Some of the output and outcome targets remained over-ambitious and having a stand-alone sub-component on capacity building for women did not work, because of its overlap with another component which also targeted women. The institutional environment, targeting realism, and poverty focus of the program should have been reassessed at mid-term. Notwithstanding an overall unsatisfactory project performance at mid-term, only a "light-touch" Mid-Term Review (MTR) was pursued. As a result, no major changes were introduced at mid-term, and all targets set at appraisal were maintained.
51. **Policy Environment.** In the case of Albania, IFAD staff close to the Borrower were aware of shifting areas of attention among government management, namely, away from dependency from IFIs towards EU membership. Two projects prior to this project had been dropped at the request of the GoA, and there has been no further lending to Albania after this project. The institutional analysis and risk mitigation plan were not sufficiently robust to recognize the shift in government ownership, and let the project stagnate, rather than shift the dialogue with Albania towards alternative ways to support the rural poor under an EU-membership scenario. This project also suffered from a serious lack of institutional understanding, contributing to the failure to transform the Mountain Areas Development Agency (MADA) into Albania's National Agency for Regional Development, as foreseen at appraisal. No new institutional assessment was carried out for MADA, despite the fact it was already in charge of managing another IFAD-financed program Sustainable Development Rural Mountainous Areas (SDRMA). MADA rightly retained SDRMA staff to manage MMP, hence ensuring some institutional memory and shared technical knowledge. However, there was no performance review or appraisal of training needs. In the end, the foreseen transition, which was to be carried out as part of the country's plan to access the European Union, did not take place. MADA was still facing a precarious situation at the time of project completion.
52. **Empowering the Rural Poor.** IOE observes, also not for the first time, that the main shortcoming of the design related to the combined approach to value chain and targeting. The project focused on the most vulnerable farmers that were willing to move to market-based activities. However, the project's cost sharing, demand-led approach meant that its grants and loans went towards more commercially-established farmers. These shortcomings were not addressed in a timely manner during implementation.
53. Also, the project followed a two-track approach to mainstreaming gender consisting of setting gender targets for all its core activities, while keeping a standalone component on women's capacity building. This approach was not effective, however, as many activities overlapped. The supervision reports confirm that the pro-poor dimension of MMP was partly lost during project implementation. As put by the 2014 supervision

report, "considering that MADA did not have the right tools to reach the poor producers, and that MMP would maximize its impact targeting the better-offs, MADA focused on its secondary target group, hoping that the poor producers would indirectly benefit."

Case 4. Pro-poor policy environment/Empowering the Rural Poor

54. The **Burkina Faso Rural Business Development Services Program (PASPRU)** was predicted to meet its development objectives but did not. Its development objective was to contribute to rural poverty reduction by developing the local private sector. The design of the project did not provide a sufficiently profound understanding of the targeting, and implementation oscillated between the priority needs of the rural poor, priority financial services, and profitable value chains. This case demonstrates issues with the pro-poor policy environment in terms of government ownership and poverty targeting strategies to empower the rural poor.
55. **Policy environment.** A lack of government ownership, as evidenced by the fact that many of the design and implementation issues highlighted by the QA Review were never resolved (evidenced by effectiveness delay, lack of readiness, staffing not in place by Board Approval, unfamiliarity with the beneficiaries, and poor institutional understanding). The project's relevance was further undermined by the lack of Government ownership in terms of funding. Eighty-nine per cent of Government funds were allocated to management costs (against 12 per cent expected at design). In addition, the Government reallocated BOAD resources to another project and cut considerable resources from PASPRU, without finding an alternative donor.
56. **Project Design.** Possibly as a result of lacking ownership, the project also suffered from a lack of Government and IFAD readiness to push for effective and efficient implementation. The Government was not prompt in replacing key vacant positions among project management staff (director, monitoring and evaluation manager, regional managers). Furthermore, the project lacked support from IFAD. Only five supervision missions were carried out of twelve expected in a period of six years. The evaluation questioned the quality of the support provided by supervision missions with some key expertise missing among team members. The MTR failed to adjust the project internal logic and its implementation manuals to better reflect the changes since the project starting date. The QA recommendation to use the MTR to evaluate the quality and the quantity of services, and adjust targets as needed, was not followed up.
57. **Empowering the Rural Poor.** The project documents take a somewhat problematic approach to the notion of targeting. Targeting in IFAD is generally understood to refer to particular categories of beneficiaries, such as smallholders, pastoralist, women, or youth. In short, poverty targeting is about people. The project documents use the wider notion which includes people, but also the "targeting" of value chains and business services. This inevitably led to confusion. The program was supposed to implement the same strategy adopted by its predecessor *Projet d'appui aux filières agricoles* (PROFIL) which was predictably inappropriate for PASPRU. The geographical targeting was too wide with seven regions targeted. Although the program design made efforts to reach the most vulnerable, PASPRU did not set pre-defined value chains. As it happened, the emerging value chains were most attractive to the better-off rural micro-enterprises (RMEs). At the same time, it was not clear how the project would reach poorer RMEs without penalizing service providers, as cost recovery would be more difficult from poor clients. There was no guarantee that the established Funds would benefit the poorest. Key issues such as decision-making procedures, eligibility criteria, and selection of recipients were not addressed at design. The aim to support 12,000 RMEs was ambitious compared to the 2,700 RMEs strengthened by the previous *Project d'appui aux micro-entreprise Rurales* (PAMER). Also, the risk that the "push for numbers" (QA Review warning at design) would compromise the quality of services and efforts to reach IFAD target groups was realized.

Case 5. Pro-poor policy environment/Project Design

58. **The Dominican Republic Project for Rural Poor Economic Organizations of the Border Region** was predicted to meet its development objectives but did not. The development objective was to increase the income and assets of men, women and youth members of economic organizations through participative, equitable and environmentally sustainable development. It targeted 65,000 poor and extremely poor smallholder farmers and micro-entrepreneurs. A special effort was to be made to reach the poorest and most vulnerable groups: women, children and youth, and Haitian migrants and their descendants. The underlying rationale for the project's relevance was to improve food production for both consumption and markets.
59. **Project Design.** At approval, this was a well-designed, relevant project, responding to the needs of the poor and poorest in parts of the country that had been left behind. The project was aligned with the then government policies and with IFAD's mandate. A number of recommendations made at QE and QA were included in the design, such as the value-chain analysis and more comprehensive training topics. Although the project design was relevant, it lacked readiness, and suffered from a lack of ownership that would negatively impact its implementation. First, the project design only outlined concrete actions on how to reach women and youth, but not other poorer or vulnerable groups. Second, the underlying assumption seemed that benefits would flow from less vulnerable groups to more vulnerable groups. Within beneficiary organizations, the participatory approach lost out to somewhat exclusive discussions between managers and the most productive farmers. Trickle-down did not work, as a result of lacking incentives among the most productive farmers, and of the contents of the discussions that became skewed to reflect the interest of the larger farmers.
60. **Policy Environment.** Several issues delayed the project's implementation. Some of these were beyond the project's control, such as a presidential election and the setup of a new government, as well as the need for parliamentary ratification of high-level decisions related to the project. Clearly, these risks might have been foreseen in the risk analysis, and mitigation measures taken in a timely fashion. Other issues could have been tackled by the project team, such as management, the institutional setting, as well as the inability to meet conditions for first disbursement and the lack of fiscal space. However, the strategy of the country changed during implementation. For instance, agricultural public expenditure increasingly focused on producer prices and subsidies, reducing the relative weight of the project's funds in the national budget for the sector.
61. At mid-term, the project was classified as 'at risk.' The two measures taken (i.e., a change in implementation modality and in implementing agency) were pragmatic solutions to a flawed project that had limited time left for implementation. IFAD's reaction should have been a fairly rigorous restructuring earlier in the project life. As it was, the measures taken attempted to ensure continued implementation progress, but left the development objective achievement in doubt. As a result, the needs of the poor were only addressed to a limited extent. However, the project's outcomes would have been significantly worse, had it not been for CPM's efforts to get the government to transfer the project from a disinterested Ministry of Agriculture, to a keen Ministry of Economy. The results achieved are in no small measure due to that effort.
62. It was clear by Mid-term that the government had lost interest in the project, for instance evidenced by its failure to establish key decision-making bodies, ensure that the Steering Committee would meet and that the Regional Consultative Councils were created. The project was manifestly considered not as relevant as other initiatives supporting the Government's agricultural sector strategy. And even though the project's implementation methodology was changed, the logical framework was not adapted. The weaknesses of the M&E system identified in the MTR were not improved. The risk of limited or changing government ownership was not directly addressed, either at appraisal or during implementation.
63. Related to the above point on ownership and risk, this project lacked sufficient understanding of the institutional framework. An institutional analysis could have

avoided much of the start-up delay and allowed for more effective and efficient implementation of the project through better institutional coordination and policy alignment, while taking a measure of the Government's ownership at design, and during implementation.

Case 6. Implementation Capacity

64. **The Eritrea Fisheries Development Project (FDP) was predicted to not meet its development objective and did not.** FDP's development objective was to raise production and productivity of the fisheries sector while conserving fish stocks and the marine ecosystem. The policy and institutional objectives were to strengthen Eritrea's Ministry of Marine Resources and support the restructuring of the cooperative system. Eritrea had large numbers of poor rural people, with widespread starvation throughout most of the rural areas. The poor had extremely limited opportunities for improved food security given the limits on agricultural intensification. However, the country has 1300 km of coast line, with abundant fish, but with very poorly developed infrastructure, and limited social and institutional capital to sustainably improve catches and provide an alternative food resource.
65. At the time of project design, IFAD was the first IFI to have a meaningful dialogue with the government of Eritrea. This project was also the first operation after a hiatus of about 20 years. The underlying rationale for this project was to create a pilot operation that would allow the Borrower and IFAD to collaborate on a relatively small project and build fisheries and institutional expertise along the way. Eritrea was coming out of a war, but was faced with an ongoing conflict with Ethiopia, with many rural people drafted into the armed forces. The government was lacking capacity at virtually all levels, and an underdeveloped private sector, with the central government determined to manage projects through the public sector.
66. Eritrea had gone through a long period without IFI support and lacked recent experience with project management. The Ministry of Finance had suggested the Ministry of Agriculture as the logical IFAD counterpart, but the senior staff of that Ministry gave little priority to an ocean fisheries project. They actually preferred a fresh water fisheries and agricultural project. However, combining all the activities considered priorities by the various stakeholders would have resulted in an excessively complex operation, and it was decided to carry out two separate, and distinct projects - this one, and one on fresh water fisheries.
67. IFAD underestimated the border disputes between Eritrea and Ethiopia, a situation which remains challenging. As a consequence, the availability of skilled and knowledgeable staff was limited, as most of them were enrolled in the military. Also, it should not be surprising that in a country at war, counterpart funds for the FDP were not provided in a timely fashion. The expectation that the government could set up a semiautonomous, semi-independent cooperative support unit to manage FDP cooperatives proved to be unrealistic. The procurement process conducted to purchase the fishing vessels revealed that the costing estimated at appraisal was far too low, with the market price being seven to eight times more than estimated. The creation of a cooperative support unit as a parallel system proposed at design was resisted by Government and stalled the provision of inputs to fishing communities. The need to ensure government's buy-in was identified by the QA Review but not implemented. That is surprising, as the QA had proposed a number of activities to ensure government's buy-in. Further serious limitations in institutional understanding undermined the project: (i) a lack of understanding of the policy, strategies and plan for conservation; and (ii) a lack of agreement on roles and responsibilities, including no interference by the Government in cooperative management.

68. **In summary, the case studies¹⁹ provide a wide-ranging view of the quality of relevance, but significantly, confirmed the conceptual framework in Table 3 and the key elements of Relevance presented there.** As to the predictive value of the QA review, it must be remembered that its key objective is to improve the quality of the project design, not to speculate on eventual outcomes. In cases where QA recommendations were implemented, as in the case of Afghanistan, the development objective was achieved. Inversely, where QA recommendations were ignored, it often led to failure in achieving the development objective, as in the case of Eritrea. In that case, QA recommendations were not followed up and the QA prediction of unlikely achievement of the development objectives was confirmed. This indicates the need for better accountability to ensure QA recommendations are followed up during implementation.

69. Drawing from these six case studies as well as the findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses, Table 6 presents these positive and negative factors driving optimal or continued relevance for IFAD project interventions. In addition, it is critical to note that all cases had some form of knowledge gap in their designs or during their implementation. The most serious gaps had to do with institutional arrangements, implementation capacity, depth of government ownership, political economy, knowledge management, and learning from doing.

Table 6
Key factors impacting relevance

	<i>Positive influences</i>	<i>Negative influence</i>
Enabled, empowered rural poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A solid understanding of the poor, and a menu of appropriate intervention options: timely, accessible, affordable. • Solid targeting and participatory approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacking government commitment to rural poverty reduction • Poor poverty analysis • Poor targeting, particularly for poor women and girls • Lack of understanding of realistic options for the poor, particularly for the young
Pro-poor Policy Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pro-poor government, committed to borrowing for the poor • Follow-up projects, building on lessons learned and capacity built 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An economic environment that harms, rather than helps the poor • Failure to provide appropriate economic options for the poor • Allowing institutions to exclude the poorest, particularly indigenous people and herders
Project design quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant, simple objectives, aligned with government policies and integrated into government structures • Strong institutional knowledge that would provide a solid knowledge base on the economic, social and political context in which the project will operate, the different stakeholders in the project and their aspirations and conflicts of interest, and the implementation mechanisms to make the project actually work. • Readiness for implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex, rigid and overly ambitious designs with poor component integration and of questionable technical quality • Poor understanding of institutions for the poor • Poor M&E, log frame
Implementation capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued (decentralized) government ownership during implementation • Meaningful follow-up to QA recommendations during early years of implementation, particularly when formalized during the MTR • Support from IFAD staff and technical advisors. Country office support. • Adaptation of the project where and when necessary, maintaining focus on rural poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of focus on beneficiaries and results • Implementation issues, including poor implementation plans, serious and long-term staffing issues, ineffective PIUs, and governance and corruption issues • Underutilization of MTRs, and ignoring QA recommendations

5. Lessons

¹⁹ Cases studies are based on documents at entry, during implementation and at completion, as well as on interviews with the key IFAD staff.

70. Based on the findings and the case studies presented in the previous chapters, this chapter presents five key lessons regarding Relevance in project interventions.
71. **Lesson 1. Ensuring the "continued relevance" of a project intervention requires adapting the design throughout implementation.** Relevance is not a fixed assessment at design, a binary decision on whether the project is relevant or not. Yet, typically the section on Relevance in IFAD Project Design Reports just provides a simple reassurance that the project targets the rural poor and cites general government and IFAD policies to confirm alignment. This reflects more the simpler definition of Relevance of most IFIs rather than IFAD's more comprehensive definition.
72. A more suitable question **at the design stage** may be whether the proposed project is the most relevant investment to alleviate the poverty of the intended beneficiaries. That question is occasionally being asked at the concept stage and brings about a more meaningful discussion of Relevance. The design team should first identify those policies which would help bring the intended transformation and measure the expected outcomes. Second, it should be explained why a specific project would be the most appropriate to support the key policies of the country and how it is supposed to be more cost effective, as compared with other possible interventions. Third, lessons from similar operations that support the notion that this is the most pertinent intervention for the desired impact should be presented. Advice and guidance should be sought from various government ministries including agriculture, finance, planning or economy regarding whether and how IFAD intervenes to contribute to a project based on reliable data and rigorous analysis that goes beyond pleasing the government.
73. **During implementation**, continued relevance is improved by regular consultations with the beneficiaries and an ongoing policy dialogue with the government as well as close monitoring with the implementing agency. Consultations with the beneficiaries may be done through beneficiary assessments or empowering mechanisms that allow rural poor people to influence the allocation of funding for sub-projects or ensure that they engage in the evaluation of services delivered on their behalf (e.g., constructions they have identified and partially funded). In the interest of continued relevance, the criterion would be assessed during the concept quality discussion, the mid-term review as well as exit. The QA recommendations do not appear to be optimally used, despite the finding that the application of the QA advice leads to better outcomes.
74. To further underline the importance of the relevance debate, we recall that IFAD has poverty and the rural poor manifestly in its definition of Relevance, in contrast with other IFIs, including the World Bank. In a world that must urgently address issues of climate change on the poor, find decent jobs for young people, and reduce increasing wealth inequalities, organizations such as IFAD have a major advantage, provided they continue to push for the highest possible project Relevance as seen from the perspective of the rural poor. Therefore, Relevance needs to be revisited throughout the life of the project to support responsive and appropriate adaptations to the design for the greatest impact on rural poor people.
75. **Lesson 2. Meaningful engagement of beneficiaries in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects enhances project relevance.** This Two key areas, when improved, would be likely to result in higher Relevance: (i) better understanding of the needs and options of the beneficiaries, based on intensive consultation and (ii) improved targeting.
76. Despite reported pressures to reduce field time during project preparation,²⁰ there is no substitute for intensive dialogue which is required to acquire a profound understanding of the issues, priorities, and expectations among the different categories of rural poor people in the project area. That understanding is then translated into a diagnostic and confirmation from the beneficiaries of their commitment to action, a menu of appropriate

²⁰ IFAD's new project design process as of July 2018 foresees only one field mission , removing the second appraisal mission.

options that are relevant, accessible, and affordable are discussed, and priorities agreed and formalized in the log frame.

77. A solid mechanism to enable and empower the rural poor is good targeting. As targeting was the subject of the 2018 ARRI Learning Theme, we refer to that study. In addition, this chapter recognizes three key targeting shortcomings that may need improvement: (i) reduce the mismatch between the needs/capacities of the target groups, and the innovation proposed; (ii) improve follow-through of targeting throughout the project cycle; and (iii) ensure that all IFAD staff and managers have a common understanding of Relevance and targeting.
78. Unfortunately, targeting has both contributed to Relevance, where done well, but also undermined Relevance where shortcomings were found. The Bhutan Market Access and Growth Intensification Project provides an example of poor targeting. The evaluation found that when the project opened all activities to all households, the subsistence households could not fully participate due to the beneficiary contribution requirements (e.g. 70 per cent of cost of dairy cows was expected to be paid by the beneficiary). This meant that the project benefitted the most "emerging commercial farming households" who could fully benefit from the project components. This unsatisfactory result could have been predicted, as the focus of the investments at design, in terms of investment (US\$10.97 million out of US\$13.5 million), was on the component targeted at better off and non-subsistence households.
79. Thus, highly relevant projects have good targeting strategies and engage beneficiaries in responding to these four simple questions: (i) who are the poor; (ii) why are they poor; (iii) what are we going to do; and (iv) how will we do it.
80. **Lesson 3. The role of the government in Relevance is critical: in adopting pro-poor policies, by insisting on pro-poor design, in providing adequate implementation capacity, and ensuring continued relevance during and after the project's lifespan.** Four areas would, when done well, lead to improved relevance: (i) IFAD's role in policy advice and conflict resolution; (ii) government ownership and simple designs; (iii) implementation capacity commensurate to beneficiary needs and project design; (iv) governments managing risk; and iv) longer-term engagement.
81. A **government committed to borrowing for the poor**, maintaining pro-poor policies, and designing pro-poor projects leads to more relevant projects. This entails the government having the willingness, resolve and capacity to create and maintain a pro-poor policy environment. The notion of country and government are not the same, particularly in project design. The country context includes the views of different beneficiary groups, government at local and national levels, the relevant private sector, and concerned community organizations. IFAD has developed the tools and expertise to play its role as honest broker between these stakeholders effectively. Country ownership must go beyond the idea that "this is what government wants." This requires a needs assessment that builds from the COSOP and rural sector performance assessment of the Performance-Based Allocation System (PBAS).
82. **Policy advice and conflict resolution for relevance.** In some countries IFAD finds like-minded governments, and IFAD's focus is on maintaining good relations, information exchange, and fostering partnerships, as in the Vietnam case study. In other countries, government priorities do not include the rural poor and IFAD's focus is usually on advocacy, partnerships of the willing, and fostering champions, as in the Dominican Republic case study. In other countries, there may be actual discrimination against IFAD's specific subgroups (i.e., pastoralists, women, youth, and indigenous peoples). Advocacy may require improving countries' regulatory frameworks to allow the poorest people (including particularly vulnerable groups of women, youth, pastoralists, indigenous peoples) to compete on a level playing field.
83. An example where **government policies and practices diverge from IFAD's** mandate centers around pastoralists who are manifestly targeted by IFAD. As found in

the targeting learning theme, the issue of mobility is **complex and controversial**, internationally, as well as within particular countries. Yet, in line with IFAD's mandate, there is an urgent need to cater to the needs - in terms of health, education and livelihoods - of pastoralists who want to continue leading a mobile way of life. The two main reasons are that: i) pastoralism is the most effective and efficient way of using and managing natural resources in the drylands; and ii) areas with access to water for settlement in these semi-arid and arid regions cannot cater to the entire pastoral population. However, the Ethiopia Second Pastoral Community Development Project interventions catered more to the needs of pastoralists having to and wanting to settle and did not take sufficiently into account the needs of the mobile population.

84. Admittedly, most **policy dialogue** takes place in the context of COSOPs, rather than projects, but two issues are important for project discussions as well. The first issue is the **variation over time in some countries' commitment to the poor or in their perception of IFAD's comparative advantages**. For example, the focus of the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Agriculture shifted during the implementation of the Rural Poor Economic Organizations of the Border Region project away from the rural poor. Although the CPM managed to find a better project champion in the Ministry of Economics, the remedial action did not occur in time to improve the overall project achievement which was evaluated as moderately unsatisfactory. In Albania, IFAD was the only IFI operating in the poor mountainous areas, with limited support from the national government. The government had dropped two other projects prior to the Mountains to Markets Project, and declined to borrow anymore from IFAD upon its closure, focusing on EU support for its eventual membership. In both examples, IFAD needed to detect earlier the shift in government focus to allow for timely dialogue on how IFAD could remain engaged and relevant.
85. Second, the notion of alignment to government policy does not accurately reflect or capture **the reality of different and sometimes conflicting views among governments units**. Some CPMs are struggling to balance conflicting pressures, and it is not exceptional that a CPM is caught on the horns of a dilemma, having to satisfy conflicting demands of IFAD management and the government, both of which may be politically motivated. The compromises found do not always improve the project's relevance.
86. **A lack of implementation readiness is often related to limited ownership and is a key risk to Relevance**. Ownership does not have a widely shared or accepted definition, but it is generally understood to be a measure of government commitment – first to a participatory process of design that responds to the key priorities of the rural poor, and aligns with the government policies, and second, to effective and efficient implementation with assurances of sustainability of the project's results. This government commitment may manifest itself at widely differing levels, from ensuring timely payment of counterpart funds, via maintaining a pro-poor policy environment, to ensuring that procurement follows the agreed rules without government interference, and the timely hiring of capable and motivated staff for the PIU. A robust institutional assessment may provide an early warning and a basis for remedial action when ownership is not at the level it is needed.
87. As to **government's risk management**, there is some concern, expressed by a number of IFAD staff, about balancing risks and concessional lending as well as about the risk of moving into emergency relief rather than development lending. IFAD's mandate to work with the rural poor means that its work often includes a higher level of risk than for IFIs working on the most promising economic opportunities. Most countries accept the higher risk, in return for projects that are relevant for the most vulnerable parts of the rural population, under highly concessional terms. However, there is a concern that with an increasing number of countries graduating, their risk tolerance might dwindle, as the terms for graduating countries are less concessional. At the same time, there are still important pockets of rural poor people in those countries.

88. As to the **quality of mitigation**, evaluations indicate that **the main risks are identified during project design**; however the mitigation of project risks was also an objective of IFAD's ex-ante QA review. The QA recommendations have been very valuable, and the case studies demonstrated that when applied the design was likely to be improved. However, some teams ignore the recommendations which happens at the peril of the achievement of the DO. Better results and risks may be mitigated if: (i) the ex-ante quality design review assessed and rated Relevance in terms of the appropriateness of the project design to the country context; (ii) quality assurance recommendations were included in the terms of reference of all MTRs, which would show how the recommendations have been addressed during implementation.
89. **Lesson 4. A lack of understanding of institutional arrangements together with the lack of implementation capacity ranks as one of the main threats to improved Relevance.** Weak implementation can cripple the relevance of even the best designs. The average government performance rating in the IOE evaluations is a modest 3.9, close to the divide between (Moderately) Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory. IOE evaluations, QA Review comments, as well as the case studies indicate three factors are particularly helpful in successful implementation: (i) continued and sometimes decentralized government ownership during implementation; (ii) timely support from IFAD staff and technical advisors and in particular support from country offices; and (iii) the adaptation of the project where and when necessary, while maintaining the project's focus on the rural poor. It is somewhat surprising that given the positive impact of direct IFAD support that the annual allocation for supervision and implementation decreased since 2008 from US\$50,000 per project to US\$30,000, prior to the accelerated decentralization. Given IOE's focus on continued relevance, and the interesting example of the AfDB putting a premium on efforts to ensure ongoing relevance, it may be worthwhile to revisit these allocations. Even in the case when preparation periods are likely to be shorter, and designs left somewhat incomplete, the current allocation for design (US\$250,000), which is significantly lower than other IFIs, should not be reduced, at the risk of less relevant operations, or poorer quality. However, the allocation for implementation support appears inadequate to fill in the gaps of a speeded-up preparation process and to maintain quality and relevance under changing circumstances.
90. Three ways to **build and maintain local capacity** include: (i) contracting selected services in, from local institutions; (ii) working toward longer term engagements, including improved knowledge management; and (iii) optimizing IFAD's decentralization. Over time, many **countries have built capacity** to undertake selected preparatory tasks in the design of projects, such as social and environmental research or technical training on agricultural, hydrological, or engineering designs. Taken together, some of these country systems are likely to meet IFAD standards for contracting their services in, thus improving relevance while building capacity.
91. **Longer-term engagement with selected borrowers** could break the persistence of implementation and institutional issues. A longer-term engagement, led by COSOPs and informed by a solid portfolio review, would help overcome the limits of a five-or-six year project duration which makes solutions elusive and not resolvable in the timespan of a typical project. Setting longer-term policy and realistic implementation goals, would focus on "how to" mechanisms to improve implementation capacity and inform any new project with a solid understanding of poverty and targeting. Over time, and depending on the country, the collaboration and mutual learning could be built up, with greater dependency on selected country systems as suggested above and in the 2017 ARRI learning theme on financial management.
92. There also is an argument for "**continued relevance**", which is the direction the OECD-DAC discussion is taking as well. **Continued relevance means monitoring during implementation, ensuring that the intervention is still appropriate to the government, the context and the beneficiaries** – making adjustments throughout the life of the project, but also throughout the life of several projects. In fact, the trend

towards longer-term engagements may have actually started at IFAD. As a response to reduced design resources, there has been a rise in the design of multiple phases of a project through a number of additional financing and second phase approvals. A different example of **building longer-term relations is IFAD's decentralization**. In 2018, IFAD accelerated its decentralization process to regional hubs in order to increase its relevance by being closer to the countries and demonstrate a longer-term commitment. Theoretically, this should also allow greater involvement of government in project design. The newly introduced Transition Framework foresees graduating countries from highly subsidized loans to other products.

93. The question is justified if this graduation process may lead to governments designing their own projects. There is no doubt that many governments could design quality projects. However, they may have **trouble designing projects according to the specific requirements of a wide range of donors**. With every additional requirement in the design of IFAD projects (climate change, youth, nutrition, to name some recent ones) the design capacities of many governments will be stretched even further. This increases the risk of government officials distancing themselves from the design process, an issue that is now being addressed under the new guidelines for preparation.
94. **Lesson 5. Well-functioning institutions are a key determinant of higher Relevance**. Unfortunately, "Institutional Arrangements" is a prominent persistent issues raised by the QAG and IOE. A lack of understanding of institutions leads to the problems most often highlighted in both the QAG comments and IOE evaluations: slow implementation, overly ambitious and complex projects that are poorly matched to the limitations of existing capacity, underperforming PIUs, ineffective and inefficient training, missing important risks, failure to address political economy issues or using citizen accountability mechanisms, a lack of ownership or commitment, ambiguous roles and responsibilities among the key stakeholders.
95. As to the insufficient understanding of the **institutional arrangements**, there are two elements that merit attention: (i) a comprehensive institutional assessment; and (ii) a depository of institutional knowledge and experience. While a solid **institutional assessment** should be the pre-requisite for any project design, it need not be exhaustive. Unfortunately, current practice errs on the other extreme, with projects routinely listing the number of agents from Ministry of Agriculture records, but without having done a training needs assessment, or incentives analysis. The point is for the country team to be optimally informed to design and implement the project, keeping in mind the **context** in which the project will operate, the **stakeholders** in the project, and **mechanisms** to make the project actually work.
96. As to the **context**, there is a need for a good understanding of the overall reform challenges, possibly with an assessment of the willingness among the key stakeholders to change. Prior to approval the following areas, of **direct relevance to the project**, need to be addressed: the key political economy aspects; the availability and use of citizen accountability mechanisms; the effectiveness of public awareness communications, opportunities and challenges; and the incorporation of relevant results from the mandatory social assessment in the design and budget.
97. Regarding **stakeholders**, project design reviews need to ensure that:
- All key stakeholders are identified, and where relevant categorized into manageable groups.
 - The roles, accountabilities and responsibilities of the various stakeholder groups are unambiguous, shared, and agreed upon.
 - The links and communications between government staff, private sector operators, and beneficiaries, are made obvious and logical.
 - A skill gap analysis is available, listing the required skills, knowledge and attitudes for various stakeholder groups to play their roles effectively, with a comparison of

those requirements with what is actually available, resulting in a training plan, and perhaps a plan to hire and fire staff and Technical Assistance.

- An analysis of relevant HR policies and practices (for public and private sector staff) is prepared to determine to what extent they are helpful, or constitute a risk to the project, and need change.

98. A **new institutional analysis is not required for all projects** and some projects may utilize the results of earlier analyses. This would be facilitated by the creation of a depository of past analyses which may be developed and housed on-line by an interested Ministry, national library or the IFAD website. The depository would store institutional analyses of previous projects, including those done on behalf of partner organizations. It would be particularly helpful to make use of that knowledge and experience in managing project risk, and to formulate specific institutional indicators for log frames. In countries with a long-standing collaboration with IFAD, such as Burkina Faso as compared to Eritrea, **lessons from earlier implementation experience** should also provide some pointers as to what aspects of an **institutional assessment** would merit particular attention.

6. Way forward

99. Relevance will remain a key criterion in IFAD projects, as it confirms and guides IFAD's unique poverty orientation and commitment to the rural poor. Relevance, taken as a continuum, provides a linking mechanism between project quality and country context and allows for incremental improvements, ensuring value for money for the beneficiaries and the client.

100. **All efforts to improve performance in relevance will happen against a backdrop of change in IFAD.** There have been profound staffing changes that continue to pose a challenge in maintaining tacit knowledge, as well as skills and attitudes that are conducive to improved relevance. Should budgets for consultants be reduced this would have a major impact on the ability of CPMs to deliver. Currently, Management is **concerned** that IFAD's approval process is: (i) too long and too costly;²¹ (ii) limiting country ownership; (iii) lacking in details on components; and (iv) skewed towards internal compliance. Management is presently implementing a plan to reduce the design process to about 12 months, while ensuring stronger country ownership. There is a new format for the design report that will "do away with excessive background information".

101. This pressure to prepare projects in a shorter time frame may result in reduced opportunities for dialogue with the beneficiaries, the borrower, and among IFAD staff, which may have negative effects on key elements of Relevance, including consultation, targeting, and a solid institutional understanding. At the same time, IFAD management is introducing a new **restructuring policy**, which is intended to make the restructuring of projects easier, faster and cheaper. Clearly, the two measures combined (faster preparation and easier restructuring) will make for a nimbler process of designing new projects. The situation is too early to judge, but some risks to Relevance may be considered at this stage: (i) "Doing away with excessive background" may undermine the knowledge bases for many projects; and (ii) the recent restructuring of PMD --which halved the number of rural institutions and organizations specialists and the downgrading of P5-level CPM positions to P4 and filling them with P3-level Program Officers – may carry the risk of less experienced CPMs focusing on processes, rather than engaging substantively with governments. Some relatively recent introductions, such as the support to the private sector and value chains, that are yet to fully crystallize, are sometimes perceived to carry the risk of deviating from IFAD's core values.²²

²¹ Ranging from US\$120,000 to US\$400,00.

²² Some staff argue that in the past IFAD would start a project with a socio-economic assessment to try and understand the needs of the beneficiaries, and discuss various livelihood opportunities directly with them. Once it was clear what interventions would –in the opinion of the beneficiaries—make a positive, transformative change in their lives, the project would be constructed around those interventions. However, value chain projects tend to go in the opposite direction. The

102. As the analysis showed, achieving “optimal” Relevance depends on a range of factors. Arguably, addressing two recurrent issues would have a significant impact on project Relevance. They are the **weak understanding of the institutional arrangements** underlying a project; and the ongoing issue of **limited implementation capacity** in many countries. These persistent issues indicate the need for IFAD to adopt a continued relevance approach which entails adaptive design in recognition that Relevance needs to be dynamic and project interventions need to be adapted to remain relevant for the duration of the project. Long-term engagement will also allow IFAD to build a robust institutional knowledge base of government institutions, implementation capacities and context that may be used to design projects in less time. Nonetheless, as even the best project design may fail due to changed socio-economic, political and environmental contexts the design must be continually adapted through well-resourced implementation support and earlier MTRs. Thus, for continued relevance a project requires good analysis as part of the pre-assessment, good capacities (government and IFAD) to implement the design, and the resources to adapt the design quickly or in a responsive manner.

design now often starts with the identification of market opportunities, and once agreed, the search is on for beneficiaries that fit those opportunities, with may or may not include the poorest.

Annex 1: Key elements in the OECD/DAC relevance discussion

1. The communique of the DAC High Level Meeting, adopted on 31 October 2017, included an encouragement to explore adapting the criteria. As stated in para 23: "We also encourage the DAC and its respective subsidiary bodies to explore adapting the five key evaluation criteria to program evaluations in line with the 2030 agenda". At the 21st meeting of the Evaluation Network members agreed to start a process to explore adapting the Evaluation Criteria. An excellent introductory paper was written, opinions and papers invited, and in a consultative process a draft is being written, to be presented at the 23rd EvalNet meeting in February 2019. The output will be a set of adapted criteria with a user guide to explain their appropriate use and application. The outcome would be higher quality evaluations which apply a set of criteria in evaluations in an appropriate manner, also enabling collaborative work and facilitating comparison and synthesis studies. Below, we summarize a discussion paper written by Hans Lundgren for the 21st meeting of the DAC Evaluation Network, held in Paris, France in March 2018.
2. The origin of the evaluation criteria goes back to the Principles for Evaluation of Development Assistance which was developed by a predecessor body to the Network – the DAC Expert Group on Evaluation. They were agreed to by the members of the Expert Group following a two year period of elaboration and discussions, and subsequently endorsed by the DAC High Level Meeting in 1991. They were a landmark achievement setting out important principles for members related to: the definition and purpose of evaluation, the institutional structure for managing evaluations, the principles of impartiality, independence and credibility, evaluation management processes, and partnerships. The principles are still in use. The DAC Quality Standards were developed through a three-year consultative process with members and partners and agreed to by the network in 2010 and subsequently endorsed by the DAC. On criteria, the quality standards states: The evaluation applies the agreed DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The quality standards recommend the use of the criteria but also clarified that additional or fewer criteria can be used depending on the purpose of the evaluation. It does not recommend a mechanical use of the criteria. The paper then recognizes three relatively "new" types of development assistance, for which the five criteria remain broadly appropriated, their applicability in contexts of complex emergencies could be increased through specific elaboration of some criteria or adding sub criteria. These three types are Humanitarian Assistance, Peacebuilding, UNEG and ECG.
3. The past thirty years have seen rapid social and economic development in many parts of the world, with diminishing numbers of poor, better health and education for many. At the same time, there are countries and regions where development does not seem to take root, governance is moving backwards, civil society space is reduced, conflicts are becoming ever more protracted and the number of refugees and forced displaced persons are reaching new global highs. The rise of extremist violence is another important part of the changed landscape. Other factors influencing the development scene are related to digitalization, artificial intelligence and the new industrial revolution. At the same time, we are witnessing increased inequality in many societies. Demographic shifts, including urbanization and changes in age distribution and are also underlying influencers of the planet's population dynamics. Overall, it is a fragmented and increasingly diverse context. Against such a background, the adoption by the UN of the SDGs in 2015 was an important landmark and provides a vision for a better world where no one will be left behind. The implementation of the 17 goals, 169 targets and the monitoring process with 232 indicators will clearly provide numerous challenges but also opportunities for more holistic and cross-sectoral approaches to development. The question is whether the changes will require a re-set of evaluation criteria. Several possible new criteria have been mentioned, such as leaving no one behind, inclusiveness, diversity, and human rights and gender. It has also been argued that the evolution in evaluation methods and approaches needs to be reflected in the criteria, such as

complexity, coherence, coordination, and the use of new and rapidly evolving technology, for instance. It should be noted that development evaluation has evolved. Over the past fifteen years, we have seen a wave of new approaches. Many hundreds of impact evaluations and a number of systematic reviews have been implemented. New approaches involving complexity and qualitative methods have been developed and are increasingly applied. In short, the current set of evaluation criteria has not prevented the development of new methods and experimentation. Robert Picciotto argues²³ that the DAC criteria would be equally serviceable in other domains of evaluation practice. The DAC criteria are seen as useful and valid for evaluation at project, country, regional/global levels and fit for purpose not only in development but also for developed countries. The article argues for some refinements, notably related to coherence, and also notes that the criteria have proved resilient to shifts in policy doctrines and have demonstrated their worth in diverse operating environments.

4. Following the 21st OECD DAC EvalNet meeting of 14th November 2017, the subsequent workshop in March 2018, sought to 'Progress the Dialogue' around the possible adaptation of the five main evaluation criteria. Key conceptual challenges were identified, including for Relevance: Whose understanding of relevance?
 - a. Definitional issues, such as strategic relevance, relevance to needs?
 - b. relevance to actions of others, relevance for what?
 - c. Relevance emphasizing intention or accomplishment?
 - d. Different dimensions of relevance require specification and definition – this includes strategic, policy, operational relevance.
 - e. Diplomatic and humanitarian/development relevance can also be different criterion.
 - f. A proposal of 'significance' was made to replace relevance.

²³ From his article "The logic of development effectiveness; is it time for the broader evaluation community to take notice?" (published in Evaluation 2013).

Table 1

Key trends in the ratings of Relevance

Year	IFAD Management Ratings for Relevance	Observations
2007	From the high 80's to the 90's	The ARRI numbers show some discrepancy with those of the PPRs, as the latter included only closed, and thus older projects. The trend among more recent project is thus positive.
2008	All ratings in the 90's	Announcement of IOE's new evaluation manual, and an invitation to management to further harmonize RIDE with the new manual.
2009	Overall numbers very close to 100, up from 2006.	A specific note on changing circumstances, and thus changes in relevance reveals good and bad practices: Albania through restructuring, and Cameroun not adapting.
2010	<i>Continued very high (97% and 98%) overall ratings for relevance, but also a higher proportion of 5 and 6 rated projects.</i>	The adoption of a participatory planning process is a key factor in enhancing the relevance of a project's interventions. <i>(From this edition, the outline of the RIDE changes and reports directly against the RMF)</i>
2011	Similar, very high ratings	The relevance of three projects was enhanced (Armenia, Mauritania #1180 and Viet Nam) as their designs drew on projects previously implemented in the same country, thus benefitting from experience and a favourable institutional basis. Some projects' relevance has been further enhanced by flexibility in adjusting its components and objectives to a changing context, as happened in Brazil, Chad (#1144) and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Where weaknesses were observed (Mexico), project design was too complex and had overambitious objectives. Appraisal of the institutional framework was insufficient which negatively impacted relevance
2012	95%	None
2013	Very high	<i>From this edition of the RIDE, the size of the document was sensibly reduced.</i> <i>Relevance is no longer addressed specifically as in the previous editions.</i>
2014	Very high	None
2015	99%	None
2016	100%	None
2017	No rating	None
2018	100%	None

Annex 2: List of projects in the Sample by group

<i>Project ID</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Project</i>	<i>Evaluation type</i>	<i>Completion year</i>	<i>Group</i>
1443	WCA	Niger	Agricultural and Rural Rehabilitation and Development Initiative Project - Institutional Strengthening Component	PCR/V	2013	Group 1
1452	NEN	Albania	Mountain to Markets Programme	PCR/V	2014	Group 1
1449	NEN	Moldova	Rural Financial Services and Marketing (RFSMP)	PCR/V	2014	Group 1
1591	WCA	Niger	Emergency Food Security and Rural Development Programme (PUSADER)	PCR/V	2014	Group 1
1476	NEN	Sudan	Revitalizing the Sudan Gum Arabic Production and Marketing Project	PCR/V	2014	Group 1
1454	APR	China	Dabieshan Area Poverty Reduction Programme	PCR/V	2015	Group 1
1458	ESA	Ethiopia	Pastoral Community Development Project - Phase II (PCDP II)	PPE	2015	Group 1
1504	WCA	Gambia	Livestock and Horticulture Development Project	PCR/V	2015	Group 1
1576	APR	Timor Leste	Timor-Leste Maize Storage Project	PCR/V	2015	Group 1
1477	APR	Vietnam	Pro-Poor Partnerships for Agroforestry Development Project	PPE	2015	Group 1
1451	NEN	Bosnia	Rural Livelihoods Development Project	PCR/V	2016	Group 1
1433	WCA	Mauritania	Value Chains Development Programme for Poverty Reduction	PCR/V	2016	Group 1
1412	LAC	Mexico	Community-based Forestry Development Project in Southern States (Campeche, Chiapas and Oaxaca)	PPE	2016	Group 1
1562	NEN	Moldova	Rural Financial Services and Agribusiness Development Project	PPE	2016	Group 1
1483	APR	Vietnam	Project for the Economic Empowerment of Ethnic Minorities in Poor Communes of Dak Nong Province	PCR/V	2016	Group 1
1501	WCA	Liberia	Agriculture Sector Rehabilitation Project	PCR/V	2017	Group 1
1600	APR	Sri Lanka	Iranamadu Irrigation Development Project	PCR/V+	2017	Group 1

1628	APR	Tonga	Tonga Rural Innovation Project	PCRV	2017	Group 1
1552	APR	Vietnam	Agriculture, Farmers and Rural Areas Support Project TNSP	PCRV	2017	Group 1
1438	WCA	Congo	Rural Development Project in the Likouala, Pool and Sangha Departments	PCRV	2015	Group 2
1507	NEN	Georgia	Agricultural Support Project	IE	2015	Group 2
1331	WCA	Benin	Rural Economic Growth Support Project	PCRV	2016	Group 2
1425	WCA	Burkina Faso	Rural Business Development Services Programme	PCRV	2016	Group 2
1362	WCA	Cameroon	Rural Microfinance Development Support Project	PPE	2016	Group 2
1479	LAC	Dominican Republic	Development Project for Rural Poor Economic Organizations of the Border Region	PCRV	2016	Group 2
1373	ESA	Eswatini	Rural Finance and Enterprise Development Programme	PPE	2016	Group 2
1420	ESA	Tanzania	Agricultural Sector Development Programme (ASDP)	PCRV	2016	Group 2
1565	APR	Solomon Islands	Solomon Islands Rural Development Programme (RDP)	PCRV	2013	Group 3
1459	APR	Laos	Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Productivity Enhancement Programme	PCRV	2015	Group 3
1460	APR	Afghanistan	Rural Microfinance and Livestock Support Programme	PCRV	2016	Group 3
1482	APR	Bhutan	Market Access and Growth Intensification Project	PCRV	2016	Group 3
1453	ESA	South Sudan	South Sudan Livelihoods Development Project	PCRV	2016	Group 3
1538	NEN	Armenia	Rural Asset Creation Programme	PCRV	2016	Group 4
1518	ESA	Eritrea	Fisheries Development Project	PCRV	2016	Group 4

Key:

- Group 1: Predicted to meet its development objectives and did
- Group 2: Predicted to meet its development objectives but did not
- Group 3: Predicted not to meet its development but did
- Group 4: Predicted not to meet its development and did not