

**Sierra Leone Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation
Freetown, 27 November 2019, Freetown, Statement by Mr
Fabrizio Felloni, Deputy Director of the Independent Office of
Evaluation of IFAD**

- Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
- Distinguished Deputy Ministers of (i) Finance; (ii) Planning and Economic Development; Agriculture and Forestry
- Authorities and officials of the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone
- Representatives from international Development Agencies
- IFAD colleagues,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly honoured to be here with you today at the conclusion of the IFAD Country Strategy and Programme Evaluation in the Republic of Sierra Leone and to have the opportunity to address the participants to this National Workshop. I will deliver my remarks on behalf of Mr Oscar Garcia, Director of the Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD, who could not attend due to concomitant institutional commitments and who asked me to convey his grateful thoughts to the government representatives and all the participants.

My deep appreciation goes to the Government of Sierra Leone, in particular to the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, as well as to other agencies, for their invaluable support and collaboration throughout this country strategy and programme evaluation process, and especially, in the organization of this event.

I also thank my colleagues in the West and Central Africa Regional Division of IFAD, notably Mr John Hurley, Lead Regional Economist, for his presence and Mr Jakob Tuborgh, Country Director for Sierra Leone, who will later guide us in reflecting on future directions for the country strategy. Thanks also go to Mr Patrick Bao, former IFAD country programme officer.

I thank Mr Hansdeep Khaira, Evaluation Officer, and to his team, who conducted this comprehensive evaluation and Ms Manuela Gallitto from our Office in Rome who ably supported the preparation of this event.

This is the first country strategy and programme evaluation conducted by the Independent Office in Sierra Leone. We hope that this evaluation will pave the way for the Government of Sierra Leone, IFAD and other partners to develop the next country strategy and new projects supported by IFAD.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation will provide valuable inputs for the preparation of the Agreement at Completion Point. This is a short document, which summarizes the main evaluation recommendations and includes the specific follow-up actions that the Government of Sierra Leone and IFAD Management will agree to adopt and implement within specific timeframes.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me share a few remarks on the context and content of this evaluation.

As you know, Sierra Leone had had one of the highest economic growth rates in the world. Its GDP grew steeply from 3 per cent in 2009 to 21 per cent in 2013. However, two exogenous factors - the Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak in 2014 and the steep price decline of iron ore, a major commodity export for Sierra Leone, had a severe effect on the economy.

Agriculture is the economy's mainstay, contributing about 60 per cent to GDP. Agriculture now employs about 62 per cent of the labour force, of which 70 per cent are women.

However, the sector is dominated by subsistence farming and productivity is low. Major constraints include weak extension services, lack of credit, weak farmers' organizations, and declining soil fertility due to land degradation and deforestation. Furthermore, around 70 per cent of youth is unemployed or underemployed.

In light of these issues, IFAD's partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone has been pivotal. Since 1979, IFAD has committed 130 million US dollars in highly concessional loans and debt sustainability grants to support rural poverty reduction and agricultural development.

The thrust of IFAD's portfolio has been on two areas - agricultural production and rural finance. These two areas have been highly relevant in the revival and rebuilding stages of the country emerging from a long protracted civil war, and later on in the consolidation and development stages. The portfolio has been inclusive in targeting smallholders, youth and women.

The portfolio has supported an increase in rice productivity, and has contributed to higher incomes for beneficiaries.

One of the biggest achievements has been the rehabilitation of roads, which had been severely damaged during conflict. Better roads have connected people in rural areas not only to markets, to buy and sell produce, but also to their political representatives, thus ensuring that their voices can be carried to those tasked with responsibility for their socio-economic development.

In addition to these significant achievements, the evaluation identified also areas for further improvement.

Firstly, while projects helped raise the productivity of rice and cocoa, linkages with the processing and marketing parts of the value chain did not achieve full potential.

Secondly, while large strides were made in taking rural financial services to the poor, financial products were not well adapted to the specific needs of smallholder farmers, for example in terms of frequency of repayment, size of loans.

Thirdly, while efforts were made to reach young people, a youth needs assessment study to attract or maintain young people to agriculture, given the high level of youth unemployment in Sierra Leone, was lacking.

Finally, the Government and IFAD have now gathered a wealth of knowledge from the project portfolio. It is not time to consolidate such knowledge and use it to inform policy-making.

We hope that this evaluation will provide the Government and IFAD with useful insights as they jointly embark on a new strategy in achieving the objective of alleviating poverty and food insecurity of the rural poor people of Sierra Leone.

I wish you a very productive and frank discussion during the workshop.

Thank you again for being here today.