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# PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

**Hundred and Twentieth Session**

**Rome, 7 - 11 November 2016**

**Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function**

**MANAGEMENT OBSERVATIONS**

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1. FAO Management appreciates the Independent Evaluation of the FAO's evaluation function, which is the first external evaluation of FAO's evaluation function since the approval of the FAO Charter for Evaluation in 2010.
2. Management appreciates the Evaluation's acknowledgement of the significant progress made during the last biennium to improve the usefulness of evaluations, and that the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) "has become more aligned with FAO's strategic approach", making "progress in systematizing its practice in guidelines, in implementing a learning programme for its staff, and in the design and implementation of an appropriate communication plan for a better dissemination of its evaluations".
3. The Evaluation also notes that there is scope for improving evaluation learning and accountability, and to this end it recommends the development of a strategy and an action plan (recommendation 1); as well as to enhance the independence of OED (recommendation 2). Furthermore, it calls for the development of a programme of decentralized evaluations through the FAO Regional Offices supported by OED (recommendation 3), as well as a higher level of engagement with its Members in developing the evaluation plan (recommendation 4) and in pursuing evaluation capacity development activities (recommendation 5). Finally, the evaluation recommends the development of a comprehensive evaluation policy for FAO that among other things regulate FAO decentralized evaluations and provides a framework for evaluation capacity development activities (recommendation 6).
4. Management welcomes the recommendations, though underlines the need for some refinements to ensure they are implementable within the broader contextual reality of FAO, as a technical specialized agency of the United Nations. Some of the recommendations made appear more suitable for evaluation functions in multilateral development banks, who have very different mandates, operating models and governance structures as compared to FAO.
5. The strategy and action plan to enhance evaluation learning and accountability (recommendation 1) will be integrated into the OED Agenda for 2017-2018, as confirmed by OED, including measures to protect OED staff from undue influence. Among the concrete measures suggested, a guidance note will be issued to protect OED evaluators and staff from undue influence. At the same time, we advise OED to prepare "conflict of interest" guidelines to ensure that appropriate OED staff are assigned to undertake key evaluation, for example, by ensuring that OED staff do not have prior involvement in the design or implementation of FAO-supported projects and programmes that they are entrusted to evaluate.
6. OED proposed however that the rating system be applied mostly to comparable technical and project evaluations, rather than strategic and programme evaluations which are much more context dependent and hence an application of ratings might be misleading. In fact, such a rating system is widely used by international finance institutions to assess the performance of loans and grants, but rarely by UN agencies in which provision of policy and technical advice is the main means of support to programme countries. It is worth noting that even in the evaluation cooperation group (ECG) of the multilateral development banks, discussions are ongoing whether the application of ratings in evaluations constrain learning and feedback for better effectiveness. The use of ratings tend to steer discussions between Management and evaluations more on accountability issues, rather than on lessons learned. It is also noteworthy that many evaluation offices in bi-lateral aid agencies (e.g., Netherlands) do not apply ratings.

7. Following the General assembly resolution on Building capacity for the evaluation of development activities at country level<sup>1</sup>, Management agrees to facilitate travel of OED Director to country-level events aimed at building country capacities and strengthening stakeholder engagement and use of evaluations (recommendation 2). Management considers however that the dual reporting line is functioning well. OED budget is protected by the Charter, OED participates in the technical assessment of its staff to be recruited, and its reports are directly submitted to the relevant bodies. Hence, Management does not consider necessary to adopt additional measures to increase OED independent status. Experience from other international financial institutions, including IFAD (see ECG peer review of IFAD, dated May 2010), noted that reporting only to the Governing Bodies can hamper learning and institutional dialogue between evaluators and Management and other stakeholders, and that there is need for a better balance between learning and accountability. It is also noteworthy that in no UN Specialised Agency, apart from IFAD, does the evaluation function report directly and only to the Governing Bodies. With regard to IFAD, it cannot be considered a model, because although it is a UN Specialised Agency, its business model and governance structure are identical to the IFIs.

8. Management understands the rationale for strengthening decentralized evaluations (recommendation 3), which aims to enhance the accountability of programme managers. At the same time, experiences on decentralized evaluations in other agencies suggest there are considerable challenges in ensuring credibility and quality of these evaluations. It is also aware of the need to build substantial technical capacity to manage evaluations in decentralized offices for this purpose. Management therefore believes, in the case of FAO, it would be more desirable to enhance programme managers' ownership of evaluations by introducing evaluation planning in their programme cycle, while the actual conduct of evaluations should continue to be technically supported and controlled by OED to ensure credibility and accountability. It will develop a plan for decentralized evaluation to this end with OED support. Management also agrees with the need to ensure full awareness and ownership by the Members of the evaluation plans (recommendation 4) and with the proposed role of OED in evaluation capacity building (recommendation 5) focusing on the agriculture sector.

9. Management agrees that the current OED Charter is narrow in scope and the Organization would need to develop its own evaluation policy (recommendation 6). Before embarking on the process to draft a new evaluation policy however, Management wishes to first pilot the ideas contained in the previous five recommendations in particular on decentralized evaluations to have some experiences on which to build the new evaluation policy suitable to the Organization.

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[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/473&referer=http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/ga1605.doc.htm&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/473&referer=http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/ga1605.doc.htm&Lang=E)

**Management Observations to the Independent Evaluation of FAO's Evaluation Function**

Evaluation recommendation (a)	Management response (b)	Management plan			
		Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	Responsible unit (d)	Timeframe (e)	Further funding required (Y or N) (f)
<p><b>Recommendation 1 A strategy and action plan for enhancing learning and accountability. This strategy and plan should include:</b></p> <p><b>i) Addressing human resource issues, mainly on the imbalance between junior level staff on the one hand and mid and senior level staff on the other hand through hiring more senior staff with sound evaluation expertise, and clarifying OED staff roles and responsibilities in OED (including mentoring) relating them to the respective staff grade;</b></p> <p><b>ii) A rating system to be applied in all (or most) evaluations so as to be able to make comparisons across sectors/areas/organizations, and to aggregate results;</b></p> <p><b>iii) An annual report that should be an OED flagship presenting evaluation results (not just summaries of evaluations), with ratings for the different types of evaluations and by regions, and with cross-cutting analysis, systemic or transversal issues and an assessment of the implementation of evaluation recommendations;</b></p> <p><b>iv) Internal and/or external quality assurance and enhancement of OED evaluations at two stages of the evaluation process: at the stage of presenting data collection tools and at the stage</b></p>	<b>Accepted</b>	<p>Management agrees with the recommendation. OED will develop a strategy and action plan that will:</p> <p>a) Address the human resource issues highlighted by the report;</p> <p>b) Identify mechanisms to strengthen the comparability of evaluation reports across sectors, excluding however a rating system<sup>2</sup>;</p> <p>c) Propose ways to incorporate evaluation results in the biennial evaluation report;</p> <p>d) Reinforce the quality assurance procedures currently in place;</p> <p>e) Include measures to enhance the quality, readability and use of evaluations, including through a higher use of quantitative data and literature reviews, targeted development of executive summaries, digests, etc. and greater use of UNEG guidance materials;</p> <p>f) Include performance indicators and benchmarks on the</p>	OED	May 2017	N

<sup>2</sup> Different from International financing institutions, FAO does not consider viable the development of a "rating" system to assess the performance of its programmes at completion stage. OED will instead develop a set of guidance to strengthen the comparability of evaluation findings across sectors and different types of evaluations.

Evaluation recommendation (a)	Management response (b)	Management plan			
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<p><i>of draft reporting; the external quality assurance could be implemented either through outsourcing or through reciprocal peer reviews with WFP and IFAD's evaluation offices, an option that has the additional benefit of sharing knowledge among the RBA without incrementing costs;</i></p> <p>v) <i>Request to use data collection tools in TOR that allow for capturing quantitative data from interviews and surveys;</i></p> <p>vi) <i>Evaluation executive summaries not exceeding 4 pages;</i></p> <p>vii) <i>Inclusion of literature reviews in evaluation reports;</i></p> <p>viii) <i>Compliance with UNEG Quality Checklist (which includes specific quality criteria for gender and human rights) for evaluation reports, incorporating them as an annex to the TOR for OED evaluations;</i></p> <p>ix) <i>Elaboration of policy briefs, transversal reports, and just-in-time reports (e.g. prior to development of a new policy) and</i></p> <p>x) <i>Performance indicators and benchmarks for the new OED strategy and action plan.</i></p>		<p>implementation of the OED strategic and action plan.</p>			

<p><b>Recommendation 2: Strengthen OED's independence, which would enhance the credibility of FAO.</b></p> <p><b>a) OED's Director should ensure that OED staff perceive that they are protected from outside influence,</b></p> <p><b>b) the independence of OED should be strengthened and adequately protected (eliminating limitations in the travel of OED Director related to the evaluation function, and allowing OED Director to make the final decision for the recruitment of OED regular budget staff);</b></p> <p><b>c) OED's Director should not be the Secretary of the Evaluation Committee and,</b></p> <p><b>d) OED should not conduct mid-term evaluations</b></p>	<p><b>Partially accepted</b></p>	<p>Management partially agrees with this recommendation.</p> <p>a) A guidance note will be issued to put in place the procedures to protect OED evaluators and staff from outside influence</p> <p>b) Management considers that the dual reporting line is functioning well and thus there is no need to further strengthen OED independence. It nevertheless agrees to be more flexible with OED Director's travel requests for attending events related to evaluation capacity development and high-level stakeholder engagement<sup>3</sup>.</p> <p>Staff appointment will remain a prerogative of the DG to ensure not only technical capacity but also geographic and linguistic diversity among FAO staff.</p> <p>c) Management will take over the Secretary of the Evaluation Committee</p> <p>d) Project budget holders at decentralized offices and technical departments will be responsible for undertaking mid-term evaluations. OED could provide technical support but will not be responsible for their conduct,</p>	<p>a) OED</p> <p>b) ODG</p> <p>c) ODG</p> <p>d) DDO, DDN, TCD, OED</p>	<p>May 2017</p> <p>May 2017</p> <p>Dec 2016</p> <p>May 2017</p>	<p>N</p>
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Evaluation recommendation (a)	Management response (b)	Management plan			
		Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	Responsible unit (d)	Timeframe (e)	Further funding required (Y or N) (f)
		except under exceptional circumstances (e.g. when specifically requested by the donor country)			
<p><b>Recommendation 3. FAO should develop a programme of decentralized evaluations, including mid-term evaluations, through its Regional Offices, funded with a proportion of the trust funds for evaluations</b></p> <p><b>Through this programme of decentralized evaluations FAO will strengthen the evaluation function, complementing the independent evaluation (for which OED is responsible) with evaluations conducted by regional or country offices, endowed with a budget for this purpose, which could use a proportion of resource of the trust funds for evaluation (the remaining funds remaining for OED), and eventually additionally donor funds. The methodology to be employed in conducting decentralized/auto-evaluations should be harmonized with OED's methodology (OED could support this process cooperating in the preparation of guidelines for decentralized evaluations and/or by outposting staff once OED has addressed its human resources issues, and through internal evaluation capacity building).</b></p>	<b>Partially Accepted</b>	<p>Management recognizes the need to enhance programme managers' accountability through decentralized evaluations. A full-scale decentralization of responsibility to programme managers may however impair the credibility and quality of evaluations. With the support of OED, therefore, Management will develop a plan that will:</p> <p>a) Introduce evaluation planning in the programme documents such as the Country Programme Frameworks and the Strategic Programmes, and guidance and support will be provided to programme managers on how this can be implemented;</p> <p>b) OED will build up evaluation services to technically support and control these evaluations with a</p>	DDO TCD OSD OED	September 2017	Y

<sup>3</sup> This is particularly important at stakeholder workshops of country programme evaluations where the presence of OED Director can help ensuring high level Government and partners' participation and engagement, which in turn facilitates greater use of evaluation findings and results at country level as well as in events aimed at developing/strengthening evaluation capacities of FAO and Member Countries, e.g. to assess progress with the Sustainable Development Goals, etc.

Evaluation recommendation (a)	Management response (b)	Management plan			
		Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	Responsible unit (d)	Timeframe (e)	Further funding required (Y or N) (f)
		possibility of providing such service from regional locations where it is cost-effective.			
<p><b>Recommendation 4: OED should develop its work programme with participation of the PC (and in consultation with the DG), and when evaluations are submitted for discussions at PC meetings there should be a clear explanation of the reasons why the evaluation was conducted.</b></p> <p><b>The rotation of PC members and their limited participation in the process of developing OED's work programme has resulted in PC members not being fully informed on the reasons why some evaluations were conducted by OED. This communication gap affected the PC use of evaluations and therefore the contribution that evaluations can make to FAO's and Member Countries learning and FAO's accountability.</b></p>	<b>Accepted</b>	<p>Management agrees with the need to ensure full awareness and ownership by the Members of the evaluation plans.</p> <p>In order to ensure continuity in the flow of information and greater evaluation use, OED will organize briefing sessions with FAO member countries, and particularly with the PC members, on a biannual basis possibly prior to Programme Committee or Council sessions.</p>	OED	April 2017	N
<p><b>Recommendation 5. OED could include in its work-programme an internal and external evaluation capacity development (ECD) initiative, for which it could mobilize donor funds and establish partnership agreements.</b></p> <p><b>The ECD initiative could be designed and/or implemented jointly with the evaluation offices of the other UN Rome based agencies, organizing joint ECD activities in Member Countries. These activities could also involve staff from FAO's Regional and Country Offices, strengthening their capacities to manage and/or conduct decentralized/auto-evaluations. This recommendation would also require an adjustment of the</b></p>	<b>Accepted</b>	<p>Management agrees with the importance of engaging in evaluation capacity development in the agriculture sector, as a pillar for better monitoring and reporting on the SDGs.</p> <p>OED will develop an evaluation capacity development strategy, in consultation with interested RBA Agencies and UNEG members. Potential resource partners will also be approached in the process of developing the strategy.</p>	OED	September 2017	Y (extra-budgetary resources will be sought)



Evaluation recommendation (a)	Management response (b)	Management plan			
		Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	Responsible unit (d)	Timeframe (e)	Further funding required (Y or N) (f)
<i>Evaluation Charter, which is the next and last recommendation.</i>					
<p><b>Recommendation 6. The "Evaluation Charter for OED" should be replaced by an "Evaluation Policy for FAO". To be implemented during the first semester of 2017 by a task force involving the PC, supported by OED and in consultation with the Office of the DG, the Legal Office, and (for aspects related with decentralized/auto-evaluation) TCD, DDO and the Evaluation Committee.</b></p> <p><b>The Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) approved by the 35th Session of the FAO Conference in November 2008 specified that a comprehensive evaluation policy would be incorporated in a Charter for approval by the Council. The Charter approved in 2010 was restricted to OED. Given the important decentralization process that FAO has gone through since 2010, and the emphasis given to evaluation capacity development by Member Countries, as well as by UN agencies, and the issue in 2016 of a revised version of the United Nations Evaluation Group Norms and Standards for Evaluation it would be appropriate to adapt the Charter to take into account these changes, as well as to strengthen the independence of OED, along the lines of what was indicated in recommendation 2 and in other parts of this report.</b></p>	<b>Partially accepted</b>	<p>Management recognizes the narrow scope of the current OED Charter, as pointed out in the Evaluation. With the support of OED, it wishes to pilot a new decentralized evaluation system in one or two regions as well as in one or two strategic programmes, before embarking on drafting of a policy that defines responsibilities of decentralized offices and strategic programme teams. This would also enable identification of necessary resources and expertise to operate such a system. It therefore wishes to move the target date to 2019.</p>	<p>DDO TCD OSD OED</p>	<p>September 2019</p>	<p>Possibly if a full-scale decentralization of evaluation function is considered</p>