

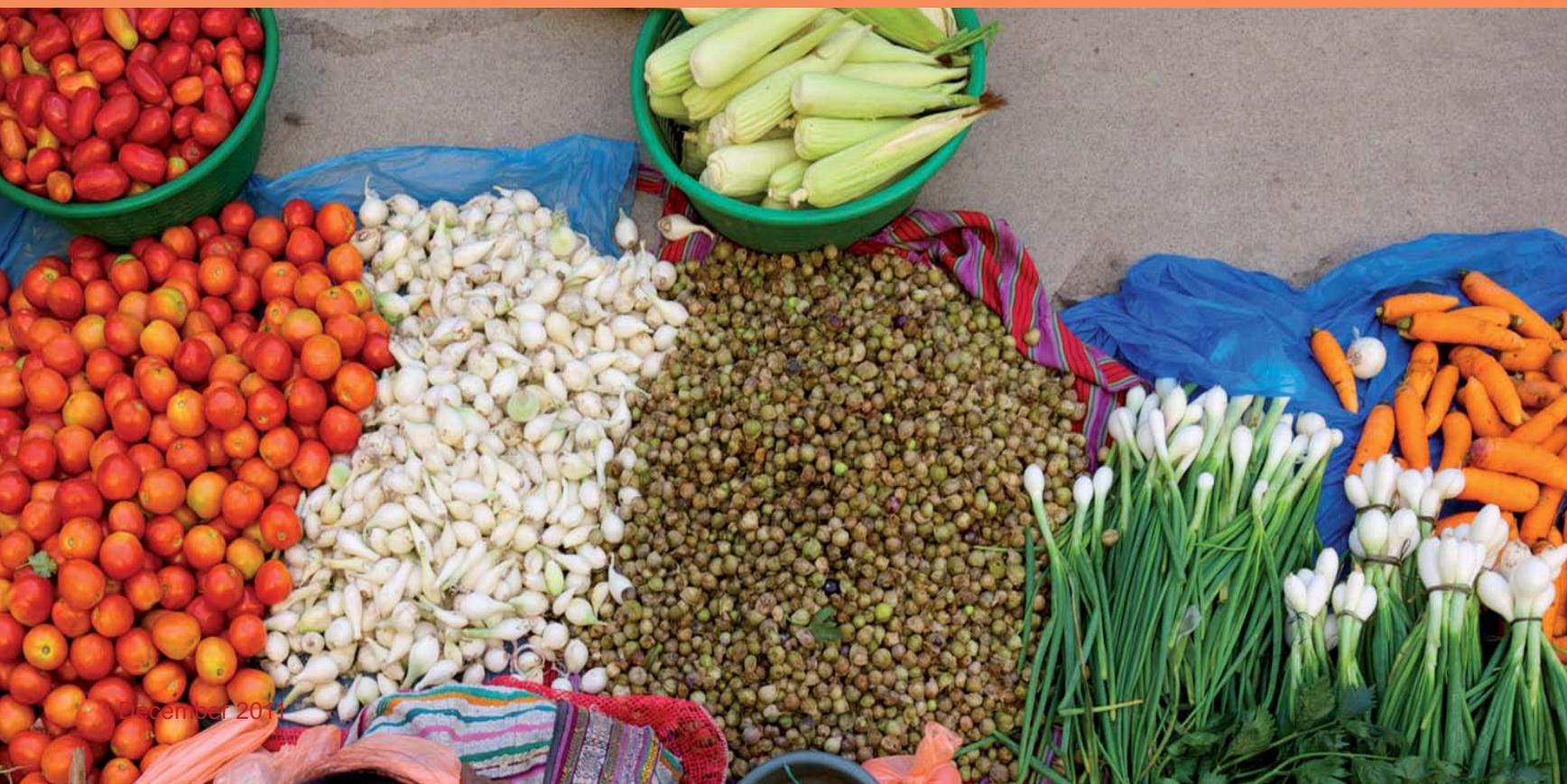


Enabling poor rural people  
to overcome poverty

Executive summary and IFAD Management response

# IFAD's Performance with regard to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

CORPORATE-LEVEL EVALUATION



December 2011



# Executive summary

**Background and objectives.** The Consultation on the Eighth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources decided in 2008 that the Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE) would undertake this corporate-level evaluation on IFAD's performance with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment. The objectives of the evaluation are to: (i) assess the relevance of IFAD's strategy in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment; (ii) learn from the experiences and good practices of other development organizations; (iii) assess the results of activities funded by IFAD related to gender equality and women's empowerment in its country programmes and corporate processes; and (iv) generate a series of findings and recommendations that will assist IFAD's Executive Board and Management in guiding the Fund's future activities in this area.

**Process.** Four building blocks form the basis of the evaluation: (i) an analysis of the evolution of gender-related concepts and development approaches, and a comprehensive documentary review of the policy and evaluation documents prepared by other development organizations; (ii) an assessment of key IFAD corporate policy and strategy documents; (iii) a meta-evaluation of past operations based on existing evaluative evidence, a review of recent country strategic opportunity programmes (COSOPs) and on-going projects, and five country visits to gain insight into the perspectives of partners in these countries and collect evidence from the field about the evolving approaches and results of IFAD-funded projects; and (iv) a review of selected corporate business processes that have implications for IFAD's performance in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in partner countries. Section C in chapter I of the main report gives a more detailed account of the objectives and processes related to the evaluation's four building blocks.

**Main findings.** There has been an evolution globally in approaches to building gender equality and women's empowerment. Pre-1975 efforts were mainly addressed to men as producers and women as homemakers, which ignored the important role of women as farmers

and food producers. Subsequently, there was a shift to women-focused approaches and approaches focusing on changing the relations between women and men. A recent and promising gender equality approach promotes the complementarity of women and men in family production and farmers' organizations.

The review of literature on the topic revealed that there are two major constraints to the effective application of lessons from previous operations: a reluctance to address gender as a major organizing principle of society and a failure to invest sufficiently. All development agencies with recent evaluations have revealed, at best, mixed success in implementing gender mainstreaming. There was a broad consensus among development partners that this was mainly due to the lack of: (i) results orientation; (ii) consistent leadership and follow-up by senior management and executive boards; (iii) staff incentives and accountability through performance management systems; (iv) a clear understanding of how best to address gender inequality; (v) adequate investment in gender equality expertise in operations; (vi) attention to gender balance in staffing; and (vii) an inclusive organizational culture. Some of the findings from these evaluations are also applicable to IFAD.

Because it was established at a time of significant global attention to the need for development to include women, IFAD has always paid attention to gender equality and women's empowerment. Between its inception and 1992, it did so mainly through women-specific project components; since then, it has included women as beneficiaries and as actors more systematically in its projects.

The new millennium marked an increase in efforts to "mainstream" gender equality and women's empowerment in the design, implementation, supervision and evaluation of IFAD-funded operations. This was done mainly in connection with IFAD's Gender Plan of Action 2003-2006, and, subsequently, with the 2008 Framework for Gender Mainstreaming in IFAD Operations. These are two of the key documents that capture IFAD's corporate strategic approach to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

IFAD's corporate strategic approach to gender is largely relevant and consistent, but fragmented across numerous documents, including the gender action plan and gender framework. Moreover, synergies with other thematic and corporate policies and strategies are not clearly articulated. Interpretations of the terminology and understandings of the topic also differ widely, which has led to alternative approaches in COSOPs and in project design and implementation.

The evaluation found no evidence of systematic monitoring or reporting on progress related to gender equality and women's empowerment by either Senior Management or the Executive Board. Reporting is in fact largely confined to project-level activities. It is also fragmented across numerous documents, preventing a consolidated picture of the main results, opportunities and challenges associated with the topic. However, compared with comparator agencies, IFAD has done better in instilling a results orientation in its gender work.

The evaluation reviewed older and recently designed IFAD-funded projects, five country programme evaluations, and five COSOPs developed last year. Overall, the performance of past IFAD-financed projects is moderately satisfactory, but this average rating masks significant variance among projects and countries in attention to gender-related dimensions of design and implementation. Performance in efficiency and promotion of innovations and scaling up is inadequate. The evaluation found a relationship between gender achievement and a project's overall achievements, a finding confirmed by evaluations in other organizations. However, the analysis does not reveal a causal relationship in either direction. Compared with earlier ones, newer COSOPs and project designs are paying increasingly more attention across the board to gender issues. On the whole, the evaluation considers that IFAD's performance is moderately satisfactory in achieving its first two corporate objectives related to gender, but moderately unsatisfactory in achieving the third objective.<sup>1</sup>

The review of corporate business processes found that factors that support IFAD's work on gender equality and women's empowerment include a recognition of the importance of the issue at the most senior levels (in Management and the Executive Board); operational systems and processes that have a reinforced quality enhancement and quality assurance system; direct supervision and implementation support; and wider country presence. IFAD has established an elaborate results measurement framework including gender indicators for design and implementation, but this framework consists of multiple layers and systems and requires streamlining. Independent evaluations assess gender as part of the various evaluation criteria applied (e.g. relevance, effectiveness, etc.), but do not have dedicated gender indicators and/or questions that are applied in each evaluation.

In terms of knowledge management, few efforts have been made to aggregate results coherently at the regional or corporate levels, and lesson-learning and cross-fertilization of experiences on gender issues is limited and ad hoc. Like some of the comparator agencies, IFAD does not invest sufficiently in learning from its experience and building on its successes. Some initiatives to ensure learning and knowledge management are taking place, but they are not systematic or adequately resourced. Their analysis of what has contributed to or prevented progress on gender equality and women's empowerment needs to be strengthened. The role of communication in highlighting IFAD's work related to gender equality and women's empowerment is generally positive.

There are some good examples of policy dialogue by IFAD on gender issues in partner countries. However, in spite of this, on the whole policy dialogue performance at the country level is variable, but generally unsystematic, with little analytic underpinning and not backed by the required human and financial resources. On the other hand, IFAD has played a useful role in selected global policy and advocacy platforms (e.g. farmers' associations) by drawing

<sup>1</sup> Box 5 in the main report contains the three corporate objectives for gender equality and women's empowerment.

attention to the plight of rural women and their central role in smallholder agriculture and rural development processes.

Partnerships with civil society organizations and NGOs working on gender issues are generally positive. Some good examples of relations with borrowing-government agencies that deal with gender equality and women's empowerment were also found; this varies considerably from country to country. Partnerships with donor governments have been good in terms of the supplementary funds mobilized at the corporate level, but generally limited in terms of discussion of content issues with bilateral aid agencies involved in operations. However, IFAD representatives actively participate in the gender networks of the United Nations and those of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee. No significant partnerships devoted to gender were apparent with the private sector, apart from a handful of initiatives at the project level and with the Farmers' Forum.

In terms of gender architecture, the gender desk within the Policy and Technical Advisory Division has spearheaded the process of ensuring attention to gender in project design and implementation, and supports other corporate processes such as communications and fundraising. In the five geographic regions covered by IFAD operations, the gender desk has provided support to learning and knowledge management, but resources for this function are variable and inadequate. The contributions of the thematic group on gender were influential in the early years of the gender action plan, but more recently, there are indications that the group needs revitalization through the development of clearer results-oriented objectives and workplans. The role of gender focal points is unclear, and their accountability and working relationships also need review.

Arguably, the greatest challenge in IFAD's gender equality and women's empowerment work relates

to its human resources management and corporate culture. Historical data reveal that the ratio of women to men in the organization is rather traditional, with many women in support staff positions and few in leadership functions, even though in 2010 IFAD hired its first woman Vice-President and first woman Director of the Office of President and Vice-President. There are an encouragingly high proportion of women in the more junior Professional category. Even though there is room for further improvement, IFAD nevertheless compares well in terms of its gender balance in staffing with selected United Nations organizations and international financial institutions. Although IFAD's Human Resources Policy explicitly makes reference to ensuring gender balance in IFAD's workforce, the guidelines for consultants' recruitment makes no such provision. In fact, the evaluation found that few women and gender experts were recruited as consultants in the teams responsible for COSOP development and key phases of the project life cycle (e.g. design and supervision missions, including evaluation).

IFAD's human resources policy includes anti-harassment provisions and a variety of work-life balance policies. The evaluation found poor uptake of the options provided in formal policies (e.g. special leave without pay). IFAD's informal culture has not traditionally encouraged the inclusion of perspectives and ways of working that are women-friendly or family-friendly, although these are important for building an organization capable of delivering on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Similarly, there are no specific incentives for attention to gender equality in staff, consultant or divisional performance; and no accountability or negative consequences for lack of attention. Performance in this area does not figure in individual workplans, which tend to be largely activity-based. In other words, the type of results orientation that is strongly advocated in IFAD-funded operations is not applied to an equal degree in individual work planning and human resources management.



Another shortcoming is that IFAD is unable to track in its loan investments the amounts allocated to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, and there is no evidence that it has taken concrete steps to address this problem. Similarly, there is no indication of the funds allocated ex ante for this purpose in IFAD's annual results-based programme of work and budget. The evaluation also found that there has been a disproportionately high reliance on supplementary funds and grants for core gender activities. Access to such sources of funding is not secure – and, for supplementary funds, specific efforts are required for additional periodic reporting to the concerned donors. The Board, on its part, has not asked IFAD to provide information on the amount of resources the organization is investing in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

**Conclusion.** IFAD's strategic approach to gender is relevant, but guidance is fragmented in several corporate documents. The Fund's effectiveness in meeting one of its three strategic objectives (improve women's well-being and ease their workloads by facilitating access to basic rural services and infrastructure) is moderately unsatisfactory. Moreover, results of IFAD-financed operations are moderately satisfactory on the whole, even though there is significant variability across projects and countries. A number of key corporate business processes that are essential for supporting IFAD's gender work remain weak. In sum, as far as the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is concerned, there seems to be a gap between rhetoric and practice, which raises the question of whether IFAD is indeed "walking the talk".

**Recommendations.** The evaluation makes the following recommendations:

**Develop an evidence- and results-based corporate policy on gender equality and women's empowerment.** IFAD should develop its first overarching corporate policy on gender equality and women's empowerment, for submission to the

Executive Board in 2011. The policy would be IFAD's principal reference document on gender equality and women's empowerment, bringing under one umbrella the Fund's main strategic objectives and priorities in this area. The recommended policy should indicate how key corporate business processes will be adjusted for better results on the ground.

The gender policy should include a section on who within IFAD Management will be responsible for implementation, oversight and reporting. IFAD should produce a consolidated annual progress report, covering the results achieved in the implementation of the new policy, lessons learned and adjustments made to key corporate business processes that affect performance in gender-related activities. The policy should also include an overarching results measurement framework for IFAD's gender work, and specify how the Executive Board will fulfil its role in providing guidance and support, as well as oversight on results.

**Knowledge management, learning and analytic work.** IFAD needs to invest in building a common evidence-based understanding among staff of the theory of gender equality and women's empowerment, and its related terminology. Among other issues, this should include attention to the systematic documentation and cross-fertilization of lessons learned and good practices across projects, countries and regions, and at headquarters as well as in the field.

**Innovation and scaling up as key principles of engagement.** The corporate-level evaluation on innovation recommended that IFAD define an IFAD-wide innovation agenda at the corporate level that consisted of a few selected themes or domains. The themes or domains selected, "big bets", should be in areas of the agriculture and rural sector where there is a proven need for innovative solutions and where IFAD has developed (or can develop) a comparative advantage in successfully promoting pro-poor innovations that can be scaled up. In this regard, this evaluation recommends that gender equality and

women's empowerment be included as one of the "big bets" in IFAD's corporate innovation agenda until 2015. IFAD should, however, remain open to promoting gender-related innovations at the country or project level that respond to context-specific challenges. COSOPs and project designs should outline the specific efforts needed to ensure that successful innovations can actually be scaled up for wider impact on gender equality and women's empowerment.

**Policy dialogue.** Policy dialogue and advocacy work should focus on the selected "big bets", but also on specific thematic areas that might require attention in a given country context. Furthermore, staff competencies and skills will need to be enhanced for effective engagement in policy processes, which also requires continued attention to partnerships with multiple stakeholders for advocacy at global and country levels.

**IFAD's gender architecture.** The evaluation recommends that Management conduct a dedicated, comprehensive review of IFAD's overall gender architecture to ensure that the organization has the required human resources and funds to achieve the desired results on the ground in borrowing countries. The review should include not just the Programme Management Department (PMD) but all other departments in the organization. The evaluation makes specific recommendations for the gender architecture, which may be seen in chapter VI of the report.

**Tracking investments and budgets.** It is recommended that Management undertake an analysis of spending on gender equality and women's empowerment in a regionally based sample of projects that have good gender equality results. This would allow it to determine the level of costs incurred in the past, which can serve as a guideline for future project designers. In addition, efforts should be made to indicate the amount of administrative budget being devoted annually to gender-related activities.

**Training.** While gender-specific training and awareness-raising is needed on key concepts, it is also recommended that a gender perspective be incorporated in training events organized by PMD on operational aspects and by the Human Resources Division on core competencies and in staff induction programmes. A gender training programme should be developed as soon as possible and implemented from the beginning of 2011.

**Assessment of gender equality and women's empowerment in evaluations.** It is recommended that IOE develop specific indicators and key questions for assessing gender equality and women's empowerment in country programme and project evaluations.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it should include a dedicated section in all evaluation reports in order to provide an overall account of performance on this indicator and to highlight the proximate causes of good or less good performance. The same recommendation is also applicable to the various components of IFAD's self-evaluation system.

<sup>2</sup> That is, in the context of project completion report validations and project performance assessments.





# Management Response

## Background and introduction

IFAD Management welcomes the corporate-level evaluation on IFAD's performance with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment, which was undertaken in response to a decision of the Consultation on the Eighth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources. While acknowledging the collaborative spirit with which the IFAD Office of Evaluation (IOE) has conducted this evaluation, Management would like to underscore that this response was constrained by the limited time available between receipt of the evaluation report and submission of this document.<sup>3</sup>

This response presents Management's views on some strategic issues and proposes a way forward in implementing the recommendations agreed on by Management.

## Overall assessment of findings and quality of the report

Management has noted the evaluation's finding that IFAD's performance on gender equality and women's empowerment is better in new projects and programmes than in older operations, and it endorses, to a large extent, the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report. Management considers the report to be a useful document which, together with the working papers, provides a good basis for taking further action. Its findings are in line with the findings from Management's self-assessment. Management also feels, however, that the country case studies were under resourced and, as a result, are insufficient in terms of presenting the key factors of success or failure of country programmes and projects in addressing gender issues. In general, more justice could have been done to the wealth of experience available at the field level. Consequently, the evaluation report primarily focuses on corporate issues of IFAD as

an institution rather than on the outputs and outcomes of IFAD-funded projects with respect to gender equality and women's empowerment. The study could have presented more evidence in terms of the assessment of IFAD's strategic engagement in related global policy processes.

IFAD does not do enough to document and disseminate its field experiences in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. In spite of this, as noted in the evaluation report, IFAD-funded projects stand out compared with those of other international financial institutions. It is interesting to note that scores based only on the desk reviews of project documentation are lower than those obtained when the actual experiences are directly examined, as in the country case studies. This suggests that, in many cases, IFAD does better on the ground than can be discerned from the review of documents at headquarters. Relatively weaker results on the third strategic objective – improving women's well-being and easing their workloads by facilitating access to basic rural services and infrastructure – and human resources-related gender issues contribute to the final rating of performance as “moderately satisfactory”. There is therefore no room for complacency and IFAD needs to improve its efforts, with enhanced commitment, instruments and resources. IFAD Management is committed to take on this challenge, mobilizing the resources and promoting the institutional changes needed to do so.

The evaluation notes that although gender-related documents are broadly consistent with the goal of improving gender equality and women's empowerment, IFAD's strategic approach and corresponding guidance are fragmented into different documents. Management generally endorses this finding; it also recognizes that IFAD needs to take on the challenge of developing a better set of indicators to measure impact and results in gender equality and women's empowerment. Management believes that it is important to develop a common understanding in

<sup>3</sup> Management received the final version of the report on 3 November 2010.

IFAD of basic principles and concepts. On the issue of relatively weaker performance on gender with regard to the third strategic objective, Management would like to clarify that success in this domain is contingent on investments that are often outside IFAD's remit (i.e. outside of agriculture and rural development) and need to be funded by partners. Nevertheless, IFAD can and will do better, including by finding the right partners. Management also realizes that synergies between economic and productive investments and with basic human services (health and education) are essential to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. IFAD's future strategy will be geared to further clarifying the actions needed and partnering with governments and other donors in achieving better results against this objective.

IFAD Management has noted the evaluation finding of good efforts made by IFAD – better than those of other international financial institutions – to improve operational processes in order to strengthen its gender-related work. It also notes that these efforts have led to results on the ground that are more substantial than those of other development organizations. It has also taken note of the variance in IFAD performance on gender issues between projects and within IFAD's own management structure. The report identifies some causes of this variance but could have gone even further in identifying the underlying reasons for such uneven progress (strong in some cases, weak in others).

IFAD's own human resource management and corporate culture are identified as the greatest challenges in IFAD's gender equality and women's empowerment work. IFAD Management recognizes that gender diversity – as well as diversity in age and nationality – is necessary to increase organizational effectiveness. In this light, Management agrees that IFAD needs to equip itself with the instruments and resources needed to promote gender equality in its human resources policies.

IFAD Management has taken note of the finding that, while IFAD's gender architecture is appropriate on

the whole, it needs to be reviewed to achieve greater clarity and accountability. It also concurs with the finding that it is difficult to track the resources allocated to gender, a challenge shared by other international agencies. Nevertheless, IFAD will seek better ways to do this. However, the statement regarding IFAD's excessive dependence on supplementary funding does not appear to be sufficiently evidence-based. Rather, IFAD has indeed mobilized supplementary funds for gender work and has allocated its own resources to this purpose. This is a strength, in Management's view, not a weakness.

## Way forward

The corporate-level evaluation on IFAD's performance with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment was undertaken in the light of the following decision by the Eighth Replenishment Consultation: "The independent Office of Evaluation will conduct an evaluation of IFAD's performance on gender equality and women's empowerment in 2009. Based on the findings of the evaluation, the Executive Board will consider the need to develop a corporate policy and implementation strategy on gender."

With respect to the corporate policy and implementation strategy, while IFAD Management will be guided by the Executive Board as per the decision of the Consultation quoted above, it has noted the evaluation's recommendation that "an overarching evidence- and results-based corporate policy on gender equality and women's empowerment be developed by Management for submission to the Executive Board in 2011." Further, the evaluation recommends that this document should cover not only operations, but also other key corporate business processes such as human resource management, communications, finance and budget.

Management will implement this recommendation if it is endorsed by the Executive Board. Such a policy document could clarify basic concepts and would need to be operational in terms of identifying responsibilities, actions and resources. The policy

could be accompanied by a results framework and an implementation strategy that were well integrated within and supportive of IFAD's systems. This would need to be developed through a participatory and consultative process. In the development of this policy, the following issues would also need to be reviewed and addressed:

- (a) Promoting performance on gender equality and women's empowerment in job descriptions and work planning/performance management within IFAD;
- (b) Promoting gender balance in staffing, including in IFAD country offices and at IFAD headquarters;
- (c) Ensuring work-life balance within IFAD;
- (d) Investing more in managing knowledge, enhancing learning and undertaking analytic work, and engaging in policy dialogue and advocacy related to gender issues, both directly and through enhanced partnerships; and
- (e) Developing a coherent framework for business processes already in place to further IFAD's work on gender equality and women's empowerment.

In the process of preparing the policy, depending on the decision of the Executive Board, IFAD would also:

- (a) Review the need for the Executive Board and Senior Management to lead and oversee issues related to gender equality, and propose ways and means for strengthening their capacity and roles in this area; and
- (b) Undertake a comprehensive review of IFAD's overall gender architecture, including: oversight functions at Management level; required profiles, location and numbers of dedicated gender positions in the Programme Management Department (PMD) and other divisions, including the Human Resources Division (HRD);

redefinition of the role of gender focal points and allocation of adequate resources for this function; and role and structure of the Thematic Group on Gender.

In its efforts to improve the effectiveness and impact of IFAD's country operations, IFAD will continue to implement the Framework for Gender Mainstreaming which remains valid for operations until replaced by a new corporate policy. IFAD will continue to pursue more vigorously the current positive trends identified in the evaluation report. Towards this end, it will continue to improve gender responsiveness in project design and implementation. It will continue to include gender expertise in project-cycle-related missions, in project management and country presence structures. IFAD will make the best use of the opportunities offered by its new operating model, primarily through direct supervision and increased country presence. It will seek to improve its capacity to learn more on gender equality and women's empowerment through existing knowledge management processes, and its monitoring and reporting systems, including the Results and Impact Management System (RIMS) and project logical frameworks. IFAD will also continue to implement the four commitments it made relative to the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG3 – the promotion of gender equality) when receiving the Global MDG3 Champion Torch, for which divisions and units have been asked to renew their action plans for 2011. On the occasion of the October 2011 review of progress made in fulfilling Torch commitments, an award will be given to the division that has made the most progress. In relation to important opportunities over the next 18 months, IFAD will continue to provide leadership within global policy processes to advance the gender equality and empowerment of rural women.

<sup>4</sup>The innovation evaluation recommended that an IFAD-wide innovation agenda be developed at the corporate level, consisting of a few selected themes or domains. The themes or domains selected – “big bets” – should be in those areas of the agriculture and rural sector where there is a proven need for innovative solutions and where IFAD has (or can develop) a comparative advantage to successfully promote pro-poor innovations that can be scaled up.

The President of IFAD will continue to play a leadership role on this issue. While awaiting the review of IFAD's gender architecture, IFAD's Executive Management Committee will nominate a member of the Operations Management Committee as responsible, under the leadership of the President, for implementation, oversight and reporting on gender equality and women's empowerment within IFAD.

IFAD will take more steps to strengthen its institutional capacity. Starting in early 2011, it will more systematically include a gender perspective in training activities to be undertaken on operational aspects (PMD-organized) and on key competencies. PMD (for operational training) and HRD (for competency training) will submit a plan to this effect by end-January 2011. In addition, Management will nominate a senior

staff member in HRD to oversee the development of a gender and diversity strategy that will be part of the corporate gender policy, in line with the target set under IFAD's current Results Measurement Framework. This will aim at identifying measures that can improve gender balance and promote a culture that values diversity. IFAD will also strengthen corporate reports such as the Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE) to report on its gender performance. In addition, it will introduce gender as one of the "big bets" in IFAD's corporate innovation agenda until 2015 (target year for the MDGs). IFAD will also support innovative approaches, and their scaling up, by building partnerships with regional knowledge centres of excellence on this theme.

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The main report can be downloaded from the website: <http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/index.htm>.  
To receive hard copies, send requests to: [evaluation@ifad.org](mailto:evaluation@ifad.org).

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