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The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and its partners in developing
countries share the challenging mission of enabling the rural poor to overcome their poverty.
A partnership which takes shape primarily through hundreds of rural development projects
and programmes at grass-roots level, often in the poorest and most remote regions of the
world.

Although the performance of these projects has improved in many aspects over the years,
external evaluations continue to report weaknesses in their monitoring and evaluation (M&E)
systems, in particular in the way impact M&E is carried out and used at project management
and policy level. The need for support is also evident from the numerous requests that IFAD
receives each year from its partners for assistance in M&E system design and operation.

In line with the IFAD Action Plan 2000-2002, which seeks to “improve impact assessment”,
this new practical guide was developed through a yearlong consultative process with its
potential users: project M&E officers, managers, designers and supervisors. Its purpose is to
facilitate the development and use of effective and participatory M&E systems as tools for
impact-oriented management, shared learning processes and accountability.

As such, it is an integral part of our global effort to improve the performance and monitor the
results of our common initiatives to strengthen the capacity of the rural poor and their
organisations, improve equitable access to productive resources and increase access to financial
services and markets.

Lennart Båge
President
International Fund for Agricultural Development
After a long consultation process and much work by a variety of M&E specialists from all regions of IFAD operations, I am pleased to present the IFAD Practical Guide for Monitoring and Evaluation of Rural Development Projects.

The process began in 2000 when the Fund’s Office of Evaluation and Studies conducted a stocktaking exercise, which covered a decade of IFAD experience with M&E at project level. After which, a comparative review was undertaken of the strategies and approaches to M&E systems at project level of several major development agencies. While the stocktaking exercise observed a general weakness in most M&E systems, the comparative review concluded that there is substantial material on M&E concepts and theories, although there remains a lack of practical resource kits on the methodologies and processes at operational level.

As such, the overriding goal of the guide is to improve the impact of IFAD-funded projects, through the introduction of effective M&E systems. It focuses on a learning approach to management that uses achievements and problems to improve decision-making and accountability. This requires creating an M&E system that helps primary stakeholders, implementing partners and project staff to learn together in order to improve their development interventions on a continual basis. As the ultimate objective is to ensure the maximum possible benefit for the rural poor, they are the ones best placed to assess project impact and must therefore be considered full partners in any future M&E. The guide also suggests ideas for implementing this and other forms of participatory M&E.

The primary target audience is composed of staff from project management units, in particular project directors and M&E officers, together with their implementation partners, such as, public services, NGOs and CBOs. The guide is also aimed at technical consultants and supervisors from co-operating institutions. Because the effectiveness of M&E systems also depends on the decisions taken during project design, specific sections of the guide provide advice to project designers, including IFAD staff and their consultants.

This guide presents a number of original features that I believe could contribute to its success and usefulness:

• It has been developed together with its potential users through a consultative process lasting over a year. It addresses their practical problems, starting from their current M&E practices, however rudimentary, and whenever possible uses examples of good practices from IFAD-funded and other rural development projects.

• The guide is geared to the specific context, procedures and partnerships of IFAD supported operations. It emphasises participatory processes throughout, and proposes options that can be adapted to the requirements of project managements in different regional and national contexts.

• The guide is organised in eight stand-alone modules that are tailored to the needs of different categories of users with specific yet differing monitoring responsibilities and tasks.

• The guide is also available to the public in a user-friendly, electronic format on the IFAD web page (www.ifad.org/evaluation).
Furthermore, the guide is not a stand-alone initiative. In fact, it forms part of broader spectrum of activities which include, more specifically, improvement of the logical framework approaches in project design and supervision, training, translation of the guide into local languages and the development of regional M&E support networks which take stock of IFAD’s experience with the PREVAL (Programme for Strengthening the M&E Capacity of IFAD-funded Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean). This regional customisation should further adapt the contents of the guide to the needs of its users and their feedback will be incorporated in future versions.

I trust that the guide will be a valuable tool and contribution to the enhancement of impact assessment and achievement in IFAD-supported projects.

Luciano Lavizzari

Director
Office of Evaluation and Studies
# Navigating the Guide

## Manager

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- Nicaragua. J.L. Sandino
- Peru. C. Sotomayor, J. Solórzano, E. Mar, I. Loaiza, T. Samagoa


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Acronyms

APR      annual project review
AWPB     annual work plan and budget
BPL      below poverty line
CBA      cost-benefit analysis
CBO      community-based organisation
CCU      central coordination unit
CI       cooperating institution
COSOP    Country Strategic Opportunities Paper
CPM      country portfolio manager
CV       curriculum vitae (résumé)
DC       district council
DPF      district project facilitator
dt       district team
FUG      forestry user group
GIS      geographic information system
GPS      global positioning system
HYVs     high-yielding varieties
ICGs     income-generating activities
IFAD     International Fund for Agricultural Development
LFA      logical framework approach
MIS      management information system
MOVs     means of verification
MTE      mid-term evaluation
MTR      mid-term review
M&E      monitoring and evaluation
MU       monitoring unit
NTCU     national technical coordination unit
NGO      non-governmental organisation
PCU      programme coordination unit
PD       project director
PIM      participatory impact monitoring
PM&E     participatory monitoring and evaluation
PMU      project management unit
PNGO     participating NGO (i.e. implementing partner)
PRA      participatory rural appraisal
SHG      self-help group
SOF      Special Operations Fund
SWOT     strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
TA       technical assistance
TOC      table of contents
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