

42nd Session of the Conference

Secretariat Response to Item 17 - Programme Evaluation Report 2021

The Office of Evaluation thanks the Members for their kind words, and appreciates the statements that recognised the usefulness and the impact of our evaluations.

Responding to the question by the Asian Group on the impact of COVID-19 related travel and access restrictions on our evaluations, indeed, the Office needed to employ various measures in the conduct of its evaluations. Given the diversity of the situation among countries and localities, and its evolution over time, our evaluation teams needed to be flexible and identify the best available method as they go through the evaluation process. Generally, the teams made much more use of remote data collection tools such as online interviews, virtual meetings and surveys, and expanded their efforts to find evidences from existing materials. There was also a significant increase in the use of national and local consultants for field data collection. Some teams have also drawn on past field experiences of national consultants and the data they have. Although these measures – the new way of doing business – have allowed the teams to address the challenges in large part, there were cases when the scope of evaluations had to be adjusted to accommodate the reality and to maintain data integrity.

On the number of evaluations conducted in each region, the Office decides on the countries subjected to country programme evaluations (CPEs) on a case-by-case basis in consultation with Regional Offices. The first deciding factor is the programme cycle – the country programme evaluations are normally conducted in the penultimate year of the cycle to produce maximum utility. Other important factors relate to the expressed needs from the Regional or Country Offices, for instance, to conduct a strategic review prompted by a change in the government or FAO representation. Looking over a longer time period, the Asia Pacific region is relatively well covered by CPEs, with the current biennium as an exception. In fact, the region had the largest number (5) of CPEs in the previous biennium (2017-2018) and the same number (5) is envisaged in the next biennium (2021-2023).

On project evaluations, by statute, the Office conducts them if the budget is over USD 4 million. The relatively small number of coverage for the Asia Pacific region stemmed from the fact that the region has much more small-scale technical assistance projects than large-scale field operations in comparison to some other regions. With the decentralization of evaluation functions to Country Offices expected next year, more flexibility will be given to Country Offices in selecting projects for evaluation and hence the coverage may expand. In these cases, it will be important to include them in the evaluation plan attached to the Country Programme Framework, in consultation with government counterparts and funding partners, and ensure sufficient allocations for evaluation in the respective project budgets. The Office of Evaluation and the Regional Offices are appointing a regional evaluation specialist in each region to cover the decentralized evaluations. For the Asia Pacific region, the regional evaluation officer is expected to be on board later this year.

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