**Case Study of the Effectiveness  
of the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO**

Contents

[Executive Summary](#_Toc324698103)

[1. Rationale for the Case Study 1](#_Toc324698104)

[2. Key Questions for the Case Study 1](#_Toc324698105)

[3. The Relevance of the FAO-IEE and its Terms of Reference 2](#_Toc324698106)

[History and Context 2](#_Toc324698107)

[The Terms of Reference 3](#_Toc324698108)

[4. The Extent to Which the FAO-IEE Met its Terms of Reference 5](#_Toc324698109)

[Evaluation Methodology 5](#_Toc324698110)

[Coverage of the Evaluation 7](#_Toc324698111)

[Evaluation Independence and Issues of Evaluation Team Recruitment 8](#_Toc324698112)

[Evaluation Quality 9](#_Toc324698113)

[5. The Efficiency of the FAO-IEE Evaluation Process 12](#_Toc324698114)

[6. The Results of the FAO-IEE and its Effects on FAO and Subsequent FAO Reforms 13](#_Toc324698115)

[Immediate Results 13](#_Toc324698116)

[Implementation of the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) 15](#_Toc324698117)

[Overall Conclusion on the Effectiveness of the FAO-IEE and the Sustainability of the Changes 18](#_Toc324698118)

[7. Some Specific Questions Included in the Case Study Terms of Reference 19](#_Toc324698119)

[Did the IEE miss opportunities to address generic issues affecting FAO’s effectiveness, e.g. its positioning in the international cooperation architecture? 19](#_Toc324698120)

[Could the IEE have been carried out by the Organization’s Evaluation Office, Drawing on its Own Work? 19](#_Toc324698121)

[Can a need for future IEE’s in FAO be obviated by a comprehensive programme of evaluation work by the FAO Evaluation Office? 20](#_Toc324698122)

[What were the effects of the IEE on evaluation in FAO and did it influence the future evaluation programme? 20](#_Toc324698123)

[Did the Experience of FAO Verify the “Theory of Change” hypothesised for the review of comprehensive evaluations of multilateral development institutions? 21](#_Toc324698124)

[Are there Critical Lessons which can be drawn directly from the FAO IEE for the future application of IEEs to International Development Institutions? 21](#_Toc324698125)

[The need to evaluate beyond individual institutions 22](#_Toc324698126)

[Annex - Case Study Methodology Detail of Survey Results - Perceptions of Effectiveness of FAO Reforms & Sources of Documentary Evidence 23](#_Toc324698127)

[Methodology 23](#_Toc324698128)

[Detail of Survey Results of Perceptions of Usefulness and Effectiveness of FAO Reforms 25](#_Toc324698129)

[Major Sources of Documentary Evidence 25](#_Toc324698130)

John Markie

On behalf of FAO Office of Evaluation, May 2010

|  |
| --- |
| Executive Summary **Demand for the Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO:** The FAO-IEE took place in response to a demand from the membership as a whole. This demand came first from some developed countries which were highly critical of FAO’s leadership and grew to have widespread support for a balanced IEE.  **The Case-study concluded:**   * The IEE was very relevant to the needs of FAO in providing an effective service to member countries; * The terms of reference were comprehensive, balanced, appropriate and in line with evaluation standards, with one possible exception of the depth as distinct from breadth of country coverage; * The FAO Governing Body arrangements to develop, support and ensure the independence of the IEE were appropriate; * The evaluation coverage, methodology, quality and independence were of a high standard; * The evaluation process was efficient and provided value for money; * The IEE showed immediate positive effects for FAO in allowing FAO to preserve its budget; * The FAO Governing Body commitment to IEE follow-up resulted in a comprehensive Immediate Plan of Action for FAO renewal (reform), based very largely on the recommendations of the IEE. As a result FAO has undergone probably the most extensive reform process in the UN system; * The great majority of FAO management and of the governing bodies consider the changes in FAO resulting from the IEE to be largely beneficial; * With the passage of time, and the election of a new Director-General, the IEE has ceased to be a major driver of change; * The FAO IEE experience did verify the theory of change posited for this study: “The organizational change triggered by an evaluation is a function of the authorizing environment; the independence and ‘externality’ of the evaluation function and process; and the quality of the report and the follow-up arrangements. When these factors are aligned organizational change is induced even if management is initially reluctant to accept evaluation report findings.” The case-study, also identifies a number of other contributory factors, emphasising the importance of IEEs being formative with explicit recommendations.   **In conclusion it is judged that:**   * There remain many individual institutions which have not been subject to overall evaluation and where such assessments would undoubtedly be valuable. A number of potential lessons are drawn for the future of IEEs in general from the case study; and * It was evident from the FAO-IEE that FAO’s role in addressing food and agricultural issues could not be considered in isolation from other international institutions. It was also clear that neither managements or governing bodies of those institutions were well equipped to make holistic and balanced decisions which fully reflected the international architecture (governmental and non-governmental). At the national level much more attention is given by both national governments and the international community to achieving coherence and efficiency of effort in line with national policies. A priority should now be given to global sectoral review as an input to optimising the international architecture for global sectoral governance and other global public goods and for support to nations and regions. Current global priorities include: finance, food and nutrition, energy, climate change, health and environmental issues, in addition to peace and security. Although rapidly becoming less current, a firm basis of evidence has been accumulated through evaluation for sectoral assessment in the agricultural and food sectors. Such a basis is less comprehensive for the other key sectors but the issues remain real with steadily increasing fragmentation of international effort, as documented in the FAO-IEE. |

**Abbreviations used in the text**

CC-IEE: Council Committee for the IEE (evaluation preparation and monitoring)

CoC-IEE: Conference Committee for the IEE (evaluation follow-up)

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

IEE: Independent External Evaluation

IPA: FAO Immediate Plan of Action

MOPAN: Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network

OECD-DAC: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee

UNEG: United Nations Evaluation Group

# 1. Rationale for the Case Study

1. Shareholders and donors are increasingly commissioning ‘independent’ and comprehensive evaluations of development effectiveness to assist decision making regarding resource allocation and funding commitments for international agencies and funds. At least seventeen such evaluations have been undertaken in the last ten years, costing in excess of US$30 million.
2. While common principles, guidelines and definitions, etc. are available for evaluating development policies, projects and programmes, no generally accepted methodologies exist for organizational mandates, performance and results. Similarly no generic criteria are in place for deciding on the scale, scope, management, implementation, oversight and follow-up of comprehensive evaluations.
3. A concerned group of evaluation specialists who have previously undertaken comprehensive evaluations have therefore initiated a project that aims to draw lessons from comprehensive evaluations of international institutions. This case study, along with other similar case studies is designed to contribute to this project.

# 2. Key Questions for the Case Study

1. The case study assesses the extent to which the design, implementation and follow-up arrangements adopted for the IEE contributed to accountability and learning within FAO. To this end the study assesses:   
   1. The relevance of the evaluation and its terms of reference;
   2. The degree to which the evaluation met the terms of reference;
   3. The efficiency of the evaluation process; and,
   4. The results of the evaluation and its effects on FAO and subsequent FAO reforms.
2. **The methodology** used for the case study is summarised in the Annex. In short, the extensive documentation on the evaluation and its follow-up as contained in FAO Governing Body Documents[[1]](#footnote-1) was reviewed along with separate assessments carried out by a number of agencies. Questionnaires with a series of closed questions enabling scoring of perceptions were sent to all FAO senior management, FAO country representatives, and the representatives of national governments to FAO. Rates of return were statistically representative for all three groups but the return rate was least satisfactory for representatives of national governments, who in many cases felt themselves unqualified to comment as they were not in post at the time of the evaluation. Interviews were conducted against a standard set of questions, with a purposive sample which included team leaders of the evaluation, FAO Deputy Directors-General and other senior managers closely associated with the evaluation and its follow-up and with a cross-section of representatives of FAO Governing Bodies. All the discussion in the report is triangulated using the evidence from these various sources and applying well proven and accepted criteria of what constitutes good evaluation practice.

# 3. The Relevance of the FAO-IEE and its Terms of Reference

## History and Context

1. As FAO entered the new millennium, there was growing dissatisfaction by the developed countries and some developing countries with the management and orientation of the Organization. Criticism became more evident from 2003 onwards and was particularly vocal from the USA and developed Commonwealth countries. At this time the idea of a “donor” independent external evaluation (IEE) of FAO began to be voiced. Some of the country representatives proposing the evaluation considered that the undertaking the evaluation would have an influence on the election for Director-General, as the then Director-General of FAO (Jacques Diouf) was expected to stand for a third term of six years at the FAO Conference in November 2005 and they did not wish him to be re-elected.
2. It became very evident to the then sponsors of the IEE idea that in an Organization with one country, one vote, the G77 would not countenance, an evaluation of FAO commissioned and managed by the developed countries (donors), which seems to have been the original idea, of at least some of them. In this context it should be noted that, as with the UN itself, members of the UN specialised agencies, including FAO, make contributions to the Regular Budget of the Organization which is voted by the Conference of all members against a fixed scale. There are thus larger and smaller contributors but not donors as would be the case with a regular budget funded from voluntary contributions (there are however also voluntary contributions, mostly in FAO’s case for particular projects or programmes and these account for about half FAO’s total expenditure).
3. The first formal proposal for an IEE was made by the USA and Canada at the FAO Council[[2]](#footnote-2) in November 2004. There was major concern that an IEE at that time would interfere in the election process for Director-General and that it should not call into question FAO’s basic mandate. A compromise was thus reached. An Inter-Sessional Working Group (ISWG) was established by the Council *“to formulate proposals for the scope, conduct and institutional arrangements for the evaluation for consideration by the Council. The ISWG would consist of a core group of up to three Members of each regional group and the coordinator of the Group of 77. All Member Nations would be entitled to participate in the ISWG .......................... the ISWG will prepare proposals for:*

* *terms of reference for a committee, to be established under Article VI of the FAO Constitution to oversee, on behalf of the Council, the entire evaluation process;*
* *terms of reference of the Independent External Evaluation of FAO, including the scope; content; methodology; composition, expertise and criteria for selection of the evaluation team; cost estimates; reporting process; and timetable for completion of the evaluation; and*
* *definition of an appropriate supporting role for the Secretariat.*

1. *The ISWG would present its proposals preferably to the Hundred and Twenty-eighth Session of the Council in June 2005, and in any case not later than the Hundred and Twenty-ninth Session in November 2005.*
2. *All phases of the evaluation process, commencing with the work of the ISWG, would be financed from extra-budgetary resources[[3]](#footnote-3).”*
3. The Chair of the ISWG was elected by consensus, a prominent country representative from a G77 country (Brazil). The then head of FAO evaluation was appointed secretary and the group began its work in January 2005. It gradually became clear that countries not in the Core Group would not accept to be silent observers and the ISWG became in effect an open committee. It was also very evident that the G77 would not agree to the start of the evaluation before 2006, so it could have no influence in the election of the Director-General (November 2005).
4. In August 2005 the Director-General, launched his own reform proposals. These were stated to be: in the spirit of the reforms being proposed by the then UN Secretary-General (Kofi Annan) in the UN itself, to respond to the agreed MDGs; and to respond to various high profile evaluations conducted by the FAO evaluation office, including that of FAO’s Decentralization. Although never stated as such it seems that the intent was also, partly to signal he was ready to dynamically implement change during a third term as Director-General and partly to pre-empt the IEE. The reforms were thus controversial, as it was considered by many of the developed countries, that it would be more efficient to await the outcome of the IEE. Nevertheless, the reforms were agreed by the FAO Conference in November 2005.
5. The process of the ISWG gradually led to a greater sense of ownership of the forthcoming IEE by the developing country members of FAO and a few contributed to the Trust Fund established for the IEE. As can be seen from Table 1 both representatives to FAO governing bodies and FAO managers continue to consider that the IEE was designed through a consultative process by the governing bodies. However, managers are less totally convinced of this than governing body representatives, probably because the extent of consultation with management was less than that within the governing bodies (ISWG).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1 Questionnaire response** | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The IEE was Designed by the FAO Governing Bodies through a Consultative Process** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 93% | 82% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 89% | 68% |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director Level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | |

## The Terms of Reference

1. Two independent senior external evaluation specialists were commissioned to draft terms of reference for the IEE (one from a developed and one from a developing country). These in slightly modified form were subsequently agreed by the FAO Council and Conference in November 2005.
2. **Quality of the IEE Terms of Reference, judged against standard evaluation criteria:** The IEE terms of reference specifically referred to the evaluation addressing the standard criteria of relevance, clarity of objectives and design, efficiency, (including quality of implementation and outputs), effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Reference was made to the UNEG and OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. The Paris Declaration was agreed in the same year as the IEE terms of reference (2005) and adherence to it was not referred to in the terms of reference as an assessment criterion both because of the date of its agreement and because it only has direct relevance to that minority of FAO’s work which is directly country driven technical cooperation[[4]](#footnote-4).
3. The terms of reference were comprehensive dividing evaluation work into four main areas:

* Technical work of FAO;
* Management and organization of FAO;
* FAO Governance; and
* FAO’s role in the multilateral system.

1. The terms of reference emphasised that the evaluation should be evidence based. Quality of methods was provided for, while not being prescriptive on those that would be employed by the evaluation team.
2. There was some un-formalised criticism by academics that the terms of reference were not sufficiently focused, but this was deliberate. The membership considered that it was essential to really examine the entirety of the Organization and its work. The inception report to be prepared by the evaluation team and the preparation of a subsequent evaluation matrix were foreseen as the way of becoming clearer on priority questions.
3. The evaluation was specifically envisaged in the terms of reference as providing a basis for decisions on follow-up and clear recommendations were requested for this. It was also specified that while the basis for evaluation assessment would be results, the evaluation would focus on current practice and continuing areas of activity, not those which had been included in the past but for which no longer formed part of FAO’s programme.
4. The IEE quality assurance advisers drew attention to one aspect of the terms of reference which they considered did not conform to evaluation standards. They considered that the number of country case-studies was excessively high, especially to developing countries (23) and that the number should have been more restricted to allow them to be in greater depth. In drawing –up the terms of reference the member country representatives had considered that breadth of regional coverage and country diversity was an essential for a global organization and only in this way would members be satisfied that a full perspective had been gained. The evaluation team shared the view taken by the membership that an IEE must represent an overview and was also considered that fewer studies could tend to skew the representivity of the sample. Evaluations were available in more depth carried out by FAO evaluation office which were drawn on (although at that time FAO was only initiating country evaluations, as such).
5. **Resources and time-frame:** The evaluation was adequately resourced with a budget of US$ 3.9 million directly for the work of the evaluation, excluding the costs of the Council Committee. Preparation for the evaluation and the design of the evaluation follow-up were separately resourced. The overall time-frame from start-up of work by the evaluation team to presentation of its final report, was ambitious (17 months) but this was driven by the need for the evaluation to inform the decisions on the future of FAO by the biennial FAO Conference (the decision to proceed with the evaluation was taken in November 2005 and the decisions on follow-up were scheduled for November 2007). A timeframe of 3.5 years to the following-FAO Conference would have been quite unrealistic in terms of relevance to the political exigencies of decision making and the short time available for the evaluation did serve to concentrate the minds of all concerned and facilitate momentum for subsequent follow-up.
6. **Conclusion - Relevance of the Evaluation and its Terms of Reference:** The interviews with governing bodies and management and all the available documentation confirm that the evaluation and its terms of reference corresponded to a crisis of confidence in FAO which was unique to the Organization, although there was also a general questioning of the efficacy of the UN system. By the time they were approved the evaluation and its terms of reference were a demand of the great majority of the membership of FAO and were supported by the majority of senior management. The evaluation was thus relevant and timely. General lessons for the pertinence of organization-wide evaluations cannot however, be drawn except in so far as when there is an acute loss of confidence in an organization, an evaluation is an appropriate response. This is further reinforced by the subsequent discussions in this case study because the evaluation did not confirm some of the pre-conceptions of major funders who if they had acted without an evaluation would probably have withdrawn or markedly reduced their funding.

# 4. The Extent to Which the FAO-IEE Met its Terms of Reference

1. In November 2005, the FAO Council and Conference agreed the terms of reference for the IEE and the establishment of a Council Committee for the Independent Evaluation of FAO (CC-IEE). Overall arrangements were designed to support independence, impartiality and objectivity of the evaluation.

## Evaluation Methodology

1. The IEE methodology included some primary data collection and major analysis of secondary data. Each of the four areas of coverage briefly summarised above was led by one core team member and had distinct elements to its methodology but several of the methods addressed all elements of the coverage, including questionnaires to member countries and other agencies, country visits for individual and focus group interviews. Transparency was aided by publishing standard protocols, checklists, etc. on the internet. The mix of methods facilitated extensive triangulation in arriving at findings and recommendations.
2. Methods encompassed:
   1. An extensive review of written materials from multiple internal and external sources, including, among others, internal FAO reports and previous studies internal and external audit reports, and UN system-wide reports;
   2. A review of FAO corporate-level evaluations, project evaluations and auto-evaluations, including an assessment of their quality. In addition, for many corporate evaluations, the IEE systematically tracked the recommendations made, management responses and subsequent follow-up. These evaluations were a particularly important source of information for the IEE assessment of the Organization’s technical work;
   3. Within generic terms of reference, specialists in almost all major FAO technical programme areas analysed key changes in the sector over the past seven years and provided analytical frameworks intended to situate FAO in the changing institutional landscape and to review the Organization’s results and potential priorities for the future (in practice these reports were of very variable quality and almost universally called for an expansion of work in the area under review. The reports were thus used as working documents by the core team and triangulated against previous FAO evaluations, country visits, results of questionnaire surveys and some additional analysis to arrive at findings on each technical area of work. They were not made publically available, as to do this would have been divisive with the technical units concerned who were in any case liable to argue, on the basis of the drafts they had seen that their area of work was supported by the IEE for expansion);
   4. Visits were made to 35 member countries, which included 23 developing countries, ten OECD capitals, the Russian Federation and the European Commission. These visits were led by core team members accompanied by regional and technical specialists. Countries were selected on the basis of a simple, numerically-based formula, which was then population-weighted for each region and a random selection made. Field visits used a generic evaluation matrix to ensure uniformity in the information collected, but allowing for differences in emphasis and applicability of different FAO products to different parts of the world and countries at different levels of development. The field visits were supported by country profiles, prepared in advance, including an inventory of FAO projects over the last six years and key donor and government programming documents. They followed standard check lists adapted to the specific situation and reported on standard formats;
   5. Structured and semi-structured interviews (face-to-face and by telephone) and focus groups were conducted, using the same questions or generic frameworks. Over 2,500 individuals were involved;
   6. Analysis of over 3 000 responses to twelve separate questionnaires;
   7. Comparisons of FAO against other agencies in each of the four core areas of the IEE, selected primarily for their similar function (i.e. technical agencies) and/or size, with some additional comparisons on specific areas. Comparison was also made with the other Rome-based agencies (WFP and IFAD), where appropriate. This was done through data review and direct interviews, as well as benchmarking within the UN system more widely (e.g. through review of UN High Level Committee on Management (HLCM) and other UN system data). Consultations were maintained with those bodies and individuals responsible for ongoing reform efforts within the UN system;
   8. Review of the extent of literature citations and internet references to FAO (for technical work and global governance for food and agriculture);
   9. An inventory of key global and regional organizations supplying services in the agriculture and food sector, ranked by FAO technical staff for their importance to FAO as partners and as competitors, and drawing on relevant studies produced by independent research institutions as well as the experience of FAO staff;
   10. A detailed analysis of the trends in and make-up of FAO funding;
   11. Retrospective examination against set criteria of historical institutional initiatives and reforms undertaken within FAO; and
   12. Analysis of data from FAO’s IT systems, for example on budget, finance and personnel.
3. Although counter-factual thinking was evident in the qualitative judgements made on FAO’s effectiveness, the available base information did not include adequate quantitative data to permit the application of systematic counterfactual analysis and there was self-evidently no basis for a control on a *“with and without FAO global situation”*. At the more micro-level within the Organization the Results Based Management system had not for the most part developed baselines or systematic monitoring. This failing was addressed in the recommendations of the evaluation but limited the possibility for the application of quantitative outcome or impact indicators.
4. The IEE did make extensive use of evaluation reports with respect to the technical work of the Organization and certain institutional issues, in particular those of decentralization and the organization of technical cooperation and emergency assistance. The IEE thus undertook a separate evaluation of the evaluation office and its work in order to verify the extent of reliance which could be placed on the independence, objectivity and overall reliability of FAO evaluations (at the time of the IEE, the evaluation office of FAO had a dual line of reporting to the Governing Bodies, which agreed its work-programme, and to the Director-General. The IEE found that de-facto it exercised a high degree of independence and its work was of good quality (among the best in the UN system), but it had a less clearly independent status in the organizational structure and institutionalised guarantees, than is now the case).
5. As noted with respect to the terms of reference, the IEE did not specifically assess FAO’s performance against criteria of the Paris Declaration and nor would it have been appropriate for it to have done so. The spirit of the Paris Declaration was however very evident in examination of FAO’s country level work, particularly with respect to its emphasis on national priorities and integration in the UN system and wider development assistance. The spirit of the Paris Declaration, was also applied as a criteria in looking at the approach of donors to FAO itself and their willingness to rely on the Organization’s standard reporting, monitoring, audit and evaluation systems and their willingness to provide programmatic funds in line with the Organization’s agreed priorities.

## Coverage of the Evaluation

1. Work was divided into four primary areas as per the terms of reference:
   1. Technical Work addressed the normative and operational work of FAO including subject matter of: access to food, crops, livestock, forests, fisheries, commodity trade and rural development and its efficiency and effectiveness in overcoming hunger, safeguarding the environment and improving conditions for economic and social development including gender equity; and modalities of technical cooperation, policy development and advice, regulatory and standard-setting work, information dissemination, advocacy, statistics, studies, emergency responses, networking and dialogue;
   2. Management, Administration and Organization, including planning and programming, budget, administrative and financial systems, organizational structure (including decentralized structures), oversight, evaluation, corporate culture, human resources management and deployment, knowledge and risk management, and accountability policies and practices;
   3. Governance included the roles, efficiency and effectiveness of the governing bodies in: providing global governance for food and agriculture; and guiding the work of the FAO secretariat. This encompassed the relationship between the Members and the Secretariat in the determination of strategy, policy and priority-setting, financing issues of the Regular Budget and voluntary contributions and governance relationships within the UN system, as well as the participation of stakeholder groups; and
   4. FAO’s Role in the Multilateral System: Central to this were questions of the appropriate role for the FAO in an international development and governance architecture that was vastly different from 1945 when FAO was founded, the absolute and dynamic comparative advantages of the Organization and its ability to enter into alliances and contribute to reform of the UN and wider international systems.
2. There had been some questioning that the terms of reference specifically excluded the evaluation from reviewing FAO’s mandate in the international system. This did not prove to be a restriction in practice, as relevance and results were examined in all areas of the FAO mandate which were being actively pursued by the Organization. The coverage was comprehensive in the report as well as in the terms of reference. The division of work into the four areas well reflected the key evaluation questions to be addressed. There were some overlaps between these four areas, especially as regards FAO’s technical work and its role in global and regional governance for food and agriculture and its role in the multilateral system, but this would have been the case with any other split and the synergies were well addressed in practice.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 2: Questionnaire response** | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The IEE addressed all the main issues for FAO** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 89% | 75% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 92% | 76% |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director Level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | |

1. As can be seen from Table 2, both the representatives to FAO’s governing bodies and FAO management agree that the IEE addressed the main issues for FAO. There is little or no difference in the view of the two groups, with three quarters well satisfied with the coverage of issues and only around ten percent noting any disagreement with the statement.

## Evaluation Independence and Issues of Evaluation Team Recruitment

1. There was some questioning of the independence of the process agreed for selection of an independent evaluation team and the independence with which the evaluation would be conducted. This criticism was not in any way formally presented and was not primarily from Government Representatives of developed or developing countries but from various evaluation professionals and academics in email traffic. It was not clear how they considered the evaluation quality and adherence to terms of reference should have been assured but as is clear from the terms of reference of the CC-IEE it had no authority to interfere in the evaluation methods or findings and recommendations. Its terms of reference stated *“The IEE Council Committee, assisted by a Bureau, will provide overall oversight for the management and operation of the evaluation, including on financial matters and adherence to standards of quality and independence. It will ensure that the terms of reference are adhered to in a timely manner, with quality and independence of process and outputs and within budget. Drawing on the advice of the quality assurance advisers, Committee comments on findings and recommendations will thus be restricted to quality assurance, i.e. that the findings and recommendations are analysis and evidence based.”....*
2. *“The quality assurance advisers, of which there will be two, will serve as and when required. They will have a key role vis-à-vis the Committee of the Council in preparing independent reports, and providing assurance on the independence and quality of the evaluation work. They will be present at each meeting of the Council Committee to provide feedback to the Committee and provide the Committee with an independent source of evaluation expertise. In addition, the quality assurance advisers will be responsible for monitoring reports to the Committee on the status of the work of the evaluation, in line with the work plan.”*
3. These same critics of the IEE considered that true independence of the evaluation could only be achieved if the evaluation was put out to open tender and a separate independent panel made the selection of a consultancy firm. In fact what was done was to advertise widely for a team leader and core team specialists to cover: (i) the technical work of FAO, (ii) management, organization and administration, (iii) Governance of FAO, and (iv) FAO’s role in the multilateral system. The core team applicants were screened against, their qualifications as evaluators and in the technical area for which they applied. Attention was also given to regional and gender balance. Applicants were assessed on the advice of the secretary to the ISWG (FAO Evaluation Head) against a set of standard criteria. The short-listed candidates for team leader and the first listed candidates for core team membership were interviewed by a working group drawn from the Bureau of the Council Committee for the IEE.
4. The decision to go the route of recruiting a core team individually was intended to ensure geographical balance, regarded as very important by the developing countries, and gender balance which was important to all member countries. It was thus, designed to ensure that the FAO membership had full confidence in all the team. There was some lack of cohesion by some members of the core evaluation team, whether this would necessarily have been avoided in a high-level team, recruited by a consultancy firm for such an extensive evaluation is not assured. Two senior management representatives in interviews and one governing body representative from a developing country did question if too much emphasis had been placed on geographical and gender balance at the price of uniformly high competence.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 3: Questionnaire response** | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The IEE had a geographically balanced evaluation team reflecting FAO’s global membership** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 80% | 60% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 90% | 63% |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | |

1. The consensus was that, although the team leadership was from a developed country, the participation of three developing country representatives in the core team of five, greatly enhanced the developing country FAO members’ confidence in the evaluation. This degree of developing country participation in the core team would have been highly unlikely in the case of a consultancy firm. It was also noted that major qualified consultancy firms almost always had links to developed country development agencies. As can be seen from Table 3, both governing body representatives and FAO management remain relatively satisfied that a desirable geographical balance was achieved.
2. The FAO Council took a further measure to ensure that FAO management would not have any opportunity to reduce the independence of the evaluation. They suspended certain internal administrative rules of the Organization with regard to the hiring of consultants, which would have allowed any administrative impediments to have been placed on the workings of the IEE.
3. The mandate of the CC-IEE was interpreted strictly, so that when it came to considering, how follow-up measures to the evaluation should be organized, the Council decided its Chair should convene a separate group for this. As participation in this group was open to all members and it had the same secretary as the CC-IEE, the effective difference was the chairpersonship and the mandate.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 4: Questionnaire response** | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The IEE was Independent** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 93% | 79% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 94% | 80% |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | |

1. Given the far reaching and critical nature of the final evaluation report, it would be difficult to argue that independence was in any way lost in practice. The view that the IEE was independent continues to be the perception of both governing body representatives and management (see Table 4).

## Evaluation Quality

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 5: Questionnaire response** | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The IEE was professional** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 96% | 86% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 98% | 88% |
| **The evaluators consulted adequately with all stakeholders** |  |  |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 86% | 62% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 79% | 53% |
| **The IEE made clear and actionable recommendations** |  |  |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 96% | 68% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 90% | 73% |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | |

1. Representatives to FAO governing bodies and FAO managers consider that the IEE was professional (Table 5). There was overall satisfaction with the level of consultation particularly by governing body representatives but for managers although the overall assessment was positive, there were definitely trade-offs in the time-frame of the evaluation and the extents of possible face- to-face consultation at each stage of the process.
2. At the Request of the Governing Bodies (CC-IEE), very early in the evaluation, an emerging issues paper was produced (April 2007). This identified a number of hypotheses for testing, confirmation and elaboration in the final evaluation report. Some have questioned this as prematurely focusing the IEE. It did however have a number of benefits. It gave FAO member governments and management an early feel for the type of issues likely to come out of the IEE. If there were hypotheses which certain constituencies strongly questioned, it allowed them to assemble the facts. It facilitated the IEE in successfully completing its work in a tight time-frame and did not preclude the identification of additional issues during the evaluation.
3. A factor which could have influenced the quality of the evaluation work, but which does not appear to have done so, was a set of critical circumstances in the team leadership. The first team leader (Keith Bezanson) became critically ill in the first few months of the evaluation. He continued to work with the evaluation but a replacement team leader (Leif Christoffersen) was appointed through competitive selection and most tragically his wife died shortly after his appointment. Despite this the core team continued its work and both the first and second team leaders were fully available for the final analysis of data and the completion of the report.
4. The IEE itself identified the following limitations in the quality of the evaluation:
   1. The time available for actual evaluation work which was about one year;
   2. The 35 country visits had to be undertaken at an early stage of the evaluation. This helped to identify questions for the evaluation but made them less useful in systematic fact gathering on the responses to those questions;
   3. The major weaknesses in FAO’s monitoring and the absence of an overall long-term results framework made it very difficult to assess FAO's results. This, coupled with the inherent difficulties in evaluating global public goods activities and technical assistance meant the country studies were not able to systematically track the global technical activities at the country level in the way the IEE had hoped;
   4. Multiple survey instruments were used, and the best social science practice was followed. but, the IEE did not have time to pre-test the instruments, and as a result the confidence level was not as high as would have been desirable, but the IEE team did not believe that this substantially weakened the basis for its finding;
   5. Given the vast scope and short time frame of the evaluation, the IEE had to rely on a very large team of colleagues, not all of whom necessarily fully understood the nature of the IEE. This gave the IEE the benefit of many expert opinions, but also required an elaborate effort at triangulation and synthesis to pull it all together;
   6. Given the time constraints, the formal opportunities for direct participation of stakeholders were structured and focused. This limited the opportunities for reactions from the private sector, civil society and academia; and
   7. Given the limited timeframe and in order to keep the report to a manageable length, choices were made to focus on areas most central to the ToR in the light of the larger emerging picture. This means that most but not all technical work was fully described and assessed. The team noted that this in no way constituted a judgement on the quality of the areas receiving little or no explicit attention, but it did of course mean that in most cases they were considered less central.
5. The evaluation did cover its terms of reference in full. Priorities and objectives were thoroughly analysed, as well as the weaknesses in the governance, institutional arrangements and processes for their definition. There was explicit use of standard evaluation criteria in the largest section of the IEE report which addressed the technical programmes of the organization. It was also stated implicitly or explicitly when the data was not available to assess the impacts and sustainability. Considerable attention in the reports analysis and in its conclusions was given to the relevance and role of the Organization, in the light of changes in the international context. A section of the report addressed the overall quality and issues of programme design.
6. Efficiency was examined in terms of FAO’s overall systems, its culture, efficiency of governance and efficiency with respect to individual programmes and functions such as programming and planning. The administration, management and organization team took essentially a bottom-up approach to exploring the strengths and weaknesses in rules and processes from the working level up through line management to senior management. The greater use of top-down review could have complemented that from the bottom-up with deeper insights. This perhaps was the underlying reason for the only really negative comment received on the IEE in response to the questionnaire from a middle level manager in administration. It may also have contributed to the IEE calling for a root and branch review of FAO’s management and administration by a management consultancy company, a review for which the IEE was able to provide little guidance on areas for concentration in the analysis.
7. The Quality Assurance Advisors congratulated the IEE Team on a very readable and comprehensive report, which contained a wealth of information. They concluded that the quality of the report could be described as “robust”. The evidence has been gathered through solid and valid methodologies and analyzed thoroughly:
   1. The report was evidence-based;
   2. The Terms of Reference for the IEE were fully met;
   3. The evaluation had been conducted in an independent way and the evidence, conclusions and recommendations were not inspired or influenced by any stakeholder group in FAO;
   4. Extensive consultations were held with all stakeholders of FAO as part of the process. This had fully informed the evaluation without in any way compromising the independence of the Team;
   5. The report looked forward as well backwards and thus was formative as well as summative. This contributed to the formulation of a great number of detailed recommendations, as specifically required by the Terms of Reference. The recommendations had been successfully prioritized; and
   6. Considered that inadequate attention and synthesis had been provided by the IEE on:
      1. the questions of what and how FAO should deliver at the country level (a concern which they had also expressed with the original terms of reference);
      2. the role of FAO in contributing to global and national responses in the areas of environment and climate change; and
      3. strengthening impact assessment in the context of a strengthened evaluation function.
8. As can be seen from Table 5 above the IEE was considered by both managers and representative to FAO governing bodies to have made clear and actionable recommendations for follow-up.

# 5. The Efficiency of the FAO-IEE Evaluation Process

1. The IEE got underway in April 2006 and presented its final report in September 2007. The actual evaluation was thus completed in 18 months, a short period for an evaluation of this extent. In terms of value for money there has been little questioning of the costs of the evaluation. Its direct cost represented about 0.7% of FAO’s annual expenditure at the time and this was the first evaluation of the Organization as a whole in its 50 year history.
2. The governing body process which involved the whole membership could be considered less efficient, but it was essential to the full ownership of the evaluation by the membership, confirmed in their reports and the subsequent follow-up process.
3. The one area, not of inefficiency but of significant hidden cost was the FAO management and staff input. Several senior managers have noted that the Organization failed to fully foresee or plan for this input. There were also opportunity costs for governing body representatives but this was not considered by those interviewed for this study or at the time to have been a major issue given the priority their governments attached to the exercise. However, the level of commitment required was definitely a strain for the smaller countries.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 6: Questionnaire response** | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The IEE provided good value for money** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 92% | 69% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 66% | 49% |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | |

1. Table 5 shows that the question of overall value for money as one of the areas where the perspective of managers and representatives to governing bodies diverge. Although two thirds of mangers responded positively on value for money, this was one of the only two questions where less than half the managers were mostly or totally in agreement (on the six point scale). As appears from their comments, this was due to a desire for more progress on follow-up.
2. A question put to all interviewees was whether the overall costs of the evaluation (direct and indirect) were justified and the response was unanimously that given the need for the evaluation and its eventual results the costs were insignificant. However, some of those interviewed in management did go on to note that the evaluation was a unique response and they would not consider the indirect costs in staff, management and governing body time to be justified for regular IEEs.
3. As with any process the evaluation itself could have been even more efficient and suggestions as to how this might have occurred have included:  
   1. There could have been a smaller tighter and more cohesive team used for the assessment of technical programmes, rather than the large number of individual specialists and specific technical critique could have been obtained through the use of reference panels (itself a heavy organizational exercise);
   2. Integrated within the evaluation, a management consulting firm could have been used to cover managerial, administrative and financial aspects of the evaluation. This might have precluded the need for a follow-up study “the Root and Branch Review” or allowed that study to have much tighter terms of reference proposed by the IEE. It is doubtful, however, that, as the evaluation was voluntarily funded, the resources would have been immediately available for such a costly input into the IEE itself;
   3. The evaluation report being clearer on the extent of commitment of staff time which would be necessitated for follow-up. Some members of management considered that financial resources should also have been committed as part of the immediate follow-up process to study how to improve the effectiveness of FAO’s field structure, as they considered the IEE had adopted a restricted view of this. It is unlikely that this would have yielded immediate benefit, as the issues were known (including from the previous major evaluation of decentralization), and some positive change occurred immediately, despite the resistance of the then Director-General.

# 6. The Results of the FAO-IEE and its Effects on FAO and Subsequent FAO Reforms

## Immediate Results

1. Following management’s basic acceptance of the findings of the IEE and a willingness to reform, the first result of the IEE was the confidence in the Organization expressed at the 2007 session of the FAO Conference which received the IEE report. This was reflected in a substantial increase in its net US$ Regular Budget which grew in US$ terms (although not purchasing power) by 21% (US$929.84 for 2008-09 as compared with US$ 765.7 for 2006-07). This was at a time when the trend was to freeze or make very small increases in UN agency budgets. There can be little doubt that in the absence of the IEE, FAO would have at the minimum suffered similar budgetary treatment. There was one significant dissenter from this consensus, i.e. the USA, at that time under a Republican Administration. It appears that the USA had believed that the IEE findings would provide a tool for cutting FAO’s budget and in fact the IEE recommended both reform and growth moving in lockstep. As a result of this the USA withdrew from participation in the follow-up process to the IEE for the first months of 2008 but subsequently fully re-entered into participation.
2. The IEE made 107 recommendations with large numbers of sub-recommendations and action observations. This level of detail reflected what was requested in its ToRs for actionable recommendations for FAO reform. It could also be argued that it encouraged governing body intervention in micro-management but this reflected the distrust there was at the time between FAO’s most senior management and the governing bodies. At the same time many of the recommendations were widely supported at the level of management immediately below the level of the Director-General.
3. The IEE recommended that the governing bodies and management should jointly design a follow-up action-plan. In the event for reasons which are not entirely clear, the developing countries (G77) considered that such a joint approach would compromise the primacy of governance and a one year follow-up mechanism was agreed by the 2007 FAO Conference, whereby the Conference established a Committee of the whole for IEE follow-up, chaired ad personam by the then Chair of the FAO Council, with the former head of evaluation as secretary. There were working groups also of the whole to address: the Technical work of the Organization; Governance; and Administration, Finance and Support Services.
4. The lack of formal management participation in the follow-up Committee was at first a significant handicap, as the input which only management could provide was lacking. Over the course of the Committee’s work, management steadily increased its input at the Committee’s request but this clearly remained a governing body, rather than a joint process.
5. It could have been helpful if the governing body follow-up process had had access to the evaluation team for clarifications, but this was precluded by the reluctance of senior management and some country representatives to have further influence exerted by the team.
6. The unprecedented level of engagement of FAO members in the process is difficult to exaggerate. There were 79 meetings of the working groups, of a day or half-day duration. These meetings were normally attended by a range of 40-80 country representatives. The full Conference Committee met nine times. All recommendations of the IEE were systematically addressed and the great majority were approved, albeit sometimes in modified form, and translated into actions. The overall judgement of governing body representatives and managers was that the governing body process was effective for FAO reform (see Table 7)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 7: Questionnaire response** | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The Governing Body process was effective for FAO reform** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 82% | 54% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 86% | 55% |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | |

1. In line with the recommendations of the IEE, and in parallel with the design of an immediate plan of action by the governing bodies (CoC-IEE), a “Root and Branch Review” of financial and administrative areas was commissioned from a leading consultancy firm. This resulted in less directly applied recommendations. The reasons for this are unclear, whether due to the complexity of the areas being addressed, the resistance of the administrative functions and responsible Governing Body committees to change or the competence and familiarity with the UN system of the consultants.
2. The Governing Body process resulted in an Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal (IPA) which provided a time-bound set of defined actions and the elements of a strategic framework and medium-term plan. It was approved unanimously at a Special Session of the FAO Conference in November 2008. The first year of implementation was subject partly to voluntary funding but after that implementation was included in the FAO Regular Budget with a total of US$ 45 million for the two years 2010-11 and US$ 39 million budgeted for 2012-13.
3. The IPA very largely followed the recommendations of the IEE. Significant divergences of the IPA from the IEE recommendations were:

* An improved but continued lack of very clear prioritisation in resource allocation. In this context however, it should be noted that the IEE itself had difficulty in providing clear cut recommendations on areas for cuts and the problem largely reflects the divergent priorities expressed by the representatives of member countries;
* A reduction in the size of the FAO Council to facilitate a more executive role which was resisted by the G77 and some European countries which emphasised the principle of representivity;
* Streamlining of the country office structure which was resisted by the G77 and not facilitated by the then Director-General;
* Major consolidation of headquarters units, which was resisted by the then Director-General;
* A more flexible and less uniform structure for both headquarters and decentralized offices, which was also resisted by the then Director-General.

## Implementation of the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA)

1. The report by management on the implementation of the Immediate Plan of Action (April 2012), “IPA Annual Report for 2011 and Direction for 2012” reported that in quantitative terms the number of completed IPA actions was 81 percent of the total and that a further 15 percent were on track for completion within timeframe. Of the remaining actions subject to major delays, three were due to lack of consensus in the governing bodies and four of the others were complex projects key to the workings of the reform (Managing for Results, Enterprise risk management, Human Resources Management, and the Global resource management system. Qualitatively management considered that progress was overall satisfactory and the remaining reforms could be speeded-up. It should however, be noted that this was in contrast to its assessment at the end of 2011, prior to a call for accelerated closure of the IPA by the incoming Director-General. The report did acknowledge that the complex reforms would take longer to complete.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 8: Questionnaire response** | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The Management Follow-up process was effective for FAO reform** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 75% | 43% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 90% | 55% |
| **Implementation of IPA Reform is proceeding well** |  |  |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 75% | 43% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 84% | 42% |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | |

1. As can be seen from Table 8, managers are more satisfied that there was an effective management follow-up process than are representatives to the governing bodies. The majority of all assessments were positive but less than half those of governing body representatives and just over half those of FAO managers can be considered very positive. Similarly overall satisfaction that that reform is proceeding well is clearly positive but is higher for managers than for the governing bodies and the majorities of both groups are less than fully satisfied.
2. In addition to the monitoring and adjustment of the implementation of the Plan by the governing bodies which continued through the system of the Conference Committee to the end of 2011 a number of external bodies have examined the validity of the plan and the progress:  
   1. **MOPAN** reported at the end of 2011[[5]](#footnote-5). It stated that “FAO is committed to organisation-wide reform and has acted on the recommendations of the 2007 Independent External Evaluation (IEE) – The MOPAN assessment identified improvements in several areas identified in the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) developed in response to the IEE, including the strengthening of its evaluation function, the integration of gender equality mainstreaming into its strategic programme, and promoting the right to food in human rights-based approaches. FAO’s follow-up activity to implement the IPA demonstrates its efforts to incorporate the recommendations in its programming. However, the MOPAN assessment also found that that there is still much work to be done to complete the reform process”. Progress in Results Based Management in particular needed to be further strengthened.   
      With respect to MOPAN criteria for developing country assistance by multilateral organizations, based on the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, the MOPAN report stated that, in line with IEE recommendations: “

* *The FAO works collaboratively with direct partners to assist developing countries and countries in transition to modernise and improve practices in agriculture, forestry and fisheries; and ensure good nutrition for all;*
* *The FAO‘s direct partners, more than half of whom are government representatives commended the FAO for its support for national plans and contributions to policy dialogue;*
* *The FAO forms partnerships with governments and the private sector, academic and research institutions. It supports inter-agency plans and appeals by participating in joint planning missions and sharing information with other partners;*
* *The organization receives lower ratings for its use of country procurement and financial management systems and its participation in program-based approaches. However, given its technical assistance function and its level of funding at country level, the Paris Declaration targets may set unreasonable expectations for an organization like FAO*.”  
  1. **The US Government Accountability Office[[6]](#footnote-6)** reporting in September 2011 found that the IPA resulted from the Independent External Evaluation. Their report assessed the progress in implementation of the IPA and the adequacy of monitoring and reporting on that progress. It was found that reporting on IPA implementation by FAO may not fully reflect the status on all action items and some could be classified as on schedule or completed which had been classified as subject to delays and vice-versa. It found that the biggest delays were on three areas where the Member States in the Governing Bodies could not reach agreement (the coverage of country offices, size of the Council and qualifications for the post of Director-General). There was found to be a lack of clear communication from senior management on Culture Change, resistance from staff to the mobility policy and from middle level managers to the introduction of the Enterprise Risk Management Methodology.
  2. **Australia** Multilateral Assessment Report March 2012[[7]](#footnote-7)**:** The IEE and its follow-up was not the main focus of the assessment. The assessment found “FAO is undergoing one of the most comprehensive reform programs in the UN system”. *“The reforms launched in 2008 in the “Immediate Plan of Action” (IPA) are well underway and have improved systems for planning, budgeting and managing by results. They include devolving more responsibility for planning and budgeting to the regional level, with accompanying staffing and financial reforms.” The IPA “seems to be making good progress and is likely to bring improvements in planning and management for the next biennium (2012-13).” On the extent to which FAO places value on alignment with partner countries’ priorities and systems, the report found “FAO is at least adequate in this respect”*. It was noted also that much FAO direct assistance related to humanitarian emergencies where use of national procurement, etc. was less relevant. It was found that *“a new resource mobilisation strategy has been developed in an effort to increase alignment of voluntary funding with objectives, it has yet to succeed*”.
  3. **All these reports** commented positively on FAO’s evaluation function and the extent of its independence.

1. **Mannet Report[[8]](#footnote-8)**: Commissioned by the FAO Office of the Inspector General (Audit), in January 2011, the consulting firm Mannet completed a rapid, high-level review of the implementation of the IPA with the overall purpose of helping the Organization optimise the benefits from investment in the IPA. This report was less satisfied with FAO Reform. It concluded

*“The Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) is thus far doing its job as an immediate plan of action. However, the focus in most, if not all action, has been at the surface level neglecting important elements of organizational development. ........ Effective change management is shaped and driven by a compelling vision and clarity of purpose............... The IPA was based on a comprehensive assessment of the FAO environment. While ambitious in scope, it did not take a holistic approach to organizational change. There were too many fragmented projects and actions, and the approach lacked cohesion. Many projects dealt with surface as opposed to deeper, systemic issues. The drive to complete, in a relatively mechanistic way, a large number of actions meant that there was little attempt to assess FAO’s readiness for and receptivity to change, to prioritize and sequence individual IPA actions, or to examine the capacity of the Organization to absorb change.......  
The reform process has led to a broad range of initiatives designed to build FAO capacity. Some important foundations have been laid. However, the focus in most if not all cases has been at the surface level, and this alone cannot bring about the organizational transformation and renewal desired by Members. The IPA has done its job as an immediate plan of action, and the actions not yet finished should be completed and mainstreamed as quickly as possible. The longer term organizational strengthening approach must be carefully managed to leverage more fundamental and systemic change. In developing a plan for the transition, it is important to think about sequencing and integrating the different efforts, as well as genuine receptiveness to change”*.

1. Although FAO management stated in its report on the implementation of the IPA that it welcomed the Mannet report and that its suggestions on how to move forward were in line with steps already taken by the Organization, it specifically rejected the basic conclusion, stating *“The nature, complexity and wide-ranging scope of the IPA Programme have accounted for the focus on what is referred to in the Mannet report as “surface level” implementation of what has been mandated by IPA actions. However, management would not agree that these changes are not having a fundamental impact on the effectiveness of the Organization”*.

## Overall Conclusion on the Effectiveness of the FAO-IEE and the Sustainability of the Changes

1. The Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) can be directly attributed to the IEE. It was the driving force of the points of action through its recommendations. Almost all managers and representatives to FAO governing bodies consider the IEE to have been useful (Table 9) and well over 80 percent in both cases were fully positive on this. Both groups were also uniformly positive that the reform resulting from the IEE had been good for FAO. All those interviewed considered that the changes made as a result of the IEE would make FAO a more effective organization and that the practical changes are sustainable. Some interviewees had reservations in a few areas as to whether the changes would be a net benefit, but the overwhelming judgement is that FAO will provide a better service to the world as a result of the IEE and the implementation of the resultant IPA (detailed questionnaire responses on the usefulness of changes in various areas are provided in the Annex).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 9: Questionnaire response** | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The IEE was useful** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 96% | 89% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 94% | 83% |
| **Reforms resulting from the IEE are good for FAO** |  |  |
| Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 86% | 75% |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 84% | 66% |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | |

1. Alone, the IEE was not sufficient for reform, the other essential factor was the commitment of the FAO membership with passive resistance, from the then Director-General but commitment of key senior managers. The governing bodies, themselves took on a task which would normally be undertaken by management, in designing the (IPA) and FAO has probably been undergoing the most comprehensive reform of any major UN Agency. Significant changes which have taken place, include:

* More attention to overall strategy and priorities;
* A much greater emphasis on results based management;
* Significant streamlining and modernisation of administrative systems;
* Decentralization of authority and functions to the regional and country level;
* A number of programme adjustments (but some judge these to have been more cosmetic than actual); and
* Significant changes in the governance processes and structure.

1. Two sets of changes resulted from the process, rather more than the evaluation. The close involvement of the membership in the follow-up:

* Made the member representatives both much more informed about FAO and improved their understanding of each other’s governments’ positions, lessoning the tension between developed and developing countries and also increasing the reliance on evidence rather than political perspective for decision making. Although with the passage of time, the turnover of representatives has reduced this somewhat, informants considered that a sustainable change had occurred;
* Allowed the governing bodies to develop a taste for micro-management, which was essential in drawing up the Immediate Plan of Action, but which impinges on the role of management and introduces inefficiencies in governance. It could now become markedly counterproductive with a new Director-General in place.

1. This having been said there is also a consensus of opinion that culture change in FAO secretariat is not deep rooted and is not self-sustaining (born out also by the questionnaire responses see Annex and a survey of FAO staff[[9]](#footnote-9)). Progress has been made but continued progress, will depend greatly on the new leadership of FAO, which has downplayed follow-up to the IEE. The needs to deepen culture change, extend to progress on: results orientation, internal partnering, dialogue between and across different layers of management, delegation of responsibility and balanced response to risks and benefits. While all those interviewed considered that culture change must become an ongoing institutional process and not a project, there were differences of view on how much emphasis this should receive and whether the process required ongoing external facilitation.
2. **In conclusion:** It is evident that future change in FAO will owe less to the IEE. Although the IEE is still referred to, the new Director-General has made clear that he now has his own priorities for the future development of the Organization, which, while largely in the spirit of the IEE, do not owe their origin or development to it.

# 7. Some Specific Questions Included in the Case Study Terms of Reference

## Did the IEE miss opportunities to address generic issues affecting FAO’s effectiveness, e.g. its positioning in the international cooperation architecture?

1. The positioning and role of FAO in the international cooperation architecture and in the overall architecture for development and global governance was addressed at length by the IEE.
2. Some of those interviewed and the Mannet study referenced above, posited that inadequate attention was given to the overall modalities and connectedness of FAO to address issues at country level. The report did in fact give attention to this. It would be truer to say that in the period since the IEE with partial implementation of many of its recommendations with respect to decentralization, thinking has moved further on the networking of FAO’s country and regional presence, the accessing of expertise, decentralised resource mobilisation and development of programmatic approaches at country level. Subsequent evaluations conducted by the FAO evaluation office have contributed to this development of thinking.

## Could the IEE have been carried out by the Organization’s Evaluation Office, Drawing on its Own Work?

1. The FAO-IEE, came at a time of crisis of confidence in the Organization and was intended to provide evidence and recommendations to further highly political decision making on the Organization’s future. It was a very high profile exercise within the Organization’s Governing Bodies. It seems unlikely, that even if there had been an evaluation office at that time with its sole line of reporting and responsibility to the Governing Bodies, there would have been adequate surety in the objectivity of evaluation staff (who over the years develop loyalty to the Organization) to give the sense of full confidence in both the reliability and macro-perspective of the IEE).
2. It is unlikely that costs could have been significantly reduced, by the IEE relying more on existing evaluation material and undertaking less primary data collection. The primary data collection was also necessary to member country confidence and to the IEE team in validating existing evaluations. As noted above, the IEE drew heavily on evaluation reports completed by the FAO’s evaluation office. This was called for in the terms of reference and the IEE validated the reliability and objectivity of the evaluations. However, these reports were not comprehensive in their coverage of the technical work of the Organization. They did not cover governance or administration and finance at all and audit reports did not address issues at a strategic level.

## Can a need for future IEE’s in FAO be obviated by a comprehensive programme of evaluation work by the FAO Evaluation Office?

1. It is to be hoped that FAO will never again reach the point of crisis of confidence which necessitated the IEE. However, the IEE direct costs were only some 0.7% of the Organization’s annual expenditure. An IEE every eight years coinciding with the terms of FAO Directors-General, would seem justified in order to take an overall strategic look at the Organization (one former senior manager interviewed did not share this view and considered that the evaluation of decentralization which had been conducted prior to the IEE by the FAO evaluation office demonstrated that more specifically problem oriented evaluation was more useful than an IEE, but it needs to be recalled that the real follow-up to that evaluation only took place when its recommendations were reinforced through the IEE).
2. Given the status the FAO evaluation office now has, IEEs could now be commissioned by that office and needs for primary data collection would be substantially less if the IEE was well foreseen in advance, and given that the evaluation programme of the Organization is building up a comprehensive body of evidence at a strategic level. However, agreement on the terms of reference by the governing bodies and a senior external independent team are important, not only to tackle major management issues, but also to address governance (governance in FAO, as with the UN itself and the other specialised agencies, is not only important for the operation of the organization but for global governance of the sector, in FAO’s case food security, food and agriculture).
3. However, the timing of IEEs is very sensitive and was discussed at length during interviews. An incoming Director-General is elected on a platform and if an IEE reports after the election it is unlikely to be of use to candidates in formulating their platforms. An outgoing Director-General may resist an IEE which could be considered a critique of their leadership, but on balance an evaluation completed some six months before the election of a Director-General, would be likely to be of the greatest usefulness. Some interviewees suggested that there would be less resistance to evaluation by Executive Heads if they were decided as a desirable feature of responsible management for the UN system as a whole.

## What were the effects of the IEE on evaluation in FAO and did it influence the future evaluation programme?

1. The IEE made specific recommendations for the future status of the evaluation office in FAO which were translated into the IPA and have been implemented. These institutionalised the independence of the evaluation function within the FAO secretariat and confirmed a dual reporting line to the FAO governing bodies and the Director-General. They also established the evaluation budget in terms of a percentage of the total budget and set out measures for evaluation quality assurance. The basic principles agreed in the IPA were amplified into an evaluation charter approved by the FAO governing bodies.
2. By the time of the IEE the FAO programme of evaluation had already taken on a significant strategic dimension and applied criteria of achieving overall coverage and addressing areas of priority concern for management and the governing bodies. Some subsequent evaluations did have their origins in the reviews undertaken for the IEE (e.g. the evaluations of water and nutrition).

## Did the Experience of FAO Verify the “Theory of Change” hypothesised for the review of comprehensive evaluations of multilateral development institutions?

1. The comprehensive theory of change to be tested was stated as “The organizational change triggered by an evaluation is a function of the authorizing environment; the independence and ‘externality’ of the evaluation function and process; and the quality of the report and the follow-up arrangements. When these factors are aligned organizational change is induced even if management is initially reluctant to accept evaluation report findings.”
2. The FAO IEE certainly was firmly authorised by the membership of FAO as whole; was in reality and was seen to be independent and external; and produced a quality report. The evaluation was followed-up through an authoritative and institutionalised process. Were these the sufficient and necessary conditions to the effects the evaluation eventually had? Perhaps, but there were definitely a number of other contributory factors:

* The evaluation was not only firmly authorised, it was a response to compelling demand;
* There was quality of evaluation process, in particular ownership and confidence in the evaluation by the membership was addressed every step of the way from the geographically and gender balance of the evaluation team, to the consultative processes and quality of methodology;
* The evaluation was comprehensive. Although some considered at the outset that the terms of reference should have been more issue focused, this would have required a pre-judgment of the issues. Comprehensive coverage also meant that there was no scope to question whether the IEE report lacked balance because certain issues had not been addressed. It may be questioned as to whether IEEs should be issue focused from the outset and this may in part be linked to their frequency. In the FAO case the total coverage was a contributory factor to the acceptance of the report by the membership at large;
* The evaluation recognised political realities and in the view of some interviewees did not dilute recommendations in a way which could have occurred through excessive discussion with management (some interviewees considered that this had happened to the detriment of the subsequent root and branch review conducted by management consultants);
* The evaluation made specific recommendations. In the FAO case and in the case of many evaluations, management cannot be relied upon to develop implementation plans for recommendations it is not convinced of. The IEE gave both management and the membership the opportunity to react to specifics. In many cases they reacted favourably in others modifications were developed but a road forward towards implementation was provided in a way which could not have occurred in the absence of relatively precise recommendations;
* The follow-up process preserved the momentum of the evaluation itself.

## Are there Critical Lessons which can be drawn directly from the FAO IEE for the future application of IEEs to International Development Institutions?

1. There remain many individual institutions which have not been subject to overall evaluation and where such assessments would undoubtedly be valuable. If there are general lessons that can be drawn from the FAO IEE, in addition to the general confirmation of the “theory of change” posited for this study, they are that:
   1. IEEs are at their most useful when they are not only, or even primarily, for accountability but are formative, addressing the issues they identify;
   2. IEEs must recognise and address political realities;
   3. IEEs must address the governance of the institution. They cannot be seen merely as an examination of management and systems. The member states must be assisted through IEEs to correct the weaknesses in both their ways of working and policies, essential to the renewal of international systems;
   4. Some, but not extensive, compromise on evaluation principles is justified to ensure ownership and confidence in the evaluation by key decision makers in both governing bodies and management;
   5. High priority should be given to an institutionalised follow-up process;
   6. Actionable recommendations on main findings greatly facilitate follow-up. The recommendations may not all be accepted and they may be modified, but managers and governing bodies benefit most from clarity on, not only what is the problem, but how it could possibly be addressed (sometimes with alternatives).

## The need to evaluate beyond individual institutions

1. It was evident from the FAO-IEE that FAO’s role in addressing food and agricultural issues could not be considered in isolation from other international institutions. It was also clear that neither managements or governing bodies of those institutions were well equipped to make holistic and balanced decisions which fully reflected the international architecture (governmental and non-governmental).
2. At the national level much more attention is given by both national governments and the international community to achieving coherence and efficiency of effort in line with national policies. A priority should now be given to global sectoral review as an input to optimising the international architecture for global sectoral governance and other global public goods and for support to nations and regions. Current global priorities include: finance, food and nutrition, energy, climate change, health and environmental issues, in addition to peace and security. Although rapidly becoming less current, a firm basis of evidence has been accumulated through evaluation for sectoral assessment in the agricultural and food sectors. Such a basis is less comprehensive for the other key sectors but the issues remain real, with steadily increasing fragmentation of international effort, as documented in the FAO-IEE.

# Annex - Case Study Methodology Detail of Survey Results - Perceptions of Effectiveness of FAO Reforms & Sources of Documentary Evidence

## Methodology

1. The methodology drew on the following evidence bases:
   1. Assessment, against standard criteria of the OECD-DAC and UNEG, of the quality of the evaluation terms of reference, team selection, evaluation process, evaluation methodology and the evaluation report;
   2. Review of FAO Governing Body Documentation for each stage of the evaluation process and its follow-up, and review of assessments by external agencies to FAO of the evaluation follow-up and progress of FAO Reforms. For detail see Sources of Documentary Evidence below;
   3. Perception Survey: Questionnaires were sent to all serving FAO staff of Director level and above and to FAO Representatives in Countries (collectively FAO management) and to the Representatives of national governments to FAO (see below);
   4. Interviews were carried out with a purposive sample of representatives to FAO governing bodies and senior FAO staff with respect to the evaluation; and
   5. The main author of this report had the advantage of having been intimately concerned with the FAO-IEE, as secretary to the Council and Conference Committees for the preparatory process, the evaluation itself, and the follow-up process to design the Immediate Plan of Action. He was also budget holder and had the management responsibility for the overall process. This familiarity with the evaluation and the actors while a distinct advantage, may also have limited objectivity in preparing this report. This has been offset by the use of an external quality assurance adviser and quality assurance by the FAO Office of Evaluation.
2. **The perception survey:** Response rates to the questionnaire suffered to some extent with management, because managers who had not been in post at the time of the IEE did not always feel qualified to comment. This was even more of a problem for representatives of national governments to FAO, who are normally subject to turnover on three-four year terms.
3. Questionnaires were organised on a six point scale for which the response to statements was:

* Strongly agree
* Mostly agree
* Partially agree
* Partially disagree
* Mostly disagree
* Strongly disagree
* Do not know

1. There were no significant differences between the responses of FAO Director and above and the FAO Country Representatives and for the purposes of analysis these are grouped together in the report. Comments from the questionnaires were also considered as well as the response to statements on the questionnaires. The questionnaires had the following response rates:

* FAO management Director level and above - 32%, number of responses 22
* FAO management Country Representatives. - 36%, number of responses 30
* Country Representatives to FAO (active Rome based missions) – 23%, number of responses 29

1. Responses to questions were overwhelmingly positive and the nuance of response was only perceptible at the upper end of the six point scale. Thus, only the positive percentages are given in the tables of this paper (the negative can be derived by the difference from 100%). There were almost no responses at the extreme of the negative scale.
2. Twenty-seven managers and 23 government representatives to FAO provided comments in addition to their response to the numerical fields in the questionnaires. These were found to reinforce many of the points made in the interviews.
3. **Interviews** took place against the following set of standard questions: *“With appropriate emphasis on the stages of the evaluation with which they were most involved and without closing out points that the interviewees may want to make in addition, the discussion will cover for all those interviewed:*

* *Looking back in retrospect do you consider that the IEE was a useful undertaking and its costs justified (the expenditure was US$ 3.9 million directly for the work of the evaluation)? If you consider the IEE not to have been useful, do you have views on what might have been a suitable alternative mechanism?*
* *What do you consider the strong and weak points of the way the evaluation was prepared and executed? How might things have better been done differently?*
* *Did the evaluation provide a good basis for follow-up and with the resources and time available how could it have provided a better basis?*
* *What were the strengths and weaknesses of the follow-up process and its results (Governing Bodies and FAO management)?*
* *In your overall judgement has the IEE contributed to the strengthening of FAO and if so what were the most important positive outcomes. If you consider conversely that the IEE weakened FAO in what ways did this happen.”*

1. Fifteen formal interviews, and in two cases written responses, were conducted with:

* Five current and former FAO Deputy-Director Generals of whom one is current acting Director of the Director-General’s cabinet;
* The current Director of the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) Programme Management Unit;
* The secretary of the Conference Committee which oversaw implementation of the IPA until the end of 2011;
* The two Chairs of the governing body committees responsible for the IEE design, implementation and follow-up;
* The two team leaders of the IEE;
* Four representatives of national governments to FAO familiar with the process and representative of the FAO geographical regions.

## Detail of Survey Results of Perceptions of Usefulness and Effectiveness of FAO Reforms

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Questionnaire response** | | **Percentage Responding Positively on 6 Point Scale** | |
| **The Reforms of FAO below were useful and effective** | **The IEE was useful** | In Agreement if only partial  (above midpoint on 6 point scale) | Mostly or Totally in Agreement |
| FAO Governance | Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 77 | 58 |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 86 | 63 |
| FAO Technical Programmes | Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 88 | 63 |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 84 | 54 |
| Decentralisation | Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 69 | 39 |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 88 | 55 |
| Administrative and Financial Systems | Representatives to FAO Governing Bodies | 74 | 44 |
| FAO Headquarters and Decentralised Management\* | 76 | 56 |
| \*Questionnaires were sent to all staff of Director level and above and to FAO Country Representatives | | | |

## Major Sources of Documentary Evidence

1. The preparatory process -Reports to the FAO Council:

* Paragraph 113, CL 127/REP, Report of the Council of FAO, Hundred and Twenty-seventh Session, Rome, 22-27 November 2004, <http://www.fao.org/unfao/govbodies/gsb-search/gsb-iframe/en/?dmurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fao.org%2Funfao%2Fbodies%2Fcouncil%2Fcl127%2Fcl127_en.htm>
* CL 129/10, October 2005, Council Hundred and Twenty-ninth Session, Rome, 16-18 November 2005, Independent External Evaluation of FAO, Report to the Council of the Inter-Sessional Working Group (ISWG) for the Independent External Evaluation of FAO (IEE), <http://www.fao.org/unfao/govbodies/gsb-search/gsb-iframe/en/?dmurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fao.org%2Funfao%2Fbodies%2Fcouncil%2Fcl129%2Fcl129_en.htm>

1. The IEE Report and Management Response:

* C 2007/7A.1-Rev.1, October 2007, Conference FAO: The Challenge of Renewal, Report of the Independent External Evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), September 2007 - <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/012/k0827e02.pdf>
* C 2007/7A.2, October 2007, E, CONFERENCE, FAO: The Challenge of Renewal, Report of the Independent External Evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Annexes 2-4, November 2007 <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/012/k1080e.pdf>
* C 2007/7 B October 2007, Conference Thirty-fourth Session, Rome, 17 - 24 November 2007, Report of the Independent External Evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Management Response “in-Principle” <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/012/k0970e.pdf>

1. Conference Approved Immediate Plan of Action

* C 2008/4 October 2008, Conference,Thirty-fifth (Special) Session, Rome, 18-22 November 2008, Report of the Conference Committee on Follow-up to the Independent External Evaluation of FAO (CoC-IEE), Immediate Plan of Action

1. Reports and papers of the Conference Committee for IEE Follow-up (CoC-IEE) (287 papers) <http://www.fao.org/iee-follow-up-committee/iee-document/en/?no_cache=1>
2. Status of IEE Follow-up April 2012

* CL 144/10, April 2012, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Council Hundred and Forty-fourth Session Rome, 11- 15 June 2012 Immediate Plan of Action – IPA annual report for 2011 and direction for 2012http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\_upload/bodies/Progr\_Comm/PC\_110-documents/CL\_144\_10\_Final\_23Apr-E.pdf

1. External Reports Assessing IEE-follow-up:

* Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). Organisational Effectiveness Assessment, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, December 2011 <http://static.mopanonline.org/brand/upload/documents/MOPAN_2011_FAO_Final_Vol_1_Issued_January_2012.pdf>

United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), United Nations Improved Reporting and Member States’ Consensus Needed for Food and Agriculture Organization’s Reform Plan, Report to Congressional Requesters, September 2011, GAO-11-922 <http://www.gao.gov/assets/590/585453.pdf>

* Australian Multilateral Assessment, March 2012, page 84 <http://www.pidg.org/uploads/public/documents/library/AMA%20Documents/ama-full-report.pdf>
* CL 144/10 Web Annex, Assessment of the IPA Programme—A Way Forward - Final Report, Mannet: Piers Campbell, John Hailey, Veronica Hope Hailey, Judith Hushagen, 16 January 2012 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/025/md535e_WebAnnex_01.pdf>

1. The Annex provides web-links to the main sources of these references [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The FAO Council members functions as the highest level of FAO governance between the biennial Conference sessions. It has 49 members nominated by their regions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Report Hundred and Twenty-seventh Session of the Council, Rome 22 to 27 November 2004 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. i.e. excluding normative work, advocacy, regional work and response to humanitarian and livestock and plant emergencies. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). Organisational Effectiveness Assessment, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, December 2011 <http://static.mopanonline.org/brand/upload/documents/MOPAN_2011_FAO_Final_Vol_1_Issued_January_2012.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), UNITED NATIONS Improved Reporting and Member States’ Consensus Needed for Food and Agriculture Organization’s Reform Plan, Report to Congressional Requesters, September 2011, GAO-11-922 <http://www.gao.gov/assets/590/585453.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Australian Multilateral Assessment, March 2012, page 84 <http://www.pidg.org/uploads/public/documents/library/AMA%20Documents/ama-full-report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. • CL 144/10 Web Annex, Assessment of the IPA Programme—A Way Forward - Final Report, Mannet: Piers Campbell, John Hailey, Veronica Hope Hailey, Judith Hushagen, 16 January 2012 http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/025/md535e\_WebAnnex\_01.p [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Progress report on the Immediate Plan of Action Implementation, October 2011, CL 143/10, 143rd session of the FAO council , Rome 28 November to 2 December 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)