



Investing in rural people

Exploration of a methodology for assessing the impact of policy engagement

What impact and how to assess it?

by

Anna McCord

Ed Heinemann

Lauren Phillips

26 IFAD
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Abstract

While policy engagement is increasingly considered a key dimension of development cooperation, there have been few attempts by development agencies to systematically monitor and evaluate the impact of their work in this area. In recent years, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has sought to strengthen its engagement in country-level policy processes, and to develop a range of tools to more effectively monitor and evaluate this work. In this context, it commissioned a piece of work to develop and test a methodology for assessing its policy impact. The exercise served to review four purposively sampled IFAD policy engagement activities, in India, Indonesia, Nepal and Viet Nam, and analyse their impact; identify the factors contributing to, or limiting, the outcomes achieved and draw out lessons for future policy work; and propose a replicable methodology that could be used for similar exercises elsewhere. The methodology was found to provide, in a relatively short period of time, an independent appraisal of IFAD's role and effectiveness in relation to the policy issues in question, based on multiple external perspectives. The paper concludes that the methodology offers a credible, cost-effective and potentially replicable approach to appraising policy impact, both within IFAD and for other development agencies conducting policy-related activities, and it makes suggestions on strengthening the methodology and increasing its operational relevance.

1 Introduction

This paper explores the issue of policy impact and shares the recent experience of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in implementing a methodology for assessing it. The paper describes and summarizes the findings of the assessment, and draws conclusions regarding the potential role of the methodology in future policy impact appraisal.

While policy advocacy has long been an important activity for international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on development (see, for example, Chapman and Wameyo 2001), bilateral and multilateral development agencies are also increasingly interested in achieving policy influence as a basis for more sustainable development results than are possible through traditional projects. As a result, a number of agencies now explicitly consider policy dialogue – or influence or advocacy – a key instrument for development cooperation (see, for example, Peebles et al. 2015 or Bazeley et al. 2013).

Despite this acknowledgement of its importance, the perception remains that policy engagement is a difficult activity to accurately monitor and evaluate, particularly when development agencies are interested in attributing impact to their policy engagement efforts. There are a number of reasons for this. First, policy processes are complex. The relationship between policy-related activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts is not predictable, linear or straightforward, and the links between them are not always direct: well-implemented activities do not always lead smoothly to the outputs, or the outputs to the outcomes, etc. Second, multiple actors have an impact on policy. Policy change usually comes about as a consequence of the actions of many different players and the interactions between them: the higher up the hierarchy of objectives one goes, the more limited is the possibility of attributing change to the impact of a single player alone. Third, the ultimate goal of policy engagement often goes beyond influencing policy per se and is, rather, to increase opportunities for the well-being of people. If it is difficult to measure a policy outcome, there are even greater conceptual and practical problems associated with measuring the impact of policy change on citizens, and there are few approaches to draw on. And, finally, policy engagement often encompasses a range of different activities, which means that monitoring plans must be tailored to the specific activities in question.

But while it was once true that “the monitoring and evaluation of advocacy and influencing work is critically underdeveloped” (Chapman and Wameyo 2001: 2), there is now a growing literature that tries to systematize approaches to and methodologies for tracking and evaluating the impact that development agencies have with their policy advocacy, influencing and engagement strategies. Thus, while monitoring and evaluating policy engagement is certainly not straightforward (for all of the reasons above), there is increasing understanding of the principles that need to underpin it; a number of methods of assessing policy influence have been developed; and there is some consensus about what should (and should not) be claimed as contributing to nationally owned policy processes.

This paper summarizes some of that literature, as well as putting forward a methodology (and selected, initial results) applicable to the type of policy work being undertaken in one agency, IFAD. IFAD has in recent years identified increased engagement at the country level on policy issues relating to agriculture and rural development as an essential area of work, complementing its core project and lending work. It recognizes “country-level policy engagement” (CLPE) as being “critical for effective implementation of IFAD-supported projects, [and] also a precondition for enabling rural people to overcome poverty” (IFAD, 2016). It also views CLPE as an effective mechanism for scaling up proven approaches and lessons derived from its project work in the countries where it engages.

The definition of policy engagement that IFAD has developed seeks to respond to its mandate and its institutional and operational model, and is a deliberately broad and enabling one: “A process for IFAD to collaborate, directly and indirectly, with partner governments and other country-level stakeholders to influence policy priorities or the design, implementation and assessment of formal policies that shape the opportunities for inclusive and sustainable rural transformation” (IFAD, 2017). It has further identified a range of activities that fit within, and contribute to, the policy cycle,¹ and that can be considered to constitute CLPE (see box 1.)

With this increased interest in policy engagement, there has been a concordant increase in interest in monitoring and evaluating policy. There have been four main drivers for IFAD’s efforts: (i) a learning dimension – being able to identify and analyse the policy-related approaches used and activities conducted, and their impacts, both successful and less successful, in order to build on the achievements realized and ensure that the lessons learned are reflected in subsequent country strategies; (ii) the need for accountability – ensuring that it is possible to report on policy engagement activities, outputs and outcomes, particularly to both IFAD senior managers and the Executive Board; (iii) supporting management and decision-making – identifying blockages, weaknesses or gaps in the policy engagement

Box 1 Typology of country-level policy activities within IFAD’s work

1. Create space for policy dialogue.
2. Enhance stakeholder capacity for policy processes.
3. Policy analysis and support for policy formulation.
4. Operationalize/pilot national policy at the local level.
5. Review policy implementation to identify gaps, constraints or blockages.
6. Draw out successful models and promote adoption/scaling up.
7. Directly participate in policy dialogue forums.
8. Strengthen the capacity of government agencies.
9. Share experiences at regional and/or global levels.
10. Promote dialogue between government agencies.

Source: IFAD 2017.

1. The policy cycle can be defined in different ways. At its most simple, it comprises the stages of (i) agenda-setting, (ii) policy formulation and decision-making, (iii) policy implementation, and (iv) monitoring and evaluation (IFAD, 2017).

strategy during implementation, or identifying opportunities for a stronger policy focus, and using this information as a basis for making changes in approach or emphasis where necessary; and (iv) promoting stakeholder engagement by involving in-country stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process as an opportunity to gain their buy-in and promote a shared policy agenda, as well as to learn from their experiences and perspectives.

While recognizing the conceptual difficulties in monitoring and evaluating CLPE activities, outcomes and impact, IFAD has been exploring a variety of approaches for doing just that. Within IFAD's corporate-level project monitoring system, it has defined policy-specific indicators that can be used by projects to monitor progress at output and outcome levels; it is exploring how to use IFAD's annual client survey as a tool for monitoring the effectiveness of its policy engagement; and it is currently developing an online dashboard to enable IFAD staff to report on their policy-related activities as they are carried out. A recent guidebook² offers a series of specific tools that staff can draw on in monitoring and evaluating CLPE activities.

As part of this process of exploration and learning, one of the activities that IFAD has carried out is a study that assessed the extent to which specific IFAD activities contributed to policy change in four countries in Asia (India, Indonesia, Nepal and Viet Nam) and identified the factors enabling and limiting success. It assessed what worked, why and how, and who made it happen, as well as the relevance of the interventions. Through its use in the four countries, the methodology was tested across a diversity of contexts to make it possible to draw conclusions regarding its applicability and relevance for use more widely within IFAD for CLPE appraisal.

This paper does five things. First, it reviews the literature on monitoring and evaluating policy, in order to understand good practice and add to this literature with the methodology adopted here (section 2). Second, it describes the methodology developed and tested in the four case studies for qualitatively assessing CLPE impacts (section 3). Next, it reviews the specific CLPE activities, assessing their impact and identifying some of the factors contributing to the outcomes achieved (section 4). Then it analyses the value of the methodology for assessing the impact of policy engagement, including the lessons learned while carrying out this research (section 5). Finally, it closes with a set of conclusions and reflections on moving forward.

2. IFAD 2017. The tools outlined there include After Action Review (AAR), the Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM), the bellwether methodology, impact logs, RAPID Outcome Assessment (ROA) and stories of change.

2 Good practice for M&E of policy activities

There is an increasing amount of practical literature around techniques and practice for monitoring and evaluating policy-related work. This section provides a brief review of some of the elements of the literature that are of particular relevance to the study.

Given the difficulties in attributing any policy outcome specifically to IFAD, a key issue for the study is that of how to make an assessment of whether or not, and the extent to which, IFAD's actions contributed to policy change. This issue of assessing contribution was addressed in an important paper by Mayne (2001). He argued that, as a result of the increased focus on management for results in public administrations during the late 1990s, there was a need for those administrations to be held accountable less for service delivery and more for the outcomes sought from their delivery. But because of the problems of attributing economic or social outcomes to public programmes, he proposed that performance could be better measured and reported through an approach known as "contribution analysis". This offers a methodology made up of six steps: (i) develop the results chain (or theory of change – ToC), (ii) assess the existing evidence on results, (iii) assess the alternative explanations, (iv) assemble the performance story, (v) seek out additional evidence, and (vi) revise and strengthen the performance story. Following these steps, it is possible to build a credible story about whether or not – and how – the programme in question has contributed to the intended outcomes. It does not *prove* a contribution, but it does provide plausible evidence to reduce the uncertainty about the contribution made. While Mayne's methodology is designed to help evaluate the contribution of policies to outcomes (the last step in the causal chain between policy advocacy and outcomes), and has been applied to do just that in a number of countries, including by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) to evaluate its development assistance programmes in Fiji (see Kotvojs 2006), the idea of contribution rather than attribution is important for external actors seeking to assist in domestic policy processes.

The importance of the ToC for understanding impact is taken further in the Participatory Impact Pathways Analysis (PIPA) outlined by Douthwaite et al. (2008). The approach, designed for use in evaluating complex projects in the food and water sectors, encourages stakeholders to make explicit their assumptions about how the project will achieve an impact, and to define "impact pathways" that describe how individuals and organizations should act differently, project strategies to bring this about, and how such change might impact on people's livelihoods. The participatory process of PIPA promotes learning and provides a framework for "action research" on the processes of change, while the impact pathways are used to articulate an "outcomes logic model" and an "impact logic model", which can be used to develop indicators and targets for project M&E.

A distinct body of literature has also arisen to specifically address M&E of policy-related advocacy and research activities, and expanded to include a wider set of activities, some of which are among those included in IFAD's broad definition of CLPE. A key reference is Hovland (2007), focusing on the M&E of policy-oriented research. The author argues that the traditional way of measuring the impact of research – by tracking citations and through peer review – is insufficient to monitor the intended and actual impacts of policy-oriented research, or research that is intended to inform and influence policy decisions and processes (including policy implementation). The paper provides a number of tools and approaches for measuring progress, which can be utilized by different actors for a series of distinct products. It lays out five steps for best practice in policy-related M&E: (i) defining the M&E approach from the beginning of the project, (ii) creating quality assurance mechanisms, (iii) having active coordination of M&E during the life of the project, (iv) mixing self-evaluation and external evaluation, and (v) leaving space and budget for evaluation at the end of the project. Hovland notes that:

The appropriate M&E approach for a policy research project will depend on the project's scale, timeframe, budget, aims, and any conditions set by donors The key is to focus on one or two manageable and appropriate approaches, and then to complement these with elements of other approaches if needed.

(Hovland 2007: 39)

A more recent piece by Pasanen and Shaxson (2016) builds on Hovland's work, as well as the M&E framework for policy research projects developed and tested by the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (ODI 2014). It seeks to provide a comprehensive but flexible model for how an M&E framework for a policy research project can be designed and structured. While it is clear that many of the choices about the scope, intensity and timing of M&E should depend largely on the resources available, Pasanen and Shaxson suggest that the M&E system be structured around six areas: (i) strategy and direction ("Are we doing the right thing?"), (ii) management and governance ("Are we implementing the plan as effectively as possible?"), (iii) outputs ("Are outputs audience-appropriate and do they meet the required standards?"), (iv) uptake ("Are people accessing and sharing our work?"), (v) outcomes and impacts ("What kinds of effects or changes have the work contributed to?"), and (vi) context ("How does the changing political, economic, social and organizational climate affect our plans and intended outcomes?").

Jones (2011) looks at how to monitor and evaluate a broader range of activities that aim to influence policy. In doing so, he too draws on Hovland's work and reasserts the importance of developing a ToC as a basis for subsequent planning and M&E activities. Having distinguished a range of different approaches to policy influence (activism, evidence and advising, public campaigns and advocacy, and lobbying), he defines a range of activities involved in each approach; articulates a typical ToC associated with each one, along with intermediate outcomes to assess; and summarizes a number of approach-specific monitoring tools. Tsui et al. (2014) focus specifically on monitoring and evaluating policy influencing and advocacy. The paper provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on the M&E of policy to date in an introductory section, and then, as in Hovland's paper, presents a series of approaches, tools and case studies that can be combined and utilized to monitor and evaluate policy.

The authors define policy influence as “an intervention intended to catalyse, stimulate or otherwise seed some form of change through different forms of persuasion” (Tsui et al. 2014: 5); they note that policy work is complex, and that, as noted above, monitoring its outputs and outcomes requires an adaptive approach.

There are two aspects of Tsui et al.’s paper that are useful for the study and methodology discussed below. The first is that the authors are interested in a number of potential approaches to policy advocacy and outcomes, including indirect approaches or approaches where changes in behaviour were equally or more important than changes in policy. As will be seen in the discussion of the case studies below, IFAD’s work often took a more informal and behaviour-focused approach, rather than taking an explicit interest in changing government policy. Second, the section of the paper that aims to measure success notes six areas that are all highly relevant for the work that follows: (i) linking advocacy and outcomes is complex; (ii) determining whether or not an approach has been successful is difficult, and depends on who is asked; (iii) it is often hard to determine which of many policy-related activities leads to an ultimate success; (iv) policy work happens over long periods of time and change is “slow and incremental”; (v) it is difficult to collect knowledge over time; and (vi) success impact often means working politically, which can present challenges in demonstrating results.

While there is an increasing body of literature around M&E of policy activities, it appears that as yet little has been systematically applied by international development agencies. In 2008, the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) carried out a study to evaluate a pilot exercise for monitoring its policy dialogue activities. The study found that staff had used a number of different tools to manage their policy dialogue initiatives, but that DFID’s overall performance-monitoring system was not well adapted to capturing the often intangible, sensitive factors that may contribute to successful policy dialogue (Watson and Pierce 2008). More recently, the United Nation’s Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) jointly tried to explore the impact of their policy engagement retrospectively by applying a formal framework for evaluating policy work in a publication entitled *From Evidence to Action: The Story of Cash Transfers and Impact Evaluation in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Davis et al. 2016). However, in response to the question “How do other donors measure the impact of policy dialogue?”, a 2011 review conducted on behalf of AusAID (McCullough et al. 2011) concluded, “The short answer to this question is that they do not.” To the authors’ knowledge, this remains largely the case, and few international development agencies regularly monitor – let alone evaluate – the impact of their policy-related work.

3 A methodology for assessing the impact of policy engagement

In order to address this challenge, IFAD commissioned a piece of work to develop and test a methodology for assessing the policy impact of its CLPE work. The research was designed with three objectives in mind, summarized as follows:

- i. to review the experiences of a small number of purposively sampled IFAD CLPE activities in four countries of the Asia and Pacific region and analyse their impact;
- ii. to identify the key factors that have contributed to these outcomes and those that have limited success, drawing out lessons for future policy work;
- iii. to propose a credible, cost-effective and replicable methodology that can be used to undertake similar exercises at the country and regional level.

These objectives provided the basis for both the assembling of a team to conduct the study and the development of a methodology to do so. The team was led by an international evaluation/policy specialist, who worked initially with a policy evaluation specialist to develop a tailored methodology; subsequently, in each of the four countries in question, the team leader worked with an independent national expert in the area of agricultural policy under review.³

The methodology developed for the study drew on the approaches and ideas outlined in section 2. It was designed both to offer up insights of immediate value to IFAD and to be potentially replicable for use in subsequent similar exercises. In each of the four countries, a single CLPE case study was purposively selected as an example of CLPE that was considered within IFAD to have been successful: more specifically, in these cases the activities under review were understood to be linked to changes in policy development, policy outcomes or policy implementation, according to an institutional narrative internal to IFAD that identified IFAD as a contributing agent to that change. The intention was to provide an in-depth understanding of IFAD's performance on specific CLPE issues and its contribution to an identified policy change, based on a synthesis of both internal and external perceptions of IFAD's engagement that tested – and validated or diverged from – IFAD's own internal "contribution narrative".

The study itself was conducted in three stages:

- i. development of the hypothesis – articulation of the IFAD CLPE contribution narrative and preparation of a background report;
- ii. testing of the hypothesis – in-country exploration of the narrative using a bellwether interview approach;
- iii. write-up of study findings.

3. The full team comprised Anna McCord (international evaluation/policy specialist), Enrique Mendizabel (policy evaluation specialist), and national experts Narasimhan Srinivasan (India), Mariam Rikhana (Indonesia), Nav Raj Baral (Nepal) and Dang Kim Son, with support from Ngo Thuy Linh (Viet Nam).

Stage 1

In each country, an independent national expert, with support from the IFAD country office, prepared a short background report providing summary information regarding IFAD programming and the case study CLPE intervention. The background report, which was based on a review of the relevant literature and interviews with IFAD country staff, was used to provide a descriptive account of each of the CLPE case studies. It included a statement of the IFAD contribution narrative, articulating the internal IFAD perception of the impact of the intervention under review, including a specification of the policy change to which the CLPE intervention contributed. This contribution narrative formed the hypothesis that was tested during stage 2. It also identified a pool of potential informants knowledgeable about the policy process under review for stage 2. The background report as a whole thus played a key role in informing the second phase of the research.

On the basis of the report, the national expert and IFAD country office staff, in collaboration with the international consultant, then confirmed the key informants for the stage 2 bellwether interviews, and the national expert arranged an interview schedule for the research visits.

Stage 2

Once this preparatory phase was completed, the review team carried out five days of intensive research in each country. In three of the four countries, the research took place exclusively in the capital; in India, given the federal nature of its government, the team visited both the national and the state capitals. The team did not visit the IFAD-supported projects that were linked to the CLPE, as the focus was not the performance of the projects overall but the associated CLPE activities.⁴ The research visits commenced, where possible, with an orientation session with IFAD, which covered the national programme, the project associated with CLPE and the CLPE activity itself, including the “IFAD contribution narrative” under review.

To test the extent to which the IFAD activity had contributed to the specified policy change, the methodology drew on the responses of key informants in the sector, using a bellwether approach. This entailed tracing the change backwards, starting from the policy change and identifying the key determinants of the change through semi-structured interviews with senior informants drawn from a range of sectors, known as “bellwethers”, defined as “influential people in the public and private sectors whose positions require that they be politically informed and that they track a broad range of policy issues. Bellwethers are knowledgeable and innovative thought leaders whose opinions about policy issues carry substantial weight” (HFRP 2007). The approach, pioneered by the Harvard Family Research Project, is described as involving *structured interviews with bellwethers, but with an important twist. Instead of asking directly whether a specific issue is on the policy agenda, interview questions initially create room for a wide range of unprompted responses. Bellwethers are unaware before the interview that questions will focus on the specific policy issue of interest. They are informed about what the interview will generally cover but are not given specific details. This approach ensures that bellwethers’ responses are authentic and unprompted.* (HFRP 2007)

Using this approach, the team interviewed between 17 and 30 key informants in each country over a one-week period. The informants were drawn from six spheres: civil servants, politicians, civil society representatives (national and international), international development partner (bilateral and multilateral) representatives, academics and media actors. The informants

4. In India, the IFAD-funded institution NERCORMP, which was the focus of the CLPE case study, hosted and facilitated the research, rather than the IFAD country office as in the other case studies.

were unaware beforehand that the purpose of the interview was to explore IFAD's impact on the policy issue of interest, as the interview focused on the policy change and the drivers of this change, rather than explicitly placing IFAD at the centre of the discussion. This enabled the researchers to understand informants' perceptions of the main drivers of policy change and the extent to which they perceived IFAD as contributing to the policy agenda, if at all, and it reduced the risk of positive respondent bias, which could result in an overstatement of IFAD's role.

When informants mentioned IFAD as a driver of or contributor to change, the team sought evidence in support of this assertion. When IFAD was not identified, the team probed the context and looked to identify other drivers in order to assess their relative importance. Where informants did not mention IFAD at all, the team explored the agency's contribution explicitly at the end of the interview in order to assess the informant's knowledge and perceptions of IFAD and CLPE. The team also asked open-ended questions regarding the role of IFAD in relation to the broader policy debate and perceptions of its potential contribution at the end of the interview to elicit further insights.

Taking this open-ended research approach to identifying the main drivers of a change in discourse or policy did not in all cases result in the identification of IFAD as a factor, leading to findings that are not in all cases consistent with the IFAD contribution narrative.

The team reviewed the findings after each interview and analysed the set of responses at the end of the research process in order to assess CLPE performance in relation to the IFAD contribution narrative. The initial findings were validated with IFAD country staff at the end of the research period and analysed at a review team workshop, and the conclusions were shared with IFAD country staff in draft format for verification, thus adding to the rigour and validity of the findings.

Stage 3

Following the conclusion of the in-country work, the international specialist wrote up the findings of the study. This was shared in draft form with the four national experts and then with the four IFAD country offices/country programme managers (CPMs) and the commissioners of the study, to seek their input and comments prior to its finalization.

4 The findings the methodology offered: four case studies in Asia

Each of the four case studies reviewed was associated with an IFAD-supported project or initiative, and the findings provide an assessment of their impact on a specific policy change in each country. As such, on the one hand, the case studies highlight the strengths and weaknesses of IFAD's approach, while on the other they demonstrate the type of findings that the methodology can offer. The findings for each case study are set out below.

4.1 India

The contribution narrative

"Successive IFAD-financed projects had provided the evidence to state governments on community-based approaches to resource management, leading to the approach being scaled up across the entire northeast region of the country."

Background

The North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas (NERCORMP) aimed to transform the lives of poor and marginalized tribal families in selected districts of three states in the North Eastern Region of India (NER), through improved and environmentally sound management of their resource base. The first phase of the project was implemented from 1999 to 2008, and the second from 2010 to 2017. One of its key achievements was the creation of community organizations, notably Natural Resource Management Groups (NARMGs) and Self Help Groups (SHGs), that played an important role in terms of promoting community participation, management and ownership.

CLPE objectives and activities

CLPE is not formally mentioned in the NERCORMP project design reports and neither phase had explicit CLPE objectives or activities, nor do CLPE objectives feature in the 2010-2015 country strategic opportunities programme (COSOP). IFAD carried out limited policy dialogue around NERCORMP with government actors regionally and nationally. During annual loan reviews with Delhi-based policymakers, there was limited space for such dialogue, with NERCORMP only one of multiple projects under discussion. Annual IFAD supervision missions to the NER provided a greater opportunity for policy-related discussion, through government officials' participation in the missions and the debriefing process to the North Eastern Council (NEC), although neither were strategically used to promote a policy agenda. Equally, IFAD did not communicate the project's successes or promote its ideas within the NER or in India more widely, leaving this to the NERCORMP secretariat, which had limited policy capacity and experience.

Policy outcomes

Despite this limited policy engagement, NERCORMP can be identified as having had four policy-related impacts, namely:

- a. **Contributing new modalities for programme implementation:** NERCORMP had multiple influences in terms of community mobilization and participation processes, NGO participation, and the creation of community institutions, notably the NARMGs and SHGs. Subsequent IFAD-supported projects and other development partner and government programmes adopted or replicated these approaches, as did national- and state-level government programmes implemented in the region. The project also mainstreamed women's participation in community decision-making; promoted natural resource management and the community ownership of livelihoods agenda; and engaged NGOs to offer alternative institutional options for programme delivery in addition to government departments – all ideas subsequently adopted in government programming in the region.
- b. **Promoting convergence** (harmonizing diverse government development interventions to increase impact and promote efficiencies in delivery) is an agenda that is central to the policy debate in the NER. IFAD innovations contributed directly to convergence by improving the harmonization of programme delivery in relation to key community institutions and processes, with one example being the adoption of NERCORMP-created institutions and processes under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.
- c. **Promoting government buy-in**, scaling up and sustainability. The central government directly funded the NERCORMP secretariat during the unfunded period between the first and second phases in order to prevent staffing attrition and protect the investment made. The government used the second loan to expand the geographical coverage of NERCORMP, while a third phase exclusively funded by the NEC is currently being initiated, indicating programme sustainability.
- d. **Creation of technical assistance capacity.** Over the past few years, the NERCORMP secretariat has been taking on a role as a regional resource, providing technical assistance for project implementation. Formalization of this role is currently under discussion, in terms of the NERCORMP secretariat becoming a government-financed Regional Resource Centre to provide technical assistance for programme management and implementation, thus capitalizing on NERCORMP implementation experience as a resource for the region.

Discussion

That IFAD did not play a more active policy role was consistent with the fact that the COSOP did not highlight policy engagement as a priority for IFAD, which in turn reflected the Government of India's view that it is not the role of its development partners to engage in policy dialogue. Nonetheless, IFAD was perceived by those involved as having missed opportunities to celebrate NERCORMP's achievements and share innovations arising from the project more widely within NER and beyond, in other areas of the country where conventional project implementation modalities were not viable.

IFAD instead allowed NERCORMP successes to “speak for themselves”, and knowledge of NERCORMP spread largely through the experiences of senior Government of India staff who were seconded to the programme or worked alongside it, as well as civil society actors, and through the NERCORMP secretariat personnel themselves. They provided technical assistance, based on their project experience, to government and development partners developing other programmes in the region, including a World Bank project (North East Rural Livelihood Project – NERLP) that adopted many of the institutional characteristics of NERCORMP. Thus, the project offered processes that enabled development programme implementation in areas where successful operating models were scarce.

This process, which entailed the circulation of senior personnel between the government service and NERCORMP, created a cadre of champions who recognized the project’s significance and its potential to contribute to the broader development agenda, and offered political and financial support for its maintenance and expansion. These senior actors also respected IFAD “as genuine, committed, diligent and honest in its work – with a high level of empathy for the vulnerable” (senior government informant), and they ensured that the secretariat survived during interim periods without IFAD funding and following programme completion in 2017. In the absence of government support, these funding gaps would have led to the closure of the secretariat, with a significant attendant loss of capacity, institutional memory and hence CLPE relevance.

Conclusions and implications

At the time of NERCORMP’s initiation, few other development actors had governance and participation models that were amenable for use in the challenging environment of the remote and traditionally governed areas of the NER, and the government struggled to find modalities to deliver core programmes in these states. This was the particular value added by the NERCORMP model. The intervention fitted well within the prevailing institutional and policy context in the NER, and the original project design was praised by informants, as it addressed not only a specific need relating to the development of small producers but also broader institutional needs arising from the unique governance situation in the NER (the region has a degree of autonomy under the Indian constitution, and the *Panchayati Raj* administrative system that is used in most of India is not fully implemented there) and the challenges of a low-security environment. In this way, the project addressed recognized institutional and development needs in a way that was acceptable to a range of stakeholders at central, regional, state and local levels, and has become, over time, internalized as a government-owned and -funded programme.

While CLPE was not part of the NERCORMP concept, the project was successful in innovating new ways of “delivering” development in a resource-poor and remote region. Its success was recognized by key officials and this led to its replication and expansion and the adoption of key project components in other states and donor programmes, as well as the use of NERCORMP delivery models in other government programmes. In the absence of a policy agenda, it was the spontaneous transmission of knowledge about the project, derived from experience of it (the project “speaking for itself”), that led to these positive outcomes, and

this is presented by IFAD as an indicator of successful CLPE. However, it is also reasonable to assume that if IFAD had had a more explicit policy engagement agenda at the design stage, and had actively mandated staff to engage in CLPE in support of the project, the impact could have been greater in terms of policy influence, with impacts beyond the three states in which the project was implemented.

4.2 Indonesia

The contribution narrative

"An IFAD-supported project had informed the government's approach to implementation of the Village Law, on the basis of a community-driven development approach piloted in the remote areas of Papua and West Papua."

Background

The objective of the National Programme for Community Empowerment (PNPM) was to reduce poverty and improve local-level governance and socio-economic conditions in rural Indonesia. The Agriculture component of PNPM (the project piloted by IFAD in Papua and West Papua from 2009 to 2014) aimed to improve agricultural livelihoods by developing new models of community participation in development planning and resource allocation, and thus to influence PNPM implementation.

In 2014, the project was suspended, along with all similar programmes, by the government, which then introduced a new Village Law, a national policy that promotes the autonomy of villages and serves as a framework for village development and community empowerment, with villages allocated resources that they manage. In 2016, IFAD was invited to continue and extend programming in Papua and West Papua and also to advise the government on the integration of lessons from the Agriculture PNPM into the implementation of the Village Law throughout the country, and in particular to advise on modalities for developing participatory community development plans for infrastructure and related economic activities.

CLPE objectives and activities

IFAD initially saw involvement in a component of the PNPM as an opportunity to pilot approaches to promote inclusivity and improve impacts on rural livelihoods, although the initiative did not have explicit CLPE objectives. No formal CLPE activities were carried out prior to suspension in 2014, although a film was made documenting the initial achievements, and IFAD management visits were used as opportunities for exposure and to share process achievements with government partners. By 2016, IFAD's CLPE objectives were articulated as the successful implementation of the second phase of the Agriculture PNPM in Papua and West Papua, which would result in the associated innovations around participatory planning processes being adopted nationwide.

Policy outcomes

The initial phase of IFAD's Agriculture PNPM intervention did not directly impact on policy, given on the one hand that the PNPM was cancelled after the 2014 elections and the component suspended, and on the other that the Village Law enacted just prior to the 2014 elections

was influenced by advocacy by a range of other actors, including politicians, development partners and civil society, but not IFAD. However, the innovative implementation modalities of the Agriculture PNPM were recognized by the government, and it was as a result of this that IFAD was subsequently invited to restart and extend programming, and to advise on the implementation of the Village Law throughout the country. The project restarted in March 2017, and at the time of writing a work programme was under development in support of the government's request for support in improving the modalities of Village Law implementation. Therefore, IFAD has not yet influenced policy or Village Law implementation; rather, the key CLPE outcome to date is the invitation to IFAD to assist the government in developing the modalities for implementation of the Village Law, which represents an acknowledgement of the value that IFAD has added to national policy processes.

Discussion

Significantly, reviews of the Agriculture PNPM were not positive in the early stages, and there were few data to document success in terms of significant and sustained impacts. Indeed, the programme was rated as "moderately unsuccessful" until 2013, and it was only in 2014 that significant economic and livelihood benefits were reported. Informants noted that policymakers who visited the project during this period observed individual success stories that were perceived as "generalizable", while the IFAD-sponsored film also illustrated success in terms of increased incomes and diversified livelihoods for a number of case study families, indicating the potential impact of the intervention. Papua and West Papua are recognized as difficult environments in which to promote community participation and ownership, and the fact that the project had been successfully implemented there with a degree of local ownership was perceived as significant and worthy of replication.

Government endorsement of the Agriculture PNPM was thus based on direct experience, rather than active IFAD policy engagement. Staff visits to the project and feedback from district officials, facilitated in part through the IFAD supervision and implementation support process, were the main means of informing central government about the process and implementation successes. As summarized by one key informant, "Government officials do not read thick reports, they see with their own eyes, they are not interested in reading. If you want to convince the higher officers, bring them to the field, then they will be convinced." This suggests that formal documentary evidence may not be a prerequisite for effective CLPE, as is often assumed.

Another factor enabling policy influence was the institutional repositioning of IFAD following a critical country programme evaluation in 2014. An investment in greater country presence and visibility helped to rebuild institutional credibility with the government after a period of poor performance. In this way, the government was well disposed to IFAD and confident enough to invite it to extend its role in 2016, having recognized its model as a potential solution for Village Law implementation nationally. This relationship was also strengthened by a perception by government officials of IFAD as a "positive partner", less driven by internal institutional priorities than other agencies that offered support conditional on the adoption of prescribed policy choices, and more able to offer more comprehensive support for rural development than other development partners.

Finally, the timing was right: IFAD had a model that had been found to deliver participation and ownership in a challenging environment, a good relationship with the government, and an unspent allocation waiting to be reactivated at the point where there was an interest on the part of government in identifying effective modalities for the implementation of the Village Law and funding transfers, and a need to show benefits in time for them to provide electoral capital for the President.

At the same time, IFAD could arguably have had greater policy influence. No formal policy dialogue was carried out with government or development partners to promote the Agriculture PNPM model, and while programme results were presented periodically to national working groups, steering committees and policymakers across government, IFAD had limited engagement and influence with the other agencies working on Village Law policy development, including other development partners, including the Rome-based agencies, and no formal collaboration with them on PNPM-related issues. A key factor here is IFAD's limited human resource capacity in Indonesia, which informants identified as a major constraint on greater engagement in relation to both Village Law policy discussions and policy more generally. The recent posting of a country director in Jakarta has addressed the lack of a consistent senior institutional presence to some extent, but he has responsibility for multiple countries in the region, which constrains capacity for regular participation in national policy discourse and limits engagement in policy areas relating to smallholder agriculture, where IFAD is uniquely placed among the development partners and has the potential to take a leadership role.

Conclusions and implications

Notwithstanding the constraints outlined above, IFAD was able to be opportunistic, capitalize on successful institutional repositioning, and engage in responsive ad hoc CLPE, building on the success of a programme that largely "spoke for itself" and drew the attention of the government as a potential model for Village Law implementation. It is premature to assess the sustainability of the outcome of the CLPE initiative, as PNPM implementation in Papua and West Papua has only recently recommenced, and whether or not IFAD can capitalize on the invitation to influence national implementation is still to be determined. However, the invitation to provide input may itself be taken as a CLPE success, in terms of bringing an IFAD pilot to the national agenda. Whether or not the IFAD-supported Agriculture PNPM will have a broader influence and affect Village Law outcomes in the medium or long term remains to be seen. Equally, it is not known if the government will continue to fund the Village Law investment in infrastructure, which is at the heart of the IFAD model, beyond elections in 2019.

4.3 Nepal

The contribution narrative

"Over a 20-year period, successive IFAD-supported projects had developed, piloted and scaled up a pro-poor approach known as leasehold forestry, which had been taken up in national legislation, policy and institutions, thus transforming national approaches to forestry management."

Background

Both the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project (HLFFDP, 1992-2002) and its successor, the Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Programme (LFLP, 2005-2014), aimed to ensure (i) the management of leasehold plots by poor rural households to meet subsistence and income needs and protect the environment, (ii) an increased role for livestock in contributing to subsistence and income needs, (iii) leasehold groups and the village finance associations becoming sustainable rural financial institutions, and (iv) the development of government capacity to implement leasehold forestry in a poverty-focused, gender-sensitive way. Their most innovative features were the handing over of degraded forestland to the poor, together with the introduction of livelihood improvement planning.

CLPE objectives and activities

Over a 20-year period, against the backdrop of the insurgency waged between 1996 and 2006, which severely hindered implementation and policy engagement, the two projects demonstrated the pro-poor leasehold forestry concept and showed that the transfer of land with degraded forests to the poor could reduce poverty, empower women and reforest the hills. The projects also created platforms for dialogue at local and national levels, and institutions to represent the poor and participate in forestry dialogue, including the creation of local Leasehold Forestry User Groups and cooperatives, and village financial institutions that were subsequently used by other government and development partner projects. In particular, the projects responded to the concern associated with the community forestry approach widely used in Nepal in the 1980s and 1990s, that “the voice of the poor was not heard” (former district forestry officer).

While the projects did not have an explicit policy agenda, the 2013-18 COSOP did include policy objectives relating to leasehold forestry, although unlike the other development partners in the sector, IFAD’s focus was almost exclusively at the project level. Its approach was to develop and fund the leasehold forestry model over several funding cycles, building the capacity of government and project staff, and then communicate project learning and achievements through the regular joint (IFAD and government) supervision missions, which repeatedly recommended addressing the policy hurdles to extended leasehold forestry. The strong performance of LFLP in achieving its objectives was critical, and this led to media coverage and visits to the project, including by MPs, that resulted in requests in parliament to extend the project. Eventually, therefore, leasehold forestry had a range of champions beyond IFAD supporting it: those working within the government’s forestry institutions, the project implementers, politicians wanting to provide outreach to the poor, and FAO, which provided the technical expertise to support successful project implementation.

Policy outcomes

IFAD played a catalytic role in promoting pro-poor leasehold forestry within Nepal. It established the concept, and the projects developed a model that was eventually mainstreamed into government policies and legislation. The model influenced the Department of Forestry, which reorganized the Community Forestry Division and created a leasehold forestry section within it, and led directly to government budget allocations to take the work forward after the IFAD financing period came to an end. The Leasehold Forest

Policy 2002 provided the policy framework for handover of national degraded forests to the poor, while – after a number of legal and technical hurdles – the 1992 Forestry Act was finally amended in 2017 to fully incorporate pro-poor leasehold forestry. The leasehold forestry concept was also taken up in the government’s Tenth National Plan (2002-2007), and in its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. It has also been widely replicated in other parts of the country and it has influenced the design of subsequent IFAD-financed projects, as well as informing a variety of interventions in the sector by other development partners.

Achieving these outcomes is particularly significant given that IFAD is not a major player in the Nepali development arena in terms of either the size of its programme or its representation in the country. It had not participated in the development of community forestry programming in Nepal, and it joined the forestry debate only later, championing the concept of pro-poor leasehold forestry. Initially the leasehold forestry model was strongly opposed by the other development partners in the forestry sector, which were committed to promoting community forestry, and it was accepted by them and the government only after a decade of successful project implementation.

Discussion

IFAD’s undoubted policy influence benefited from the 20-year commitment to promoting leasehold forestry. Both projects responded to a recognized weakness in terms of the limited pro-poor dimensions of community forestry and offered successful bottom-up models that increased rural incomes, promoted community mobilization and supported government ideology following democratization. At the same time, a number of factors were identified as constraining the active involvement of IFAD in policy considerations and the continuity of the programme.

First, IFAD’s capacity to support CLPE in favour of leasehold forestry was constrained by a lack of personnel, with the single IFAD representative in Nepal (the country programme officer – CPO) being responsible for all country programme activities. This situation was exacerbated by CPM turnover, and the differing policy perspectives of successive incumbents. This, combined with IFAD’s relatively small programme in Nepal, meant that IFAD found it difficult to lead or promote policy discourse around forestry issues and leasehold forestry – even though this was perceived as its comparative advantage by other development partners. Furthermore, IFAD’s engagement in the sector was inevitably limited to the period of project implementation, and it withdrew from the debate at project completion in 2014, when there was need for continued engagement in order to consolidate the achievements realized. As a consequence, and despite its successes, the potential of leasehold forestry has not been fully realized.

Second, following decades of support to the forestry sector, the major development partners have withdrawn from the sector in favour of new priorities. In this context, there is a perception that IFAD and the development partner community more widely have walked away from a major issue at a critical juncture. Given the current development partner focus on a climate change agenda, this withdrawal is perceived as paradoxical. Informants noted that in the light of this shift in focus the preferred partner in government was now the Ministry

of the Environment, despite its limited operational mandate and implementation capacity, rather than the line ministries with responsibility for agriculture, livestock and forestry, to the detriment of practical support in response to existing development challenges.

Third, there are political and governance challenges. Leasehold forestry now has a policy and legislative basis, and resources have been provided by government to scale it up. However, a major concern is now to develop and maintain implementation capacity in a complex political and governance context. Growing politicization of the civil service has resulted in what has been described as “policy regression” since 2003. There has been a loss of political support for, technical capacity in relation to and knowledge about leasehold forestry, and there have been difficulties in extending it to new areas. In addition, the separation of the departments for agriculture, livestock and forestry has undermined the holistic approach to leasehold forestry, and IFAD was criticized for contributing to this separation. The consequence is that the physical area under leasehold forestry remains a fraction of that under community forestry, and there is concern that, in the absence of further external support, leasehold forestry may have run its course.

Conclusions and implications

On the one hand, IFAD developed a successful model that met its poverty and environmental objectives, and which led – through a prolonged process of the projects “speaking for themselves” – to political recognition and policy reformulation. However, it lacked the capacity to consolidate or capitalize on these achievements in a changing social and political environment. In addition, new issues have arisen in regard to leasehold forestry targeting and implementation, requiring innovation in leasehold forestry design. These are issues that IFAD is currently unable to assist in addressing, as it is no longer working in the sector.

4.4 Viet Nam

The contribution narrative

“Drawing on its project experience in the country, IFAD had played an instrumental role in changing the strategic approach underpinning the National Targeted Program on New Rural Development (NTP-NRD), a primary instrument of the Vietnamese Government in implementing its rural development policy.”

Background

The NTP-NRD 2010-2020 is being implemented across Viet Nam with the aim of consolidating the multiple social, economic, cultural and political interventions taking place in each commune. It aims to promote ownership of key development processes at the commune level as well as providing government policy orientation and support. In the first phase (2010-2015), NRD performance in all communes was evaluated against 19 uniform criteria. The Market-oriented Participatory Socio-economic Development Planning (MOP-SEDP) approach, which IFAD has supported in three provinces, promotes local-level planning to improve the efficiency of decentralized resource allocations for socio-economic activities.

CLPE objectives and activities

In 2013, looking to phase 2 of NTP-NRD (2016-2020), the government approached key development partners, seeking support and financial assistance for the expansion of the programme. In response, the development partners proposed that, prior to making financial commitments, a review of NTP-NRD performance should be carried out, and they committed to providing resources to assist the analysis and contribute to the formulation of the new phase.

In late 2015, IFAD worked with the World Bank to conduct an assessment of the NTP-NRD strategy and performance, and propose recommendations for the second phase (Crockford et al. 2016). The assessment confirmed the contribution of NTP-NRD in terms of rural infrastructure and services delivery, but it argued that it had contributed little to the process of rural economic transformation. Its recommendations for NRD phase 2 included a less top-down, more market-driven orientation, a greater role for community-level planning and decentralization, and a more flexible and context-specific approach to performance assessment. The MOP-SEDP model was put forward as offering an approach to local planning that could be integrated into the government's socio-economic development planning processes under NRD.

The intervention was carried out not as part of a formal IFAD policy engagement strategy relating to the decentralization agenda and its implications for smallholder agriculture but, rather, as an opportunistic exercise at a critical policy moment, and it was limited to activities that were feasible within the context of limited financing from a one-off grant. It resulted from the initiative of the country director, who was able to reallocate some responsibilities in order to make time for CLPE activities: accessing resources to finance the study, commissioning and supervising the report, organizing the policy workshop to present the findings, and participating in associated donor forums. However, the partnership between IFAD and the World Bank that underpinned the intervention was not without problems: neither agency was entirely happy with the process and the content of the review, and tensions emerged, related in part to differences in institutional priorities and processes relating to policy engagement. It is certainly possible that the success of the intervention was limited by the difficulties experienced by both parties.

Policy outcomes

The recommendations from the IFAD/World Bank assessment were presented in March 2016 at a workshop co-hosted by IFAD and the National Office of NTP-NRD, and with participants including key representatives from government and the development partners. The recommendations were agreed by the workshop participants, with the government mandating the National Office of NTP-NRD to use the findings and recommendations in the design of phase 2 of NRD. Many (although not all) of the recommendations were subsequently endorsed, first in the Prime Minister's "Decision 1600/QD-TTg" – notably a focus on value chain development and a relaxation of the 19 fixed performance criteria – and second in the Ministry of Planning and Investment's "Draft Circular on Manual for Participatory Planning at commune level under the implementation of NTP-NRD", issued in February 2017, which drew on evidence from not only MOP-SEDP but also other development partner interventions.

In order to take forward the report's recommendations for strengthening M&E in NRD phase 2, IFAD provided a grant for the provision of technical assistance to the National Office of NTP-NRD, starting in December 2016.

Discussion

The report was perceived by informants as valuable, inasmuch as it reinforced a message (already widely recognized among government staff, development partners, researchers, the media and farmers) regarding the need for reduced central control over agricultural development programming, increased flexibility in implementation, and a stronger focus on market- and community-led investment and programming. Both the report's findings and the confirmation of the recommendations at the subsequent workshop were of value to key government actors managing the programme, as they were able to use the credibility of development partners to add weight to their own preferred policy revisions in high-level political negotiations, a process described by one senior government official as "putting our words into the mouths of experts".

At the same time, there were other, simultaneous drivers of change and there was a unanimous perception among informants outside IFAD that the NRD policy revisions would have taken place anyway. The review was carried out at the right time in terms of the five-year policy development cycle; at a time of openness to policy review, with an ongoing debate within the country regarding the fundamental principles of central control first initiated during the 1980s; a recognition of the need for change on the part of government; and a popular campaign for liberalization, based on a media-led critique of the shortcomings of NRD. Thus, the CLPE intervention pushed at what was clearly an already open door. However, its success raised IFAD's profile and further strengthened its relationship with the National Office of NTP-NRD, and this gave IFAD the confidence to provide further support to NRD and position itself for further engagement on these aspects – additional positive CLPE outcomes.

Conclusions and implications

While the policy revisions are likely to have occurred irrespective of the intervention, given the government's prior recognition of the need for these, the study may have facilitated this process. Possibly the intervention could have had a greater impact if it had extended the existing discourse into new areas and provided an agenda for more progressive programming and policy change, although how politically feasible this would have been is open to question. Yet, overall, the impact of the exercise was positive, and IFAD's role in it was made possible by its institutional credibility in Viet Nam, resulting from decades of loan financing, its good relationships with partner ministries, and its knowledge of the sector, rather than the performance of the MOP-SEDP approach per se. It was also made possible by IFAD's ability to partner with the World Bank – even though this was not without problems – and to provide technical assistance in a timely and unconditional way in support of government priorities.

However, informants suggested that there was also potentially a greater CLPE role for IFAD to play, promoting greater sectoral collaboration and donor coordination and engaging with the government on wider issues relating to smallholder agriculture, drawing on areas of IFAD expertise and experience. Viet Nam is undergoing significant economic change and policy reform and the government is keen to access relevant policy support for decentralization

and market-based development. There is potential for IFAD to support this process given its experience and expertise. As summarized by one informant: "Now is not time for projects but for policy." Informants also identified Viet Nam's agricultural policy experience as valuable to other countries embarking on a similar transition and identified IFAD as uniquely placed to promote a process of South-South learning. In fact, there is already a growing policy focus to IFAD's programme for CLPE in Viet Nam, although extending this role would require increased staffing in the IFAD country office and an expanded set of skills relating to policy analysis and advocacy, as well as increased financial resources to enable the IFAD country office to respond to government requests for policy support.

5 Reflections on the CLPE assessment methodology

The study served to test whether or not the methodology under review offered a credible, cost-effective and replicable approach that could be used to undertake similar exercises at country and regional levels. This section reviews the methodology and assesses its performance and value.

5.1 Review of the methodology

The methodology developed was underpinned by the principles of contribution analysis (Mayne 2001) and informed by the literature on M&E of policy influence and advocacy (e.g. Tsui et al. 2014). It used a bellwether interview approach to test the IFAD contribution narrative, or ToC, and this was found to be effective in unpicking the real contribution of IFAD CLPE activities to processes of policy formulation, implementation and review. It was also useful in terms of identifying the key factors that contributed to these outcomes, and the process and resource allocation revisions required to support the expansion of CLPE programming within IFAD, both at the country level and institutionally.

The approach provided opportunities for gaining, within a short period of time, multiple external perspectives from across a diversity of spheres, on IFAD's role and effectiveness within the policy discourse in relation to the issues explored, as well as perceptions of IFAD's institutional standing within the policy arena more generally. This gave voice to previously unheard perceptions and enabled the triangulation of findings to prevent the dominance of individual voices as well as the probing of responses to explore issues of relevance or inconsistency. Thus, it served to hold a mirror up to the organization and test IFAD's own internal CLPE "success stories", thereby creating opportunities for discussion and learning that related to both the intervention under review and the wider institutional context. This is not always comfortable: external perceptions of IFAD's strengths and weaknesses, and its role in policy changes, do not always match those held internally.

The study elicited insights into IFAD's CLPE performance that would not be readily accessible using conventional evaluation approaches. In each of the case studies, it produced a rich set of responses that, taken collectively, offered credible evidence of a policy contribution – albeit not in all cases one that matched the contribution narrative defined at the start of the exercise. It made it possible to answer the research questions set out in the terms of reference, providing insights relating both to the specific case studies reviewed and to wider questions on IFAD and CLPE.

Nonetheless, a number of challenges were encountered in implementing the work. Primary among these was the challenge of defining the CLPE intervention under review in each context, and identifying the policy change against which IFAD's performance was to be assessed.

As noted above, the subject of enquiry, CLPE, is broadly defined within IFAD to include influencing not only policy priorities and design but also "the implementation and assessment of formal policies". This definition includes a range of implementation activities that are not always associated with formal policy dialogue, as well as those that entail more conventional or explicit policy-oriented activity. As a result, it was a challenge to identify in the case studies which actions constituted CLPE, as distinct from ongoing project implementation, particularly given the importance of the demonstration effect, which led to spontaneous, unmediated policy change and project replication, and which may be characterized as "indirect advocacy". In such cases, project implementation led to policy and implementation changes, but without formal policy engagement activity on the part of IFAD.

All the policy engagement interventions selected for review were considered within IFAD to be CLPE successes. However, it was not easy in every instance to capture the policy-related change that the intervention had sought to bring about, partly because policy-related objectives were not formally articulated in project documentation during the period in which the case studies under review were developed. This was a challenge, as the methodology required the identification of a particular policy change and then explored the extent to which IFAD had contributed to it as the basis on which to assess the success or otherwise of the engagement. Therefore, developing a coherent contribution narrative for each case study was crucial but problematic.

The activities identified as policy engagement in the four studies were diverse, ranging from the production and dissemination of a commissioned report using grant funding over a six-month period (in Viet Nam) to a 25-year loan-funded engagement (in Nepal), with all the activity this entails. The outcomes of the interventions also varied significantly, and did not in all cases include clear examples of policy change against which to assess the impact of the CLPE: outcomes ranged from invitations to extend programming and provide national technical assistance, to project replication, to the adoption of implementation innovations and changes in national policy. The extent to which these outcomes were the result of policy engagement, rather than effective implementation, also varied. None of the case studies used the term "policy engagement" to describe their activities in their own internal discourse, and none had explicit *ex ante* CLPE objectives or indicators. Therefore, the research entailed retrofitting the concept of CLPE onto project components and activities that did not all have clearly articulated policy impacts or objectives. This should be less of a challenge in the future given the progressive introduction of CLPE into IFAD programming.

Reviewing the case study interventions in isolation from the wider set of project and policy activities being carried out nationally meant that drawing country-wide conclusions regarding IFAD policy engagement was not appropriate. It was not possible to judge the extent to which the interventions selected for review were representative or typical of overall performance and engagement in CLPE, meaning that the findings are case study-specific. This was not a problem, as the review was intended to take place at the level of case study

rather than country programme. However, divorcing the review from the country context and information about other CLPE activities meant that the background report produced in the first phase of the study and the initial IFAD orientation were critical to ensure that the case study analysis was informed by an adequate knowledge of the national context and the role of the case study CLPE intervention within the broader IFAD country programme.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the application of a common framework across the diverse case studies provided a consistency of approach that made it possible to identify cross-programme issues, raising institutionally relevant questions and insights. The methodology was sufficiently flexible to enable the extraction of significant insights across a diversity of institutional and conceptual contexts, and could accommodate diversity in a way that a more tightly prescribed and quantitative approach could not.

The methodology does not provide a quantitative appraisal of CLPE performance, or a score that can be used to enable ranking or comparisons between programmes or changes over time, although it can provide valuable qualitative material for comparison between countries. Given the conceptual complexities of IFAD CLPE, its multidimensionality and the diversity of CLPE within and between projects, it would be neither desirable nor meaningful to summarize CLPE performance in a simple composite index.⁵ Therefore, a methodology entailing a qualitative narrative appraisal of case study performance is proposed as the most appropriate means of appraising CLPE performance and providing the insights that will support ongoing CLPE development in country.

5.2 Learning points

A number of important lessons emerged from the application of the methodology, relating to the key role of the country office in the framing and design of the research, the management of the bellwether responses and the limits of the approach in terms of appraising policy engagement overall at the country level. These findings are summarized below.

First, the methodology is dependent on an accurate conceptualization of the policy objectives and country context in the narrative prepared by the country office and national expert in stage 1, identifying the CLPE intervention and the associated policy change within a contribution narrative. The quality of this narrative in terms of the depiction of the CLPE objectives and associated activities is critical. Shortcomings during the first phase may adversely affect the quality of the findings of the review, as it sets the reference points for the bellwether interviews and identifies the policy change outcomes against which CLPE performance is appraised. The construction of this narrative is affected by the accessibility and quality of project documentation and the extent to which it articulates CLPE objectives and associated activities and outcomes. The national expert also plays a key role in the elaboration of the contribution narrative, the contextualisation of the case study intervention in the broader IFAD and national policy context, and the accurate description of the project under review. Thus, the quality of the analysis is dependent on the national expert's familiarity with IFAD projects and the national programme, and his or her understanding of the CLPE intervention and its significance in the wider policy context, as well as the availability of IFAD country-level staff who can inform the exercise.

5. Given the constraints on a composite quantitative appraisal of CLPE outlined in this discussion, the "policy engagement" indicator within IFAD's current National Client Survey, which reduces national CLPE to a single index, may be of limited value in terms of providing a meaningful assessment of variation in performance over time or cross-country comparison.

Second, the method also depends on the country office and national expert for the identification of appropriate bellwether informants in each of the informant categories, as this is critical for the validity and credibility of the research findings. This can be a challenge if the national expert is not fully conversant with the policy context and IFAD staff are not available to participate in the research design process. This was the situation in one of the case studies, resulting in an IFAD staff member raising a concern regarding the informants selected for review: "I note that many of the people interviewed are new – and many I have not heard of either."

Third, the process may elicit contestation in terms of which views are reported in the findings, particularly where there are discrepancies in the perceptions of IFAD's role. The bellwether approach addresses this challenge by eliciting multiple perceptions of the drivers of the particular policy change under review, noting, exploring and reporting divergent perspectives. Dominant themes are identified and attempts are made to verify them using a process of triangulation, while also taking into account the political and economic context of each informant. In this way, the informants' responses are contextualised in order to reduce the risk of bias and subjectivity.

One IFAD staff member raised concerns about the risk of individual voices dominating, asking, "Who does one believe where there are differing perceptions?" This concern referred to findings that challenged the IFAD contribution narrative in terms of the role of IFAD in relation to a particular policy outcome. The bellwether process does not rely on "believing" a particular informant, or giving greater weight to some responses over others; rather, the aim is to elicit perspectives from the range of stakeholders and attempt to identify the patterns that emerge in order to build up an understanding of causality and drivers, and of the roles of different actors and processes in bringing about change. Where there is a divergence in perspectives, responses are triangulated and the overall balance of different perceptions is considered. It is also important to root findings in empirical evidence, especially where they diverge from the contribution narrative. In this instance, this evidence was provided through the bellwether process, which revealed that the policy revision in question had been the subject of a national debate for several years prior to the IFAD intervention, including a major national newspaper campaign, rather than being placed on the agenda by IFAD.

The fact that findings may not correspond to the IFAD institutional perspective set out in the contribution narrative indicates that the bellwether methodology can add value by eliciting an independent review of external perceptions. It offers an opportunity not only to hear voices that may not normally be solicited but also to capture opinions that it might not be institutionally or politically acceptable to articulate outside the bellwether process, because, critically, it takes as its starting point the objective issue of drivers of policy change, rather than inviting an institutional critique. The selection of a range of informed stakeholders, including those from outside the normal development partner/government sphere (e.g. academics, journalists and civil society representatives) also creates space for external voices that may not otherwise be heard and may provide surprising alternative perspectives. Such divergent perspectives can be a basis for discussion and learning and are a core benefit of the bellwether process.

Fourth, while the methodology can offer new perspectives, there are limits to what can be achieved through a rapid bellwether process. The methodology was designed to review a single case study in each country and to be implemented rapidly and cost-effectively, with a short initial phase of national information-gathering followed by five days of intensive and focused interviewing by the review team. Therefore, the findings are limited to the perceptions of those interviewed, in relation to the specific policy issues raised. This focus on a single episode of CLPE may be somewhat artificial in terms of the assessment of IFAD's performance with regard to policy change at the country level, and it highlights the importance of adequate framing in the first phase of the study.

However, the implications of the findings from the individual case studies can usefully be analysed and discussed within the review team in order to identify common themes relating to IFAD institutional structures and processes, abstracting from the specific case studies to identify broader findings that may be relevant for IFAD institutionally. Although the extent to which this interpretation based on the four case studies is valid more widely within IFAD could not be ascertained by the study authors, it is anticipated that the reflections will provide a useful starting point for discussion within IFAD, and that the themes and challenges identified will be of relevance.

6 Conclusions

IFAD is currently carrying out a series of initiatives to explore how best to monitor and evaluate its policy engagement at the country level. This paper summarizes a study exploring the role of one potential approach to addressing this challenge, reviewing the experiences and analysing the impact of a small number of IFAD CLPE activities in four countries in Asia, identifying the key factors that influenced policy outcomes, and drawing out lessons for future policy work.

The study also considered whether or not the methodology developed represents a credible, cost-effective and replicable methodology that could be used to undertake similar exercises at country and regional levels. Any assessment of the effectiveness of the methodology and its potential replicability needs to start by considering whether or not it was able to provide a useful review of the CLPE experiences and impacts and identify the key factors involved.

As shown in section 4, the methodology did make possible a credible qualitative assessment of the contribution of IFAD CLPE to a range of policy changes, the identification of internal and external factors that contributed to or hindered outcomes, and the articulation of external perspectives on IFAD's policy engagement in country. In doing so, it was able on the one hand to "revise and strengthen the performance story" (Mayne 2001) – the contribution narrative associated with the policy change – and to draw out lessons for future policy work, in the countries in question and beyond.

The methodology's successful application was achieved by drawing on the expertise of a large number of diverse informants, identified by IFAD staff and the national policy expert. Their input was moderated by the national policy experts, who worked within a consistent methodological framework developed and overseen by the international consultant who worked across all four of the case studies. In this way, the methodology provided a unique external perspective on IFAD's policy engagement in theory and practice – one that was at times uncomfortable but arguably more valuable as a learning exercise for that. It is true that the methodology does not offer quantified data, although it is questionable to what extent this would be of value in increasing our understanding of processes of policy engagement. In addition, the triangulation of the different perspectives that the methodology encourages also contributes to enhancing the rigour of the exercise (Heinemann et al. 2017).

The methodology was able to generate significant insights regarding CLPE performance in the four countries in a relatively short period of time – one week to prepare the background report and a further week of interviews with informants in each country – while the total cost for the four-country study, including the development of the methodology, was under US\$80,000, suggesting that it can offer a relatively cost-effective evaluation approach. This, combined with its ability to generate useful perspectives and its relative simplicity,

indicates that it has the potential for replication. The inclusion of explicit policy agendas and objectives in IFAD's COSOPs and project design reports should render future application of the methodology somewhat simpler, as it should not require the research team to reconstruct the contribution narrative or to retrofit CLPE concepts to activities that took place before the term was formally defined within IFAD.

Within IFAD, or other international development agencies, the methodology adopted in this study can be used by a review team with access to in-country staff and key national actors, and it can be applied in a variety of contexts – as a stand-alone assessment of CLPE performance, as part of formal project or country evaluations, or at key points in the project or country programme cycle when a strategic review is required. It is, like all methodologies, as effective as those who practice it; ensuring that the initial contribution narrative, or ToC, is credible and that the informants identified are adequately informed about the policy process in question are both critical.

Finally, there are two observations that are relevant in terms of the future use of the evaluation methodology. First, it can benefit particularly from being designed and implemented as a collaborative process with the country office, in terms of engagement in identification of the national expert, articulation of the contribution narrative, identification and provision of documentation, identification of key informants, and participation in orientation and verification meetings. This can ensure not only the quality of the process and findings but also country office confidence in the findings, which can increase the extent to which the research offers a valuable tool for improved country programme impact. Second, the exercise can be facilitated by improved real-time monitoring of policy engagement activities at the country programme level – something that IFAD is currently working to develop. Having available a greater amount of information about the efforts of the country offices to engage in a policy process over the long and medium term, and the specific activities undertaken, would make it possible to develop a more informed and credible contribution narrative, thus facilitating the *ex post* evaluation of the results achieved.

While this report has documented the effective piloting of a methodology to enable IFAD to enhance its evaluation of CLPE, it is hoped that the findings are of relevance to the wider community of practitioners working on policy engagement and impact assessment, and that this report documents lessons that are of value to IFAD and beyond, in terms of the development of a feasible, cost-effective and insightful approach.

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Annex 1: Summary of the four CLPE case studies

Country	IFAD-funded project associated with CLPE	Duration	CLPE goal
India	North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas (NERCORMP)	1999-2017	CLPE not explicitly articulated in project or COSOP documentation. Implicit objective: adoption of community participation and livelihood process innovations more widely in NER.
Indonesia	Agriculture subcomponent of the National Programme for Community Empowerment (Agriculture PNPM)	2009-2014, 2017-	CLPE not explicitly articulated in project or COSOP documentation. Implicit objective: IFAD participation in livelihood process innovations, developed in Papua and West Papua, adopted for national Village Law implementation.
Nepal	Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project (HLFFDP) Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Programme (LFLP)	1989/90-2002/03 2005/06-2014/15	CLPE not explicitly articulated in project or COSOP documentation. Implicit objective: government mainstreaming of pro-poor leasehold forestry (policy and implementation).
Viet Nam	MOP-SEDP component of the New Targeted Program on New Rural Development (NTP-NRD)	2010-2014	CLPE not explicitly articulated in project or COSOP documentation. Objective of grant-funded CLPE intervention to support NTP-NRD: Improve NTP-NRD phase 2 design.

Type of CLPE	Outcomes
Indirect CLPE (demonstration effect/"speak for itself")	<p>NERCORMP implementation modalities and institutions relating to participation adopted in subsequent IFAD and development partner projects, and used for implementation of government programmes.</p> <p>NERCORMP Secretariat funded by government during breaks in IFAD funding.</p> <p>NERCORMP Phase 3 funded by national government.</p> <p>NERCORMP secretariat working as informal advisory body for NER institutions.</p> <p>NERCORMP secretariat currently under consideration as nationally funded technical assistance resource institution for programme implementation.</p>
Indirect CLPE (demonstration effect/"speak for itself") plus IFAD institutional positioning	<p>IFAD invited to advise government on integration of participation and livelihoods processes into PNPM national programme.</p> <p>IFAD invited to recommence and extend programme in Papua and West Papua.</p>
Direct CLPE within project	<p>Leasehold forestry given priority 1 programme status in the Tenth National Plan of the National Planning Commission (2002-2007).</p> <p>Leasehold forestry identified as a contributor to one of the four strategic pillars targeting poverty reduction in the Nepal Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2003).</p> <p>Leasehold forestry unit created in government.</p> <p>Leasehold forestry concept replicated outside IFAD project areas and incorporated into subsequent IFAD- and development partner-financed projects.</p> <p>Leasehold forestry participatory institutions used for other government interventions.</p> <p>1992 Forestry Act amended to include leasehold forestry (2017).</p>
Direct CLPE	<p>NTP-NRD policy revised in line with IFAD recommendations.</p> <p>IFAD invited to provide technical assistance to support NTP-NRD M&E.</p>

Annex 2: Case study CLPE activities by type

Viet Nam (NTP-NRD)	Indonesia (PNPM)
Create space for policy dialogue: an investment project can be used to create space for policy dialogue between national stakeholders – particularly rural producer organizations (RPOs) – including a range of different organizations representing smallholder farmers, and then support that dialogue	
Create national policy dialogue between national stakeholders	
Partial: host one-off event (policy workshop)	No
Participate in national policy dialogue	
<i>Ad hoc</i> participation in government-led dialogue	<i>Ad hoc</i> participation in government-/development partner-led dialogue
Develop organizations representing smallholder farmers to participate in national/regional debate	
No	No
Enhance stakeholder capacity for policy processes: an investment, or grant-financed, project can be used to enhance the capacity of national stakeholders, particularly RPOs, providing them with the skills and analysis they need to ensure their leaders are able to participate effectively in national policy processes	
Partial	No
Policy analysis and support for policy formulation: an investment project, grant project or even IFAD's administrative budget can be used to finance analysis of national policy and/or to provide short-term consultancy support for policy formulation	
Yes	No (policy analysis has taken place for other projects)
Operationalize/pilot national policy at local level: an investment project may be used to enable government to operationalize at the local level a national policy – particularly in states where the central government may have limited policy leverage at the local level, or to pilot new models for implementing national policies	
Yes: pilot new model for implementing national	Yes: pilot new model for implementing national policy
policy	
Review policy implementation to identify gaps, constraints or blockages: an investment project can provide a vehicle to review relevant current policies, to identify implementation gaps and/or policy constraints and blockages, understand the reasons and bring the evidence to government	
Yes	No

India (NERCORMP)	Nepal (leasehold forestry)
No	Yes: develop new model and bring new ideas into policy dialogue [e.g. policy workshop in 2007/08]
No	<i>Ad hoc</i> participation in government-/development partner-led dialogue
No: organizations active at district level but not engaged in policy debate	Yes: organizations active at national level
No	Partial: investment in technical assistance for government staff
No	Yes
Yes: spontaneous use of project institutions to implement national programmes	Yes: pilot new model pre-dated and directly led to new national policy
No	Yes: funded technical assistance input to Agricultural Development Strategy that included a leasehold forestry component (2013) and national workshops (2013/14) that influenced policymakers, managers and politicians

Viet Nam (NTP-NRD)	Indonesia (PNPM)
<p>Draw out successful models and promote adoption/scaling-up: successful approaches and models piloted or developed under an investment project can be drawn out and analysed, to promote their adoption/scaling-up by government under a national strategy or programme. This may be done under the project itself, or by the CPM/CPO building on the evidence generated by the project</p>	
No	<p>Potential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government has invited IFAD to support replication of community participation model in Village Law nationally • No formal promotion of IFAD model by project or IFAD
<p>IFAD participates in policy dialogue forums: the CPM/CPO can actively participate as IFAD's representative in in-country policy dialogue forums (e.g. sector working groups), bringing on-the-ground experience and lessons learned to government and its other development partners</p>	
Partial: limited and <i>ad hoc</i> engagement	Partial: limited and <i>ad hoc</i> engagement
<p>Strengthen the capacity of government agencies: a project can provide a vehicle to strengthen the capacity of relevant government agencies to formulate, implement and assess national policies and programmes</p>	
<p>Potential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government has invited IFAD to support development of national M&E guidelines (grant funding) • Improvement in local implementation of national policy not reported 	<p>Potential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government has invited IFAD to assist with national implementation (grant funding) • Improvement in local implementation of national policy
<p>Share experiences at regional and/or global levels: a regional/global grant can offer a framework to bring together policy stakeholders from different countries, to share experiences among peers, promote peer-to-peer learning and build trust between stakeholders from the same country</p>	
No	No
<p>Promote dialogue between government agencies for improved and more coherent policymaking and implementation, particularly around cross-cutting issues such as climate change adaptation or nutrition</p>	
No	No

India (NERCORMP)	Nepal (leasehold forestry)
<p>Partial:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project participation model adopted in other IFAD, state and World Bank projects • Project secretariat may become source of regional technical assistance (government initiative) • No formal promotion of model by project or IFAD 	<p>Yes: leasehold forestry model has become policy and has been adopted in government, development partner and IFAD programming</p>
<p>No</p>	<p>Partial: limited and <i>ad hoc</i> engagement, limited delegated authority to CPO</p>
<p>Partial:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project secretariat providing technical assistance to range of regional- and state-level actors informally. May become formal source of regional technical assistance after IFAD project completion • Improvement in local implementation of national policies 	<p>Partial: policy and implementation modalities developed with IFAD project inputs, but capacity to implement and monitor deteriorated after IFAD project completion</p>
<p>Yes: regional workshop</p>	<p>Yes: regional workshop and book publication</p>
<p>Partial: no promotion of formal dialogue on core policy issues but project resulted in increased convergence (harmonization of programme implementation at local level) – spontaneous outcome</p>	<p>Partial: coordination has broken down since IFAD project completed</p>

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