

Notes on the second meeting of Convenors and Friends in 2020

02 April 2020

1. The second meeting for 2020 between Convenors and Friends and the President of IFAD took place on Thursday, 2 April 2020. In light of restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually via Zoom video-conferencing.

Agenda item 1: Opening remarks by the President and adoption of the agenda

2. The President welcomed participants to the second meeting this year and the first virtual meeting of the group. Friends in attendance were from List A, Mr Bruce Kirkwood Campbell (Switzerland); from List B, Dr Yaya Olaniran (Nigeria); from Sub-List C1, Mr Médi MOUNGUI (Cameroon); from Sub-List C2, Mr Manash Mitra (Bangladesh), and from Sub-List C3, Mr Nazareno Cruz Montani Cazabat (Argentina). The President extended a special welcome to Bangladesh as a new member on the Executive Board for 2020.
3. In line with the host country, the President informed participants that the United Nations flag at IFAD headquarters had been lowered to half-mast that day in memory of the victims of the COVID-19 virus. He shared the sad news with participants that the Governor for the Dominican Republic, Ambassador Antonio Vargas Hernández, had passed away some days earlier. The President also informed the group that an FAO colleague, known to many in the Rome-based diplomatic community, had tested positive to COVID-19 at the end of March and had since passed away. The President had expressed sympathies on behalf of the staff of the Fund to the families and colleagues of both dear friends.

Agenda item 2: Lessons learned from recent virtual Governing Body meetings

4. The Secretary of IFAD updated participants on recent meetings and evolving practices for Governing Body meetings in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure business continuity and comply with decrees issued by the Italian Authorities and the World Health Organization guidelines, meetings had been held virtually and in English only, and discussions streamlined by reducing the agenda to essential items, in agreement

with Committee's chairs and members. Documents for other agenda items had been shared with members, who had been invited to use the on line commenting feature for these. Comments received and Management's responses would be compiled, translated and made available on line.

5. The Secretary of IFAD referred to the recent virtual meetings namely:
 - Executive Board informal seminar on Targeted Capacity Investment (TCI) Implementation Plan (25 March);
 - 156th meeting of the Audit Committee (AC156) (30 March); and,
 - 108th session of the Evaluation Committee (EC108) (1 April).
6. He informed the group that feedback from members had been positive and assured Convenors that Management would strive to make interventions more concise during future meetings. He confirmed that the briefing by the President of IFAD on COVID-19 on 3 April would also be held virtually. Other meetings such as the Executive Board retreat would necessarily have to be postponed.
7. The List A Convenor, echoed by others, complimented IFAD on adapting to a virtual setting, supporting members in the use of new technology and confirmed that meetings held via Zoom were largely successful. Members pointed out however that the three recent meetings had run over the scheduled timings; in particular, the TCI informal seminar had exceeded the time foreseen by one hour. They called upon all participating to exercise self-restraint and to keep within established times. Suggestions included having one representative of Management provide the IFAD consolidated response to multiple interventions, reducing opening and closing interventions by Management and time limits for interventions from consultants and external experts. Members agreed that virtual meetings should be limited, when possible, to a maximum of 3.5 hours and suggested including a 5-10 minute break. The Sub-List C2 Convenor also raised the issue of connectivity, pointing out that the sound quality had been impaired during a discussion at the Audit Committee.
8. Convenors also thanked IFAD Management for sharing regular updates from the COVID-19 Taskforce and asked for additional information.
9. Management noted that IFAD's PoLG had been impacted and the Fund's response would be tailored to country-specific situations. Describing what IFAD was doing, Management said the Fund was focusing on four areas: analysis; re-purposing funds and deferring payments; scaling up digital capacity; and, supporting policy-making. Examples were provided such as working with Government to ensure that food and transport systems continued to function in Bangladesh, keeping market routes open

and informing producers accordingly, and expanding an existing e-voucher scheme in Kenya to increase the number of beneficiaries.

10. Upon the request of a number of members for information that could be shared with capitals, Management agreed to provide information on IFAD's response to the COVID-19 emergency. This information would include concrete examples of how IFAD planned to mitigate the risk of the pandemic leading to a food crisis. Management reminded members that IFAD main role would be in the recovery phase as the Fund was not a humanitarian agency, and also underlined the importance of building resilience in rural communities. Recurrent threats from climate-related shocks to the current pandemic show how important resilience is and this is where the focus would be.
11. From a financial perspective, Management mentioned the immediate impact on borrowing, changes in disbursement trends, and the need to elaborate new scenarios for IFAD12. Management described this phase as 'the what if' phase. IFAD's credit rating would become more critical as it was essential in order to expand the borrowing-base to borrow from institutions. IFAD expected to have further – positive – news on the credit rating exercise closer to the 129th session of the Executive Board. IFAD was working internally to upscale its paperless system for withdrawal applications. The automated system was currently being used by 50% of the Fund's borrowers and this would be increased.
12. Furthermore, in response to requests from some governments, IFAD would reach out to them proposing new initiatives and revisions for ongoing programmes.
13. The President informed the group that IFAD could possibly complement humanitarian activities led by the United Nations Secretary-General with the proposed special funding mechanism as well as possible targeted socio-economic initiatives led by IFIs.
14. Members looked forward to the President's virtual briefing on COVID-19 on 3 April.

Agenda item 3: 129th session of the Executive Board (EB129)

- a. EB129 provisional agenda, as adjusted in light of the revised modalities**
- b. Procedures and technical arrangements**
- c. Trainings for EB representatives**

15. The Secretary of IFAD explained that the EB129 agenda would be reduced and that the session would be held over three afternoons of approximately 3 hours each. To this, the List C Convenor asked that the timing be set to facilitate representatives participating from different time zones.

16. The Secretary also informed participants that IFAD was exploring the possibility of providing interpretation for the virtual meeting. To streamline discussions, numerous documents had been submitted to the Board for written comments in advance of the session.¹
17. Management explained that Management's responses to comments received within deadlines would be handled in two ways: responses to individual comments would be published as soon as ready and all comments on a given document with relative responses would be consolidated into a single document and published. For members who had voiced concern about meeting deadlines for commenting on documents, the Secretary of IFAD explained that comments received after deadlines would be responded to either in-session or bilaterally.
18. Members alerted Management that discussions in-session on COVID-19 and TCI would be lengthy. In addition, they requested that an update be provided on the risks associated with audit and oversight in light of the COVID-19 crisis.² Members also asked to allow time to discuss IFAD12. Convenors were also informed that a fourth afternoon would be set aside for the session, should it be required.
19. On the TCI agenda item, the List A Convenor requested Management to share a short paper in advance of the Board session setting out the actions and funding proposed for the Board's approval to facilitate focused discussions. This paper would take into account the comments and feedback already received from members on this topic.
20. Overall, the group expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Fund in communicating with its Members and keeping them informed.

Agenda item 4: Consultation on the Twelfth Replenishment of IFAD's resources (IFAD12)

21. Management proposed that the second session planned for June be held virtually, and members' feedback would be sought prior to posting the Chairperson's summary on the first session. The List A Convenor advised that she would reach out to her List on this topic in the next days to alert them with a view to building consensus, and would report findings to Management.³

¹ Further to the meeting, members were informed that the interpretation function would be piloted at the EB120 during the virtual EB session via Zoom. A dedicated briefing was held for all EB members on 17 April.

² An information document has been posted on the EB129 site on the Members Platform titled: "IFAD's Internal Oversight: Modified Approach in Response to the Global Pandemic Emergency".

³ Further to the meeting, the List A Convenor confirmed the non-objection of List A to proceed with proposing that the second session of IFAD12 Consultation be held virtually.

22. It was agreed that an oral update on this topic would be included on the agenda for the forthcoming EB129.
23. Members recalled that both the June and October sessions were considered critical in terms of discussing substantive issues. They also raised some concern about the ability of donors to pledge funds to IFAD12 by year-end, as originally planned, in light of COVID-19 and the unfolding global economic crisis. Some members proposed that IFAD extend the deadline for pledges to February 2021, in conjunction with the Governing Council session. Management explained that this option would be considered and that all efforts would be made not to go beyond the established dates to avoid jeopardising operations. It was highlighted that any further delay beyond February 2021 would require an in-depth assessment of financial implications.

Agenda item 5: Other business

24. The Secretary of IFAD informed the meeting that the President's meetings with Lists prior to EB129 would be held virtually on 15 April, and that Members will be provided with details in due course.