

Notes on the Second Meeting of Convenors and Friends in 2021

8 April 2021

1. The second meeting for 2021 between Convenors and Friends and the President of IFAD took place on Thursday, 8 April. The meeting was held virtually via the Zoom meeting application.

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

2. The President welcomed participants to the second meeting of the year. He congratulated Gloria Wiseman of Canada, on assuming the role of List A Convenor and Bjørg Skotnes of Norway as the new List A Co-Convenor. Friends in attendance were, for List A: Mr Sylvain Fournel, from France; Ms Judith Randel, from Ireland; for List B: Dr Yaya O. Olaniran, from Nigeria; for sub-List C1: Mr Médi MOUNGUI, from Cameroon; and, for sub-List C3: Ambassador Federico Zamora Cordero, from Costa Rica.
3. The President updated the Group on a number of issues, namely, IFAD12, the Integrated Borrowing Framework (IBF), IFAD11, and decentralization.
 - On the status of IFAD12 contributions, the President informed the group that approximately US\$1.15 billion had been pledged to date. Convenors were asked to remind Member States which had not yet done so to make their pledges and deposit their Instruments of contribution (IOC).
 - Following the Board's approval of the Integrated Borrowing Framework (IBF) in December 2020 and the Governing Council's approval of the corresponding amendments to the Agreement Establishing IFAD in February 2021, IFAD was in the process of preparing for its inaugural private placement. The private placement was expected to be issued under a medium-term note (MTN) programme as is common with peer IFIs at the end of 2021 or early 2022. The private placement proposal would first be reviewed and approved by the Executive Board before any issuance, and this would not entail market borrowing. This additional borrowing would complement IFAD's core resources.
 - Under IFAD11, the Fund had delivered a total of US\$2.604 billion in support of 75 investment programmes/projects and 47 grants (which includes RPSF and PSFF) as of the end of March 2021. This represented 74 per cent of the IFAD11 PoLG target of US\$3.5 billion. Activities would be intensified during this final year of IFAD11 and the 2021 PoLG would comprise 31 projects and 10 additional financing proposals for a total value of US\$913 million. A second PBAS reallocation exercise would be run to distribute the related resources of approximately US\$67 million and ensure a full delivery of the IFAD11 PoLG.
 - The decentralization process was moving ahead as planned with operational divisions including SKD and FOD moving to the field and Regional Directors out-posted. The existing hub model would be replaced by regional offices and the number of Country Offices would be increased. In support of decentralization, the new delegation of

authority framework had been prepared following wide consultation with staff and would greatly increase empowerment at all levels. The Framework would be released in the coming weeks

4. Given the intense agenda and time constraints, it was agreed that agenda items 2 (feedback on the Governing Council) and 5 (additional Board sessions and lessons learned from virtual meetings) would be discussed either under other business, time permitting, or at the next meeting of Convenors and Friends. The revised agenda was adopted accordingly.

Agenda item 3: 132nd session of the Executive Board (EB132) and related events

5. The Secretary of IFAD provided an overview of events on the margins of EB132 and highlighted key strategic items for discussion thereat.
6. Convenors expressed appreciation for the EB132 provisional agenda, endorsed the strategic discussion topic on market borrowing, and proposed including oral updates on: mitigating risks and minimizing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on operations, working arrangements and staff vaccination plan, UN Reform and, the Food Systems Summit.
7. On the impact of COVID-19 on operations, Management advised that some project completion deadlines would be extended and a longer time frame would be set for others.
8. In terms of the effect of the pandemic on staff, Management confirmed that up to 95% of staff continued to telework, with a number of staff teleworking from non duty stations. A staff survey had been carried out with a view to exploring preferred post-pandemic work modalities. Results of the survey would inform Management's decisions in this regard. A first analysis of results showed that hybrid solutions, combining teleworking and working in presence, would be considered. Studies and benchmarking exercises were also being carried out.
9. Overall, Management expressed its view that teleworking would continue post-pandemic but noted that it had, in part, had adverse effects on staff well-being. Workload and tension had increased and this was cause for concern for Management.
10. The staff vaccination programme had commenced. The Rome-based agencies programme was led by FAO in coordination with the Italian Authorities. The UN-backed Covax scheme would ensure access to vaccines for staff in country offices.
11. At the request of Convenors, Management agreed to organize an informal seminar on IFAD's graduation policy before the September Board.
12. Also at the request of Convenors, it was agreed to extend the deadline for receipt of members' comments on EB132 documents posted for on-line review.
13. It was noted that the Executive Board would be called upon to approve the closure of the Working Group on the Transition Framework, which last met in March 2019 and had since been dormant. Responding to a question, Management advised that working groups were established and closed upon

decision of the Board. Should this, or any Executive Board Working Group be required in future, the Executive Board had the authority to establish subsidiary bodies as deemed necessary.

14. Finally, Convenors welcomed the news that, as of EB132, interpretation would be available in the Fund's four official languages for participants following proceedings in the virtual *salle d'écoute*.

Agenda item 4: Sixth Executive Board retreat

15. As previously agreed, the retreat would be held virtually on 18 and 19 May. Given the virtual setting and to facilitate dialogue, it was proposed that delegations would comprise one representative for each Executive Board member and alternate member, as well as List Convenors.
16. The facilitator, Bob Wright, had already contacted Convenors to gather input in preparation for the event and the provisional agenda would be published soonest.
17. Convenors shared suggested topics for discussion including: taking stock of reforms and changes in recent years; decentralization and IFAD's growth; market borrowing from a development perspective; quality of programming; and, the forward looking plan for the Independent Office of Evaluation as envisaged by the newly appointed Director.
18. Management expressed appreciation for the valuable proposals which all merited consideration, schedule permitting, and added that a discussion at the retreat on the Fund's annual budget and the impact of zero real growth would be timely.

Agenda item 6: Food Systems Summit

19. Turning to the Food Systems Summit, Management provided an overview of upcoming preparatory events including six meetings in the week ahead chaired by the Associate Vice-President, External Relations and Governance Department. An Executive Board informal seminar on IFAD's engagement in the Food Systems Summit would be held on 22 April from 1.30 to 3.30 p.m. In this regard, Management welcomed Convenors' suggestion to allow for unlimited participation in terms of numbers from Member States. A pre-Summit meeting would be hosted by Italy in July.
20. IFAD was working closely with the United Nations Special Envoy for the Food Systems Summit, Agnes Kalibata, and with the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed, on all action tracks. As anchor for Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods, IFAD was leveraging on its experience with the Farmers' Forum and Indigenous Peoples' Forum.
21. Management expressed regret that civil society organizations had opted to hold a parallel and separate Food Systems Summit event. Management informed the Group that IFAD continued to explore ways of collaborating with civil society organizations with a view to engaging them in the main Summit.
22. Convenors asked how IFAD was positioning itself for the Summit, how the Fund could support national dialogues and how the outcomes would impact the Fund's work.

23. In this regard, IFAD had already begun to make plans for the post-Summit period. An example of this was to collaborate with financial institutions such as the Cassa Prestiti e Depositi and the Agence française de développement to facilitate access to finance for smallholder rural producers and artisans.
24. In response to a question on inclusiveness and reaching out to countries which had not yet committed to engaging in the Summit, Management acknowledged difficulties. The Special Envoy for the Summit was making every effort to address these. In addition, an event to bring key African ministers and decision makers together was being organized with the African Development Bank in April.
25. Convenors and Management recognized the challenge of coordinating many actors and executors with a risk of disconnect among them. IFAD would be vigilant to ensure that proposals were translated into practical terms with measurable goals and tangible outcomes. Management reassured the group that smallholder rural people would come first, irrespective of international or national politics.

Agenda item 7: Update on IFAD's Financial Profile

26. Management provided a summary of the Fund's financial profile. Management recalled that the financial architecture transformation has had the key objective of ensuring that IFAD will be able to provide its development impact more sustainably and strongly in the decades to come, with many of the improvements dating back to IOE's independent evaluation of IFAD's financial architecture. The mitigating actions taken by IFAD in recent years to address those findings and accommodate the growing cumulative approved programming were reiterated. These included among others: the Debt Sustainability Framework reform, the new capital adequacy and liquidity policies, increasing the levels of borrowing through the Integrated Borrowing Framework (IBF), mechanism for early encashment of replenishment contributions, and policy on early loan repayments from borrowers, and a dynamic portfolio management approach that secures a more efficient and effective use of financial resources in investment projects.
27. Convenors were informed that a paper on this topic was under preparation and invited members to reach out to Management for further information.

Agenda item 8: Senior Management team

28. The President shed some light on the departures of the Associate Vice-Presidents of the Strategy and Knowledge Department and the External Relations and Governance Department, the reasons, and their continued commitment to the work of senior management. Members appreciated the openness to discuss the subject, highlighted the need to deal with the emanating perceptions, touched on the possibility to revisit the discussion on remuneration and requested for information on the way forward. The President informed the Group that vacancy announcements for the two positions had been published. The deadline for applications for both positions was 2 May 2021.

Agenda item 9: Other business

29. The Sub-List C1 Convenor informed the Group of a change of Convenor within the Sub-List. As such, Mr Carlos Amaral of Angola would step down and Mr Médi MOUNGUI of Cameroon would take over as Sub-List C1 Convenor for 2021 and 2022. Egypt would assume the position for 2023.
30. The President thanked Mr Amaral for the dedication with which he had fulfilled the role of Sub-List C1 Convenor and looked forward to working with Mr MOUNGUI in his new capacity.
31. Time did not permit the discussion of agenda items 2 and 5, moved under other business at the adoption of the agenda.
32. No other business was raised and the meeting was adjourned. Convenors and Friends would meet again on 10 June.