

Notes on the Third Meeting of Convenors and Friends in 2021

10 June 2021

1. The third meeting for 2021 between Convenors and Friends and the President of IFAD took place on Thursday, 10 June. 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 and congratulated Mr Médi MOUNGUI of Cameroon for assuming the role of Sub-List C1 Convenor. Friends in attendance were, for List A: Mr Petter Nilsson, from Sweden; for List B: Dr Yaya Olaniran, from Nigeria.
3. The President expressed his appreciation to Convenors for a successful sixth Executive Board retreat. While it had not been possible to meet in person, Management was optimistic that conditions would soon allow for face-to-face gatherings. The President invited the Group to express opinions on the main outcomes of the retreat and to guide Management on follow up actions to be taken, under agenda item 2 of the draft agenda for the meeting.
4. The President updated the Group on a couple of issues of importance namely: IFAD12 Replenishment and IFAD ranking first overall on the Quality of Official Development Assistance (QuODA), conducted by the Centre for Global Development (report available [here](#)).
5. Speaking about IFAD12, as of the beginning of June, pledged contributions amounted to about US\$1.15 equivalent to 74% of the replenishment target. This was expected to increase as a number of countries had yet to pledge.
6. The agenda was adopted as set forth.

Agenda item 2: Feedback from the sixth EB retreat and next steps

7. Management recognized the limitations posed by the virtual setting of the retreat. Management commended the active participation of Executive Board representatives at the retreat. Many of the topics raised during discussions would be critical for the future of the Fund. Management intended to maintain the momentum to identify key contributing factors towards doubling IFAD's impact while respecting its mandate and leveraging its comparative advantage.
8. Convenors would have a unique role in gathering insight and feedback within their Lists. This information would guide Management on how best to advance discussions. Convenors underlined the need to maintain high quality programmes when considering an increase in volume of work. Convenors agreed to liaise with Members and welcomed consensus-building occasions, ideally in-person. To this, the President indicated management's desire to hold a one-day in-person gathering, ideally in October, should the situation continue to improve and allow for such gathering.

9. Confirming their commitment to the Fund, Convenors and Friends alike congratulated IFAD on the outcome of the Quality of Official Development Assistance (QuODA) 2021 assessment. The Fund's ranking in first place was a source of pride.
10. Convenors stressed the need to balance high ticket agenda items and those that touch on efforts to continue improving on the delivery of projects in the field. On this subject of programme delivery, the President informed Convenors of the preparations towards the implementation of IFAD 12 which included mapping out the best ways for IFAD to better leverage its resources for greater impact.
11. Convenors further indicated that a compilation of the outcome of the proceedings was to be made available and therefore looked forward to receiving the report of the sixth Executive Board retreat.

Agenda item 3: Additional Board sessions and lessons learned from virtual meetings

12. When introducing the agenda item, Management referred to the busy meeting schedule ahead and, in particular, the high number of meetings on the Rome-based agencies calendar in June and July. Members had also commented on this.
13. Management informed the Group that it had taken measures to alleviate the situation by replacing a number of informal seminars with targeted outreach and bilateral meetings. In other cases, documents would be submitted for online commenting. Management reassured members that feedback received would be considered carefully.
14. An updated list of meetings and events would be published on the Member States Interactive Platform.
15. Management and Convenors agreed that innovative working modalities adopted during the pandemic had served the governance process, and the Executive Board, well.
16. Consequently, a number of these innovations would be maintained when in-person meetings resumed. For example, the vote by correspondence procedure would continue. A dedicated area had been created on the Member States Interactive Platform to present all documents requiring action through vote by correspondence as well as documents approved through this method.
17. The process whereby documents were opened for comments on line had been well received by representatives and would also continue. In future, deadlines for submission of comments would be extended to a few days prior to Board sessions to accommodate requests from member states to allow for more time to consult with capitals. Consolidated documents with comments received and responses from Management would then be posted online subsequent to the Board session in question.
18. These new working modalities had and would continue to reduce the number of items presented for discussion during Board sessions.

19. When discussing the possible merits of holding an additional annual meeting of the Board, Convenors took into account the potential nature of work in the post-COVID era but expressed preference not to add on another session, given alternative decision-making methods successfully implemented as described above.
20. With regard to returning to in-presence meetings, hybrid or other, the Group shared lessons learned in their respective countries. Members urged Management to take a flexible approach and align with evolving trends in Member States. Members highlighted financial, environmental and health reasons for minimizing the movement of people and questioned the need to return to pre-pandemic levels of travel.
21. Based on feedback received from Convenors, and the experience and lessons learnt from the how the Board has operated during the period of the pandemic, Management suggested holding one virtual and two in-person Board sessions in 2022 and would therefore submit a written proposal to this effect for the Board's formal approval.
22. The Group underlined the important role of sub-committees of the Board in providing clear guidance and direction to facilitate the Board in making informed decisions. This would avoid extensive and time-consuming discussion on items previously examined by sub-committees.
23. Management endorsed this principle and proposed that this be one of the items to be discussed during the planned one-day in-presence Board retreat possibly in October.

Agenda item 4: Update on operational and skills preparations towards IFAD12

24. The Fund's portfolio had reached 129 million beneficiaries, and for the second consecutive year, was in excess of the IFAD11 target of 120 million. Performance results were good, notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fund continued to meet all targets on institutional efficiency. Mechanisms to support programmes in conflict affected states would be strengthened.
25. In line with IFAD11 and IFAD12 targets, actions had been identified to improve sustainability, efficiency and support government performance. Dedicated grants would support these efforts.
26. Activities had also been identified to strengthen IFAD's position as a learning oriented institution.
27. Responding to concerns regarding staff readiness and capacity, Management updated the meeting on plans to address these issues. An 'upskilling initiative', including the launch of a revamped operations academy, aimed to fill skill gaps and upskill staff in a consistent way.
28. Furthermore, IFAD worked closely with the FAO Investment Centre and through the Centre, had access to highly qualified and experienced specialists. A joint review had demonstrated that collaboration with FAO was beneficial and had improved quality.

29. Country presence was essential to working together and better. Collaboration with UN Country Teams had intensified as a result. In this regard, the Board would receive an annual update on UN reform at its September session.
30. Convenors mentioned the importance of a mentorship programme, and were informed various schemes, including a buddy system, was in place to support especially newly assigned Regional Directors and Country Programme Managers.
31. Convenors welcomed the information on decentralization and filling the skill gap, increased partnerships and collaboration with other UN Agencies in the decentralised setting.
32. With regard to the filling of the skill gap either through upskilling on acquiring the needed expertise, a request was made to provide the Board with a progress report and time line for planned activities on a yearly basis. Management agreed and would consider the option of integrating this into the regular updates on the People, Processes and Technology Plan (PPTP).

Agenda item 5: Other business

33. The List C and Sub-List C3 Convenor informed the Group of his end-of-term of office and imminent departure from Rome. As such, Mr Benito Santiago Jiménez Sauma of Mexico would relinquish these functions.
34. The President thanked Mr Jiménez Sauma for the dedication with which he had fulfilled the roles of List C and Sub-List C3 Convenor and looked forward to meeting him in person in the coming weeks to wish him the best and bid him farewell.
35. List Convenors expressed their appreciation for the guidance provided by the outgoing List C and Sub-List C3 Convenor. Representatives also took the opportunity to bid farewell to the Associate Vice-President of the External Relations and Governance Department and to the Associate Vice-President of the Strategy and Knowledge Department. Convenors wished them all the best for their future endeavours.
36. No other business was raised and the next Convenors and Friends' meeting would take place on 3 September. Management invited Convenors to submit items to the Secretariat for inclusion on the draft agenda.
37. The President seized the opportunity to update the Convenors on the recruitment for the replacement of the two Associate Vice-Presidents and his intention to involve representatives of each of the three Lists of the Executive Board on an exceptional basis in the interview panel.
38. In closing, Management informed that the Informal Joint Meeting of FAO Council and IFAD and WFP Executive Boards would take place on 20 October.
39. The meeting was adjourned.