2019 progress report on Rome-based agency common services

Rome-based agencies Common Procurement Team

1. The Rome-based agencies (RBAs) Common Procurement Team meets quarterly and participates in the initiatives, working groups and projects of the Procurement Network of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) to foster inter-agency collaboration, the sharing of knowledge and best practices, the harmonization of rules and procedures and the professional development of procurement staff.

2. Since 2018 four joint tenders have been issued, of which three have been completed, namely, a tender for the provision of transcription services for governing body meetings, a tender for lease of multifunction printers and services and a tender for supply of gas. The fourth tender, for the medical and health insurance services for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) only, is in progress.

3. FAO and IFAD have joined forces on a joint tender for medical insurance services that meets both of their needs. The World Food Programme (WFP) is conducting a procurement exercise for a stand-alone medical plan, in consideration of its differing staff characteristics and risk profile.

4. In order to achieve more flexibility in fine-tuning service requirements and negotiating the best value for money in their joint tender, FAO and IFAD have agreed to adopt a multi-stage procedure including an innovative approach known as the "Negotiated Procedure". The tender exercise is in progress and is expected to be complete by the end of September, within the agreed timeline. FAO and IFAD management and staff associations are being kept informed within the limits of the confidentiality required of a competitive process.

5. In Rome, in May 2019, the Common Procurement Team, together with the trade promotion authorities of Italy, Malta and Israel, hosted an international procurement seminar, which was well attended by prospective vendors and procurement officials from 13 United Nations agencies. The event was organized under the overall coordination of the HLCM Procurement Network.

6. In 2018 and the first half of 2019, numerous piggy-back contracts[1] were concluded by the RBAs and other United Nations agencies.

7. FAO issued four piggy-back long-term agreements (LTAs) based on other RBA's LTAs for radio equipment, for health and safety management software, for information technology (IT) and digital architecture consulting and advisory services and for equipment, support and maintenance for an e-voucher system.

8. IFAD leverages the buying power of FAO whenever possible, in particular by joining established LTAs for IT hardware, infrastructure components and services. As a result,

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[1] The term "piggy-back contract" as used here describes a situation in which one United Nations entity procures goods or services under an existing long-term agreement or other contract concluded by another United Nations entity in order to benefit from the preparatory work that went into the selection of the vendor and thus reduce administrative costs, take advantage of favourable pricing negotiated in the existing contract or benefit from the procurement expertise of the entity that negotiated the existing contract. See High-Level Committee on Management Procurement Network Working Group on Harmonization. 2015. *Harmonizing UN Procurement: Common UN Procurement at the Country Level.* https://www.ungm.org/Areas/Public/Downloads/15_06%20HarmonizingUNProcurement_GUIDELINES_final.pdf.

IFAD benefits from the superior buying power of FAO and avoids the cost of performing complex, large-scale assessments and identifying the technical requirements for IT components and services.

9.   FAO and WFP attended a recent vendor seminar in Warsaw in June 2019.

10.   Since late 2018, three joint certification courses were conducted by the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply in Rome, relating to the Institute's introductory certificate in public procurement (level 2) and advanced certificate in public procurement (level 3).

Evaluation

11.   Responding to a call to strengthen external evaluation capacities, enunciated both in a United Nations General Assembly resolution (69/237) and in a 2014 Joint Inspection Unit analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations system, a community of practice on evaluation for food security, agriculture and rural development: "EVAL-ForwARD", was created. EVAL-ForwARD aims to promote the integration of evaluative thinking into national and global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) review systems. Over the 2019-2021 period, EVAL-ForwARD will expand its membership, reaching and engaging broader audiences interested in evaluation for food security, agriculture and rural development and using a variety of virtual and face-to-face channels. Based on the evolving needs of the community, EVAL-ForwARD will develop knowledge-sharing and learning activities that will strengthen evaluation capacities, with a particular focus on evaluating progress towards the achievement of SDG 2.

12.   The independent evaluation offices of the three RBAs are providing inputs to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Sustainable Development Goals Working Group based on a previous joint initiative to enhance the evaluability of SDG 2, which was organized as a technical seminar in November 2015. The relevance of that work continues, and the work is being shared for inclusion in a consolidated repository of UNEG initiatives to support SDG achievement. The three evaluation offices are also planning to carry out work to synthesize evaluation evidence on SDG2 and will start preparations for an evaluation of RBA collaboration in 2020, with implementation to begin in 2021.

13.   FAO, IFAD, and WFP have collaborated on an increasing number of joint decentralized evaluations, including with other partners, such as an FAO/WFP joint evaluation of a resilience project in northern Mali (2015–2018) funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development. This represented an opportunity for both agencies to document the achievements of the project and its potential to improve the lives of the rural populations in the future, as well as to contribute to the improvement of the implementation of joint activities in the intervention areas and elsewhere. In addition, two decentralized evaluations are planned to start in 2019, a multi-country evaluation of the Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment commissioned by FAO, IFAD, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and WFP and a joint evaluation of a programme in Mozambique funded by the European Union, "Support to Accelerate Progress towards MDG 1C in Mozambique – reducing hunger and chronic malnutrition in the country", which was jointly implemented by the three RBAs. In November 2018, FAO and WFP organized a workshop to identify good practices on joint decentralized evaluations. The workshop will inform the further development of FAO/WFP joint evaluation guidance and contribute to improved practices for joint evaluations.

Oversight

14. Oversight (and internal audit and investigation) continues to be a major area of collaboration among the three RBAs.

15. A joint audit of security management in headquarters was conducted by FAO with WFP. Because this area had recently been assessed by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security and because it has a different resourcing model, IFAD did not participate in the audit. It did, however, provide information for comparative purposes. The audit report was issued in September 2018.

16. In May 2019, the three RBAs co-organized the 17th meeting of Heads of Internal Audit in International Organizations in Europe, which was hosted by FAO. Over 50 participants from 35 organizations attended the meeting. The agenda focused on the key areas of interest to the members of the internal audit profession.

17. The tenth annual meeting between FAO's Office of the Inspector General, IFAD's Office of Audit and Oversight and WFP's Inspector General and Oversight Office, Office of Internal Audit, was held in June 2019, hosted by IFAD. The three agencies shared their workplans and discussed areas of potential joint work and audit and investigation experiences, including methodologies, challenges and lessons learned. Internal and external experts, including the heads of IT for the three agencies, spoke to the group and provided insights on emerging technologies.

Risk management

18. All three RBAs are currently participating in a system-wide HLCM risk working group, which the WFP Chief Risk Officer co-chairs. The working group has agreed (and the HLCM has endorsed) a risk maturity model for use by all participating United Nations agencies (about 25 in all). The maturity model is being piloted in a few United Nations agencies, including WFP, and feedback on its use as a management tool is due to be presented to the HLCM at its October 2019 meeting.

19. Under the guidance of the HLCM the working group has been asked to consider three key areas for fostering common approaches among United Nations agencies: risk appetite; embedding; and risk information sharing. IFAD is leading the workstream on risk appetite and WFP is leading (with FAO contributing to) the workstream on risk information sharing. Progress will be presented to the HLCM in October.

Environmental sustainability management

20. Environmental management is a long-standing area of collaboration between the RBAs, spanning direct activities in Rome and United Nations wide efforts through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)-led Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management. In 2019, FAO, IFAD and WFP contributed to the development of a new *strategy for sustainability management in the United Nations for 2020-2030*, which the Secretary-General called for in late 2018 to raise the level of United Nations ambitions on in-house sustainability management. It sets out the United Nations' core ambitions on the environment and how the work needed to achieve them is funded. The strategy has been approved by the HLCM and the CEB in 2019 and will be launched at the United Nations Secretary-General's climate summit in September 2019. The work builds on long-standing inter-agency efforts to reduce the United Nations environmental footprint, including energy and greenhouse gas emissions and improved

waste and (from 2018) water management, including through the adoption of environmental management systems.

21. Within the United Nations, the RBAs have a proud reputation in advocating high standards for environmental management through local collaborative efforts. Sustainable procurement provisions are embedded in procurement policies and procedures. For World Environment Day in 2018, more than 500 RBA staff joined a pledge campaign to reduce plastic pollution, and since then dedicated facility teams at all three agencies have taken action to reduce single-use plastics from offices and catering operations. The fifth annual "Clean Up Rome" event mobilized inter-agency volunteers (including from Bioversity International and the International Development Law Organization) to clean a public park in the context of the Clean Up the World week in September 2018. In 2019 a number of staff exchanges aimed at increasing knowledge-sharing and providing professional development opportunities are envisaged.

Organizational resilience management

22. The three RBAs maintain regular contact, and at meetings held in February and June 2019 their respective focal points reviewed a revised draft memorandum of understanding on organizational resilience management. Among other things, this agreement provides for the RBAs' use of one another's premises in cases of disruption of critical functions of one or more of them, as well as for joint preparedness training.

Treasury services

23. The RBAs participate in each other's investment committees, exchanging knowledge and best practices and collaborating on joint procurement of treasury services, including most recently custodial bank negotiations, the selection of external investment managers where there are similar needs and an asset allocation study on long-term investments. The agencies also participate in the HLCM finance and budget network working group on common treasury services, which helps coordinate collaboration on foreign exchange, banking, investments and payment services.

24. Other areas of potential collaboration include joint analysis of the credit risk of common financial counter-parties and the sharing of knowledge and best practices on cash-based transfers.

Common commissary services

25. FAO is in the final stages of negotiating a new agreement in the form of an exchange of notes with the Government of Italy concerning the possibility of establishing an online commissary. As in the past and subject to the explicit agreement of the Government of Italy, WFP will be able to avail itself of the provisions of this FAO agreement, while IFAD will continue with its own separate commissary arrangement, which is entirely outsourced.

26. A competitive selection process for a contractor will be launched immediately after the conclusion of the exchange of notes. In anticipation of this, FAO has already published a request for expressions of interest on the United Nations Global Marketplace, while the complete tender documentation is under finalization.

27. It is expected that the contractor selection and all arrangements for the new commissary will be finalized and in place in time for operations to start in January 2020.

Corporate airfare agreements

28. The RBAs continue to conduct joint negotiations to obtain the best possible corporate airfares on all major airlines and alliances. Using their joint purchasing power, the RBAs are moving from local to global agreements with the key airline partners used for official travel in support of achieving cost efficiencies, including for travel originating from field offices. The RBAs are exploring future collaboration with other United Nations agencies outside of Rome on joint global airline agreements. FAO and WFP have used the same fare auditor to conduct fare audits in connection with its outsourced travel management.

Headquarters hosting agreements

29. In July 2018, a memorandum of understanding was finalized between FAO and WFP for the provision of 324 square metres of office space at FAO headquarters to WFP on a reimbursable basis. Under the memorandum, FAO provides WFP with office maintenance and utilities, basic office furniture, IT infrastructure and services, medical and travel clinic services, security and access to and use of common areas such as cafeterias, restaurants, restrooms and meeting rooms.

Hosting agreements in the field

30. Currently FAO hosts IFAD in eight country offices, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia (agreement concluded in 2011), Burundi (agreement concluded in 2014), Madagascar (agreement concluded in 2014), Mozambique (agreement concluded in 2012), Pakistan (agreement concluded in 2013), Rwanda (agreement concluded in 2014), Sierra Leone (agreement concluded in 2014) and Yemen.[2] In addition, FAO provides IFAD with office space for storage in Yemen. Since 2015, FAO and IFAD have been sharing joint premises in Ghana provided by the Government. Subsequently all administrative and security expenses for the joint premises are co-shared by the two agencies. It is expected that in the next two or three years IFAD will enter into additional service-level agreements with FAO and/or WFP, thus increasing collaboration among the RBAs in areas such as field security, field security training, general administration, human resources and IT support. In some countries, IFAD uses FAO host country agreements to extend privileges and immunities to its staff and operations. WFP liaises with IFAD and FAO facility managers on common services agreements including maintenance and printing services and LTAs regarding the management of premises. Currently WFP hosts FAO in nine countries: Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, Kenya, the Niger, Philippines, South Africa, Turkey and Zimbabwe. WFP hosts IFAD in four countries: Nepal, South Africa, the Niger and Zambia. Moreover, WFP has very often, where feasible, shared premises with IFAD and FAO at the national and subnational levels. IFAD country offices enjoy extremely collaborative IT and technical support from their FAO and WFP partners in hosted country offices.

Human resources

31. The three human resources directors hold monthly meetings to discuss strategic collaboration and alignment in the area of human resource management. Human resource policy officers in the three RBAs actively collaborate in ensuring that the

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[2] With possible upcoming moves of the Mozambique and Pakistan offices to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices, the number of FAO-hosted IFAD country offices will decrease to 6 in 2020. In Mozambique, a formal letter expressing IFAD's interest in moving to UNDP was issued in late June 2019, while in Pakistan IFAD is currently exploring the options with UNDP to move its office to the UNDP building, which is also shared with nine other United Nations agencies.

human resource policies of the three agencies are aligned as much as possible. In the past two years, they have worked closely on the new compensation package for professional and higher category staff, which was introduced in phases between 2016 and 2018, and on the discussions on changes in post adjustment following the latest salary survey in Rome, with the parallel introduction of common mitigating measures. Language and office skill testing, pension and health and life insurance also continue to be areas of strong collaboration and exchange between the three organizations. It has been agreed that FAO will continue to host IFAD through the medical records system Cority, despite migration to FAO's cloud-based medical records system. The medical services of the three RBAs have been collaborating through exchanges of experience and knowledge. However, WFP has recently decided to select its own medical insurance, separate from the one being jointly selected by IFAD and FAO.

Shared IT infrastructure

32. RBA collaboration may be developed in relation to the Security Operations Centre (SOC), with which FAO has signed a service contract. SOC services could very well be shared with the other two RBAs. At the end of 2018, IFAD piggy-backed on the FAO SOC service contract, resulting in significant cost avoidance by allowing IFAD to leverage the identification of technical requirements and the vendor and contracting process undertaken by FAO.

Shared IT services

33. IFAD continues to host the joint RBA website zerohunger.world, which is used by the three agencies to communicate with one another and showcase joint initiatives. In addition, FAO, IFAD and WFP are collaborating with regard to geographic information systems and related data. In particular, data sources are being shared and joint resources are being used to access data layers through, for example, Google Earth Engine. The endpoint of one of the internet connectivity and related telecommunications lines between IFAD and the United Nations International Computing Centre is housed at FAO at no cost, ensuring cost savings and the protection of privileges and immunities. Lastly, FAO and IFAD are able to leverage expertise and content on the common corporate learning management system, Cornerstone.

Shared IT security

34. The chief information officers and IT security officers of the three RBAs are in close contact with the aim of articulating a common and shared RBA approach to IT security. With IFAD, this has led to collaboration in relation to the above-mentioned FAO/SOC contract, which was piggy-backed by IFAD with the result that its experience in endpoint detection and response was beneficial to FAO. In addition, FAO and IFAD have signed a memorandum of understanding allowing for the reciprocal hosting of disaster recovery facilities. Currently FAO is hosting IFAD's disaster recovery site and IFAD has reserved a space in its headquarters data centre should FAO require it. In the event of a disaster at IFAD, hosting its disaster recovery site at FAO would allow IFAD to be operational within only 24 hours of the incident.

Governance processes

35. Eighteen joint RBA events will have been organized from 2018 through the end of 2019, including the second and third joint informal meetings of the governing bodies of the RBAs. The RBA governing body secretariats formulated a joint position on the renegotiation of the agreement between the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and

the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) regulating the conditions of employment of conference interpreters.[3] Coordination and mutual support regarding conference services continued through participation in a joint FAO-WFP selection panel for senior interpretation staff; the use of local interpreters, particularly in the Chinese and Russian languages, sharing interpreter costs where possible by scheduling several informal meetings on the same day or on consecutive days to increase cost effectiveness by hiring fewer teams of interpreters; deconfliction of the RBA governing bodies calendar of events; and utilization of FAO premises as venue space.

36. In 2017, as part of an HLCM-sponsored collaboration project, the documentation teams of the RBAs contributed to an initial pilot for the implementation of XML technologies in the production of the documentation for the governing bodies. While the project continued in 2018, WFP could not participate because the resources of its Translation and Documentation Branch had to be focused on a very high Executive Board documentation workload; it is hoped that WFP's contribution to the project will resume before the end of 2019.

37. In order to foster common best practices among the RBAs, the secretariats of the governing bodies have also continued to support ad hoc staff exchanges for some activities. In mid-2019, the governing body website teams began exploring synergies for the development of a joint platform for managing and registering online the contact information of the members of all three governing bodies.

38. In February 2019 the forty-second session of the IFAD Governing Council was hosted at FAO. This highly collaborative effort between FAO and IFAD staff for the setup and use of FAO facilities including rooms and IT services and support including network, web streaming, printing services and conference equipment resulted in an extremely successful outcome.

Security

39. The FAO, IFAD and WFP security services have developed ever-increasing collaboration over the years. This collaboration can be enhanced, and cost savings may be further achievable over time.

40. With regard to governance and executive board relations, the WFP Security Director briefs the executive boards of FAO and WFP on a quarterly basis during joint FAO-WFP informal briefings on emergencies. This provides the boards of the two agencies with regular overviews of risk management in specific contexts.

41. The Security Cell, chaired by the FAO Chief Security Advisor, continues to meet, with agency security focal points sharing and discussing the latest security-related information and initiatives, including briefings and updates from Italian governmental security agencies.

42. In the field, WFP provides supplemental security resources to FAO and IFAD. This encompasses security coverage for high-level visits (e.g. RBA joint principals' field visits and joint board visits) but also includes the regular provision of WFP security assets (armoured vehicles, personal protective equipment) and the funding of security costs for shared accommodations and offices.

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[3] The agreement was finalized in December 2018 with validity dates from 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2023.

43. Global Security training for programmes is mutually available. WFP-led women's security awareness training is available to RBA female colleagues at the global level. FAO and IFAD personnel are eligible to participate in the SSAFE (Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments) training provided by WFP in Rome, and WFP personnel have participated in FAO SSAFE sessions in Bozen. The number of SSAFE trainers within the RBAs has increased with the recent arrival of new security officers at IFAD, and recent FAO SSAFE courses have been delivered collaboratively by FAO and IFAD SSAFE trainers. IFAD personnel have also attended recent FAO SSAFE courses and enjoyed opportunities to attend WFP courses. WFP has also provided security guard training to FAO guards.

44. In terms of security at the headquarters level, the security teams of the three RBAs are working in a true partnership. Joint simulations and drills have been conducted and mutual support is provided during high-level events. RBA security personnel have developed the security risk management procedures for the United Nations in Italy, in which the FAO Director-General assumes the role of Designated Official for Security.

Privileges and immunities

45. Periodic meetings are held among RBA counterparts to discuss issues of common concern in the area of privileges and immunities. As a follow-up to the discussions, joint meetings are regularly held between the RBAs and the Italian authorities to streamline processes for the granting of privileges and immunities as well as to exchange views and clarify long outstanding issues.

Library and terminology cooperation

46. The RBAs continue to participate in an inter-library loan system, which enables staff from the three RBAs to benefit from all three agencies' collections. The libraries of the three agencies also engage in regular information exchange on suppliers and systems (e.g. publishers and library management services), which contributes to building synergies and improving user services. With a view to finding more efficiency gains, staff observation missions are being explored to enable the staff of each agency to learn from the approaches and methods of the other agencies' libraries. The three RBAs continue to share their terminology resources through the FAOTERM portal, which now hosts IFADTERM and WFPTERM.

Printshop

47. IFAD and WFP started to collaborate on printing services. IFAD's printshop provides printing services for WFP headquarters with agreed service levels and products and respecting the highest environmental standards.

Vehicle and asset disposal

48. FAO requested WFP for assistance with specifications for light vehicles. A number of discussions were held with FAO in this regard and FAO is now engaging with the WFP Fleet Centre. WFP has well developed LTAs for vehicle spare parts and fuel supply. Sharing of these LTAs is another area of RBA collaboration in the field.

Ethics offices

49. Over the last several years the directors of the ethics offices of the RBAs have continued to cooperate and expand their collaboration through exchanges of experience, best practices and knowledge with respect to various common areas of work and topical ethical issues. More recently, the collaboration has increased and strengthened, and the ethics offices have initiated more regular interactions through periodic meetings.

50. As part of fostering RBA collaboration – and more broadly against the background of United Nations priorities, harmonization and the sharing of best practices – IFAD and WFP have agreed to the participation of IFAD, represented by the Director of the IFAD ethics office, as an observer at one session of the Joint Executive Board/WFP management sub-working group on safeguarding against sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. This has proven to be a successful collaboration and has reinforced the existing relationship and collaboration among the ethics offices of WFP and IFAD on such subjects, especially with regard to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

Ombudsman and mediation offices

51. The heads of the FAO and WFP ombudsman and ethics offices have met on a quarterly basis to cooperate and exchange information. During field visits, services provided by the WFP Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services have been made available to FAO and IFAD employees in locations where WFP shares premises with the other agencies.

Other potential areas for collaboration

52. Several other potential areas for increased collaboration are being explored. For example, IFAD and WFP have demonstrated interest in FAO's shared services centre in Budapest, while WFP's vehicle leasing programme operated from Dubai, as well as its chain of over 80 guest houses all over the world, offers interesting opportunities for FAO. In addition, IFAD and WFP are currently working with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Lazio regional authorities on an agreement to conduct a feasibility study and concept design for a permanent home for both organizations on the premises of the former Forlanini Hospital.

Acronyms used in the document

CEB   United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination

FAO   Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

HLCM   High-Level Committee on Management

IFAD   International Fund for Agricultural Development

IT   information technology

LTA   long-term agreement

RBA   Rome-based agency

SDG   Sustainable Development Goal

SOC   Security Operations Centre

SSAFE   Safe and Secure Approaches in Field Environments

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNEG   United Nations Evaluation Group