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Investing in rural people

Status and Update on IFAD's Approach to Address the United Nations Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

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For: Information

Status and Update on IFAD's Approach to Address the United Nations Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

I. Introduction

1. In recent months, there has been extensive media coverage of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) committed by individuals working for international organizations whose mandate is mainly to provide assistance to extremely vulnerable populations around the world.
2. IFAD has a robust system in place to address complaints of harassment. Moreover, Management is committed to taking steps to address the Secretary-General's strategy to improve the United Nations response to SEA.¹ This paper provides information on the framework in place and the next steps to strengthen IFAD's measures to prevent and respond to SEA.
3. In February 2017, the Secretary-General released a report entitled *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach* (A/71/818). The report presented an assessment of the measures taken by the United Nations so far to address SEA, the continuing challenges, and the proposed actions and recommendations to improve the United Nations system-wide approach.
4. According to the report, victims of SEA are mainly women and children, the most vulnerable members of the poor and hungry populations in the areas where the United Nations operates. Violence of this kind is unacceptable and undermines the United Nations system-wide humanitarian and development efforts.
5. In his report, the Secretary-General makes recommendations articulated around four pillars: (i) elevate the voice of victims and put their rights and dignity at the forefront of the United Nations efforts; (ii) end impunity for those guilty of SEA; (iii) build a truly multi-stakeholder network to support the United Nations efforts to prevent and respond to SEA; and (iv) reorient the United Nations strategic communications approach to raise awareness worldwide regarding SEA.
6. At the November 2017 session of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, Heads of United Nations organizations made a firm commitment to the Secretary-General's proposed approach to fully address SEA in a timely manner and to review and improve SEA prevention and response measures.

II. IFAD's approach

7. IFAD's fundamental principles and core values of integrity, respect, professionalism and focus on results are reflected in the Code of Conduct, which provides clear guidance and enables staff and individuals who work for IFAD to behave ethically and carry out functions in line with the Fund's interests, vision, objectives and core values. Action that might reflect adversely on the Fund or otherwise compromise its operations is not tolerated. The Code of Conduct has been translated into the four official languages of the Fund and is available on IFAD's website.
8. IFAD does not tolerate any form of harassment within the workplace or associated with the work performed on its behalf at headquarters or in the field. This includes prohibition of any form of harassment such as sexual harassment in the workplace, or sexual exploitation and abuse in relation to IFAD's operations. These unacceptable behaviours constitute serious acts of misconduct and are grounds for summary dismissal, termination of contract and referral of the case to national

¹ See GC 41/L.3/Rev.1, Report of the Consultation on the Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources: paragraph 95(e), third bullet point; and annex I, monitorable action 48.

authorities. All staff members and individuals working for IFAD have an obligation to report and to cooperate when one becomes aware of these behaviours.

9. Further to the release of the Secretary-General's Report, IFAD took immediate steps to embody in its disciplinary framework a specific misconduct of sexual exploitation and abuse using the United Nations definitions:²

Sexual exploitation and abuse towards beneficiaries in the context of IFAD's operations in the field.

Sexual exploitation: any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another;

Sexual abuse: the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

10. Furthermore, to strengthen reporting on SEA, in July 2017, IFAD introduced whistle-blowing procedures to protect against retaliation. These procedures, which have been translated into IFAD's four official languages, are publicly disclosed on the IFAD website, and aim to encourage those who have concerns or suspicions of misconduct involving IFAD, to report them. To this end, hotlines and e-mail addresses are made available on IFAD's intranet and website for confidential reporting.
11. Several mechanisms are currently available for reporting misconduct: the Ethics Office (ETH), and the Office of Audit and Oversight (AUO) are the dedicated reporting channels. In addition, individuals may seek advice from other resource persons such as human resources officers, supervisors/managers, the staff counsellor and the Executive Committee of the Staff Association.
12. As part of the hiring procedures, all new staff must sign a declaration that they will abide by the Code of Conduct. Effectiveness of an appointment is subject to the fulfilment of all administrative procedures, including signature of this declaration. While under contract, staff must declare annually that they will abide by the Code of Conduct. Consultants and other non-staff working for IFAD also are subject to the Code of Conduct. In addition, mandatory training on the Code of Conduct and an anti-harassment training programme are administered and also provided online to ensure access by all individuals working for IFAD irrespective of their duty stations.
13. AUO's investigation section is entrusted with the investigation functions in IFAD. Disciplinary proceedings follow due process and all subjects have an opportunity to respond to allegations of misconduct within the investigation process as well as at a further stage when a letter of charge is sent to the subject. Sanctions against staff are taken by the President upon recommendation of a Sanctions Committee. Serious misconduct, such as sexual harassment and SEA, is grounds for summary dismissal. When IFAD has reason to believe that the laws of a country may have been violated, it may refer the case to local authorities for law enforcement purposes. Consistent with IFAD's transparency efforts, since 2004 AUO's annual report on its investigative activities has been publicly disclosed.

III. Way forward: outlook for 2018

14. Against the backdrop of the decentralization of IFAD's operations and recognizing that more can be done to improve IFAD's approach to SEA prevention and response, a multidivisional SEA task force was established in January 2018. The task force is led by the Director of Ethics and composed of representatives of the

² See the Secretary-General's Bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13, <https://oios.un.org/resources/2015/01/ST-SGB-2003-13.pdf>.

Office of the General Counsel, Human Resources Division, AUO and Communications Division.

15. The task force's mandate is to review and make recommendations to strengthen institutional and operational processes, policies and procedures to address SEA. This will include developing a SEA prevention policy, procedures and mechanisms to support victims of SEA. The task force will also review human resources processes such as screening and background checking to ensure that no employment offers are made before applicants fully disclose records of criminal convictions, sanctions and other disciplinary proceedings, in particular regarding SEA.
16. Best practices currently in force in IFAD, such as those listed below, will also be reviewed by the task force to assess whether they need to be improved or reinforced:
 - (a) Mandatory declaration upon recruitment that new staff will abide by the Code of Conduct;
 - (b) Annual mandatory declaration that staff will abide by the Code of Conduct;
 - (c) Mandatory training and refresher course on the Code of Conduct;
 - (d) Mandatory training and refresher course on anti-harassment programme;
 - (e) Current reporting mechanisms, hotlines and e-mail addresses (AUO and ETH) on the intranet and IFAD website;
 - (f) Obligation to report unacceptable behaviours;
 - (g) Obligation to cooperate unreservedly with investigations;
 - (h) Anonymous and confidential reporting;
 - (i) Period of one year within which to report misconduct following the incident; and
 - (j) Disciplinary framework including referrals to national authorities.
17. In addition, IFAD is committed to integrating SEA obligations and risk factors into its operations and funded projects and to build commitment among its partners at all levels – governments, the private sector and cofinanciers included – in order to protect vulnerable poor rural populations and safeguard the integrity of its mandate. The decentralization of IFAD staff to various duty stations will contribute to policy dialogue, raise awareness and provide support to governmental efforts to respond to SEA in IFAD-funded projects.
18. Education on SEA and specific training programmes such as e-learning will be developed and become part of mandatory ethics training. Raising awareness at the global level is also an essential part of the prevention measures. To this end, SEA messaging and issues will be incorporated into targeted information campaigns inside and outside IFAD.
19. The review of IFAD's current prevention and response approach to sexual harassment and SEA is an opportunity for the organization to reaffirm and champion its core values. Similarly, it will allow IFAD to tap into the experiences of United Nations organizations that are widely decentralized and in particular the Rome-based agencies (RBAs). IFAD's message is clear: any form of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.