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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. Further to the release of the United Nations Secretary-General's report entitled *Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach (A/71/818)*, and guided by the proposed actions and recommendations therein to improve the United Nations system-wide approach, IFAD has taken concrete measures to strengthen its prevention and response efforts to combat sexual harassment (SH) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in its activities and operations.
2. Against the backdrop of the decentralization of IFAD's operations and recognizing that more could be done to improve IFAD's approach to SH and SEA prevention and response, a multidivisional task force was established in January 2018. The Task Force is led by the Director of the Ethics Office (ETH) and composed of representatives of the Office of the General Counsel, Human Resources Division, Office of Audit and Oversight (AUO) and Communications Division (COM). Subsequently, the Operational Policy and Results Division and Corporate Services Department joined the Task Force to contribute to the SH/SEA efforts within the context of IFAD's operations and activities.
3. At the 123<sup>rd</sup> session of the Executive Board in April 2018, SH/SEA Task Force presented an update on the measures currently in place to prevent and respond to SH and SEA. In addition, the Task Force updated the Board on proposed measures to further strengthen IFAD's approach to address the United Nations strategy to prevent and respond to SH and SEA.<sup>1</sup>
4. Given its core values of respect, integrity, professionalism and results as well as its mission, IFAD deemed it necessary to have in place an effective policy to address SH and SEA in its activities and operations. As part of its mandate, the SH/SEA Task Force proposed the Policy on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SH/SEA Policy).
5. The objective of the SH/SEA Policy is to define the obligations of IFAD staff and non-staff with respect to SH/SEA and set out IFAD's rules, procedures and approach to preventing and responding to SH/SEA. The Policy was released on 11 April 2018 and was made available to the Executive Board as a background document.
6. The SH/SEA Policy builds on IFAD's core values of integrity, respect, professionalism and focus on results. It provides clear guidance to all staff and non-staff who are expected to abide by those principles and to behave ethically in carrying out their functions. This includes an obligation to abstain from any acts of SH/SEA and to report in a timely manner any such allegations that may arise at IFAD or in the context of an IFAD-funded or -managed activity or operation. The SH/SEA Policy has been translated into the four official languages of the Fund and will be publicly disclosed and posted on the corporate website.
7. At its 123<sup>th</sup> session, the Board welcomed the update provided by the SH/SEA Task Force, noted the recently released SH/SEA Policy, and issued a statement in support of IFAD's efforts to strengthen its procedures and policies to prevent and combat SH/SEA, consistent with IFAD's commitment to zero tolerance of all forms of harassment. The Board also encouraged the SH/SEA Task Force to undertake an

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<sup>1</sup> See EB 2018/123/R.39.

anonymous survey among staff to identify areas for improvement and to monitor IFAD's prevention and response efforts.

8. This document provides the Board with an update on the steps taken since April 2018 by IFAD to address the United Nations strategy to prevent and respond to SH and SEA.

## II. Update on IFAD's approach to prevent and respond to SH and SEA

### Preventing SH and SEA

9. Reputational risks associated with SH and SEA have been included in IFAD's corporate risk architecture and management. In addition to strengthening internal policies and procedures, a clear focus on prevention is essential to promote a culture of respect and to reconnect with IFAD's core values.
10. In May 2018, IFAD joined the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB) Task Force on Sexual Harassment and participated in discussions regarding the proposed recommendations of the Task Force, including harmonizing the definition of SH and strengthening background checks. To this end, a screening database project is being established through the CEB Task Force, where information on individuals that have records of SH and SEA can be collected and shared among organizations. In addition, the Rome-based agencies (RBAs) have strengthened their collaboration with respect to preventing SH and SEA.
11. In its SH/SEA Policy, IFAD reiterates its commitment to uphold a no tolerance policy with respect to all forms of harassment, including SH and SEA, within the workplace or associated with work performed at headquarters and in the field. To this end, provisions have been introduced within the human resources framework to ensure that thorough background checks of applicants are conducted. All applicants are required to disclose any criminal record and/or, in particular, any record of disciplinary sanctions related to SH and/or SEA on the personal history form when seeking employment with the Fund. Letters of appointment and other non-staff contracts have been updated to include references to IFAD's no-tolerance of the SH/SEA Policy.
12. IFAD reserves the right to withdraw an offer of employment if the individual is found to have been sanctioned for SH and/or SEA or to have provided untruthful information concerning perpetration of SH and/or SEA. As part of the appointment procedures, all new staff must sign a declaration that they will abide by the Code of Conduct and a specific reference has been included in the declaration to the SH/SEA Policy. 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 are also subject to the Code of Conduct.
13. IFAD will maintain a record of staff and non-staff and other individuals, such as consultants, who held work contracts with IFAD and were found to have engaged in acts of SH and/or SEA in relation to IFAD's operations and activities.

### Reporting SH and SEA allegations, and support

14. Building on the conclusions and recommendations of the Secretary-General in his report of 2017 on underreporting, IFAD has reviewed its reporting mechanisms to ensure that they are accessible, in particular, to individuals in the field, including staff in IFAD Country Offices (ICOs) and regional hubs.
15. ETH and AUO currently maintain respective hotlines and confidential e-mail addresses to receive allegations of SH and SEA, fraud, corruption and other irregular or unacceptable behaviour. These hotlines and confidential e-mail addresses can be found on the IFAD intranet and on the corporate website. Both

ETH and AUO have dedicated webpages and web links, and these have been updated and made more visible and accessible on the website. The hotlines and e-mail addresses can be used for confidential and/or anonymous reporting.

16. Within the context of its decentralization efforts, IFAD is committed to developing other SH/SEA reporting channels. Through ETH, dedicated senior focal points will be appointed and trained in the ICOs and regional hubs to receive allegations of SH and SEA in relation to IFAD-funded projects in the field.
17. Similarly, although not subject to the Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures of IFAD, should a SH/SEA complaint be filed through this mechanism, it will be immediately forwarded to ETH.
18. Mindful of creating an environment where individuals feel safe to report allegations, IFAD introduced whistle-blowing procedures in 2017 to encourage and protect from retaliation those who report concerns or suspicions of misconduct involving IFAD, including SH and SEA. These procedures are publicly disclosed on the IFAD website and have been translated into the Fund's four official languages.
19. Affected persons can seek support from ETH, human resources officers, supervisors/managers, the Staff Counsellor who is a qualified psychologist, and staff representatives of the Executive Committee of the IFAD Staff Association. With respect to project beneficiaries who are victims of SEA, support to victims is provided through existing services, programmes and their networks, in line with the General Assembly resolution on the "United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel".

#### Training and awareness-raising

20. ETH manages the mandatory training on the Code of Conduct and on an anti-harassment training programme. As part of the effort to better prevent SH and SEA, the anti-harassment programme has been updated to include specific references to SH. These training programmes can be administered both in a classroom setting and online to ensure access by all individuals working for IFAD, irrespective of their duty stations.
21. As part of IFAD's preventive actions and in order to raise awareness, a specific SEA online training programme has been developed, under the lead of ETH. The training programme builds on similar modules adopted by other United Nations organizations, including the RBAs. The SEA training has been customized to IFAD's business model and is being rolled out throughout IFAD as a mandatory ETH training course. Making this course IFAD-specific required corporate-wide collaboration championed by the SH/SEA Task Force, with an expert contribution by the Information and Communications Technology Division. It is currently available in English, and will be made available in Arabic, French and Spanish shortly.
22. An SH/SEA training course is also administered by ETH as part of the Operations Academy and through regional forums organized by divisions of the Programme Management Department and Financial Operations Department.
23. These courses will serve to make staff and other individuals holding a work contract with IFAD aware of the values of the Fund and the principles outlined in the SH/SEA Policy. The courses will also provide concrete information on how to recognize unacceptable behaviour and what action should be taken should one become aware of SH and/or SEA.
24. SH/SEA awareness-raising materials are made available by ETH in the form of SH/SEA Policy booklets, notebooks, mousepads and interactive media. COM will launch an awareness-raising SH/SEA campaign which will include internal and external outreach messaging.

25. Finally, an anonymous survey on SH and SEA will be conducted among staff to monitor the implementation of the measures taken by IFAD to better prevent and respond to SH and SEA and provide relevant information on areas that need further attention.

#### Responding to SH and SEA

26. IFAD has a thorough disciplinary framework comprising of a review by ETH of SH/SEA allegations and a robust investigative function performed by AUO. IFAD staff and any individuals holding a work contract with IFAD have a duty to report and to cooperate unreservedly with any review or investigation of allegations of SH/SEA and shall respond promptly and fully to requests for information. IFAD staff and other individuals holding a work contract with IFAD are expected to provide any additional relevant information that might be unknown to AUO, whether or not requested to do so. A failure to cooperate with ETH and/or AUO may constitute misconduct. All staff members and individuals working for IFAD have an obligation to report and to cooperate when becoming aware of these behaviours.
27. SH and SEA are considered high-priority cases for investigation. Such allegations are not subject to any reporting period limitation. Investigators in the Investigation Section in AUO received specific training for SH/SEA investigations. Disciplinary proceedings must follow due process and all subjects have an opportunity to respond to allegations of misconduct within the investigation process.
28. The disciplinary framework has been clarified to inform all staff that substantiated SH and SEA acts may be grounds for summary dismissal. While all forms of harassment, including SH, are clearly defined as misconduct in IFAD's rules and procedures, a specific item on SEA misconduct was introduced in 2017 using the definition provided by the United Nations.
29. Staff on probationary periods that are found to have provided untruthful information concerning perpetration of SH and/or SEA will see their appointment not confirmed and terminated. Similarly, the terms and conditions of non-staff contracts contain clauses on termination of the contract for acts of SH and SEA. In addition, the Sanctions Committee may issue sanctions of debarment against individuals holding a work contract with IFAD who are found to have engaged in acts of SH and/or SEA. When IFAD has reasons to believe that the laws of a country may have been violated, it may refer the case to national authorities for law enforcement purposes.

#### Integration of SH and SEA in IFAD's operations

30. IFAD is committed to integrating SH/SEA obligations and risk factors into its operations and funded projects and to build commitment among its partners at all levels in order to protect vulnerable poor rural populations and safeguard the integrity of its mandate.
31. The design of projects/programmes to be funded by IFAD will mainstream a SH/SEA risk assessment and, similarly, SH and SEA indicators will be built into supervision missions.
32. The General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing will be amended to clarify that recipients of IFAD funding are expected to immediately inform IFAD of any allegations of SH/SEA that they receive in connection with an IFAD-funded or managed activity or operation. Where IFAD has received any such credible allegations, it may take appropriate measures. These may include requesting the immediate removal of persons from any IFAD-funded or -managed activities or operations pending further action. In such cases, IFAD may also request that national authorities take the required measures to investigate the matter and inform IFAD of the outcome.
33. With respect to commercial contracts granted by IFAD, bidders will have to disclose any previous conviction, disciplinary measure, other sanction or investigation

regarding SH/SEA. Contracts include the obligation to immediately report such incidents in relation to the activities funded by the contract. Such allegations, if substantiated, may constitute grounds for immediate termination of the contract and possible debarment by the Sanctions Committee.

### III. Conclusion

34. The review of IFAD's current prevention and response approach to SH and SEA is an opportunity for IFAD to strengthen its policies and procedures and reaffirm its culture of respect for its core values in all duty stations. With a strong focus on training and other preventive measures and with the support of its Membership, its partners at all levels, governments, recipients of IFAD financing and cofinanciers, IFAD joins the efforts of the United Nations, including the RBAs, in reaffirming no tolerance of sexual harassment and of sexual exploitation and/or abuse.