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Investing in rural people

## 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

# 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 response to the United Nations Secretary-General's strategy for a system-wide approach to strengthening prevention and response measures to combat sexual harassment (SH) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in its operations and funded activities, the IFAD SH/SEA task force, led by the Director of Ethics and composed of representatives of the Office of the General Counsel, Human Resources Division (HRD), Office of Audit and Oversight (AUO), Communications Division, Programme Management Department and Corporate Services Department, reported to the Executive Board at its 123<sup>rd</sup> and 124<sup>th</sup> sessions<sup>1</sup> on concrete actions taken to align IFAD with the Secretary-General's strategy described in the report Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach (A/71/818).
2. At its April 2018 session, the Board<sup>2</sup> released a joint statement welcoming the Fund's efforts to strengthen rules, procedures and processes. Among the task force's achievements, the Board noted the release of the IFAD Policy on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SH/SEA Policy). The SH/SEA Policy has since been translated into the Fund's four official languages and is publicly available on IFAD's website.
3. The SH/SEA Policy defines the obligations of staff and individuals holding non-staff contracts with IFAD, and sets out IFAD's standards, rules, procedures and overall approach to preventing and responding to SH and SEA. Paramount to the SH/SEA Policy is the protection of beneficiaries involved in – and impacted by – IFAD-funded projects and programmes. This cannot be achieved without the strong partnership and commitment of IFAD's partners, including Member States.
4. At the September session of the Executive Board, an update was provided by the SH/SEA task force highlighting progress made towards full implementation of the SH/SEA Policy along with other developments. Noting the steps taken to strengthen policies and procedures, raise awareness and implement training initiatives, the Board issued a joint statement of support for IFAD's comprehensive efforts and reiterated its commitment to the Fund's no-tolerance policy for any form of harassment.
5. The Board welcomed IFAD's participation in the United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB) Task Force on SH, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and the ongoing collaboration among the Rome-based agencies (RBAs) on SH and SEA.
6. Recognizing the importance of cooperation across institutions in developing and maintaining advanced safeguarding standards, the Board approved a proposal for Management to explore the possibility of joining a committee, established at the World Food Programme and comprised of representatives of Member States and Management, with the aim of reviewing and discussing best practices in addressing all forms of harassment including sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse.
7. The Board underscored the importance of effective prevention measures and efficient reporting mechanisms where victims feel safe to reporting SH and SEA, and reiterated its recommendation to conduct an anonymous staff survey in order

<sup>1</sup> See EB 2018/123/R.39 and EB 2018/124/R.41.

<sup>2</sup> See EB 2018/123/R.39.

to identify areas for improvement and monitor IFAD's prevention and response to SH and SEA. The Board stated its wish to be informed of this survey's results.

8. In response to the Board's recommendation for a survey of staff on SH and SEA, IFAD will conduct a Global Staff Survey, which will include specific questions in relation to SH and SEA. The Global Staff Survey is expected to be launched by HRD by the end of 2018.
9. IFAD is committed to promoting the highest level of ethics and integrity in its operations and funded activities, and to upholding its core values of integrity, respect, professionalism and a focus on results. Achieving a culture of respect, inclusiveness and accountability depends on the strong collaboration of all actors at all levels. To this end, the Board welcomed the proposal to mainstream SH and SEA risk assessments into the design of IFAD operations and funded activities.

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

10. The development of an action plan in response to the Secretary-General's strategy to improve the United Nations response to SEA is among the commitments and monitorable actions included in the Report of the Consultation on the Eleventh Replenishment of IFAD's Resources.<sup>3</sup>
11. At the April and September sessions of the Board, information documents were presented to report on the comprehensive approach developed, and measures implemented, to align IFAD with the strategy adopted by the United Nations common system. The annex below provides a summary of all actions and initiatives implemented by IFAD to prevent and respond to SH and SEA, as well as planned actions for 2019.
12. Although IFAD has strengthened its policy framework and included reputational risks associated with SH and SEA in its corporate risk register, additional actions are needed to install a culture of accountability at all levels. While awareness raising and other preventive efforts will continue through tailored initiatives including training, the next phase of IFAD's effort will concentrate on:
  - (i) Engaging partners including Member States, implementing partners and contractors in sharing IFAD's standards and culture of no tolerance for SH and SEA;
  - (ii) Developing mechanisms to assess SH and SEA risks in project design, and mitigate them;
  - (iii) Engaging with beneficiaries and encouraging dialogue to raise awareness and review reporting mechanisms; and
  - (iv) Continuing internal communications to ensure that staff are aware and understand their role in keeping IFAD free of SH and SEA.

### A. Preventing SH and SEA

13. Prevention actions include mandatory training by the Ethics Office on IFAD's Code of Conduct, an anti-harassment training programme and IFAD-specific online SEA training based on similar modules adopted by other United Nations organizations, including the RBAs. Training is also being delivered by the Ethics Office in classroom settings through the Operations Academy, regional events and workshops.
14. To date, approximately 500 IFAD staff and partners have been trained through: the online IFAD-specific mandatory training on SEA; participation in SH and SEA classroom training and awareness-raising sessions delivered by the Ethics Office

<sup>3</sup> See GC 41/L.3/Rev.1: paragraph 95(e), third bullet point; and annex I, monitorable action 48.

through the Operations Academy; and regional events. Additional classroom training sessions are planned in November 2018 and will continue in 2019.

15. These training programmes and awareness-raising events provide information about IFAD's SH/SEA Policy and highlight staff members' responsibilities and obligations to adhere to the highest ethical standards in their professional and personal dealings, and abide by the Fund's core values. All staff and individuals holding IFAD contracts are reminded of their responsibility to contribute to a work environment free of SH and SEA, and of the actions that should be taken if one becomes aware of SH or SEA.
16. SH and SEA awareness-raising materials made available include booklets, whistleblower protection procedures, notebooks and mousepads.
17. In order to enhance its prevention efforts, under the auspices of IFAD's Ethics Office, SEA focal points will be identified in IFAD Country Offices (ICOs) and hubs in all regions. SEA focal points will receive specific training from the Ethics Office in order to actively promote SEA prevention, make recommendations to the Ethics Office on ways to promote and improve local prevention strategies, and facilitate access to reporting and support mechanisms.
18. IFAD's human resources legal framework has been strengthened to ensure that thorough background checks are conducted in recruitment processes. All applicants seeking employment by the Fund are required to disclose any criminal records and especially any record of disciplinary sanctions related to SH or SEA on the personal history form. Letters of appointment and other non-staff contracts have been updated to include references to IFAD's no-tolerance policy regarding SH and SEA.
19. As part of the Fund's appointment procedures, all new staff must sign a declaration that they will abide by IFAD's Code of Conduct; this declaration makes specific reference to the SH/SEA Policy. Effectiveness of an appointment is subject to the fulfilment of all administrative procedures, including signature of this declaration. In addition, staff under contract must declare annually that they will abide by the Code of Conduct. Consultants and persons hired by IFAD under a non-staff contracts are also subject to the Code of Conduct.
20. All bidders on commercial contracts extended by IFAD must disclose previous convictions, disciplinary measures, other sanctions or investigations regarding SH and SEA. The general terms and conditions applicable to commercial contracts for goods and services, posted on IFAD's website, include clear obligations to immediately report incidents of SH and SEA in relation to 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. IFAD will maintain a record of staff and individuals who have held non-staff contracts with the Fund, such as consultants, that have been found to have engaged in acts of SH and SEA in relation to IFAD's operations and funded activities.

## B. Responding to SH and SEA

21. The Fund's 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.
22. The IFAD policy framework, including the SH/SEA Policy, includes obligations to report acts of SH and SEA, either confidentially or anonymously, with no time limitation. Revised whistleblowing protection procedures have been in place since 2017 and are publicly disclosed on IFAD's website. These procedures offer protection from retaliation to those who report concerns or suspicions of misconduct involving IFAD, including SH and SEA.

23. The Ethics Office and AUO have improved the accessibility and visibility of their respective reporting mechanisms (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 website. Reports can be made confidentially or anonymously.
24. SEA focal points in ICOs and regional hubs will be responsible for receiving allegations of SEA in relation to IFAD-funded projects. The focal points will ensure that allegations are promptly forwarded to the Ethics Office for review and referral to AUO for investigation when appropriate. SH and SEA allegations are not subject to any time limitation for reporting.
25. SH and SEA are considered high-priority cases and investigators have been specifically trained for these sensitive investigations. IFAD staff and any individuals holding IFAD contracts have a duty to: report and cooperate unreservedly with any review or investigation of allegations of SH or SEA; and respond promptly and fully to requests for information. Failure to cooperate with the Ethics Office or AUO may constitute misconduct.
26. Affected persons can seek support from the Ethics Office, human resources officers, supervisors, the staff counsellor (who is a qualified psychologist), staff representatives of the IFAD Staff Association Executive Committee and SEA focal points in ICOs and regional hubs. Support to project beneficiaries who are victims of SEA is provided through existing services, programmes and networks in line with the 2007 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.

### C. Mainstreaming SH and SEA in IFAD's operations

27. IFAD is committed to integrating SH and SEA obligations and risk factors into its operations and funded activities, and to building commitment among all its partners at all levels in order to protect vulnerable poor rural people and safeguard the integrity of its mandate.
28. As foreseen in IFAD's SH/SEA Policy, obligations and risk factors related to SH and SEA will be mainstreamed into IFAD's operations and funded activities. Building on the experience of IFAD's partners, the Programme Management Department is revising its Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP) to include a SH and SEA risk assessment so that such risks can be identified and assessed, and mitigation strategies developed when appropriate.
29. If IFAD receives credible allegations of SH or SEA, it may take appropriate measures, including requesting the immediate removal of persons from any IFAD-funded or -managed activities, or other 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.
30. A proposal to amend the General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing will be presented to the Executive Board at its December session. Proposed revisions will include the obligation to inform IFAD of any non-compliance with the SH/SEA Policy and in connection with any IFAD-funded activity or operation, and provisions for failure to take timely and appropriate action to address the matter to the Fund's satisfaction.

## D. Collaboration and partnerships

31. IFAD participated in the United Nations system CEB Task Force on SH and contributed to the report it submitted to the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) at its October session. Proposed recommendations of the Task Force included: a system-wide approach to effective SH background checks; the introduction of a uniform definition of SH among organizations; and a model SH policy that organizations can use to align their own institutional and legal frameworks. The report of the Task Force was endorsed by the HLCM and was submitted to the CEB at its November meeting.
32. Recalling the importance of having accessible and efficient reporting channels, and noting that several United Nations organizations are experimenting with the use of external hotlines/helplines offering a 24/7 multi-language service to receive allegations of misconduct, the CEB Task Force proposed that a framework be prepared detailing the various hotlines/helpline services available and their features, which will also include an assessment of the various services.
33. The Fund also participated in several meetings of the IASC Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse to discuss and identify best practices on prevention and awareness raising, and take stock of experiences shared by NGOs in local communities.
34. On 18 October, IFAD's Director of Ethics participated in the Safeguarding Summit 2018 organized by the Government of the United Kingdom on tackling SH and SEA in the aid sector. At that occasion, a joint statement by multilateral development banks and international financial institutions (IFIs) – including IFAD – was delivered by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The statement built upon previous commitments by IFIs at a World Bank meeting in April organized by the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.
35. The summit provided an opportunity for all actors in the aid and development sectors to meet with victims' organizations and those involved with local populations, reflect on efforts made regarding SH and SEA, and identify areas of improvement.

## III. Conclusion

36. With the support of its Member States and partners, IFAD is committed to continue promoting its no-tolerance policy with respect to all forms of harassment, including SH and SEA, within the workplace and associated with its operations and funded activities. The Fund is also committed to constantly improving its approach in order to ensure that best practices in awareness raising, protection of staff and beneficiaries, reporting mechanisms and accountability are deeply embedded in IFAD's approach to SH and SEA.

## Action Plan – IFAD’s response to the Secretary-General’s Strategy to improve the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2019)</i>
<b>Strategic area I: Preventing sexual harassment (SH) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)</b>			
IFAD Policy on Preventing and Responding to SH and SEA (SH/SEA Policy)	Drafting and release of the SH/SEA Policy.	Completed	-
	Translation of the SH/SEA Policy into the Fund’s four languages and public disclosure on the IFAD intranet and website.	Completed	-
SEA online training	Develop an IFAD-specific mandatory online training course in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.	Completed	-
	Rollout the online SEA training.	Completed	Continue monitoring compliance
SH and SEA classroom training and awareness-raising sessions	<p>Training delivered by Ethics Office in classroom settings through the Operations Academy, regional events and workshops</p> <p>10.04.2018 – West and Central Africa regional forum in Mauritania</p> <p>24/25.04.2018 – Operations Academy (headquarters)</p> <p>04.07.2018 – Operations Academy (headquarters)</p> <p>22.10.2018 – Financial Management Services Division workshop in Indonesia</p> <p>24.10.2018 – Asia and the Pacific Operations Academy in Indonesia</p> <p>14.11.2018 – Near East, North Africa and Europe regional event in Morocco</p>	Completed	Operations Academy in other regions
Anti-harassment online training course	Revise the current mandatory anti-harassment training to include specific references to SH and SEA	Completed	-
Background checks	Update personal history forms to include questions on SH and SEA. Introduce provisions on the human resources framework to withdraw offers of appointment or terminate appointments and other contracts in the presence of evidence of SH or SEA.	Completed	-
	Explore the possibility of joining the United Nations common database project designed to maintain a record of individuals found to have engaged in SH.	Ongoing	-
Appointment letters and contract templates	Introduce a reference to the no-tolerance policy on SH and SEA in appointment letters and contract templates.	Completed	-
IFAD Code of Conduct annual declaration form	Include a reference to SH and SEA in the annual declaration.	Completed	-
General terms and conditions for procurement of goods and services	Include references to SH and SEA in commercial contracts (headquarters) in addition to the current references of the United Nations Supplier Code of Conduct.	Completed	-
	Include obligations for commercial vendors to adopt background checks and disclosure requirements regarding criminal convictions, disciplinary measures, sanctions and investigations related to SH and SEA.	Completed	-
Corporate risk register	Include reputational conduct-related risks such as SH and SEA in the corporate risk register to identify, monitor and prevent such risks.	Completed	-
SH/SEA staff survey	SH and SEA questions have been included in the Global Staff Survey to be launched in mid-November 2018.	Ongoing	-

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2019)</i>
<b>Strategic area II: Responding to SH and SEA</b>			
Disciplinary framework	SH and SEA identified as serious misconduct that may constitute grounds for summary dismissal, termination and debarment for non-staff.	Completed	-
Reporting and complaint mechanisms	Clarify in relevant procedures that complaints of SH and SEA can be filed anonymously.	Completed	-
	Remove one-year limitation for reporting SH and SEA.	Completed	-
	Ensure that dedicated Office of Audit and Oversight (AUO) and Ethics Office reporting channels are accessible via IFAD's intranet and website.	Completed	-
	Publicly disclose on IFAD's website the SH/SEA Policy, Code of Conduct and procedures on whistleblowing protection against retaliation.	Completed	-
SEA focal points	Identify SEA focal points within IFAD Country Offices (ICOs) and regional hubs.	Ongoing	-
	Develop and administer a training programme specifically for SEA focal points to receive allegations of SEA in ICOs and regional hubs.		Action plan for Q1
Investigation	SH and SEA are given high priority for investigation.	Completed	-
	Investigation SEA training for AUO investigators.	Completed	-
<b>Strategic area III: Mainstreaming SH and SEA in IFAD's operations and funded activities</b>			
SH and SEA risk assessment in operations	Include SH and SEA risk assessment in project design and implementation, and indicators in supervision missions.	ongoing	-
Project procurement guidelines	Include a reference to SH and SEA in the project procurement guidelines.	Ongoing	-
General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing (loans/grants)	Amendments will be proposed to the Executive Board in December to include obligations to report SH and SEA, and associated measures.	December 2018	-
<b>Strategic area IV: Coordination and cooperation</b>			
Engagement with Ethics Network (United Nations and international financial institutions [IFIs]), and Rome-based agencies (RBAs)	Participate in regular meetings of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (United Nations and IFIs) and RBAs	Continuous	-
	Explore the possibility of joining the World Food Programme joint Membership/Management committee to review and discuss best practices in addressing all forms of harassment including sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse.	Ongoing	-
Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from SEA	Participate in meetings of the Task Team to discuss best practices in SEA awareness raising and protection strategies for local beneficiary populations.	Continuous	-
United Nations System Chief Executives Board (CEB) Task Force on SH	Participate in meetings of the CEB Task Force and explore the possibility of joining the United Nations system-wide efforts to harmonize best practices for effective SH background checks; introduce a uniform definition of SH among United Nations organizations; and develop a model SH policy that organizations can use to align their own specific institutional and legal frameworks.	Ongoing	-