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

Addendum

Management's Response to Member States' Comments

Executive Board — 135th Session
Rome, 25–27 April 2022

For: **Information**

Comments from United Kingdom	Management response
<p>The UK appreciates this update and Action Plan for 2022- 23 and congratulates IFAD on the work they have undertaken to strengthen their approach to the prevention and response to SH/SEA in recent years.</p> <p>We welcome IFAD’s continued use of Clear Check (para 3). Has IFAD also considered joining the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme? This would ensure that it can check if employees have a history of misconduct when recruiting from outside the UN system. (UNHCR is currently piloting participation in the MDS, for example).</p>	<p>IFAD is committed to conducting robust background checks of individuals for sexual misconduct and is among the United Nations organizations that participate in the ClearCheck Database. In addition, IFAD uses the services of United Nations OneHR to conduct thorough reference verification, including on SH/SEA, to ensure that staff with the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity are recruited.</p> <p>We take note of the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme and its purpose as reproduced on its website “<i>to establish a minimum standard for humanitarian, development and other civil society organisations to share information as part of their recruitment process about people who have been found to have committed sexual harassment, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation during employment.</i>” While no United Nations organizations have yet officially joined the scheme, we look forward to the results of UNHCR’s experience for our review and evaluation.</p>
<p>We also welcome IFAD’s development of a confidential system for prompt reporting of credible SH/SEA allegations to Member States (para 3). Does this report on allegations both relating to IFAD staff and project beneficiaries?</p>	<p>IFAD reports credible allegations of SH/SEA relating to IFAD staff and external parties such as project staff and project beneficiaries on the Member States Interactive Platform.</p>
<p>We support the SEA focal point programme being expanded to ensure representation in all field offices where IFAD has funded operations and their close working with the local United Nations SEA network and resident coordinators (para 4). As the focal point will be the most senior staff member in a country office (i.e. we assume the Country Director) – what percentage of their time will they be able to dedicate to work on SH/SEA and how will it be ensured that they have sufficient time to devote to this, including participating in country SEA networks?</p>	<p>SEA focal points play a key role locally in promoting IFAD’s Policy to Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (IFAD SH/SEA policy), actively raising awareness on SEA and facilitating access to reporting mechanisms. The staff members performing the role of SEA focal point are the most senior staff in the IFAD Country Office (ICO), therefore, the country directors have that role. In each ICO, the SEA focal point is supported by an alternate who may be more junior and where possible, one of the two roles should be held by a woman. While no specific time or budget is allocated for this corporate role, the Ethics Office provides all SEA focal points/alternates with tools and support to enable them to deliver on the plan of activities and follow up on completion on a quarterly basis.</p>

Comments from United Kingdom	Management response
<p>We welcome the development of a code of conduct for implementing partners (para 6) – will this be aligned with the IASC Six Core Principles relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse? Will it be based on other related documents elsewhere in the UN system?</p>	<p>The proposed Code of Conduct for implementing partners will reiterate the responsibilities and obligations of IFAD’s partners in relation to the application of the IFAD SH/SEA policy, which is fully in line with the Six Core Principles elaborated by the United Nations system and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Those principles are also captured in IFAD’s “There is no Excuse!” card made available internally as well as externally to implementing partners. The card is disclosed publicly on the IFAD corporate website:</p> <p>https://www.ifad.org/documents/38711624/42205405/noexcuse_e.pdf/38815963-ea0b-c093-cb21-ccb35be3cee?t=1608039481000</p>
<p>It is great to see such a high completion rate for the mandatory training (para 12) and positive to see the strong figures from recent surveys (paras 16-21). We underline the importance of sustaining efforts e.g. to encourage a speak-up culture on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>We encourage IFAD’s participation in the UN system-wide innovation challenge, in cooperation with the WFP Innovation Accelerator (para 22) and we look forward to an update on proposals selected from the RBAs and other organizations.</p> <p>On para 24, has IFAD had any recent significant positive or negative response from partner governments on SEA/SH clauses in funding agreements? Is IFAD coordinating with IFIs on the language used in agreements (in the context of the IFI group referred to in para 26)?</p> <p>We support IFAD’s participation in UN and IFI initiatives at country level – and encourage joint documentation capturing lesson lessons learnt etc. reflecting also the training and other activities in the action plan.</p>	<p>The SH/SEA obligations for borrowers/recipients of IFAD funding are stated in the General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing and apply to all financing agreements entered into by IFAD. Through its participation in the SH/SEA networks of the United Nations system and the international financial institutions (IFIs), IFAD shares its knowledge and experience including with respect to legal obligations of implementing partners in agreements to ensure adequate safeguards and appropriate action.</p>

Comments from United Kingdom	Management response
<p>Finally, can we confirm that IFAD’s updated Social, Environment and Climate Assessment Procedures (para 25) align with the <u>IASC Minimum Operating Standards on PSEA</u> and/or the <u>SEA elements of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability</u>?</p>	<p>The updated SECAP is fully aligned with the IFAD SH/SEA policy. More specifically, SECAP requires all borrowers/recipients/partners in IFAD-supported projects to assess the risk of gender-based violence and SH/SEA. Required measures by borrowers/recipients/partners to prevent and address these risks include confidential channels for reporting incidents and providing support. Response procedures should indicate when and where to report incidents, and what follow-up actions to undertake. In addition, there must be modalities for providing support and redress to survivors and affected persons. Any complaints of SH/SEA received through the SECAP complaints procedure are forwarded immediately to IFAD’s Ethics Office for further action.</p>

Comments from Canada	Management response
<p>We commend IFAD for the continued efforts and progress made in preventing and responding to SH/SEA and we thank IFAD for sharing the new Action Plan for 2022-2023.</p> <p>Among the new actions of this Plan, we welcome the development of a model of conduct for implementing partners to be included in the project implementation manuals, and which will include references to SH/SEA. It is indeed important that IFAD implementing partners be provided with the appropriate tools and information to understand and abide by their obligations. However, we would appreciate having more information on what exactly it entails, and what are the obligations for implementing partners?</p>	<p>The proposed Code of Conduct for implementing partners will reiterate the responsibilities and obligations of IFAD’s partners in relation to the application of the IFAD SH/SEA policy. The obligations for implementing partners are included in both the policy and the General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing, which apply to all financing agreements entered into by IFAD.</p> <p>Obligations for implementing partners include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promptly inform IFAD of any SH/SEA allegations they may receive or become aware of in relation to the IFAD-funded project; - take timely and appropriate action with regard to allegations concerning their own personnel and inform IFAD of the outcome of actions taken with respect to allegations of SH/SEA; - include in national contracts with project staff, contractors, suppliers and other third parties to be financed with IFAD funds provisions prohibiting acts of SH/SEA, and allowing for the immediate termination of contract based on proven acts of SH/SEA in connection with IFAD-funded or -managed activities or operations. <p>According to Article XII of the General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing, IFAD may suspend, in whole or in part, the right of the borrower/recipient to request withdrawals from the loan and/or grant accounts if, after consultation with the borrower/recipient, IFAD has determined that acts of SH/SEA were engaged in by representatives of the borrower/recipient or a project party or by any other recipients of the proceeds of the financing without the borrower/recipient having taken timely and appropriate action, satisfactory to the Fund, to address such acts when they occur.</p>
<p>We are glad to see the continuous work and completion of the expansion of the focal points to all regions, including the rollout of specific training for the focal</p>	<p>The principles of a “victim-centred approach” were developed by the Chief Executives Board (CEB) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations System. These general</p>

Comments from Canada	Management response
<p>points. Sharing lessons learned from the experience of the focal point programme in future updates would be greatly appreciated (e.g. identify local mechanisms to provide assistance to victims). We appreciate efforts to ensure gender parity between the focal points and the alternates.</p> <p>We note the inclusion of a victim-centred approach in the action plan, and that IFAD plans to update relevant policies to include references to SH/SEA with a victim-centred approach. A stronger definition of what a “victim-centred approach” means, and in particular how this will be translated into IFAD work would be helpful. Also, at para. 27, reference is made to developing principles underpinning a victim-centred approach, which is not reflected in the Action Plan. Could you expand on this activity?</p>	<p>principles are meant to assist United Nations system organizations in adopting and implementing a victim/survivor-centred approach in their formal and informal processes, policies and procedures. The core principles identified by the CEB Task Force (respect, non-discrimination, safety, confidentiality, informed consent, support and prevention) are part of IFAD’s approach to SH/SEA and as foreseen in the Action Plan, the intention is to ensure they are also stated in IFAD’s rules and procedures.</p>
<p>Another notable new action – which we welcome - is the development of a Management Compact for Senior Management and Directors on diversity, equity and inclusion, workplace culture and SH/SEA.</p> <p>Concerning strengthening reporting and complaints mechanisms, could you share what the current gaps are, and how such mechanisms should be strengthened?</p>	<p>The Ethics Office manages the current reporting mechanisms – confidential helplines and a confidential e-mail address – and coordinates the SEA focal points who act as a reporting channel. Recently, a confidential mobile phone helpline, which is WhatsApp-enabled, was added to the Ethics Office’s complaint mechanism to ensure accessibility and visibility in the field. The Office of Audit and Oversight also manages a confidential helpline and e-mail address. Information on available complaint mechanisms is provided on the corporate website. IFAD, along with other United Nations organizations and IFIs, continuously monitors practices with regard to complaint mechanisms to ensure that IFAD’s reporting systems are aligned with best practice.</p>

Comments from Canada	Management response
<p>Concerning the innovation challenge in which IFAD participates, in close collaboration with WFP Innovation Accelerator, we would like to know more about the role of IFAD in this initiative.</p> <p>Finally, thank you for sharing IFAD 2021 SEA survey results. We note the positive trend reflecting a good understanding of SH/SEA, IFAD’s policy and duties and responsibilities.</p> <p>We also note that the findings suggest the importance of identifying victim support mechanisms, at local level. We look forward at the next update to learn about progress in that area.</p>	<p>The innovation challenge in the United Nations system stems from a proposal by the aforementioned CEB Task Force. IFAD’s participation is twofold: it has submitted a project for the challenge and also participates in the review and assessment of projects proposed by other United Nations entities.</p>

Comments from Netherlands	Management response
<p>This comment amends and supersedes the text previously posted by The Netherlands.</p> <p>The Netherlands took note of the 'Update on IFAD's Approach to Address the United Nations Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse'.</p> <p>We welcome the continued efforts of the IFAD to prevent and respond to SEA and SH, and the results achieved thus far with respect to the IFAD SH/SEA Task Force, the adoption of the 2018 SH/SEA policy and the training rolled out to staff, non-staff and implementing partners, with 98 percent of staff completing the mandatory SEA training for the first time or refresher training in 2021. The same applies to the strengthening of contracts and letters of appointment and amending the General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing and the IFAD Project Procurement Guidelines to include references to the SH/SEA policy. The results of the UN SEA survey carried out by the Office of the Special Coordinator on improving the UN response to SEA, clearly conveyed a positive trend in terms of IFAD staff members' level of understanding and recognition of SEA and SH, IFAD's policy and the individual duties and responsibilities of the respondents in the selected duty stations.</p> <p>The Netherlands also appreciates that the 2022-2023 Action Plan includes actions to further strengthen IFAD's efforts in the prevention of and response to SEA and SH, such as with respect to the ongoing decentralization of the Fund's operations, the strengthening of a victim-centered approach, the development of a model code of conduct for implementing partners and the proposal of a compact by senior management and managers at</p>	

Comments from Netherlands	Management response
<p>Director level to reiterate strong commitment to workplace culture, diversity, equity and inclusion and the need to combat all forms of harassment, including SH/SEA and discrimination.</p> <p>In addition to the above, we would like to learn more about IFAD's policies and practices in this field, and therefore get further information on various issues relating to SEA and SH prevention and response, such as with respect to a victim-centered approach, reporting and follow-up mechanisms as well as steps with respect to aligning the SH/SEA policy with international norms, values and principles.</p> <p>The first question is to what extent, in which particular areas and when IFAD will be aligning the SH/SEA policy with recently adopted international norms and principles, such as reflected in the 2019 IASC six core principles relating to sexual exploitation and abuse, the SH model policy and the CEB SH Task Force document 'Advancing a Common Understanding of a Victim-centered Approach to Sexual Harassment'.</p>	<p>Through its participation in various United Nations and IFI working groups and networks, IFAD is kept abreast of best practices with respect to SH/SEA and ensures that these are reflected in its practices, rules and procedures. The IFAD SH/SEA policy is fully in line with the principles elaborated by the United Nations system and work is ongoing to further align IFAD's internal procedures with the United Nations SH model policy, mindful of the fact that organizations in the United Nations system have differing legal, administrative and policy frameworks. The IASC Six Core Principles are captured in IFAD's SH/SEA policy and in the "There is no Excuse!" card made available internally as well as externally to implementing partners. The card is disclosed publicly on the IFAD corporate website:</p> <p>https://www.ifad.org/documents/38711624/42205405/noexcuse_e.pdf/38815963-ea0b-c093-cb21-ccb35be3cee?t=1608039481000</p> <p>As indicated above, the principles of a "victim-centred approach" were developed by the CEB Task Force. These general principles are meant to assist United Nations system organizations in adopting and implementing a victim/survivor-centred approach in their formal and informal processes, policies and procedures. The core principles identified by the CEB Task Force (respect, non-discrimination, safety, confidentiality, informed consent, support and prevention) are part of IFAD's approach to SH/SEA and, as foreseen in the Action Plan, the intention is to ensure that they are also stated in IFAD's rules and procedures.</p>
<p>The second set of questions refer to reporting. The Fund has a confidential system for prompt reporting of credible SH/SEA allegations, accessible to Member States through a dedicated interactive platform. The good practices and lessons learned of this system could benefit other organizations. Is there a plan to evaluate this system in the short term, and possibly share the findings, good practices and lessons learned to a wider audience?</p>	<p>The prompt reporting system of credible SH/SEA allegations on the Member States Interactive Platform is unique to IFAD. This practice was shared by IFAD in various forums including the United Nations and IFI SH/SEA networks. In addition, it is part of the information shared by the President in his year-end letter to the Secretary-General. Those letters are shared with IFAD Member States through the platform. The prompt reporting system has been recently implemented and review thereof could be considered in the medium term.</p>

Comments from Netherlands	Management response
<p>Additionally, while the IFAD joined the UN Secretary General’s SEA tracking system, no cases seem to have been registered in that system. What is the reason that no cases have been registered in this report?</p>	<p>IFAD participates in the Secretary-General’s SEA tracker. Since joining the tracker, no credible SEA allegations have been received in relation to IFAD and its funded operations. Unlike other organizations participating in the tracker, IFAD-funded projects are implemented by government partners who are in direct contact with beneficiaries. With the expansion in all ICOs of the SEA focal points programme, and the training for implementing partners, IFAD is further strengthening its prevention efforts to promote the no tolerance policy for SH/SEA in its activities and operations.</p>
<p>Furthermore, considering the process of decentralization and the fact that IFAD targets rural people, the question is whether existing reporting mechanisms are accessible to those working and living in the field / in rural areas, and how the Fund ensures that beneficiaries living in remote areas can access such reporting mechanisms in case incidents occur.</p>	<p>Mindful of the decentralization agenda, actions have been taken by IFAD to strengthen its reporting channels in the field. First, the Ethics Office has added a mobile phone helpline – which is WhatsApp-enabled – which increases accessibility in the field where often beneficiaries have access to mobile phones and can reach out through text messaging in Wi-Fi environments. IFAD also expanded its SEA focal point programme to all ICOs. A total of 70 SEA focal points and alternates, trained by the Ethics Office, have the responsibility of promoting the IFAD SH/SEA policy internally and with implementing partners. They also take part in supervision missions in rural areas and serve as a reporting channel for SH/SEA allegations. IFAD also provides SH/SEA training to implementing partners and project staff so that they are aware of their responsibilities to inform IFAD of any SH/SEA allegations that they receive in connection with an IFAD-funded project.</p> <p>Finally, there is ongoing collaboration among United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) and resident coordinators in ensuring that allegations received with respect to a United Nations organization are promptly shared and addressed by the concerned organization.</p>
<p>The third question concerns the victim-centered approach. How has this approach been considered so far in SH cases and in SEA cases in IFAD headquarters and field offices, and has it been inclusive of legal assistance, the provision and/or financing of local GBV protection and support</p>	<p>Through the IFAD Medical Services Unit, victims of sexual harassment in the workplace have access to medical services as well as the services of a staff counsellor (a licenced psychologist). IFAD, through its SEA focal points in all ICOs, identifies – with the assistance of UNCTs and government partners – available local support mechanisms for victims of SEA such as medical clinics</p>

Comments from Netherlands	Management response
<p>services and possibly referral to local authorities if deemed appropriate and necessary?</p> <p>We hope that IFAD can share further information on the above issues, and would like to reiterate our interest in and appreciation for the work undertaken so far in prevention and responding to SEA and SH.</p>	<p>and legal aid. No action, including a referral to national authorities, is taken by IFAD without obtaining the informed consent of the victim.</p>

Comments from Switzerland	Management response
<p>While we welcome having a confidential system for prompt reporting of credible SH/SEA allegations in place, access to the dedicated interactive platform is not obvious for member states and we suggest improvements regarding access and visibility of the platform.</p>	<p>The prompt reporting system is located on a visible tab once Members have completed access to the platform. The tab prompts the visitor to accept, by clicking, conditions such as confidentiality. The visitor is then transferred to a PDF document which contains information on credible SH/SEA allegations. We take good note of your comment and will explore with relevant internal divisions, possible improvements to increase the visibility of the SH/SEA page tab.</p>
<p>The work in progress on the code of conduct for partners is appreciated. At the same time it would be helpful to know what exactly does IFAD request/require from its implementing partners in terms of SH/SEA? And what happens if the selected partners are not yet up to the standard?</p>	<p>The proposed Code of Conduct for implementing partners will reiterate the responsibilities and obligations of IFAD’s partners in relation to the application of the IFAD SH/SEA policy. Implementing partners’ obligations are set forth in the policy and in the General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing, which apply to all financing agreements entered into by IFAD</p> <p>Obligations for implementing partners include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promptly inform IFAD of any SH/SEA allegations they have received or become aware of in relation to the IFAD-funded project; - take timely and appropriate action with regard to allegations concerning their own personnel and inform IFAD of the outcome of actions taken with respect to allegations of SH/SEA; - include in national contracts with project staff, contractors, suppliers and other third parties to be financed with IFAD funds provisions prohibiting acts of SH/SEA, and allowing for the immediate termination of the contract based on proven acts of SH/SEA in connection with IFAD-funded or -managed activities or operations. <p>According to Article XII of the General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing, IFAD may suspend, in whole or in part, the right of the borrower/recipient to request withdrawals from the loan and/or grant accounts if, after consultation with the borrower/recipient, IFAD has determined that acts of SH/SEA were engaged in by representatives of the borrower/recipient or a project party or by any other recipients of the proceeds of the financing without the borrower/recipient having taken timely and appropriate action, satisfactory to the Fund, to address such acts when they occur.</p>

Comments from Japan	Management response
<p>Japan recognizes that Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH) in the area of development and humanitarian assistance had been getting international attentions after a case of the sexual violence by WHO staff had found in 2021. In this regard, Japan welcomes IFAD’s address to SEAH mentioned in the document, and would like to expect further efforts by IFAD on this issue.</p> <p>Regarding SEAH, OECD-DAC Recommendations was adopted in 2019. Japan would like to request IFAD to consider about becoming an adherent of the recommendation, following other organizations such as UNICEF and UNHCR.</p>	<p>IFAD’s approach to preventing and responding to SH/SEA is fully in line with the 2019 recommendations on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance issued by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. We will continue to monitor and align our approach with best practices in the United Nations system and IFI networks.</p>