
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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Action: The Executive Board is invited to review the 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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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, Management established the IFAD SH/SEA multidivisional task force, led by the Director of the Ethics Office (ETH) and composed of representatives of the Office of the General Counsel, the Human Resources Division, the Office of Audit and Oversight (AUO), the Communications Division (COM), and the Programme Management Department (PMD). Since April 2018, the task force has reported to the Executive Board at each of its sessions¹ on the implementation of IFAD's SH/SEA action plans. It also reports on the concrete measures being taken to align IFAD's approach with the Secretary-General's strategy, as described in the report entitled Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach (A/71/818).
2. Since the release of the IFAD Policy to Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SH/SEA policy) in 2018, IFAD has implemented its 2018–2019 and 2020–2021 SH/SEA action plans. The 2022–2023 action plan (see annex) is under way and has been shared with the Office of the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse (OSCSEA).
3. The SH/SEA task force is reviewing the SH/SEA policy to include amendments made in recent years to the [General Conditions for Agricultural Development Financing](#) and [Project Procurement Guidelines](#) to include references to the SH/SEA policy and obligation for borrowers/recipients of IFAD funding to abide by the policy. As well, the revision includes the codification of IFAD's victim-centred approach, the adoption of the United Nations definition of "child"² and alignment with recent and relevant international standards, principles and protocols such as the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee's six core principles relating to SEA. The revised SH/SEA policy will be shared with the Executive Board and published on IFAD's corporate website.
4. In line with past practice, the President of IFAD sent a year-end Management letter about protection from SEA and reports of SH/SEA allegations to the United Nations Secretary-General. A copy of the letter is available on the Member States Interactive Platform. Through this platform, Member States are informed promptly and confidentially of all credible SH/SEA allegations received by IFAD. The information is also accessible to IFAD's workforce.

II. Update on IFAD's approach to preventing and responding to SH and SEA

A. Prevention and response

5. IFAD continues its prevention efforts with staff, non-staff or individuals holding an IFAD contract (such as consultants and interns) and implementing partners. ETH gives training on SH/SEA as part of the corporate induction programme and raises awareness through various initiatives such as learning sessions, production of videos and comic strips, and the development of awareness-raising materials on SH/SEA.
6. Staff and non-staff personnel are expected to complete a mandatory SH/SEA online training course and recertify every three years as part of the refresher programme. Completion of the course is also a prerequisite for the finalization of the

¹ See [EB 2018/123/R.39](#), [EB 2018/124/R.41](#), [EB 2018/125/R.14](#), [EB 2019/126/R.39](#), [EB 2019/127/R.42](#), [EB 2019/128/R.51](#), [EB 2020/129/R.5](#), [EB 2020/130/R.4](#), [EB 2020/131/R.2](#), [EB 2021/132/R.12](#), [EB 2021/133/R.17](#), [EB 2021/134/R.23](#), [EB 2022/135/R.14](#), [EB 2022/136/R.16](#), [EB 2022/137/R.15](#).

² See [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

performance evaluation process for staff members. IFAD is the only international financial institution that has linked the finalization of the annual staff performance evaluation exercise with completion of mandatory online ETH trainings, including the SH/SEA online modules. ETH monitors completion of mandatory training and refresher programmes.

7. ETH liaises with PMD to ensure that presentations on SH/SEA are included in project start-up workshops with implementing partners. Such training is provided by ETH through virtual classroom events. Relevant multilingual materials developed specifically for implementing partners and project staff (such as the [guide for borrowers/recipients of IFAD funding on the SH/SEA policy](#), the No Excuse Card and the [Code of Conduct for Project Parties](#)) are publicly disclosed and continue to be distributed to all participants, either in electronic or paper format.
8. Since October 2022, more than 390 IFAD staff and non-staff personnel completed the mandatory online SEA training and the stand-alone module on SH in the workplace. In addition, approximately 500 project staff in nine countries have received classroom training on SH/SEA delivered by ETH. Additional training sessions are scheduled (see annex) for upcoming project start-up workshops in English, French and Spanish in countries or regions where IFAD funds activities and operations.
9. An integral part of IFAD's prevention approach is to conduct background checks using the United Nations ClearCheck secure database system and One HR to screen applicants for sexual misconduct. All applicants in IFAD are required to disclose on their application whether they have been subject to any investigation or sanction for sexual misconduct. IFAD is committed to further strengthening its background checks in its recruitment processes and work is ongoing to explore joining other background check systems such as the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme.³
10. As part of the 2022-2023 SH/SEA action plan, ETH is collaborating with COM to develop a video reiterating IFAD's no-tolerance stance towards acts of SH/SEA, promoting a speak-up culture and informing on IFAD's reporting channels.
11. The reporting channels maintained by ETH and AUO for acts of SH/SEA allow for anonymous reporting and include confidential helplines and e-mail addresses. ETH also manages a WhatsApp-enabled mobile phone number that facilitates reporting of SH/SEA globally, especially from remote locations. In its fight against SH/SEA, IFAD relies on the SH/SEA focal points programme coordinated by ETH where focal points act as an additional reporting channel.
12. Allegations of SH/SEA are given high priority in IFAD and are promptly addressed by ETH and AUO according to their respective mandates. Mindful of IFAD's victim-centred approach, the victim's consent is sought prior to engaging in formal processes. Substantiated sexual misconduct constitutes grounds for the most severe sanction of summary dismissal and potential referral of the case to national authorities. It also constitutes grounds for termination of commercial/consultancy contracts extended by IFAD and a cause for potential debarment. Acts of SH/SEA by representatives of the borrower/recipient can trigger the suspension of requests for withdrawals from loan and/or grant accounts if, after notification, the Fund has determined that no timely and appropriate action has been taken.

B. Mainstreaming the SH and SEA no-tolerance policy in IFAD's operations

13. Efforts are made to raise awareness with respect to project parties' obligations under the IFAD SH/SEA policy. In particular, emphasis is placed on the obligation not to engage in sexual misconduct and to report suspected acts of sexual

³ [The Misconduct Disclosure Scheme](#).

misconduct either through national authorities or the Fund and in all cases to promptly inform IFAD.

14. ETH coordinates the SH/SEA focal points and alternates programme and has trained to date more than 70 staff members to take up their role and contribute to the promotion and implementation of the SH/SEA policy in all duty stations. The training programme for the new cohort of approximately 30 staff members as SH/SEA focal points/alternates in various duty stations is being coordinated by ETH.
15. Continuous efforts are required to promote IFAD's no-tolerance stance towards acts of sexual misconduct, both within IFAD and with implementing partners. As part of their role, SH/SEA focal points and alternates are called upon to liaise with United Nations country teams and resident coordinators present in their respective duty stations in order to collaborate and further contribute to the United Nations response to SH/SEA.

III. Conclusion

16. IFAD is committed to applying best practices through its ongoing collaboration with the other Rome-based agencies and its participation in the United Nations SEA working group and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) task force on addressing SH. IFAD, through ETH, also participates in the international financial institutions network to maintain and advance standards to prevent and respond to SH/SEA. ETH contributes to SH/SEA safeguarding reviews conducted by partners such as the Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility and the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network.
17. Paramount to ensuring that IFAD is always aligned with best practices is the sharing of knowledge among organizations. In that respect and at the request of OSCSEA, ETH recently presented IFAD's SH/SEA efforts and in particular its approach with implementing partners.
18. Speaking up against sexual misconduct can be difficult and often unsurmountable for victims and affected persons. Organizations are responsible for providing a safe space for victims, survivors and affected persons to come forward and report acts of SH/SEA. IFAD's commitment to combat SH/SEA within the organization and IFAD-funded projects can only be achieved through the dedication of all, including leadership, the workforce, partners and stakeholders.

2022–2023 Action Plan – IFAD’s Policy to Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment (SH) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2022-2023)</i>
Strategic area I: Preventing SH and SEA			
Update IFAD policies/procedures/processes	Where appropriate, update relevant policies/procedures/training to embed references to SH/SEA and promote a victim-centred approach based on respect for the victim’s dignity as well as principles such as confidentiality and required consent.	Ongoing	2023
SH and SEA training and awareness-raising	Monitor staff compliance with SH/SEA online training courses and roll out mandatory refresher training programme.	Continuous	Continuous
	Deploy SH/SEA training for implementing partners, project staff at project start-up workshops and/or other regional events completed and/or planned so far in 2022/2023: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 18 January, Mali (completed) • February 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 19 February, Nepal (completed) – 26 February, Pakistan (completed) – Uganda (event postponed waiting for new date) • March 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 8 March, Congo (completed) – 16 March, Sri Lanka (completed) – 17 March, Morocco (completed) – Chad (event postponed waiting for new date) – Honduras (event postponed waiting for new date) – Kenya (event postponed waiting for new date) – Mexico (event postponed waiting for new date) • April 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1 April, Sri Lanka (completed) – 4 April, Gabon (completed) – 13 April, Tajikistan (completed) • May 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 17 May, Central African Republic (completed) – 24 May, Kenya (completed) 	Ongoing	Continuous

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2022-2023)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June/August 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 7 June, Argentina (completed) – 9 June, Lesotho (completed) – 14 June, Cambodia (completed) – 22 June, Côte d'Ivoire (completed) – 27 June, Maldives (completed) – 29 June, Cuba (completed) – 28 July, Rwanda (completed) – 4 August, Nigeria (completed) – 9 August, Angola (completed) – Kyrgyzstan (postponed waiting for a new date) • September 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Brazil (postponed to 2023) – 28 September, Sri Lanka (completed) • October/December 2022 start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 12 October, India (completed) – 3 November, Zimbabwe (completed) – 7 December, Benin (completed) – 21 December, Somalia (completed) • January/April 2023 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Nigeria (postponed waiting for new date) – 16 January, Viet Nam (completed) – 7 February, Côte d'Ivoire (completed) – 24 February, Cambodia (completed) – 14 March, Tajikistan (completed) – 28 March, Côte d'Ivoire (scheduled) – 28 March, Ethiopia (scheduled) – 29 March, Haiti (scheduled) – 29 March, Ecuador (scheduled) – 4 April, Ghana (scheduled) 		
Decentralization	Include refresher SH/SEA training as part of the decentralization process.	Continuous	Continuous
Revision of procedures on SH	Review SH procedures and align with the United Nations SH model policy as appropriate.	Ongoing	2023

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2022-2023)</i>
Enterprise risk management	Contribute to corporate risk management on unsatisfactory conduct and misconduct-related risks, including SH and SEA, and contribute to the development of mitigation strategies.	Continuous	Continuous
SH/SEA communication	Production of a short video on IFAD's efforts to prevent and respond to SH/SEA.	Ongoing	2023
	Ongoing internal communications and updates on SH/SEA.	Continuous	Continuous
Management compact	Develop a compact for Directors and Senior Management on diversity, equity and inclusion, workplace culture and SH/SEA: reiterate the commitment made by Management to integrate the diversity and workplace culture principles and a work environment free of all forms of harassment and discrimination in all IFAD activities. Post the signed compact internally.	Ongoing	2023
Strategic area II: Responding to SH and SEA			
Reporting and complaint mechanisms	Review and further strengthen reporting and complaint mechanisms including at the IFAD Country Office (ICO) level.	Ongoing	2023
SH/SEA victim and affected persons support mechanisms	Identify with the support of SH/SEA focal points in-country mechanisms in place in various locations to provide assistance to SH/SEA victims and affected persons and explore collaboration with governments, United Nations entities and other stakeholders.	Ongoing	2023
Strategic area III: Mainstreaming IFAD no-tolerance for SH/SEA in its operations and funded activities			
SH/SEA focal point programme	Expansion of the SH/SEA focal point programme in all ICOs. Identify all focal points and alternates, ETH to develop and roll out a specific training to enable them to perform the SH/SEA focal point role. APR – completed LAC – completed NEN – completed ESA – completed WCA – completed Additional session provided on 14 March 2022.	Completed	2022
	Manage SH/SEA focal point programme. Training newly designated SH/SEA focal points.	Continuous	Continuous
Project implementation manual (PIM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revise the PIM to embed references to IFAD's no-tolerance policy on SH/SEA. - Propose a template code of conduct for implementing partners to be added in the PIM. 	Completed	2023
Strategic area IV: Coordination and cooperation			
Engagement with Ethics Network (United Nations and IFIs) and RBAs	Participate in regular meetings of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (United Nations and IFIs) and RBAs.	Continuous	Continuous
Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Accountability and Inclusion	Participate in meetings of the Task Team on Accountability and Inclusion to discuss best practices in SEA awareness-raising and protection strategies for local beneficiary populations.	Continuous	Continuous

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2022-2023)</i>
CEB SH task force/United Nations SEA working group	Participate in meetings of the CEB task force on addressing SH within the organizations of the United Nations system and meetings of the SEA working group.	Continuous	Continuous
Strengthen SH/SEA collaboration and linkages with stakeholders in the field	Liaise with stakeholders in field locations (the United Nations, IFIs, governments and others) for closer SH/SEA coordination, knowledge-sharing and collaboration (including resident coordinators and local SEA networks, as appropriate).	Continuous	Continuous
Innovation challenge	Participate in the United Nations system-wide innovation challenge in close cooperation with the World Food Programme Innovation Accelerator to identify and support tangible and implementable projects in the areas of leadership, culture and prevention of SH.	Completed	2023