Workplan for IFAD's Ethics Office for 2025

FOR: CONFIRMATION

Action: The Executive Board is invited to confirm the workplan for IFAD's Ethics Office for 2025

I. Introduction

1. Following the entry into force of the IFAD Ethics Charter in 2023, this document contains the first workplan prepared by the Ethics Office (ETH) for the Audit Committee. The Charter vests ETH with the independence to exercise full discretion over its programme of work, reporting directly to the President, who approved the ETH workplan for 2025. The Audit Committee's oversight of the ethics function includes regular review of ETH's annual workplan, the adequacy of ETH's resources and the results of its work. Once finalized, the workplan will be submitted to the Executive Board for confirmation at its December 2024 session.

2. ETH's mission is to uphold the highest standards of ethics and conduct at IFAD and promote the Code of Conduct and core values. ETH fosters a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability in all IFAD-supported activities and operations, building trust in the organization and strengthening its internal and external reputation. In carrying out its mandate, ETH has been entrusted with:

   • Championing the ethics function, managing the organization's comprehensive ethics and anti-harassment programme, and overseeing compliance with IFAD's Code of Conduct.

   • Contributing to the establishment of an enduring culture of ethics in the organization and, to this end, spearheading corporate efforts concerning specific ethics-related topics such as efforts to prevent and respond to all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment (SH) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and to combat hate speech, racism and discrimination.

   • Developing and disseminating ethical standards and training programmes on core ethics activities. ETH shall make mandatory refresher training courses in ethics available to all staff and non-staff – irrespective of seniority, category and level – to be completed at least every three years.

   • Guiding Management and IFAD personnel to ensure that IFAD's ethics-related rules, policies, procedures and practices are reinforced, and to promote the highest standards of ethics and conduct required by the organization.

   • Attending Senior Management meetings on agenda topics related to ETH's work.

   • Advising managers, staff and persons holding a non-staff contract on actions that may constitute an infringement or violation of IFAD's standards of ethics and conduct, as reflected in Human Resources Policy, the Staff Rules and Human Resources Implementing Procedures, including IFAD's Code of Conduct and core values, by providing confidential advice and guidance on ethics issues – for example, conflicts of interest, outside activities and gifts.

   • Administering the financial disclosure/declaration of interest programme for all staff other than ETH staff.

   • Assisting IFAD managers in the prevention of all forms of misconduct.

   • Developing and updating guidelines for managers and staff to consult on how to deal with allegations of harassment and other forms of misconduct.

   • Receiving and conducting an initial/prima facie review of documentation related to allegations of violations of the Code of Conduct, such as harassment, including SH, while ensuring confidentiality. The purpose of ETH's initial/prima facie review is to determine the existence of facts that could potentially support the allegation(s). In such cases, ETH refers the matters to the Office of Audit and Oversight (AUO), which is the sole IFAD entity entrusted with investigative functions.

- Managing the informal resolution procedures[1] for reported allegations of unsatisfactory conduct/misconduct.

- Administering the organization's policy for protecting staff from retaliation for reporting misconduct and for cooperating with duly authorized audits or investigations (whistle-blower protection policy) and receiving complaints of alleged retaliation.

- Establishing organizational objectives for ethics and compliance with IFAD's Code of Conduct and managing the organization's programme in these areas.

- Overseeing the assessment of organizational risk for misconduct and non-compliance with IFAD's Code of Conduct and core values and ad hoc reporting to Senior Management on risks, incidents, ethics-driven initiatives and progress towards programme goals.

3. In addition to the above activities, ETH's focus for 2025 will be to:

- Continue to build and strengthen a cohesive ethical culture through outreach and education.

- Promote the informal resolution of disputes and workplace conflicts.

- Take proactive measures in preventing and responding to SH/SEA.

- Enhance the office's operational efficiency by adopting innovative tools and improving collaboration across departments.

4. Through this comprehensive plan, ETH will ensure that ethical considerations remain at the forefront of IFAD's mission and operations.

II. Building a unified ethical culture across all roles and regions

5. **Objective:** Foster an organizational culture of ethics, transparency and accountability across all roles, job categories and duty stations.

6. IFAD's decentralized operations, with personnel distributed across regional and country offices, present unique challenges in promoting a unified ethical culture. Following its assessment of IFAD in 2023, the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) recommended strengthening activities to improve staff well-being, and to respond to findings from the staff survey and initial feedback on the decentralization process. Promoting a unified ethical framework empowers staff in decentralized offices to align with IFAD's core values, ensures consistency in addressing challenges related to organizational changes, and promotes a culture of support and fairness across all locations. In 2025, ETH will continue this work by implementing a robust set of outreach and training activities, reinforcing the importance of ethics at every level of the organization.

A. Outreach (first to fourth quarter [Q1–Q4])

7. ETH will carry out official visits to several IFAD offices throughout 2025, emphasizing missions to high-priority locations. This initiative will pinpoint areas where ethical challenges are particularly significant due to unique contextual elements, operational risks or organizational dynamics. Additionally, these efforts will identify other environments where ETH's presence could have a substantial impact.

8. During these missions, ETH will conduct in-person training sessions and hold informal one-on-one discussions with personnel. The focus will be on preventing SH/SEA, promoting a respectful workplace, and creating a space for personnel to ask questions and resolve any doubts related to IFAD's ethical guidelines.

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[1] ETH engages in informal resolution procedures only. ETH may refer formal complaints to AUO.

B. Training

9. Training modules on key ethical topics will be rolled out for all personnel. ETH will continue to administer mandatory online training on IFAD's Code of Conduct, the prevention of harassment in the workplace, and the prevention of sexual misconduct across all IFAD activities. It will also deliver training to groups and individuals on request. ETH will monitor compliance with mandatory training requirements, and liaise with Management to ensure that all personnel meet their training obligations.

10. In collaboration with country offices, ETH will continue to deliver training on SH/SEA (both on request and project-specific), with the aim of preventing sexual misconduct in the context of a project. This training is integrated into project start-up workshops to ensure that all project partners, including non-IFAD personnel, adhere to IFAD's standards.

11. ETH will integrate ethical decision-making and leadership principles into the performance management training for supervisors run by the People and Culture Division (PCD), with a session focused on the ethical dimension of performance management.

12. New outreach materials and guidelines will be developed to clarify ethical responsibilities related to social media use. This initiative will help personnel understand the ethical implications of online conduct, both personal and professional, and the potential risks of inappropriate behaviour on digital platforms (Q1).

13. From Q2 onwards, ETH will offer a training session on active bystander intervention to small groups, both online and in person. Participants will learn how to intervene when witnessing unethical behaviour or misconduct, and how to escalate concerns appropriately.

14. Starting in Q4, ETH will facilitate workshops focused on ethical leadership and decision-making for senior managers. These workshops will enable managers to develop the skills they need to guide teams ethically, navigate complex moral issues and continue to lead by example to promote ethical behaviour organization-wide.

C. Ethical culture events

15. ETH will host various events throughout the year to engage personnel in ongoing dialogue about ethics, including:

- **Townhall 2025 (January).** A broad organizational discussion on the theme "communication for a more respectful workplace" will be hosted by the President with support from ETH as a speaker, or another appropriate party. This event will give all personnel the opportunity to hear directly from senior managers and ETH on pressing ethical topics.

- **World Book Day 2025 (23 April).** ETH, in cooperation with the Communications Division and the Office of Development Effectiveness, will host an event on ethical publishing practices, highlighting the intersection of ethics and knowledge dissemination.

- **Ethics Day 2025 (15 October).** ETH will organize an interactive event that creatively combines ethical scenarios with fun activities, such as quizzes and role-play exercises, designed to foster awareness and discussion on workplace ethics in an engaging way.

- **16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence (November to December 2025).** In line with the global campaign to end gender-based violence, ETH will partner with internal and external stakeholders for an awareness-raising event.

16. These outreach efforts are expected to significantly enhance awareness and understanding of IFAD's ethical standards, while creating more opportunities for engagement and dialogue between personnel and ETH.

III. Informal first: Facilitating access to informal resolution of disputes

17. **Objective:** Promote the "informal first" approach to resolving workplace disputes, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment for conflict resolution.

18. In 2025, ETH will work closely with PCD and other units and teams to promote the informal resolution of workplace issues. This includes increasing access to mediation services and facilitating dialogue on how to create and maintain a respectful workplace at the divisional level.

19. In Q1 2025, ETH will work with PCD to identify an external mediation service that can be accessed by all personnel. This will provide a neutral, third-party mediator to assist in resolving disputes without escalating to formal procedures. ETH will ensure that all personnel are informed of how to access the mediator and of the benefits of using their services as a first step in resolving workplace conflicts.

20. ETH will lead informal divisional dialogues on request, focusing on workplace ethics and fostering a respectful work environment. These sessions will provide divisions with the opportunity to raise concerns, share experiences and seek advice from the ETH in a more informal setting (Q1–Q4).

21. ETH will provide support during departmental retreats, offering guidance on fostering an ethical culture and facilitating team-building activities that emphasize trust, transparency and mutual respect (Q1–Q4).

22. ETH will continue to manage informal resolution procedures under IFAD's anti-harassment procedures, ensuring that workplace disputes are addressed swiftly and in a manner that respects the dignity of all parties involved (Q1–Q4).

23. This approach is expected to reduce the number of formal disputes within IFAD, and promote a more collaborative and respectful work environment where personnel feel empowered to resolve conflicts informally.

IV. Preventing and responding to sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse

24. **Objective:** Foster a culture of accountability and ethics, with a focus on victim-centred approaches to preventing and addressing SH and SEA.

25. Building on IFAD's commitment to prevent and address SH and SEA, ETH will implement a series of policy updates and proactive initiatives aimed at safeguarding the rights of victims and ensuring a zero-tolerance approach to sexual misconduct.

A. Policy updates (Q1–Q2)

26. **Code of Conduct update.** IFAD's Code of Conduct will be updated to include explicit provisions related to SH and SEA, further strengthening IFAD's commitment to zero tolerance.

27. **SH/SEA policy alignment.** A revised SH/SEA policy will be developed, aligned with the United Nations policy and best practices of other international financial institutions (IFIs). The revised policy will provide clear guidelines on how SH and SEA should be prevented, reported and addressed within the organization.

28. **Guide for managers and supervisors.** ETH will update the comprehensive guide for managers and supervisors on how to prevent and respond to harassment, to include SH prevention. This guide will serve as a critical resource for managers,

helping them understand their responsibilities and how to support affected personnel.

29. **SEA prevention guide for borrowers/recipient.** The practical guide for borrowers and recipients of IFAD funding will also be updated, outlining best practices for preventing and addressing SEA in the context of IFAD-funded projects.

B. Risk and capacity assessment (Q1–Q4)

30. To mitigate the risks associated with SH and SEA, ETH will develop tailored tools and resources aimed at helping the Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP) team to conduct risk assessments on the topic of gender-based violence for each project and on reporting and response protocols for gender-based violence incidents.

31. In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, ETH will enhance due diligence procedures for major project partners and grant recipients. This will include implementing enhanced background checks for key personnel involved in IFAD-funded activities, focusing on SH/SEA-related risks.

32. Furthermore, ETH will liaise with IFAD's SH/SEA focal points to identify in-country mechanisms for providing assistance to SH and SEA victims. This involves collaboration with local governments, United Nations entities and other stakeholders to ensure that victims receive the support they need, both locally and internationally.

C. Mainstreaming SH and SEA prevention in IFAD's operations and funded activities (Q3–Q4)

33. The SH/SEA focal point programme and terms of reference will be revised to ensure greater impact and efficiency. Focal points will be provided with updated training and resources, enabling them to engage more effectively with project partners and raise awareness about SH and SEA prevention. The focal point programme was initially launched in 2019 and expanded in 2022 to cover all country offices.

34. These initiatives aim to strengthen IFAD's culture of accountability and demonstrate a commitment to creating a safe and respectful working environment for all personnel and beneficiaries. The policies, risk assessments and awareness-raising initiatives will help embed SH and SEA prevention into IFAD's organizational fabric, while also ensuring that victims are at the heart of IFAD's response strategies.

V. Enhancing operational efficiency

35. **Objective:** Leverage innovative case management tools and collaboration to improve workflow and operational efficiency within ETH and beyond.

36. As ETH is handling an increasing volume of cases and ethical concerns, ensuring smooth and efficient operations will be critical in 2025. In particular, ETH will focus on improving internal processes by adopting new tools and enhancing coordination with other departments.

A. New case management system (Q4)

37. To enhance both efficiency and confidentiality in managing cases, ETH will implement a new case management system. This system will facilitate easier case tracking, collaboration between teams and quicker response times. By offering an integrated platform for case documentation, communication and reporting, the system will optimize workflows and ensure that cases are handled promptly and discreetly.

B. Cross-departmental collaboration (Q1–Q4)

38. ETH will continue to work closely with other departments, particularly PCD, the Office of the General Counsel and AUO, to coordinate responses to ethical concerns,

align on best practices and streamline procedures. Regular cross-departmental meetings will help ensure that all ethics-related initiatives are coordinated effectively, reducing redundancies and optimizing workflows.

C. Collaboration and networking with other organizations (Q1–Q4)

39. ETH will maintain active participation in United Nations inter-agency ethics forums, and those led by IFIs and Member States, ensuring continuous engagement with evolving ethical standards and emerging issues. The office will participate in quarterly meetings of multilateral financial institutions, meetings with the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations, and consultations for the Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (CAPSEAH). It will also take part in meetings of the United Nations Executive Group to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment, meetings of the United Nations SEA prevention working group and meetings with the ethics offices of the sister Rome-based agencies.

40. These platforms provide valuable opportunities to exchange best practices and learn from the experiences of other organizations, fostering the enhancement of IFAD's internal ethics framework. Additionally, ETH will collaborate with other international organizations and United Nations entities through networking initiatives. This ongoing collaboration allows for shared resources, insights and innovative approaches to ethical governance, promoting mutual learning and helping refine internal practices to align with broader institutional objectives.

VI. ETH capacity and resource requirements for 2025

41. ETH is composed of the Chief of Ethics (P-5), a Senior Ethics Officer (P-4) and an Ethics Associate (G-6), all funded by IFAD's regular budget. A newly appointed Ethics Officer (P-3) will join in October 2024 (funded by supplementary funds), bringing the number of staff to four for 2025.

42. The proposed ETH budget for 2025 is US$139,650 for non-staff resources. This will cover the cost of local experts to assist the office, staff travel to raise awareness on ethical matters and SEA, and other core business requirements.

43. ETH's 2025 workplan represents a robust strategy aimed at promoting an ethical culture within IFAD, fostering a safer, more transparent work environment, and ensuring that IFAD is fully equipped to meet the challenges of ethical governance in today's complex operational landscape. Through targeted outreach, training, policy updates and operational improvements, ETH will ensure that ethics remains at the core of IFAD's organizational mission, while continuously striving to enhance its practices and processes.