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REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE PRESIDENT

TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD ON A PROPOSED

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANT

TO THE

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR PROJECT SERVICES (UNOPS)

FOR THE

**FIDAFRIQUE II PROGRAMME: CREATING A REGIONAL INFORMATION
NETWORK IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA**



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I submit the following Report and Recommendation on a proposed technical assistance grant to the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to support the FIDAFRIQUE II Programme: Creating a Regional Information Network in Western and Central Africa, in the amount of USD 1 500 000 for a three-year period.

I. BACKGROUND

1. In addition to traditional production factors (such as labour, capital and land), information and knowledge are increasingly emerging as key elements in rural development. IFAD's strategy recognizes this requirement since IFAD projects regularly include research, training and technical assistance components, and stress participatory approaches and community development activities to enable more efficient use of knowledge and information to the benefit of the rural poor.

2. Development of new information technologies (IT) and increasing integration of the global economy represent important opportunities for substantially improving local communities' and projects' access to information and knowledge. Since 1995 IFAD has developed specific initiatives in this regard. These include (i) the Fidamerica network, designed as an Internet-based knowledge and information system at the service of the rural poor in Latin America and the Caribbean; (ii) the Evaluation Knowledge System aimed at disseminating knowledge gained from IFAD evaluation activities; (iii) Electronic Networking for Rural Asia and Pacific to enhance the ability of IFAD-funded projects in the Asia and Pacific region to address rural poverty and to implement their programmes using the Internet; and (iv) more recently, FIDAFRIQUE, whose objective is to create an Internet-based network among IFAD projects in Western and Central Africa.

3. FIDAFRIQUE was conceived as a two-phased intervention. Phase I, which became effective in April 1999 and is due to close at end 2002, involves: (i) building and/or strengthening computer and telecommunication infrastructure at project level; (ii) providing most isolated projects with up-to-date telecommunication infrastructure to enable their full participation in the network through a 'positive discrimination' approach towards these projects; and (iii) integrating projects in a network to ensure high-quality basic electronic services including technical assistance and training. Given the experience thus far, it is likely that the original target of linking some 30 IFAD projects and 15 IFAD project partners will be surpassed.

4. Phase II of FIDAFRIQUE will continue to work on technical issues of connectivity, enhancing regional capacity to install and maintain IT equipment. It will also venture into the area of developing and disseminating thematic information. In addition, it will put emphasis on building capacity in information management (IM) in IFAD projects and selected regional partner institutions, and ensuring the timely generation of useful information to be used by IFAD project staff and their



partners. This information will be in two broad areas – thematic rural development issues and project management issues.

II. RATIONALE/RELEVANCE TO IFAD

5. IFAD's regional strategy for Western and Central Africa recognizes that "the timely generation and dissemination of knowledge of the dynamics of rural poverty, and effective approaches to reduce it, are crucial to enhancing direct, catalytic impact". The strategy goes on to state that "these efforts must be client-driven, recognizing that categories of partners have different information needs and require dissemination in different forms". These different clients include the rural poor themselves, project staff, civil-society partners, governments, regional organizations and other donor agencies. Further development of the FIDAFRIQUE network is a pivotal element in this strategy.

6. IFAD views this initiative as central to enhancing the effectiveness of its projects in Western and Central Africa. A major role of the programme will be to collect and disseminate information on best practices, and to put project stakeholders with similar interests and problems in contact with each other. FIDAFRIQUE II will seek to build a communications and information-exchange network that links two types of actors:

- **Project staff and their field partners (non-governmental organizations, civil-society and farmers' organizations, contractors)**, who will receive information, training and advice with a view to enhancing their IM and communications-management skills, tapping the potential offered by IT tools and Web applications; and
- **A network of regionally based organizations**, which will be mobilized to offer services and produce content as part of a process to build a truly regional network on rural development and poverty-reduction, and to strengthen capacity. The programme will work with one or more of these regional organizations to strengthen its/their skills so that management of the FIDAFRIQUE network can be transferred to it/them upon completion of Phase II.

III. THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME

7. The overall goal of FIDAFRIQUE II is to improve the impact of IFAD-funded projects through the development and dissemination of information contributing to rural poverty-reduction in the Western and Central Africa region. The target group consists of IFAD project managers and staff, regional stakeholder networks and grass-roots-level representatives of the rural poor and farmers' organizations. The programme seeks to develop IM capacity and products that will directly or indirectly contribute to poverty-reduction in the region via agricultural and rural development.

8. The programme's purpose is to enable IFAD-funded projects in the region and their partners to become more effective in documenting, sharing and using information about good practices in rural development, poverty-reduction and project implementation, primarily through electronic media.

9. By the end of the programme, it is expected that a practical region-specific knowledge and information system will be operational, and used extensively by regional stakeholders. It is also expected that one regionally based institution (or more than one) will be ready to take over programme coordination responsibilities from UNOPS.

10. Specifically, FIDAFRIQUE II will: (i) collect, generate and disseminate information on priority rural development and poverty-reduction themes in the region, and on issues related to increasing the effectiveness of project management; (ii) develop Web-based systems, off-line products and project-level local area network (LAN) systems; (iii) organize training sessions related to IT, IM and



communication skills (modelled on Fidamerica's 'systematization' approach); and (iv) provide network management and maintenance support.

11. Detailed programme outputs appear in the attached logical framework. These include: development and dissemination of Internet-based information, together with information in other forms (CD-ROMs, publications, rural radio transmissions, etc.) relevant to rural development and poverty-reduction; regional and national thematic and training workshops; development of a regional network of technicians capable of installing and maintaining the IT equipment required for enhanced connectivity.

IV. EXPECTED BENEFITS

12. FIDAFRIQUE II will be of direct value to field implementers and client communities. It will provide opportunities to learn from the experience of others by highlighting both processes and results. It will build the capacity of IFAD project staff, regional partners, and grass-roots partners to receive and process feedback and ideas from the communities about their needs. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it will facilitate the development of a culture of information sharing among IFAD, projects, and national and regional partners.

13. Expected benefits include: improved quality of IFAD project documentation and management practices; a greater sharing of knowledge and experiences between IFAD projects and their beneficiaries, and creation of knowledge networks; improved capacity of IFAD project staff, regional partners and grass-roots partners to receive and process feedback and ideas from rural communities. Also, by the end of the programme, it is expected that one regionally based organization or more will be capable of taking over programme coordination responsibilities from UNOPS.

V. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

14. Management and coordination of FIDAFRIQUE II activities will take place at several levels. A programme steering committee will meet at least once a year during the annual planning workshop to approve budget submissions and review other implementation issues. The steering committee will be composed of representatives from IFAD (including project directors from IFAD-supported projects in the region), cooperating institutions, regional partner institutions and farmers' organizations.

15. A small programme coordination unit (PCU) will be located in Dakar, Senegal. Staff of the PCU will consist of an internationally recruited programme coordinator and secretary to be hired with programme funds. UNOPS is well positioned to oversee FIDAFRIQUE activities inasmuch as it has extensive regional coverage and experience with IFAD project implementation issues, including procurement and contracting (UNOPS procured equipment under FIDAFRIQUE I). The Regional Policy Hub – also to be managed by UNOPS – will be housed in the same office in Dakar. This may generate synergies.

16. The PCU will contract the services of a number of regional partner institutions capable of serving as content providers, dissemination agents, and training specialists for best practices in rural development and poverty-reduction practices. Services will include animation of electronic discussions, production and dissemination of information, and organization of training workshops.

17. During Phase II, an explicit plan for the transfer of coordination responsibilities will be developed. In its first year, the programme will work with several regionally based organizations on elaboration of action plans for their involvement in FIDAFRIQUE, within the perspective of eventual transfer of management responsibilities from UNOPS to one or more of these regional institutions.



VI. INDICATIVE PROGRAMME COSTS AND FINANCING

18. Total FIDAFRIQUE costs are estimated at USD 2.1 million (see table below). The IFAD grant contribution is proposed at USD 1.5 million. The budget includes funds to support the regional office in Dakar where the network will be housed during Phase II; related hardware and software procurement; and development of content. A cost-sharing formula is also being introduced whereby IFAD projects make annual contributions to the costs of FIDAFRIQUE operations. This amount will be set at USD 2 000 per project during Phase II of FIDAFRIQUE (totalling approximately USD 210 000 over the life of the programme). These funds will be incorporated into each project's annual workplan and budget and, after proper approvals, will be deposited directly by IFAD to the FIDAFRIQUE programme account in Dakar at the beginning of each year. Project contributions will also consist of travel and per diem costs for regional and national workshops and training sessions. Regional partner institutions will provide in-kind contributions in terms of staff, equipment and office space.

Indicative Costs

Category	IFAD ¹	Projects	Regional Partners	Total
I. Information generation and dissemination	710 900	240 000	48 000	998 900
II. Development of Web-based and off-line systems	267 500	20 000		287 500
III. Connectivity/ hardware/software/ IT	158 750			158 750
IV. Programme management	362 500	90 000		452 500
Annual project contribution ¹		210 000		210 000
Total	1 499 650	560 000	48 000	2 107 650

¹ Annual project contribution will be allocated in equal portions to each of the four components of the IFAD grant.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

19. I recommend that the Executive Board approve the proposed technical assistance grant in terms of the following resolution:

RESOLVED: that the Fund, in order to finance the FIDAFRIQUE II programme: Creating a Regional Information Network in Western and Central Africa – for three years, shall make a grant not exceeding one million five hundred thousand United States dollars (USD 1 500 000) to the United Nations Office for Project Services upon such terms and conditions as shall be substantially in accordance with the terms and conditions presented to the Executive Board in this Report and Recommendation of the President.

Lennart Båge
President

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Narrative Summary	Achievement Indicators	Means of Verification	Critical Assumptions
Goal			
To improve the impact of IFAD-funded projects through development and dissemination of information contributing to rural poverty-reduction in the Western and Central Africa region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFAD projects adapting innovations and knowledge from other projects and external sources • Poor communities, grass-roots organizations and farmers' organizations use information and communications technologies (ICTs) and share knowledge to respond to development challenges more effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Evaluation and Studies (OE) programme evaluation in the third programme year (PY) • Concrete examples exist of IFAD projects adapting innovations and beneficiary groups using FIDAFRIQUE-generated knowledge to improve their welfare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment and involvement of all IFAD project stakeholders in the development of a knowledge-sharing system • IFAD management and staff committed to learning and knowledge-based processes
Purpose			
To enable IFAD-funded projects in the region and their partners to become more effective in documenting, sharing and using information about good practices in rural development, poverty-reduction and project implementation, primarily through electronic media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved quality of project documentation and management practices • IFAD projects and their beneficiaries sharing knowledge and best practices and contributing to creation of knowledge networks • Capacities of IFAD project staff, regional partners and grass-roots partners improved to receive and process feedback and ideas needs from rural communities about their needs • By end of the programme, a regionally based organization or more than one is capable of taking over programme coordination responsibilities from UNOPS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OE programme evaluation in PY 3 • Project reports • Participatory assessments • Active participation in electronic debates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively low cost and potential high benefits of introducing ICT in development projects • Existing knowledge repositories can be adapted for the needs of IFAD projects
Outputs			
1. Collection, generation and dissemination of information on priority rural development and poverty-reduction themes in the region, and on issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One electronic discussion organized each year on a thematic topic identified by the projects • Regional workshops for training and thematic topics (one per year), with all project-generated contributions shared through the FIDAFRIQUE extranet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project reports • Examination of FIDAFRIQUE website, CD-ROMs, publications, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFAD staff, project staff, government officials and rural communities interested in acquiring new knowledge • IFAD staff, project staff, government officials and rural



Narrative Summary	Achievement Indicators	Means of Verification	Critical Assumptions
related to increasing the effectiveness of project management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnostic studies prepared and disseminated on institutional information needs and priorities • National dissemination of selected project contributions in various formats with local support • Descriptive inventory of main online sources posted on the FIDAFRIQUE website • Online thematic gateways posted on FIDAFRIQUE • Information on new postings provided to projects by email (newsletter) through the FIDAFRIQUE network and distributed to broader public by free subscription • Training module developed on Internet use, including instructional aids in both print and online formats • National training workshops organized in 2-3 countries per year • Technical channels organized by FIDAFRIQUE (2-4 per year; ten over the programme's life) • Regular summaries and workshop reports disseminated by email, extranet and CD-ROM 		<p>communities sufficiently motivated to contribute information to the network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient technical infrastructure to support knowledge sharing and local computer applications
2. Web-based systems, off-line products (CD-ROMs, newsletters, etc.) and project-level LAN systems developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified, documented interface for server management established • Group-work module customized for internal project communication and shared management of resources (key documents, internal notes, reports, agenda, address books, etc.) • Applications introduced to automate protection of shared content, update antivirus software and disseminate to all computers connected to LAN • Extranet set up and accessible to project staff and other authorized individuals • FIDAFRIQUE website established and providing content at project, country and thematic levels • CD-ROMs with full content of FIDAFRIQUE Internet information prepared • Training module elaborated on LAN and extranet information management • National training workshops organized in 2-3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project reports • Examination of FIDAFRIQUE website, CD-ROMs, publications, etc. 	





Narrative Summary	Achievement Indicators	Means of Verification	Critical Assumptions										
<p>3. Network management and maintenance support fully operational</p>	<p>countries each year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country visits (total 20 visits of 4-8 days each) carried out to install servers and applications, set up LAN, train selected project staff in LAN administration and use Local hardware and software maintenance “point persons” identified Three emergency visits per year to ensure rapid replacement of servers in case of failure Help-desk service established and operational FIDAFRIQUE server operating and offering good performance and adequate security Mirror server for FIDAFRIQUE established on Environment and Development Action’s technical platform by end of PY2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acceptable physical infrastructure exists in most project offices to properly house computer equipment (project offices secure from the elements, reliable electricity supply, etc.) 										
<p>4. Effective Programme management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNOPS-based programme coordinator and secretary recruited and in place by middle of PY1 IFAD-based Associate Professional Officer recruited Agreements signed with collaborators Action plan for eventual transfer of FIDAFRIQUE management established early in PY2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project reports Collaborator agreements and contracts Action plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff recruited under FIDAFRIQUE are competent and motivated Key collaborators committed to taking a long-term role in FIDAFRIQUE development Agreements can be concluded with partner institutions with minimal delays 										
Activities/Inputs													
<p>1. Information generation and dissemination 2. Development of LAN, web-based and off-line systems and dissemination materials 3. Connectivity and network management support 4. Programme management</p>	<table border="0"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th style="text-align: right;"><u>Contribution (USD)</u></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>IFAD</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 500 000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Projects</td> <td style="text-align: right;">560 000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Regional partners</td> <td style="text-align: right;">48 000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2 108 000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		<u>Contribution (USD)</u>	IFAD	1 500 000	Projects	560 000	Regional partners	48 000	Total	2 108 000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project reports Financial data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding made available in sufficient amounts and in timely fashion
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