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Executive Board

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.

Technical questions:

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I. Introduction

1. IFAD is committed to ensuring that all individuals, including staff members, non-staff personnel and people involved in IFAD's activities and operations, are treated with dignity and respect. Therefore, IFAD plays a proactive role in the United Nations system that cooperatively implements the special measures stipulated by the United Nations Secretary-General for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and the bulletin addressing discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment (SH), and abuse of authority.
2. Since April 2018, the IFAD SH/SEA task force¹ has dedicated its efforts to combating all types of sexual misconduct and developing initiatives that raise awareness and promote a culture of ethics, respect and accountability.
3. The SH/SEA task force reiterates its responsibility to prevent and protect against SH and SEA by regularly reporting to the Executive Board² on the implementation of IFAD's SH/SEA action plans.
4. Since the release of the IFAD's 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. In 2023, IFAD completed the implementation cycle of the action plan approved for 2022–2023 (annex I).

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

A. Prevention and response

5. As reported to the Executive Board in the last update, the Ethics Office (ETH) is taking the necessary steps and is focused on strengthening IFAD's policies and procedures to respond to the latest recommendations of the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit and other identified international best practices. Thus, significant attention has been paid to enhancing the SH/SEA policy's focus on a victim-centred approach and reinforcing the zero-tolerance policy. This effort is still ongoing. It is worth recognizing the exhaustive analysis that has contributed to the policy initiative because of its function as a legal framework guiding IFAD's actions on preventing and responding to SH and SEA and defining the roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders participating in IFAD's activities and operations.
6. Moreover, ETH continues to take all the measures available to protect victims of SH and SEA. It raises awareness about IFAD's core values of respect, integrity, professionalism and focus on results, the Code of Conduct, and the principles embedded in the current SH/SEA policy by ensuring that IFAD staff and non-staff complete the mandatory ETH courses on the Code of Conduct, anti-harassment awareness, which includes SH, and the training on preventing and responding to SEA, as well as the respective refresher courses.
7. In 2023, over 1,000 IFAD staff and non-staff completed the mandatory SH/SEA training and the standalone module on SH in the workplace, either upon appointment or through the refresher programme (a 98 per cent rate of completion). In addition, over 1,500 project staff members received classroom training on SH/SEA delivered by ETH in 26 events for IFAD's operations worldwide.
8. Continuing with the standard practice that commenced in 2018, ETH liaises on an ongoing basis with staff in IFAD offices and with third parties/implementing partners.

¹ The task force is led by the Chief of the Ethics Office and composed of representatives of the Office of the General Counsel, Human Resources Division, Office of Audit and Oversight, the Communications Division, Programme Management Department and Corporate Services Department.

² 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](#), [EB 2023/138/R.11](#), [EB 2023/OR/5](#).

This includes engaging with them through live SH and SEA training at project start-up workshops. Relevant multilingual materials developed specially 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 systematically distributed to all participants, either in electronic or in paper format, ahead of each of the training sessions. This enables participants to familiarize themselves with the content and to actively participate in the Q&A session at the end of the presentations.

9. To encourage individuals to make a report of suspected SH or SEA even when fear of retaliation is high, IFAD has strengthened its reporting channels, allowing for anonymous reporting. In the fourth quarter (Q4) 2023, ETH completed a set of anonymous reporting forms available in three official languages: [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).
10. As in previous years, IFAD participated in the United Nations SEA survey, which is carried out by the Office of the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to SEA. The survey was conducted in duty stations identified by the United Nations as having a high risk of SEA. The 2023 survey was forwarded to 320 IFAD staff members (21 per cent more than in 2022) in over 40 selected duty stations. In all, 168 staff – 89 women and 79 men – responded to the survey, thus maintaining the 2022 completion rate of more than 50 per cent. Key results are as follows:
 - (i) Overall, the survey results applicable to IFAD are consistent with the 2022 survey and continue to show a generally positive trend in terms of understanding and recognition of SH/SEA IFAD’s policy, and the individual duties and responsibilities of the respondents in the selected duty stations.
 - (ii) Respondents reported a clear understanding of SEA policies in IFAD (98 per cent), and 99 per cent concurred that IFAD takes the zero-tolerance stance for SEA seriously.
 - (iii) More than 99 per cent of respondents indicated that they understood the prohibitions around SEA.
 - (iv) Participants were aware that it was not acceptable to engage in sexual relations with someone under the age of 18, even with their consent.
 - (v) In all, 98 per cent of respondents indicated their organization takes action to prevent SEA, and 95.5 per cent considered that their organization provided information on how to report SEA, as well as where to direct/refer victims of SEA (92 per cent).
 - (vi) The survey indicated that 98 per cent of respondents believe that IFAD would ensure that personnel who engage in the act of transactional sex, rape or sex with children will face disciplinary action (as compared to 95 per cent in 2022).
 - (vii) Respondents indicated that they would report acts of SEA involving colleagues and personnel employed by other United Nations entities (97 per cent).
 - (viii) Again, 96 per cent of respondents considered that their organization provided clear information on how to report SEA, while 87 per cent said they would report without fear of retaliation (this was a decrease from 92 per cent in 2022).
11. Following the appointment of the new Chief of the Ethics Office and the Senior Ethics Officer in 2023, it has been observed that IFAD personnel increased the use of ETH’s services. Thus, ETH has enhanced its impact on IFAD’s personnel, increased overall awareness of the IFAD SH/SEA policy, and prioritized efforts to reduce the risk of IFAD personnel being exposed to sexual misconduct.
12. In Q4 2023, ETH cooperated with the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), providing the information necessary to conduct the

organizational assessment. MOPAN's assessment covers four areas of organizational effectiveness: strategic management, operational management, relationship management and performance management, and results. It is expected that specific recommendations will be made on SH and SEA.

13. Furthermore, in Q4 2023, ETH consolidated its collaboration with the Latin America and the Caribbean Division (LAC) and the Change, Delivery and Innovation Unit (CDI) through the "Top Secret Helpline" innovation initiative. During its first phase, the initiative conducted a behavioural science investigation into the barriers that IFAD personnel face when reporting SH/SEA. The final report of the investigation will be issued in 2024. Upon its release, ETH has undertaken to make the changes needed to address the recommendations included in the report with a view to enhancing the current processes. During 2024, the partnership between ETH, LAC and CDI will continue to explore the possibilities of developing a mobile app to bolster IFAD's programmes of work regarding SH and SEA.
14. Finally, the end of Q4 2023 was marked by a milestone; the Ethics Charter was approved by the Executive Board at its 140th session. Extensive internal consultations were necessary to achieve the approval of the Charter and the updated Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee, which now has general oversight over the ethics function. The newly approved Ethics Charter strengthens the independence of the ethics function and improves IFAD's organizational integrity and risk management.

III. Conclusion

15. In Q4 2023, ETH closed the implementation cycle of its 2022–2023 SH/SEA action plan with significant progress towards an organization that effectively prevents and responds to SH and SEA. For 2024, IFAD has identified new initiatives and committed to consolidating the Fund's capacity to combat misconduct, including sexual misconduct, while providing support for victims and whistle-blowers.
16. Fighting SH/SEA is an ongoing endeavour that can only be fulfilled through substantial cooperation with key stakeholders to increase ETH's capacity to support individuals involved in IFAD's activities and operations.
17. Henceforth, ETH's ambition remains focused on ramping up its work to address SH and SEA, leveraging and measuring the progress and impact of SH and SEA mechanisms and revising relevant procedures where appropriate, to align with international best practices, while at the same time adapting them to better suit IFAD's context. Thus, ETH remains accountable for promoting such practices and enabling IFAD personnel and all individuals working on projects financed by IFAD to stand by the Fund's mandate and the SH and SEA policy.

2022–2023 action plan – IFAD's Policy to Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment (SH), Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)

	Actions	Status	Planned actions (2022–2023)
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 in 2022/2023: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January – April 2022 start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 18 January, Mali – 19 February, Nepal – 26 February, Pakistan – 8 March, Congo – 16 March, Sri Lanka – 17 March, Morocco – 1 April, Sri Lanka – 4 April, Gabon – 13 April, Tajikistan • May – August 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 17 May, Central African Republic – 24 May, Kenya – 7 June, Argentina – 9 June, Lesotho – 14 June, Cambodia – 22 June, Côte d'Ivoire – 27 June, Maldives – 29 June, Cuba – 28 July, Rwanda – 4 August, Nigeria – 9 August, Angola September – December 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 28 September, Sri Lanka – 12 October, India – 3 November, Zimbabwe – 7 December, Benin – 21 December, Somalia • January – April 2023 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 16 January, Viet Nam – 7 February, Côte d'Ivoire – 24 February, Cambodia – 14 March, Tajikistan – 28 March, Côte d'Ivoire – 28 March, Ethiopia – 29 March, Haiti – 29 March, Ecuador – 4 April, Ghana • May – August 2023 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 9 May, Mexico 	Completed	Continuous

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2022–2023)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 18 May, Brazil – 23 June, Democratic Republic of the Congo – 29 June, Congo – 26 July, Türkiye – 2 August, Mali – 15 August, Nigeria – 28 August, Bhutan • September – December 2023 - start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 7 September, Lao People's Democratic Republic – 25 September, Kenya – 4 October, Ecuador – 17 October, Nigeria – 8 November, Bangladesh – 8 November, Democratic Republic of the Congo – 4 December, Democratic Republic of the Congo – 4 December, Ghana – 12 December, Madagascar 		
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
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.	Completed	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.	Completed	2023
SH/SEA victim and affected persons support mechanisms	With the support of SH/SEA focal points in-country, identify 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asia and the Pacific (APR) - Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) - Near East, North Africa and Europe (NEN) - East and Southern Africa (ESA) - West and Central Africa (WCA) 	Completed	2022
	Manage SH/SEA focal point programme. Train 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

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2022–2023)</i>
Strategic area IV: Coordination and cooperation			
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	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
Chief Executives Board for Coordination (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