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Synthesis of Evaluations of FAO's Regional and Subregional Offices

MANAGEMENT VIEWS

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1. FAO Management welcomes the *Synthesis of the evaluations of FAO's regional and subregional offices* and appreciates the opportunity to offer its views on the issues identified, as called for by the Programme Committee at its 115th session.¹ The document will contribute to FAO's continued strengthening of its decentralized offices, the coherence of their work with corporate and national priorities, and their impact in delivering results.
2. The document presents a synthesis of five evaluations carried out from 2009-2013, an eventful period of wide-ranging change, and which placed emphasis on the structure, capacity and changing roles and responsibilities of the decentralized offices. Many of the most salient elements of transformational change address the themes of the report and there has been considerable progress in these areas, as highlighted in the report.
3. Given the time that has passed, Management welcomes the updated information presented, as well as the report's forward-looking analysis. This focuses, appropriately in Management's view, on three main questions: i) has the decentralization process led to better response to country needs; ii) have the priority-setting, programming and delivery mechanisms adapted to current needs; iii) has the capacity of decentralized offices improved service through decentralization? These issues have been highlighted in the discussions of the previous evaluations, and continue to coincide with Management's priorities.
4. Management broadly supports the conclusions in each of these three areas, believes they are in line with the ongoing approach to enhance the impact of FAO's results on the ground, and reflect ongoing initiatives for improvement. Management also agrees that the improvement process is still work in progress and welcomes the findings and lessons learned contained in the report.
5. Management accepts the three recommendations, recognizing that they contain complex implementation issues that will require further discussion.
6. The first one recommends Management and Members "to consider the review of country coverage and the location of regional and subregional offices and, if agreed, to discuss a set of criteria to guide the process." Management notes that efforts in the past to agree with criteria of this nature have not been successful, but notes the opportunity to review office coverage and location, taking into consideration any guidance that Members may provide.
7. The second recommendation calls for improving the quality of Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) and ensuring their coherence with corporate priorities, and a number of steps have been taken in this regard. As highlighted in the Mid-Term Review 2014,² these include the development of an integrated approach to programme planning, delivery and monitoring and reporting based on evidence, joining up all layers of the Organization including the country level; and the revision of procedures for Country Programming and the Project Cycle to strengthen the strategic focus and reduce transaction costs. In addition, while responsibility for direct support to country offices in formulating CPFs remains with regional and subregional offices, corporate responsibility for oversight of the CPF process was recently moved from OSD to OSP, which Management believes will better ensure coherence with corporate priorities.
8. The third recommendation signals the need to further facilitate and empower decentralized offices to achieve desirable levels and skill mix of their human resources. Several measures are planned. Management agrees and the proposed PWB 2016-17³ strengthens capacity of regional and subregional offices to support countries in key technical areas. These include nutrition, crop production and protection, animal health, statistics, legal aspects and programme development, among others. A more challenging issue, highlighted in the report, is the need to improve contractual conditions of (mainly but not only) project-funded FAO national employees working outside of long-term contracts. In part, the problems arise from the timing and duration of project funding (as opposed to longer-term programme funding, for example). Management plans will carry out a review of these issues, clarifying and training staff on recently updated human resource policy and procedure changes and looking for ways to address the underlying problems.

¹ CL 149/5 para. 7

² PC 117/5 - FC 157/8

³ C 2015/3