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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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Peer Review of the Evaluation Function of FAO

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

As regards the Peer Review Report:

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As regards Management's observations

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1. The Peer Review of the Evaluation Function of FAO was commissioned in line with the Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation, which requires a biennial peer review of "conformity of evaluation work to best practice and standards".¹ It was carried out between January and June 2012 by a panel of professional evaluators and was conducted in line with the UN Evaluation Group's Framework for Professional Reviews of the Evaluation Function of UN Organizations.
2. This cover page provides a summary of key issues of the *Peer Review of the Evaluation Function in FAO* (PC 112/6) and *Management's observations* (PC 112/6 Sup.1) for the attention and guidance of the Programme Committee.
3. In line with the Charter,² the report is being presented to the Director-General and the relevant Governing Bodies.

Key issues of the Peer Review of the Evaluation function of FAO

4. The report concludes that in comparison with many UN agencies, FAO has a mature evaluation function with considerable experience, reflecting its establishment in 1968. The report highlights that significant progress has been made over the past two years in implementing the evaluation-related IPA recommendations. Moreover, the report notes that along with UNDP's Evaluation Office and IFAD's Office of Evaluation, the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) is the most functionally independent evaluation office across the UN family.
5. The Executive Summary of the Peer Review highlights findings on the three key aspects of evaluation in FAO: its utility, its credibility and its independence. It makes nine recommendations, three of which are addressed to OED, three to the Director-General and OED, two to the Programme Committee, and one to all three parties. While Recommendation 1 to 6 relate to the Utility and Credibility, Recommendations 7 and 8 relate to amendments to the Charter for the Office of Evaluation, and Recommendation 9 relates to the application of administrative rules.
6. Within the approach adopted for the Peer Review, the report indicates that the most significant limitation was the lack of consultation with key external stakeholders, in particular government and NGO cooperating partners based in partner countries and a wider range of FAO staff directly affected by the evaluations. The review focused on the systems and approaches for identifying, implementing and using evaluations to the governing bodies; country evaluations and project evaluations were not examined in great detail.
7. The report suggests that the Peer Review's main limitations and issues might be more thoroughly covered in a future evaluation of the evaluation function of FAO. Those limitations and issues are covered in detail under Sections 2.4 and 8.2 respectively of the report. The report also highlights that it was not a formal evaluation rather it was less comprehensive and in-depth than an independent evaluation would have been.

Key issues of Management's observations

8. The Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation does not provide for a Management Response to the Peer Review. However, this was foreseen in the process of preparation of the Peer Review and Management welcomes the opportunity to make these observations.
9. Management draws governing bodies' attention to limitations related to the methodology used and scope of the Peer Review itself. This is important as, on one hand, the Peer Review rightly qualifies itself as not being a comprehensive and an in-depth exercise, and as being based on a "light" process and, on the other hand, invites Management, OED and the governing bodies to act upon a number of far-reaching recommendations.
10. Management is concerned that the Peer Review may have missed fundamental features of the evaluation function of FAO and, in particular, of its inter-relationship with all other oversight functions and decision-making mechanisms.

¹ Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation; VI Para 30

² Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation; VI Para 31

11. The normal operation of all oversight structures, seen together, has resulted in a sense, within the Secretariat, of disconnection between, on the one hand, the capacity of all oversight structures and mechanisms to produce reports and recommendations and “over-analyze” FAO and, on the other hand, the ability of the Organization’s administration and technical services to support ongoing initiatives and, once completed, to review and implement the recommendations emerging from those exercises. These oversight functions have established mechanisms to follow up the implementation of these recommendations. There seems to be reason to believe that, in itself, the large number of recommendations produced is incompatible with their strategic use, both by the Secretariat and the governing bodies themselves, notwithstanding, in the case of the Programme Committee, additional sessions devoted to consideration of evaluation reports, management responses, and follow-up documents on recommendations. It is unclear whether recommendations are effectively integrated in priority setting and results-based management and there could be a risk that both Management and the governing bodies may be unable to prioritize, differentiate among the recommendations which could become ultimately equivalent and interchangeable.

12. For its part, Management sees the Peer Review as a starting point for a future comprehensive and in-depth assessment of all oversight functions, including the evaluation function, which resulted from decisions taken by the governing bodies a few years ago. Therefore it is suggested that, both Management and the membership, refrain from any action based on the Peer Review until a fuller assessment is conducted.

13. An overarching objective of the assessment should be to determine whether oversight structures are useful for learning, decision-making and accountability, with recommendations oriented to the better attainment of these goals. Management also considers that such an exercise should be carried out in a context involving, in a suitable manner, both governing bodies and Management. There might be merit in involving in the exercise other oversight units and functions for greater cost efficiency. Therefore, it would be most desirable to involve in the exercise other oversight functions and the Finance Committee, which has, over the years performed important responsibilities in this area. Pending completion of this exercise it might be useful, as far as practicable, to consider a reduction in the number of evaluations, so that both Management and governing bodies could devote common efforts to a reassessment of the situation.

Guidance Sought

14. The Programme Committee is invited to
- a. take note of the Peer Review and Management’s observations;
 - b. endorse the proposed comprehensive assessment of the evaluation function, seen in relation to all other oversight units and functions within the Organization, to be carried out as soon as possible in an inclusive manner, involving governing bodies, Management, including concerned oversight functions of the Organization.

15. Without pre-judging the outcome of the proposed comprehensive assessment of the evaluation function in the context of all FAO oversight functions, which should be initiated as soon as possible, and subject to the views of the Programme Committee, Management submits that there might be merit in putting on hold the recruitment process of the new Director of Evaluation, whose four years’ term would start from 1 September 2013. As necessary, consideration could be given to appointing an interim Director, who would work under the current framework governing the function set out in the Charter. The Programme Committee is invited to advise on this matter.