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Agenda item 15

Decentralization and Decentralized Offices Network

1. At the 144th session of the Council in June 2012¹ and in response to the document entitled *Structure and functioning of the decentralized offices network*² Members endorsed proposals organized in three broad areas: (a) improved planning and priority setting; (b) improvements in the decentralized offices network; and (c) an integrated model for programme delivery, including the integration of development, emergency and rehabilitation activities, as well as more strategic use of Technical Cooperation Programme resources, and improved human resources management for enhanced performance, accountability and country-level impact. The present document updates the progress made in each of these areas.

2. FAO has made progress in transferring responsibilities to the decentralized offices network, however full transfer of authority beyond the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) to the country level is still in progression. This work is still on-going and is consistent with the phased approach that FAO has taken towards decentralization. Further decentralization has hinged on the recruitment and training of a cadre of FAO Representatives (FAORs) who were able to absorb the additional responsibilities, and progress has been sustained.

3. The Asia and the Pacific Region (RAP) has made considerable progress in implementing the proposals endorsed by Members at the 144th session of the Council in June 2012. Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) in all countries of the Region have been completed with linkages to Regional Priorities and Reviewed Strategic Objectives. International staff positions in three countries (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Mongolia, and Papua New Guinea) and four national officer positions in the Pacific Sub-Region (i.e., Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu,) have been established and, in many cases, filled. Integration of emergency and development activities at the country level under the leadership of the FAOR has been completed in all countries of the Region.

¹ CL 144/REP paragraphs 17-22

² CL 144/15

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A. Improved planning and priority setting

4. Members have highlighted the critical importance of improved planning and strengthened priority setting at country and other levels. Good progress has been made in this area, both in terms of rolling-out CPFs and their integration into broader corporate planning processes, including linkages to TCPs.

5. CPFs have been concluded largely as planned, but more importantly, they now need to be seen in light of their role within the reviewed Strategic Framework and its planning and programming approach. To date, out of 34 countries expected to have a CPF in the Asia-Pacific region³, 28 countries have completed them – in 4 cases after completing one National Medium Term Priority Framework (NMTPF) cycle. The existing NMTPFs are still valid in the remaining 6 countries, of which 3 are currently engaged in formulating CPFs for the second cycle. The CPFs, as desired, provide a solid basis for identifying country priorities for FAO collaboration, in line with government strategic plans and the broader UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs).

6. The CPFs play a key role in the implementation of the reviewed Strategic Framework. As the earlier Council document pointed out, "the decentralization process can only be truly successful when FAO's field activities are seamlessly connected to its global public goods; the two are necessary complements, not competing objectives".⁴ The reviewed Strategic Framework and programming process, including input from the CPFs, address this explicitly. Implementation of the new results-based framework will begin in 2014, but the work by the Strategic Objectives Teams that are leading the planning process and the development of the results framework is well advanced. It is the practical result of what the Council supported, "a direct line-of-sight from the top downwards and the bottom upwards [...] The revamped strategic planning process is the foundation for defining country-level "impact pathways" to ensure that global public goods are translated by FAO decentralized staff and collaborating institutions into country-level results in new settings, while the global public goods produced by FAO headquarters colleagues also build on country-level experience."⁵

7. The 148th session of the FAO Council approved TCP enhancement measures expressing its support "to the alignment of the enhanced Technical Cooperation Programme to the reviewed strategic framework and the bottom up alignment to national priorities through Country Programming Frameworks (CPF)" . As part of the implementation of the Strategic Framework, activities funded from the Regular Programme as well as TCP resources and voluntary contributions should gradually converge and be aligned with the Strategic Objectives and their action plans. In this context, CPFs are to identify the priorities that guide the mobilization of resources, including the TCP. At country level, the alignment of the TCP to the Strategic Framework is thus to be ensured through the CPF process. During the CPF formulation and implementation phase the FAOR will highlight under the strategic priorities identified, and in consultation with counterparts, those outputs and/or activities which could be achieved through TCP contributions. The indicative TCP pipeline will be added as an Annex to the CPF document and included in its resource mobilization plan.

B. Improvements in the decentralized offices network

FAO Representations

8. Following Council endorsement in June 2012, of the need for stronger and enhanced FAO presence in the countries, international Deputy FAOR posts were created for Mongolia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (with the FAOR based in China continuing to be the FAO Representative), and the post of Programme Development Officer was created and fielded for Papua New Guinea.

³ The 14 Pacific Island member countries making up the decentralized offices network have one combined Programming Framework.

⁴ CL 144/15 paragraph 2

⁵ CL 144/15 paragraph 11

9. Additionally, as part of the integration between emergency, rehabilitation and development operations at the country level, one Deputy FAOR post, funded through extra-budgetary resources, has been created (Bangladesh). This has proven to be very beneficial for resource mobilization, programme delivery and engagement in interagency processes. There are plans to expand this number to an additional two countries (Afghanistan and Pakistan) where the size of the programme justifies and permits such a strengthening of the office structure.

10. Contacts, either at FAO headquarters or through missions, have taken place with member countries that have requested a stronger presence of FAO and an expansion of activities through more partnership and liaison activities, possible new funding arrangements and either a new presence or a modification of the scope of the existing one. Among these, in the Asia and the Pacific Region are: i) Tonga and Vanuatu that have already signed new agreements for enhanced FAO presence, whereas draft agreements are awaiting government approval in Fiji and Solomon Islands; ii) the Republic of Korea, with which discussions have recently started for an FAO presence; and iii) China, India and Indonesia that have had preliminary contacts with the Organization.

11. This has enabled FAO to respond quickly to the country in providing policy advice, including interaction with donors and civil society organizations in mobilizing resources in support of the Agriculture sector and rural development. FAO presence in some countries especially in the Pacific sub-region, while better than before, is still very basic and requires further strengthening in terms of human and financial resources and training. The change in the role and scope of the present presence in China, India and Indonesia would promote the use of their national capacities for agriculture development in other countries under the South-South Cooperation and similar mechanisms. It should be noted that this process is in line with the request from the governing bodies to ensure that member countries contribute in a significant manner to the strengthening of the decentralized network. This joint effort with member countries will be pursued throughout the 2014-2015 biennium.

Resource, office and programme management

12. In addition to these staffing changes, another major innovation has been the full roll-out of the Global Resource Management System (GRMS) in all country offices in the Region integrating FAO country office administrative and financial information with headquarters and regional office information system which is a fundamental element of improved performance and vital for support to country-level operations from all parts of the Organization.

13. This information is now part of the enhanced performance management process, along with other elements to systematically monitor FAO's effectiveness at country level. The launch of GRMS has generated requirements for staff training in the country offices which was provided when the system was launched. Continued support to the country offices from the Regional Office, and the headquarters offices charged with implementing and improving GRMS, would be needed together with periodic refresher trainings to ensure smooth running of the system.

14. Skills mix reviews were undertaken by regional and subregional offices to ensure that their staffing structures matched the priorities of the countries and regions and were aligned with the work plans of Strategic Objectives. In response to the 31st APRC recommendations and to reflect emerging needs and priorities in the region, RAP's technical skill mix was adjusted by establishing new posts. They are: Senior Agricultural Officer (rice expert), Rural Development and Institution Officer (including social protection and gender), Nutrition Officer, Agricultural Mechanization Officer, Climate Change and Bioenergy Officer, Land Tenure Officer, Partnership Programme Officer, South-South Cooperation Officer, etc. In the Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands, two P-3 posts (Food and Nutrition Officer and Forest Resources Management Officer) were upgraded to P-4, while a new P-4 Fisheries Officer (marine resources management) was established to strengthen its technical capacity. FAO management has continued work begun in 2012 to strengthen the capacity of regional and sub-regional offices to align staffing with the demands from countries, agreed regional priorities and the reviewed Strategic Framework and emerging work plans.

C. An integrated model for programme delivery

15. In January 2012, the Organization decided to transfer operational responsibilities for emergency and rehabilitation programmes from headquarters under the lead of the Emergency and Rehabilitation Division (TCE) to decentralized offices, under the overall responsibilities of the ADG/Regional Representative. A time-bound plan for the transfer to decentralized offices was endorsed by the 144th session of the FAO Council⁶ implying a gradual transfer of the emergency portfolio, which was completed by December 2012.

16. In moving towards an integrated model, the Asia and the Pacific Region was a region where a large emergency portfolio existed and was the flagship example to achieve a fully integrated model of decentralizing emergency. This transfer took place through some key milestones such as the country capacity assessments in the first and second quarter of 2012 and pilot country transfers that took place in the second quarter of 2012. This process was supported by a Regional Workshop on decentralization and integration, held in RAP in May 2012, prior to the roll-out and transfer of the remainder of the country portfolios by the end of December 2012.

17. During August and September 2012, three emergency officers were transferred from HQ to RAP to support an integrated delivery model. Starting in October 2012, all Country Programme Officers in the Field Programme Group (FPG) at RAP were provided with the same post description which integrates operational support for emergency and development portfolios of their respective countries. This integration process provided a positive learning experience for all those involved as it entailed a knowledge transfer from emergency to development programme experience and vice versa.

18. RAP is delivering an integrated model for programme delivery that is being strengthened by recruitment of Deputy FAORs, and through support from officers in FAO's Investment Centre Division (TCI), Resource Mobilization and Partnership and South-South Cooperation groups. This model promotes effective integration of developmental and emergency-relief and rehabilitation programmes into a comprehensive country programme.

19. Transition in the FAO Representation calls for strengthening its capacity for developing an "emergency ready country office" which will include geographic information and an infographic support unit as core in addition to strengthening development activities for national disaster management units (i.e. improving technological basis such as application of information and communications technologies for rapid data collection and appraisal; quick analysis and strategy development; early warning protocols; and response protocols across major emergency threats such as flood, earthquake, drought, animal diseases, pest outbreaks).

⁶ CL 144/15