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CONFERENCE

Forty-second Session

2021

Interim Report on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System

Executive Summary

The Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) is the mechanism through which the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) “establishes key system-wide strategic policy orientations and operational modalities for the development cooperation and country-level modalities of the United Nations development system” (UNDS).

In December 2020, the UNGA adopted a new resolution ([75/233](#)) on the QCPR of UN operational activities for development that builds on, and continues the work of the 2016 QCPR resolution (71/243) towards an effective, efficient and coherent UN development system. In May 2018, the UNGA had also approved Resolution 72/279 on the “Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system”.

The Conference has requested the Director-General to take action to implement the UNGA resolutions on the QCPR. This is the eighth progress report presented to the Conference, addressing: (a) funding of operational activities for development; (b) efficiency, effectiveness and FAO’s participation in the UN system coordination mechanisms; (c) other areas of relevance to FAO; and (d) emerging trends.

This report focuses on FAO’s implementation of the 2016 QCPR, while also presenting initial trends related to the 2020 QCPR.

Suggested action by the Conference

The Conference is invited to take note of FAO’s progress in the implementation of the QCPR Resolution.

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I. Introduction

1. The QCPR is the primary policy instrument of the UNGA defining the way the UNDS operates to support countries in their development efforts. The UNGA resolutions on the “Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System”, issued in 2004, 2007, 2012, 2016 and 2020¹ are cumulative in nature. In December 2020, the General Assembly (GA) adopted a new resolution (75/233) on the QCPR. The resolution builds on the intensive intergovernmental negotiations over the longer-term positioning of the UN development system and places an unprecedented focus on supporting Members in accelerating progress towards the SDGs.

2. The FAO Conference Resolutions 13/2005 and 2/2007 requested the Director-General to take action for the implementation of these UNGA Resolutions. The Conference reviewed progress reports at its regular sessions in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019.² The present report covers FAO main milestones and achievements in QCPR implementation during the period **from June 2019 to June 2021**.

3. During the period covered by the report, FAO introduced a set of far-reaching transformational changes, in the form of programmatic, managerial and structural adjustments to ensure an organization that is fit-for-purpose, modern, inclusive and agile, while preserving technical capacity, and ready to rise to the challenges outlined by the QCPR. FAO’s vision and work are aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (hereafter referred to as the 2030 Agenda) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind is at the core of FAO’s new Strategic Framework 22-31. Finally, the report also includes a short section at the end of the document highlighting those areas that are new or are viewed with a renewed emphasis in the recently-approved 2020 QCPR Resolution.

A. FUNDING OF FAO’S OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Addressing the challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic

4. During 2020, FAO devoted unprecedented efforts to supporting Members in addressing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, leveraging its role as a unique multilateral player to address the critical interlinkages among health, trade, finance and economic and social development. In July 2020, as part of the UN efforts for a sustainable response to the COVID-19 pandemic, FAO launched a major programme to respond to the impacts of the pandemic, the FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme. The Programme is designed to proactively and sustainably address the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic from a food security and nutrition perspective. FAO identified seven key priority areas of action³: (a) Global humanitarian response plan; (b) Data for decision-making; (c) Economic inclusion and social protection to reduce poverty; (d) Trade and food safety standards; (e) Boosting smallholder resilience for recovery; (f) Preventing the next zoonotic pandemic; and (g) Food systems transformation.

5. Thus far, FAO’s COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme has attracted about USD 231 million in approvals and pledges, equal to approximately 18 percent of the total appeal as at 15 January 2021.

¹ 59/250 (TCPR 2004), 62/208 (TCPR 2007), 67/226 (QCPR 2012), 71/243 (QCPR 2016), 75/233 (QCPR 2020)

² C 2007/17; C 2009/14; C 2011/26; C 2013/28; C 2015/29; C 2017/27; [C 2019/26](#).

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/ne124en/ne124en.pdf>.

Diversification and improvement of the donor base
[Paragraph 35 of GA resolution 71/243]

6. In 2020, FAO mobilized a total of USD 1.285 billion in voluntary contributions. This represents an increase of 14 percent compared with the average for the same period from 2016 to 2019.
7. FAO Members contributed 61 percent of all voluntary contributions in 2020. United Nations Organizations contributed 13 percent, while 19 percent was received from vertical fund partners. High-income countries accounted for approximately 54 percent of total contributions, upper-middle income countries accounted for three percent, while low and lower-middle income countries each accounted for two percent of contributions. Emergency projects attracted 47 percent of all resources mobilized in 2020, with the remaining 53 percent directed towards development projects.
8. In 2020, FAO attracted 20 new resource partners compared to the 2008-19 period. Most of the new contributions came from the non-OECD DAC⁴ resource partners.
9. Approvals in 2020 were mainly driven by contributions to Chile, Somalia and Yemen, which together represented 18 percent of total funding. FAO has been significantly increasing its engagement with climate-related financial instruments; for instance, in Chile, the main resource partner was the Green Climate Fund (GCF).
10. Global and interregional projects have attracted a total of USD 458 million, and combined with the top three recipients, this has accounted for 54 percent of all voluntary contributions this year.
11. Following the revamping and improvements of both the Flexible Funding Mechanism (FMM) and the Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF) in the last three years, FAO has seen increasing interest from resource partners to contribute to these mechanisms. For example, the FMM resource partner base expanded from four in 2018 to nine in 2020, and a total of USD 57 million had been mobilized for the new phase of the FMM (2018-2021), as of December 2020.
12. In summary, despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, FAO still managed to mobilize USD 1.285 billion in voluntary contributions in 2020. In 2020, there was an upsurge of contributions from the GCF, providing the highest level of contributions, amounting to USD 211 million, all of which was directed to development-related activities. The United States of America was FAO's second largest contributor, providing USD 158 million (of which 95 percent was directed to emergency projects) followed by the European Union, contributing USD 122 million (of which 54 percent was for emergency projects). These top three resource partners accounted for 38 percent of all voluntary contributions in 2020. FAO's fourth top partner in 2020 was Germany, which provided USD 88 million to emergency Desert Locust response in Ethiopia and addressing COVID-19 impacts in Afghanistan.
13. Investments leveraged under existing partnership arrangements with FAO (e.g. World Bank, International Fund for Agricultural (IFAD), African Development Bank (AfDB), Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) increased in 2020 despite the COVID-19 crisis, to reach USD 6.6 billion up from USD 5.7 billion. South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) also increased with contributions from China, the Republic of Korea and Turkey. The current portfolio of SSTC includes Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with a wide range of institutions.

⁴ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) - Development Assistance Committee (DAC)

B. IMPROVED FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM AND FAO'S PARTICIPATION IN THE UN SYSTEM COORDINATION MECHANISMS

United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (Cooperation Framework) and FAO Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) [Paragraphs 39; 48; 50 of GA resolution 71/243]

14. In 2019, FAO had updated the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) guidelines, in order for the planning and programming instrument at country level to be fully derived from the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (Cooperation Framework), as required by the United Nations Development System Reform.
15. FAO is reviewing its CPF Guidelines to integrate the new developments of the 'Cooperation Framework Companion Package' issued in 2020⁵, and to assess the implications of and reflect any required adjustments to the FAO Medium Term Plan (MTP) 2022-25.
16. FAO Representatives (FAORs) actively participate in the Common Country Analysis (CCA) and in the formulation of the Cooperation Framework's Theory of Change to include FAO's comparative advantage as part of the UN collective offer as well as to ensure alignment between the Cooperation Framework and the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF), thus contributing to the achievement of government priorities and relevant SDG Targets in support of the 2030 Agenda.
17. In 2019-2020, FAO substantially contributed to 26 newly developed UN Cooperation Frameworks.
18. FAO has also been very active in strengthening the capacity of decentralized offices and, in close collaboration with the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC), organized in 2020 and 2021 tailored virtual face-to-face trainings on the formulation of the Cooperation Framework and derived CPF targeting 112 FAO Staff from 85 Country Offices and 5 Regional Offices
19. In April 2021, in order to facilitate FAO's contribution to the CCA, a new Country Profile tool was launched to support all decentralized offices in gaining easy access to key data and indicators at the national level from different FAO domains.

Strengthen joint programming processes [Paragraphs 50 of GA resolution 71/243]

20. FAO is fully in line with the QCPR call for strengthening joint programming processes. In 2020, FAO was the fourth largest UN agency in terms of participation in UN joint programmes (114). Approximately 13 percent of FAO's "non-core resources for development" in 2019 was allocated to joint activities.
21. According to the FAO Field Programme Management Information System data, in 2020 the inter-agency pooled funds (intended as joint programmes implemented by FAO with one or more other UN agencies) amounted to 9 percent of FAO's non-core resources. The amount increases to 12 percent if the funds received from UN agencies for project implementation by FAO are also included.
22. Implementation of joint programmes through pooled funding mechanisms is encouraged under the Cooperation Framework, and to enhance and improve FAO's participation, the FAO Project Cycle Manual includes a dedicated appendix to UN Joint Programmes. FAO is also engaged in the ongoing inter-agency efforts led by the UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) to streamline and optimize UN system-wide guidance on Joint Programmes, allowing greater flexibility to attain targets set in the Funding Compact.

⁵ Please refer to the document, FAO strategy for Agenda 2030 and UN development system repositioning, <http://www.fao.org/3/nb929en/nb929en.pdf>.

23. The FAO Project Cycle Manual was also updated in 2019 in line with the UN General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the UN Development System. The resolution includes a funding formula for the Resident Coordinator system, based - *inter alia* - on a 1 percent levy to be applied to “strictly earmarked, third-party, non-core contributions to UN development-related activities”. The levy also aims at encouraging resource partners to allocate more predictable, sustainable and less-earmarked funding for development activities that will be exempted from the levy.

24. FAO is currently consistently applying the 1 percent levy to applicable trust fund projects – in line with guidance issued by the UN inter-agency Fiduciary Management Oversight Group (FMOG).

*Involvement in the UN System coordination and the Resident Coordinator System (RCS)
[Paragraphs 49; 50; 53-57 of GA resolution 71/243]*

25. FAO is fully committed to the goals of the UN development system repositioning, aiming to reduce duplications and inefficiencies and scale-up inter-agency collaboration at all levels in order to improve alignment to national priorities.

26. Being the fifth largest contributor to the RC system among 19 UN entities, FAO is proactively engaged in the repositioned UNSDG, its Core Group and 11 thematic task teams.

27. In 2021, FAO has contributed USD 4.7 million from its core budget towards UNSDG cost-sharing arrangements for the Resident Coordinator system. In 2020, FAO also contributed USD 306 335 to the RC system from the 1 percent Levy Mechanism.

28. At the country level, the strengthened and empowered UN Resident Coordinator (RC) system offered new opportunities to FAO to provide more coherent and integrated policy support to national governments. FAO values the leadership of the RCs in the reinvigorated UN development system, and relies on RC impartiality and empowerment to advocate more systematically for FAO’s mandate and ensure the best use of FAO’s global knowledge and expertise. FAO has also started to contribute its expertise in Regional Collaborative Platforms and Issue Based Coalitions.

29. FAO is in full compliance with the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) implementation at the country level across its various pillars.

30. The modification of the performance evaluation tool (PEMS) for FAO Country Representatives integrates dual reporting on joint results and UN Country Team (UNCT) specific indicators (since January 2020), with at least one performance indicator linked to UNCT. To date, FAO is among 13 UN entities that have already done so. FAO welcomes the multi-rater performance evaluation system of UNRCs by UNCT Heads of Agencies piloted in 2020, and looks forward to its refinement.

*Results-oriented innovative national, regional and global partnerships
[Paragraphs 21d, 22.d and 37 of GA resolution 71/243]*

31. To contribute to the further harmonization of the application of due diligence across UN agencies, the UNSDG Task Team on Partnerships organized a series of seminars in the period February to March 2021. UN agencies and field offices as well as UN Development Coordination Office (UN DCO) and Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs), attended several virtual meetings where participants shared best practices, lessons learned, and challenges that UN agencies face in relation to due diligence with a view to advance the UNSDG Common Approach to Prospect Research and Due Diligence for Business Sector Partnerships (referred to as Common Approach to Due Diligence). FAO actively participated and contributed to drafting the set of recommendations highlighting best practices, challenges, lessons learned, and opportunities for enhancing the capacity of the Common Approach to Due Diligence and the development of an online Common Platform, which have been shared with UNSDG.

32. This work has helped FAO refine its Due Diligence approach in the context of the new FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021-2025.

*Simplification and harmonization of business practices
[Paragraphs 61-67 of GA resolution 71/243]*

Consolidation of business operations at country level

33. The QCPR resolutions encourage agencies to follow the UN efficiency agenda, seeking cost avoidance and quality improvements through consolidation of business operations at country level, whereby the focus is on establishment of Business Operations Strategies (BOS), Common Back Offices (CBO), Common Premises (CP) and Global Shared Service Centres (GSSC). To this effect, three so-called “enablers” have been put in place, i.e. the Mutual Recognition Statement (signed by FAO on 19 August 2019), the Costing and Pricing Principles (signed by FAO on 25 July 2020) and the Client Satisfaction Principles (signed by FAO on 25 July 2020) and, between 2019 and 2020, FAO’s engagement in this process has resulted in recurrent cost avoidance for a total amount of USD 4.2 million per year. To better support the overall global UN effort coordinated by the UN DCO, FAO has designated a lead Division in headquarters and set up a network of focal points in Regional Offices to support FAO’s Country Offices engagement in country led processes. As at the end of February 2020, 150 FAO colleagues at headquarters and in the decentralized offices have so far enrolled on the BOS 2.0 Practitioner Certification course.

34. In February 2020, a special, internal project was launched to operationalize the three above-mentioned “enablers” at the level of FAO’s administrative policies and procedures, in order to remove any policy-related impediment for UN business consolidation from FAO’s Administrative Manual and Handbook, whereby the focus is on (i) to review and revise administrative policies, procedures guidelines and tools, (ii) cost-benefit analyses, including establishment of quantitative baselines and targets, (iii) monitoring of progress at the headquarter and decentralized offices levels, and (iv) reporting annually on the impact of FAO’s engagement in the UN efficiency agenda, both to internal and external stakeholders. In the meantime, FAO’s engagement in the business consolidation processes at country level has gathered momentum and, thus far, has resulted in the sign-off of 114 Business Operations Strategies, while in 12 of these countries the process is already being taken a step further through the establishment of Common Back Offices.

Common premises

35. The establishment of “common premises” (CP) is challenging for FAO as the majority of its offices around the world are currently provided by governments free-of-charge in line with the Host Country Agreements (the HCA). Additionally, annual cash contributions are also made available by the host government for the running costs of the premises. Aside from budgetary considerations, the present arrangement allows the Organization to work more closely with its counterparts. As a result, FAO continues to pursue a pragmatic and business-oriented approach in line with the one-size does not fit all principle in addressing the proposed common support services and common premises concept, given the clear guidance by Members to avoid additional costs. Nevertheless, FAO shares common premises in several countries.

**C. OTHER AREAS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE QCPR
OF RELEVANCE TO FAO**

*Strengthening of country-level data and statistics
[Paragraphs 18.c of GA resolution 71/243]*

36. FAO’s new model for statistical capacity development, outlined in its report to the 2020 UN Statistical Commission on recent developments in agricultural and rural statistics, hinges on

establishing an array of partnerships and joint initiatives. The new FAO model consists of an integrated approach for statistical capacity development, delivered through three complementary initiatives that target key aspects of the data production cycle and country-specific statistical development needs.

37. The first initiative is the umbrella programme on measuring data relating to the SDGs, which aims to support countries in the adoption, production, dissemination and use of food- and agriculture-related SDG indicators.

38. The second initiative is the “50x2030 initiative to Close the Agricultural Data Gap”, which aims to support, both technically and financially, the adoption of Agricultural Integrated Surveys (AGRIS) that are fundamental for collecting data on a number of agriculture-related indicators, many of which are relatively new indicators, which countries have been adopting slowly, and therefore suffer from severe data gaps. This initiative aims to support 50 developing countries in the adoption of such integrated agricultural surveys by the year 2030.

39. The third pillar of FAO’s integrated strategy for capacity development is the action plan for the second phase (2020–2025) of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. The implementation of the action plan will ensure the use of existing innovative tools and methodologies developed during the first phase, and will build the enabling conditions to improve agricultural and rural statistics as well as other FAO capacity development programmes at the country level.

Participation in joint evaluations and strengthening national evaluation functions
[Paragraph 32 of GA resolution 71/243]

40. In 2020, FAO increased its involvement in joint evaluations, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which, as a global challenge, requires a concerted response and a related increase in humanitarian work.

41. In the early days of the pandemic (May 2020), FAO staff took a leading role in the preparation of a note on evaluation lessons spearheaded by the COVID-19 evaluation coalition (<http://www.covid19-evaluation-coalition.org>) on the effects of COVID-19 in food security, and coordinated a rapid evaluation synthesis together with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), within the framework of the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) (www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2955, March 2021).

42. FAO is part of the Steering Group of the UN Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations (IAHE) and contributed to the IAHE on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, to the IAHE of the response to the Cyclone Idai in Mozambique (2020), and to the IAHE of the El Nino Response in Ethiopia (2019, interagencystandingcommittee.org).

43. In 2020, FAO, jointly with WFP and IFAD, initiated a major evaluation of Rome-based Agencies (RBA) collaboration, which will cover the global, regional and country levels and inform the governance of the three agencies as well as the UN reform. FAO has also launched a cluster of evaluations in collaboration with several other implementing agencies (International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women and WFP). These evaluations will be completed in 2021.

44. Finally, FAO has renewed its efforts to promote national evaluation capacities, to assess the outcome of national policies and programmes within the 2030 horizon. This effort includes active support to the Community of Practice (CoP) *EvalForward* (www.evalforward.org), launched in 2018 in collaboration with IFAD, WFP and the CGIAR. With over 900 members in 103 countries, the CoP continues to develop capacities for evaluation in developing countries.

Complementarity between humanitarian and development activities
[Paragraph 57.h of GA resolution 71/243]

45. As part of its emergency and resilience programme, FAO's work on anticipatory action⁶ provided a tangible contribution to strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus. Together with key partners such as WFP, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Start Network, and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), FAO is among the agencies leading global and country-level efforts in upscaling anticipatory action approaches to prevent and reduce food crises.

46. FAO is working with partners and governments in more than 40 high-risk countries towards the mainstreaming of an anticipatory approach within national Disaster Risk Management frameworks. Since 2016, FAO and partners have implemented anticipatory actions to protect the livelihoods of more than 90 000 vulnerable farming and herding households across high-risk countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

47. FAO is a member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and in 2020 FAO led and/or contributed to various IASC products aiming at strengthening humanitarian, development collaboration and its contribution to peace.

48. The Global Network against Food Crises was launched in 2016 by the European Union, FAO and WFP to promote sustainable solutions to food. In January 2020, FAO and WFP, under the Global Network framework, prepared the seventh edition of "Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations", providing UNSC with an overview of acute food insecurity in countries and territories affected by conflict and insecurity. In April 2020, under the Global Network framework, FAO, together with WFP, prepared and launched the Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC) 2020. In September 2020, a Mid-Year Update of the Global Report and a technical note on the COVID-19 pandemic and food crises were released, presenting the latest estimates on acute food insecurity in times of COVID-19. Also, two editions of the FAO-WFP early warning analysis of acute food insecurity hotspots (July and October) were released, providing a forward-looking perspective and highlighting countries which are at risk of significant food security deterioration.

D. TRENDS EMERGING FROM THE 2020 QCPR

49. In December 2020, the UNGA adopted Resolution 75/233 on the QCPR of UN operational activities for development, providing guidance to the UN development system for 2021-2024. It builds on the outcomes of the 2019 SDG Summit, thus placing an unprecedented focus on supporting Members in accelerating progress towards the SDGs and includes 5 key themes: (a) repositioning of the UN development system (UNDS) and scaling up some of the elements of UNDS reform; (b) supporting countries' efforts to build a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; (c) leaving no one behind; (d) mobilizing financing and other means of implementation; (e) tailoring UN work to different operational contexts.

50. The recently-approved Resolution includes several areas that are new or are viewed with a renewed emphasis. Those coincide with areas of work on which FAO is already placing increased attention⁷:

- Identifying new avenues for full, structured and sustainable participation of young people; accelerating implementation of the Disabilities Inclusion Strategy.⁸
- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: a) building back better to ensure a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery; b) focusing on the poorest, and working with countries in implementing, with urgency, sustainable solutions and catalyzing partnerships, leveraging digital technologies; c) giving particular attention to the specific challenges of developing

⁶ Anticipatory actions (AA) are short-term disaster risk management interventions that are implemented during the critical time window between an early warning trigger and the actual occurrence of the disaster.

⁷ FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne577en/ne577en.pdf>) and Medium Term Plan 2022-2025 and Programme of Work and Budget 2022-23 (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne576en/ne576en.pdf>)

⁸ https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/assets/documentation/UN_Disability_Inclusion_Strategy_english.pdf

countries; d) analyzing lessons learned from the response plans to the pandemic at the national, regional and global levels to better prepare and provide assistance for possible future shocks, including through risk information and early warning systems.

- Mainstreaming a more climate- and environment-responsive approach in programmes and strategic plans.
- Strengthening integrated policy advice and programmatic support, technical assistance, normative support, cooperation in science, technology and innovation.
- Data collection and analysis.

51. The Resolution also addresses human rights, humanitarian-development nexus and its contribution to peace, gender equality, and includes new enabling environment elements:

- Digital inclusion – It takes note of the Secretary-General’s (SG) Road Map for Digital Cooperation and recognizes that digital technologies can be key enablers for sustainable development. It encourages cooperation between the UNDS and programme countries to improve digital inclusion.
- Transparency – It commends the establishment and operationalization of an online portal to reflect real-time contributions and expenditures related to the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system, and it urges further improvement of the Special Purpose Trust Fund portal.
- Ethics – It calls on the UNDS to continue efforts and focus on preventing and taking immediate action on sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment, and to continue implementation of the SG’s zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.