EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit of staff learning and training as part of its workplan for the 2020–2021 biennium. The fieldwork of the audit was carried out between November 2020 and March 2021. The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of staff learning and training activities in achieving the corporate goal of building, maintaining, and strengthening the capacity of staff to contribute to achieving FAO’s mission.

Main Findings and Conclusions

OIG concluded that the governance arrangements and procedures established for the planning, monitoring, implementation and evaluation of staff learning and training activities need some improvement (see Annex 2 for the definition of audit terms) to better respond to the competency, capacity and performance management requirements and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the use of the organizational resources allocated to staff learning.

Senior Management has established basic governance arrangements for staff learning and training, including: (i) separate guidelines, procedures, instructions and templates for planning, budgeting, implementing and monitoring of the different activities; and (ii) well-defined and allocated roles, responsibilities, authority and accountability for the key actors involved in the processing of staff learning and training activities.

Learning Framework

From a holistic perspective, the corporate policies and rules of staff learning and training are dispersed in several sources. There is no all-embracing source that defines for the respective actors and stakeholders FAO’s strategic focus and vision of what staff learning and training aim to achieve.

Furthermore, the arrangements established by Senior Management have two fundamental lacunae that reduce the effectiveness and efficiency of the staff learning and training activities at both corporate and divisional levels: (i) the lack of structured guidelines for planning, monitoring and evaluation of learning and training activities at the unit level other than formal training, such as on-the-job training, the use of professional and technical for a, and temporary ‘stretch’ assignments; and (ii) the absence of identification and assessment of long-range needs for better alignment of staff learning and training with the long-term strategies of the Organization.

Hence, there is a need to establish a learning framework that consolidates the corporate policies, rules, guidelines and procedures for the different staff learning and training activities allowed by the Organization, and that complements the Human Resources Division’s staffing and mobility framework.

Operational Procedures

Overall, the procedures and control mechanisms established by Senior Management to govern and regulate the staff learning and training activities were found to be complied with and applied by the respective actors. These procedures and controls provide reasonable assurance that the resources allocated for the staff learning and training activities are used in
conformity with the relevant policies and rules and contribute to achieving the intended objectives.

However, the audit observed the following weaknesses that require Senior Management’s attention to strengthen the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of staff learning and training activities:

I. incomplete planning of training activities at the unit level, and unstructured planning, monitoring and assessment of other learning activities;

II. lack of clarity of the underlying principles and the applicability of the upper limit for external training cost that has led to not undertaking training activities identified as required at the unit level;

III. excessive controls over and manual processing of the external training requests that reduce the assurance of optimal use of the organizational resources;

IV. incomplete use of budget allocations; and

V. lack of evaluation of learning and training impact.

Agreed Actions

The Human Resources Division has agreed to undertake, in coordination with other stakeholders as necessary, the following five actions contained in the report to address the issues identified:

• establishing a comprehensive learning framework;

• assessing the current approach to determining the unit training budget allocations;

• assessing the rationality of the upper limit of external training cost;

• assessing the current procedures for review and approval of external training requests; and,

• revising the procedures for the processing of individual external training requests to reduce the role of the Learning and Performance Branch of the Human Resources Division to assured value-added review and approval.

Mika Tapio

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Inspector General

15 June 2021