

Background

As noted in the Bureau's Outcome document of the Bureau meeting of 27 November 2020, and consistent with the recommendations of the CFS Evaluation and proposals made by the FAO Director General during 2020 Regional Conferences, the Bureau agreed to the Secretary's proposal to organize an informal working group comprising Bureau and (ad hoc) Advisory Group members, to inform its future policy convergence work with a view to strengthening impact of CFS policy work. This was noted as a specific area where RBA collaboration could be activated by inviting experts from all three agencies to assist.

The CFS Secretariat informed the Bureau and Advisory meeting in January 2021, that it would aim to assemble an informal working group after CFS 47 aiming to support effectively the policy influence and impact of CFS products and outreach, and that it would seek volunteers among Bureau and (ad-hoc) Advisory Group to participate. As noted in the Bureau and Advisory Group Outcomes document, it was agreed that the matter would be tabled again in March:

- to provide further information on process and expected deliverables;
- for discussion and decision on the Bureau and (ad hoc) Advisory Group's role and engagement in the process;

Rationale and purpose of the policy influence impact assessment

Following the 2017 evaluation of the CFS that recommended to strengthen the monitoring of the uptake, use, and impact of CFS products, a CFS monitoring mechanism¹ was agreed to promote accountability and share best practices at global, regional and national levels. This mechanism includes three dimensions: i) review of FSN trends; ii) assessment of the effectiveness of CFS and; iii) use and application of its policy products and recommendations. As part of this mechanism, CFS holds Global Thematic Events (GTEs) in Plenary every 2 years to take stock of progress, use and uptake, and encourages stakeholders to organize national and regional in support, but this remains voluntary and piecemeal in nature. Such an approach does not offer a strong mechanism by which to assess the effectiveness, and demonstrate the value-added, of CFS policy work and products, and their contribution to the achievement of relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

The objective of this exercise is to contribute to reviewing the effectiveness of CFS, by assessing the influence of its policy products at country level, and to assess the feasibility of designing a systematic approach for tracking the results of certain CFS products at country level.

¹ See CFS2018/45/3 – annex C in particular

Information Brief on the envisaged process

It is envisaged to hire a senior organizational assessment expert as a consultant to support the CFS Secretariat in this work and provide independent advice and forward-looking recommendations, in the context of a few selected recent/on-going processes. Tasks will include: i) conduct a comprehensive desk review of the current CFS environment and reporting set-up; ii) conduct systematic interviews with key informants and stakeholders; iii) design and test, in real-time, a policy influence tracking system; iv) based on findings of the real-time testing, derive key learning and suggestions on how to adjust this system to other CFS processes and products, and; v) engage actively with the two working/reference groups, as well as the CFS Secretariat and its Governing Bodies (Bureau and Advisory Group), keeping them informed of progress and consulting with them on key decision points.

It is foreseen that two working/reference groups will be set up for the purpose of the CFS assessment undertaken. The informal Working Group will be at advisory level, whilst the Reference Group will be at technical level. The composition of each will draw, respectively, from:

1. Advisory level Informal Working Group: [AIWG]
 - Members of the Bureau (voluntary)
 - Members of the Advisory Group (will include RBA, PSM, CSM and CFS Secretariat executive / director-level representatives - other constituencies on a voluntary basis)
2. Technical level Reference Group: [TRG]
 - Members from the CFS Secretariat
 - Members from the RBA evaluation offices

This is an important mechanism for advising and steering the policy influencing assessment process and supporting independence and impartiality while increasing the transparency, relevance, ownership, credibility and utility of the assessment. The purpose of the working/reference groups is to provide early feedback on key assessment deliverables as well as to facilitate communication with CFS stakeholders, including RBA staff. Members of working/reference Groups may also play a role as key informants during the assessment process.

Expected Deliverables and Timeline

Establishment of the two Advisory Informal Working and Technical Working Groups will be concluded in March. Then, aligning to the 2021 calendar for Bureau and Advisory Group meetings, it is foreseen that a preliminary report will set out the terms of reference for the policy influencing assessment in terms of scope, stakeholder mapping, tools, includes a summary of the approach envisaged, nominative composition of the assessment's reference / working groups (technical and advisory), suggested timetable of planned activities and key deliverables [April]. An interim report will present to the Bureau a suggested system for assessing effectiveness of CFS processes and products, to be tested [August]. A final report will summarise the findings of the real-time testing and key learning points and make forward-looking suggestions for Bureau and for CFS consideration [December 2021]

Bureau and (Ad-hoc) Advisory Group's Role and engagement in the process

Participants to the Informal Advisory Working Group will be asked to support the assessment process by assigning a focal point to: i) liaise with the CFS focal point and hired Expert Consultant, ii) provide documentation and information as necessary, and ; iii) facilitate the consultant's contacts with relevant stakeholders and set up of meetings.

They may also be called upon to engage as a stakeholder, and potentially: i) participate in (individual and/or multi-stakeholders) discussions with the expert consultant; ii) comment (in

April, July and November, as per below timeline) on the key draft deliverables; iii) contribute to a plan of action that uses the assessment's findings to inform subsequent CFS processes' design, as well as tracking its implementation.

Expected Deliverables and Timeline

It is foreseen that a preliminary report will set out terms of reference for the policy influencing assessment in terms of scope, stakeholder mapping, tools, a summary of the approach envisaged, nominative composition of the assessment's reference / working groups (technical and advisory), suggested timetable of planned activities and key deliverables (March-April). This will be followed by an interim report that will present to the Bureau a suggested system for assessing effectiveness of CFS processes and products, to be tested [August]. A final report will summarise the finding of the real-time testing and key learning points and forward-looking suggestions for Bureau and for CFS consideration [December 2021]