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An Independent Assessment of FAO's Technical Capacity

Management Observations

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1. The Report of *An Independent Assessment of FAO's Technical Capacity* was sent by the Consultants to the Secretariat and the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Programme Committee on 24 March 2017. The Report was circulated by the Secretariat to the membership on the same day. As a Conference document, the Report will be transmitted to the Conference together with the views of the 156th Session of the Council in April 2017 including consideration of the Report by the Programme and Finance Committees at their Joint Meeting in March 2017.
2. This note provides the observations of FAO Management on the Report of the Consultants, in particular with regard to their findings and proposed next steps.
3. FAO Management looks forward to follow-up of the Report to help achieve FAO's Strategic Objectives and the needs and priorities of Members.

I. Observations on Main Findings

4. The Report provides a useful quantitative assessment of the technical capacity of the Organization. FAO Management highlights the four key findings:
 - a) Technical capacity increased from 2012 to 2016 in context of flat budget and overall decline in number of posts, mainly through reinvestment of savings, arising from administrative streamlining, in technical posts and resources. Management notes that the savings arising from reduction of administrative posts are the result of close attention to streamlining of administrative procedures and elimination of bureaucracy.
 - b) Technical capacity increased both at headquarters and in decentralized offices and was broadly aligned with FAO's Strategic Framework, with non-staff resources providing the necessary flexibility to meet demand. The shift in human resources among technical specialties and departments arises from a combination of the change in strategic direction (reviewed Strategic Framework), location (headquarters and decentralized offices) and means of delivery (staff and non-staff resources, source of funding) that took place since 2012. The strategic shifts are facilitated by the ability to adapt the means of engaging technical capacity (i.e. staff and non-staff human resources) to meet rapidly changing technical needs, as evidenced in the Report. In this regard, the policy of maintaining minimum levels of vacant positions across the Organization has provided the requisite flexibility for engagement of non-staff human resources (NSHR). The use of NSHR, in particular highly-skilled consultants contracted as needed, has ensured: retention of technical capacity over a sustained period of time; capacity building in technical areas of emerging priority; and a practical entry point for technical experts to the compendium of staff at the Organization. In an interconnected world with a mobile workforce, institutional knowledge retention needs to increasingly rely on modern information tools and institutional partnerships rather than just individuals. In this regard, the use of partnerships and South-South Cooperation, which do not figure prominently in the report, provide an opportunity for the Organization to increase its technical capacity.
 - c) Most indicators of staff quality and experience improved, as well as delivery of key products and services that drive normative work and PWB outputs. While the report provides evidence that delivery has improved, data limitations may have precluded a more robust analysis of how this is related to technical capacity. The Secretariat recognizes the need to continue to better plan, monitor and adjust the allocation of technical capacity to deliver normative and programmatic products and services.
 - d) Findings are in line with recent related assessments by the FAO Office of Evaluation, the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), the Germany BMZ Mapping of Multilateral Organisations Engaged in Development, and the United Kingdom Department for International Development Multilateral Development Review (DFID-MAR).

II. Management Response on proposed next steps

5. The Report identifies three areas for attention going forward: continue to improve the matrix management approach so as to strengthen both programme delivery and technical capacity; improve the planning and monitoring of technical inputs and outputs for use by managers; pursue the opportunity to leverage FAO technical expertise in work of WFP and IFAD.

6. The report also acknowledges it is a quantitative assessment, and recommends institutionalizing in future with a qualitative dimension.

7. FAO Management agrees with the next steps proposed by the Report.

8. The suggestions concerning continued attention implementation of matrix management, strengthening of technical networks and opportunities to increase collaboration are welcome and would benefit by being more firmly rooted in the analysis of human resources and delivery.

9. The Secretariat provided the Consultants with all available data on human resources and product/service delivery. The Report correctly points to some gaps in the available data, adapts the analysis accordingly, and suggests improvements in monitoring of technical inputs and outputs to help management in future assessments. This will help the Secretariat to, for example, refine the corporate dashboards used by managers for monitoring operations and results, as well as work force planning. However, the costs and benefits of a staff time recording system would need to be carefully weighed to avoid increasing bureaucracy.

10. The finding on the need to institutionalize internally this type of assessment exercise is welcome as part of work force planning (skills mix and post re-profiling) to better build technical capacity to meet evolving programme needs. Future such institutionalization could afford the opportunity of addressing issues which fall outside of the agreed scope and terms of reference of the present assessment.

11. Thus, FAO Management agrees that there may be benefit in future assessments being expanded to include consideration of General Service level staff within the human resources dimensionality; greater disaggregation of quantitative data; as well as more nuanced qualitative analyses. These types of assessments would require the involvement of the Office of Evaluation (OED) to ensure coherent and independent substantiation, given OED's established expertise and methodologies, adherence to international norms and standards, as well as its dual reporting line to the Director-General and FAO Members.