Chair's Aide-Mémoire

Joint meeting of Working Groups I, II and III of the Conference Committee for IEE Follow-up (CoC-IEE)

Thursday 4 June 2009

Chaired by Noel de Luna, Chair WG III

Review of decentralized offices staffing, location and coverage

1. Members welcomed the second Management report on *Decentralized offices staffing, location and coverage* (www.fao.org/uploads/media/DencentralisedOffice.pdf) addressing two specific matters previously discussed by the Working Groups, namely: "FAO Country Coverage", and "Functioning as One".

FAO country coverage

2. Members appreciated the section of the report on *FAO Country Coverage* setting out the measures suggested by Management to tackle the structural deficit without net transfers of current resources from HQs, and describing the further work carried out on the criteria for country offices. In this context, Members reiterated the importance of the effective delivery to the field of the knowledge produced by the Organization.

3. In discussing this matter, Members generally endorsed the initiatives taken by Management, within the authority of the Director General, to address in the short term the structural deficit in the budget of the Country Offices network. More specifically, the following points were made:

- in line with the recommendations of the IEE, it was agreed to abolish the Lapse Factor for posts in the network of FAO Representations (FAORs), which amounted to USD0.9 million. This would allow greater provision of resources for the FAORs budget and entail a reduction of the structural deficit from USD2.7 million to USD1.8 million;

- while the need for a renewed effort to obtain timely and full payment of Government Counterpart Cash Contributions (GCCC) was acknowledged, it was considered that special conditions facing countries should be taken into account. The Finance Committee would provide the appropriate forum to look at this issue;

- queries were made regarding the possible negative impact on delivery and backstopping capacity of the proposals to appoint Emergency Coordinators (ECs) as Officers-in-Charge of FAORs and to use Regional Technical Officers (RTOs) as FAO Representatives, which are within the authority of the Director-General. Management clarified that these arrangements would involve only five RTOs worldwide, and they would affect only three ECs out of 40 countries where FAO has Emergency Coordination Units and the specific countries where such an arrangement would apply could evolve from time to time; it would promote integrated use of Regular Programme and extra-budgetary funds, and tighten the linkage between relief, rehabilitation and development activities. It was further indicated that these measures could be implemented while Members continued their discussions in the Working Groups and the Regional Groups to provide appropriate guidance;

- it was noted that further work was required on the criteria for country coverage. In particular, scenarios where countries would satisfy three or four out of the five criteria stemming from the IPA could be considered. It was also pointed out that possibilities of further multiple

accreditations should be looked at, while any closing of country offices in the Africa region was opposed by several Members.

4.   While noting the short-term steps that Management would take to address the deficit, Members considered that further work and discussions on other measures such as multiple accreditation, as well as further reflections of the criteria woull be useful and could also be pursued in the Regional Groups.

Functioning as One Organization

5.   The Working Groups generally appreciated the more detailed information provided in the section of the report entitled *Functioning as One*, addressing the structures, roles, staffing, competencies, training needs and challenges faced by the Decentralized Offices at the country, sub-regional and regional levels.

6.   More specifically, the following reflections were made in considering the issues involved in *Functioning as One*:

- the need for Management to provide a strategic vision and a more comprehensive action plan on decentralization was re-affirmed. While addressing the weaknesses identified in the IEE report, such a plan would integrate all the actions affecting decentralization across the IPA projects;

- the difficulties in strengthening field presence while not transferring resources from HQ to Decentralized Offices were underscored. In this connection, the need to match the responsibilities assigned to the Decentralized Offices to adequate resources was stressed;

- further consideration of the issues discussed was called for through informal consultation between Members and Management before the next formal meeting of the CoC-IEE Working Groups in September.

Annex

Agenda for the meeting

1. Chair's introduction
2. Review of decentralized offices staffing, location and coverage.