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Human Resources Management

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Committee is presented with major achievements in human resources management at FAO, for information.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

- Members of the Finance Committee are invited to take note of major achievements of human resources management.

Draft Advice

- **The Committee welcomed the major achievements in human resources management at FAO during the reporting period.**

Major Achievements

1. Following the request of the Members of the Finance Committee at its previous session, the Organization is reporting on the major improvements in the area of human resources policy and management over the last year. In managing human resources, FAO is continuing to follow a vision based on four main drivers: (i) recruitment and development of the highest caliber of employees; (ii) alignment of HR management to the strategic and programmatic needs of the Organization; (iii) reflection of FAO's nature as a United Nations system specialized agency; and (iv) increased efficiency in HR processes and procedures. This document reports achievements according to these drivers.

Recruitment and development of highest caliber employees

a) Employment of Consultants and Subscribers to Personal Services Agreements (PSAs)

2. An internal audit review of the various aspects of the employment of Consultants and Subscribers to Personal Services Agreements (PSAs) led to the identification of a number of shortcomings and bad practices that needed to be addressed.
3. As a result, the Organization introduced recently a revised policy for the recruitment of non-staff human resources in line with the recommendations of the Office of the Inspector General. The purpose of the changes was to streamline and rationalize the procedures involving the selection and employment of Consultants and PSA Subscribers.
4. For instance, the recruitment of Consultants at headquarters and in decentralized locations requires now a double approval, in this way, an improved and more transparent process ensures the hiring of a qualified individual. A first approval by the immediate supervisor of the consultant is followed by approval from the budget holder of the concerned organizational unit. In the event that the immediate supervisor is the budget holder, then higher order approval is required from the supervisor of the budget holder.
5. This dual process is also applied to the performance evaluation of Consultants at the end of their assignment using Quality Assessment Reports. These adjustments improve quality assurance, avoiding inconsistencies and enabling a more centralized control.
6. In parallel, the revised guidelines have strengthened the recruitment and selection procedures, to guarantee competitive processes and the recruitment of the best talents. The Organization has introduced a more uniform, transparent and rigorous selection process for consultants and PSAs, to ensure that value for money is obtained in all cases and that the use of the Organization's financial resources is effective and transparent. The changes are aimed also to strengthen the research of experts worldwide and to increase the diversity and the quality of the individuals recruited for the various profiles.
7. The revised selection process requires the issuance of Calls for Expression of Interest, covering the most frequently needed profiles/fields of expertise, to populate Organizational Rosters of Consultants and PSAs at Departmental, Regional and strategic team level.
8. Candidates are validated regarding their educational background, knowledge of FAO languages and previous experience. Subsequently, a dedicated panel interviews the qualified candidates and submits a written report for the endorsement of suitable candidates to relevant head of organizational unit. Candidates endorsed through this process are included in the Organizational Rosters of Consultants and PSAs and can receive offers for assignments in FAO.
9. Finally, a new IT tool is being deployed to support the recruitment process of the Organization. In its first phase, the tool will be used for the recruitment of Consultants and PSAs, and, as of 1 November, its main functionalities are already set up and are available for all hiring offices.

b) Secondments and loans of staff to other UN agencies

10. Secondments and loans of staff to other agencies for prolonged periods were causing a decrease in the technical capacity of the Organization and difficulties in long-term planning. The positions encumbered by staff on secondment or loan were blocked for the possible return of the staff, and the continued uncertainty impeded long-term programming, in terms of recruitment and deliverables.

11. Within the boundaries of the UN inter agency agreements, the Organization has reinforced the procedure of approval for secondments and loans, introducing a revised policy which foresees a higher level of approval to ensure alignment with corporate priorities.

12. The adjustments have increased centralized control and evaluation of the proposals, allowing the application of consistent approach and a better monitoring of these exchanges.

c) Rejuvenation of the workforce and employment of retirees

13. The Organization is committed to ensure the recruitment of fresh talents and the application of an effective succession planning.

14. Therefore, the policy on the employment of UN retirees was strengthened to ensure that the employment of retirees would be used as an exceptional temporary measure, based on specific and reasonable needs normally linked to knowledge transfer to new staff.

15. The changes implemented avoid that the employment of retirees cause an adverse impact on workforce rejuvenation

16. From March to October 2017, only 5% of the requests for the employment of retirees were approved as they are aligned with the FAO policy and no alternative solutions could be found.

17. In parallel, the Organization continues to make efforts to ensure the recruitment of high-level candidates with strong potential for the Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) positions. Efforts are also made to maintain a good retention of former JPOs, based on their performance assessments.

18. In addition to the JPOs, the Organization identifies when needed qualified professional staff at P-1 level, from the professional roster, to join departments and regional offices in different technical areas. These new young professionals contribute to the rejuvenation of the workforce and the refreshment of FAO's technical knowledge.

d) Associate Professional Officer Programme

19. The Organization continues to collaborate with donors through the Associate Professional Officer (APO) Programme to offer a structured learning experience to nationals from more than 14 different countries through exposure to international cooperation activities, while enabling them to apply their technical specialization under the supervision of an experienced FAO staff member. Currently, 12 donors participate in the programme. In 2017 the Organization has recruited 11 Associate Professional Officers and an additional 4, funded by China, are in the process of joining FAO.

e) Professional Vacancy status

20. As presented to the previous session of the Finance Committee, the Organization continues to consider it essential to maintain a certain degree of flexibility in the vacancy rate for professional positions, normally about 15-20%, so that the implementation of the Programme of Work and Budget 2018-19 can be adapted in a dynamic manner to new circumstances and emerging priorities.

21. It is important to note that, while maintaining flexibility in professional vacancy rates, the Organization continues to pay careful attention to ensure that sensitive, critical and essential positions are filled.

22. Taking into account recruitment processes currently ongoing, the vacancy rate is expected to be between 15% and 20%. The priority continues to be to ensure that all individual organizational units, in particular technical areas, maintain the target vacancy rate.

Alignment of HR management to the strategic and programmatic needs of the Organization

a) Improved development and learning strategy

23. The Organization is implementing a revised learning strategy, based on clear identification of learning needs of staff and appropriate selection of training modalities.

24. Regarding the learning needs of staff, FAO is focusing its efforts on five main areas.

- Administrative training, strengthened following audit recommendations, to reinforce the knowledge of FAO's internal systems and procedures and improve the operational capacity of staff in carrying out their duties, particularly in decentralized offices;
- Results-based management (RBM), covering training related to RBM, management for results and strategic framework;
- Technical training, to maintain the technical competencies of staff and refresh their knowledge based on current trends;
- Language training, to improve the multilingual capacities of staff in the FAO languages;
- Personal Development, this includes courses to improve soft skills and practical guides on career development.

25. The selection of appropriate training modalities is based on a strategic approach that prioritizes partnerships with academia and the use of e-learning courses.

26. In the following months, the Organization will be focusing the development of training programmes in partnerships with academia. In this way, the development of the curricula, its delivery and evaluation will benefit from the collaboration of experts in the learning area. Moreover, this approach will allow the Organization to take advantage of consortia of academic institutions working on e-learning activities such as edX (<https://www.edx.org/>), a consortium funded in 2012 by Harvard University and the MIT, now counting with 90 university partners worldwide (<https://www.edx.org/schools-partners>).

b) Relations with Staff Representative Bodies (SRBs)

27. The Organization maintains a continuous and substantive engagement with the Staff Representative Bodies – Association of Professionals in FAO (AP-in-FAO) and the Union of General Service staff (UGSS) regarding consultation on all issues affecting conditions of service of staff. Formal meetings take place through the Staff Management Consultative Committee (SMCC).

28. Starting 2017, a work plan of items for consultation is discussed and agreed between the SRBs and management at the first meeting of the year, with the objective of using it as a roadmap and consequently focusing the consultation process towards priority items. As of end October 2017, twelve SMCC meetings took place and the consultation process continues with regular meetings.

29. In this context, in April 2017 management presented to UGSS the Review of the functioning of the General Service Selection Committees, an analysis conducted by internal and external experts to identify strengths of the process and areas to be improved. The recommendations of this review have already been put in practice in the process.

Reflection of FAO's nature as a UN system specialized agency

a) Implement measures and track progress in achieving corporate geographic representation targets

30. In taking decisions on recruitment to international professional positions, the criterion of merit has always been followed to ensure that the Organization is able to fill all positions with the best qualified candidates.

31. At the same time, in line with guidance provided by the Governing Bodies, due attention continues to be given to ensure an equitable geographic representation of member countries in the Secretariat of the Organization.

32. With continuing efforts pursued in this regard, it has been possible to reduce, to a considerable extent, the number of non-, under- and over-represented countries in the Secretariat of FAO, thus increasing the number of equitably-represented countries. Moreover, many countries, that were chronically under-represented, such as the United States of America, Republic of Korea and Iran, are now equitably represented.

33. Following the completion of the new recruitments, the percentage of non-represented countries is 13%, of under-represented countries is 10% and of equitably represented countries a 74 % . In appointing the staff, and subject to the paramount importance of securing the highest standards of efficiency and of technical competence, the Organization gives priority to recruiting personnel on as wide a geographical basis as is possible, making particular efforts to recruit candidates from non- and under-represented countries.

b) Improved gender representation

34. The Organization continues its efforts toward gender parity in the workforce. Female staff accounted for 28% in professional positions at the end of 2007. At the end of September 2017, thanks to continued and expanding recruitment outreach efforts to a plethora of professional institutions and universities within selected countries, as well as attention paid by the selection authority to gender balance, this figure rose to 44%.

35. Another notable improvement that should be observed is the increase of female staff in senior positions. At the end of 2007, there was no female staff among the DDGs, and now out of three DDGs one is female. Overall, female staff in senior positions accounted for 12% at the end of 2007; now they encumber 26% of senior positions.

c) Promotion of multilingualism

36. In the context of selection and appointment procedures, the language skills of candidates, internal and external, are closely considered.

37. In addition, the revised selection procedures for Consultants and Subscribers to Personal Services Agreements have introduced a more rigorous control on the language level requested. All applicants are requested to provide evidence of their language skills to be considered qualified for assignments in FAO.

38. The role of Member States is also crucial for adopting a clear position on multilingualism, expressed through their participation in the legislative bodies of the different United Nations system organizations, and for supporting its implementation by endorsing all the necessary measures to achieve it, for example by developing national capacities to promote language professional curricula up to the standards required by international organizations.

Increased efficiency in human resources (HR) processes and procedures

a) Reorganization of HR functions at regional level and SSC transformation

39. The Organization has started a process to restructure the HR functions and roles at regional level, with the aim to increase efficiency and guarantee a high standard level of deliverables. In particular, the reorganization will avoid duplication of work and will allow a better use of the resources available at corporate and at regional level.

40. In parallel, FAO is working on the transformation of SSC to increase productivity and guarantee timely and effective processes. The aim is to ameliorate the coordination and improve the supervision of the SSC hubs. This structure will strengthen the application of standard procedures, saving time and guaranteeing consistent approaches.

b) Modern recruitment platform

41. The Organization has identified the need to automate the recruitment and the on-boarding processes in an integrated IT system environment, to rationalize operational and administrative procedures. Following in-depth analysis, it has been decided to adopt a new recruitment platform.

42. The functionalities of the new tool will enable the Organization to reduce processing time and costs, supporting the monitoring of global processes and decreasing manual processes.

43. In particular, the new platform will improve the capacity of the Organization to track the progress of the different sub-processes and to monitor the related Key Performance Indicators.

44. The new tool has been set up already to support the recruitment of Consultants and PSAs. Regarding the other processes, the Organization is working to define all the functionalities needed to fully implement the new platform during the first quarter of 2018.

c) Rationalization of working arrangements

45. The Organization has introduced new procedures, changes and adjustments to different policies to rationalize the working measures applicable to teleworking and to the requests for Special Leave without Pay and Special Post Allowance.

46. The purpose is to avoid improper usages that could cause inefficiencies, wastage of resources and unfair treatment to staff.

47. The revised procedures have implemented a more centralized control and enabled consistent approaches that guarantee fairness and transparency.

d) Reinforcement of the procedures for granting rental subsidies

48. To ensure more rigorous compliance with the criteria of consistency, appropriateness and greater alignment with national legislative requirements, the Organization has implemented a more rigorous control of the processes leading to the approval of the rental subsidy scheme in Rome and in the field.

49. Following the introduction of the new procedures, the double level of control enables to better verify information, streamlining the analysis for the final approval. The Organization is liaising with ICSC to ensure a consistent approach at UN level in Country Offices and it is promoting an implementation of the coordination among the RBAs on this subject.

e) Procedures for approval of service incurred incidents

50. An improved procedure for reporting service incurred incidents has been recently introduced with positive effects. This is helped by the analysis of the cases submitted to identify recurring patterns and to introduce measures to increase staff safety and wellness.

f) Implementation of External Auditor recommendations on Human Resources matters

51. The comprehensive analysis of the FAO progress in implementing the External Auditor's recommendations is included in document FC 169/11, Progress Report on Implementation of the External Auditor's Recommendations.

52. Regarding the recommendations on Human Resources matters, the Organization continue focusing its efforts to implement the suggested adjustments, and significant results have already been achieved.

53. FAO undertook a reorganization of the Office of Human Resources to improve internal integration and synergies and to implement the principles and guidelines of the HR Strategy in the different HR areas. Thanks to the reorganization, HR branches have introduced changes and adjustments following a consistent approach, in line with the needs of the Organization.

54. Following the recommendations of the study on technical capacity of the Organization, additional efforts have been made in the selection and recruitment of consultants, creating specialized rosters of highly qualified candidates ready to take up assignments, which constitute a pipeline of talents. This has been done while more strict controls have been introduced regarding hiring of retirees, particularly to cover functions that they were covering as staff. This is helping units to mitigate knowledge gaps and to plan their workforces accordingly.

55. As for the Performance Management, the Organization is reviewing the Performance Management Policy to link the related plans with developmental goals. At the same time, quality assurance mechanisms are being established to the Performance Evaluation and Management System (PEMS). The quality control exercise will start with review of the quality of PEMS work plans during the year end.

g) Member's requests for data on staff and non-staff human resources

56. Following the request from the Council and the Committee to standardize the format of the data provided about staff and non-staff human resources, the Organization conducted consultations with the RBAs to agree on a standard format for that information.

57. The Organization has implemented the common standard format already and the response to request for non-sensitive information is provided to the inquirer in about five working days.

Challenges

58. While human resources management continues to improve in the Organization, a number of areas for improvement have been identified and require attention and efforts to keep moving towards achieving a modern organization with sound human resources management practices.

59. One priority is the modernization of the IT recruitment platform. The new tool is now deployed for the recruitment process of consultants and PSA subscribers. In the next months, the Organization will put efforts to guarantee a proper internal knowledge sharing about the new tool and progressive implementation. Following a better understanding of this system, FAO will expand its use to the recruitment processes of professional positions and general service rosters.

60. The Organization is resolute to continue implementing the outreach activities to attract target audiences, as female applicants and candidates from non- and under-represented countries. Particular efforts will also be dedicated to attract highly specialized profiles, to support the Organization strengthening both programme delivery and technical capacity.

61. The Organization will continue concentrating its efforts regarding the capability of staff to absorb changes and improvements related to HR areas. Corporate change management strategies aim

to alleviate uncertainty among employees about how the change might affect them and reduce the potential for a negative impact on productivity. FAO is following a proactive approach to successfully lead staff through the adoption of organizational changes. In particular, this is done through clear and consistent communication activities, providing details and updated documentation that are also helping employees to understand the need for the changes.

62. The Organization is committed to continue following a renovation path to improve the areas of human resources policy and management. In particular, great efforts are concentrated on the recruitment activities, to enable the Organization to attract the best candidates available on the global market and, optimizing the use of the resources involved in the process. Therefore, FAO has started to apply a modern approach, focused on the identification of talent pools and its retention, allowing the Organization to maintain the flexibility needed to meet specific specialized needs and changing priorities. While this is a consolidated approach in the private sector, it is only recently applied by different UN agencies.

63. The Organization will continue to maintain presence in the UN HR Network to liaise with other UN agencies and international organizations to learn about best practices and successful trends, with the objective to explore their application to FAO's needs and practices.