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FINANCE COMMITTEE

Hundred and Eighty-fifth Session

22 - 26 March 2021

Update on the post-Employee Satisfaction Survey action planning process

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

**Ms Greet De Leeuw
Director
Human Resources Division
Tel: +3906 5705 1744**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Committee is presented with an update (effective 15 February 2021) on the results of the Employee Satisfaction Survey since its last meeting together with elements towards action planning and further developing a motivated and engaged work force in FAO.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

- Members of the Finance Committee are invited to take note of the contents of this document including progress made towards action planning.

Draft Advice

- **The Committee welcomed the update on the Employee Satisfaction Survey Consultation process and Action Plan.**

Background

1. During the 178th Session of the Finance Committee held in November 2019, FAO Members requested the Organization to launch an Employee Satisfaction Survey (E2S)¹ to gain employee feedback on their work experience at FAO. The E2S was launched on 16 December 2019 to 13 549 employees. When answering the Survey questions, respondents were asked to refer to the period up until 31 July 2019. The overall completion rate was 41 percent, which, based on benchmarking with other UN agencies, falls within the range of completion percentage for a first employee survey.
2. To highlight the importance of the initiative, Ms Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director-General was designated by the Director-General to take on the leadership role as FAO's Survey Champion to drive FAO's post-survey action planning through a reflective and consultative process. DDG Bechdol is assisted by a Project Team to engage with stakeholders across the Organization. The Team developed a detailed project plan with well-defined actions, timeframes and outcomes which was endorsed by the Director-General. A key aspect of the plan is to ensure transparency, inclusiveness and communication around the Survey results and action planning.
3. This report provides an update of the action planning process effective 15 February 2021.

Employee Consultation and Action Planning Process

4. In June 2020, the full Survey results were shared with Senior Management, FAO Members, Staff Representative Bodies (SRBs) and employees at large. Additional reports (providing the same results but using different breakdowns) were developed specifically for headquarters and each Regional Office to allow for more targeted discussions, or to highlight specific areas such as gender and contract type.
5. The Organization proceeded with an inclusive exercise to define a corporate action plan through a series of consultative sessions and the creation of a corporate E2S Task Force to make high-level recommendations to address the main issues identified. The Task Force is a diverse, representative body of 15 employees selected through an inclusive nomination process.
6. To ensure ongoing communication to all employees on E2S activities and progress related to action planning and to seek employee feedback and ideas, a two-way communication campaign, "Creating Change Together" was launched. The campaign leverages different internal communication channels (dedicated email box and web page, articles, noticeboard messages, FAO Latest, videos, etc.).
7. Twelve facilitated action planning sessions were conducted from June through August 2020 with the Core Leadership Team and the Director-General, as well as with managers across the Organization from each corporate work stream in headquarters and with Regional and Liaison Offices. The aim was to gather initial reactions to the Survey results, obtain feedback on the first prioritization of focus areas and begin to identify concrete actions for improvement.
8. Sessions were also conducted with the SRBs to present the Survey results, obtain their input and consult on the way forward. Representatives of the SRBs are included as members in the E2S Task Force to ensure full consultation and collaboration in defining the corporate action plan.
9. Following the initial round of consultations, headquarters workstreams and Regional Offices conducted listening/brainstorming sessions and virtual townhalls, in addition to smaller targeted workshops led by internal facilitators to gather reactions to the Survey results and solicit ideas to address the four key focus areas. Each workstream and Regional Office nominated a focal point to

¹ To designate the Employee Satisfaction Survey, E2S has been adopted as an acronym to differentiate from the acronym of one of FAO's corporate workstreams.

work closely with the Survey Champion and Project Team to develop proposals with concrete actions based on the discussions.

10. This Organization-wide consultation process has included over 90 of these meetings across offices and workstreams with over 2 900 employees actively participating. Although this process has taken some time, the conversations have been extremely valuable, and time well spent. This approach created a space for open, candid and forward-thinking conversations and provided opportunities for employees at all levels to share their views and opinions on actions that will contribute to a more transparent, efficient and inclusive FAO. This responds directly to the E2S results, with the area of Communication scoring well below all other areas (41 percent negative), including employee perception that the Organization does not make sufficient effort to solicit their opinions and thinking (34 percent negative).

11. To specifically address the issues which emerged from the Survey related to ethical behaviour and misconduct, additional meetings were carried out with workplace conduct Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), including Human Resources Division (CSH), Ethics Officer, Legal Office (LEG), Office of the Inspector-General (OIG), Ombudsman, and the Staff Counsellor. SMEs reviewed the Survey results related to the questions on harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority and discussed specific actions taken, or to be taken, to tackle these issues.

Action Plan

12. The E2S Task Force has met over 20 times to review the ideas and proposals transmitted by the Regional and Liaison Offices and Headquarters workstreams. The proposals for action are centred around the four key areas of focus as outlined below and aim to address the main issues highlighted through the Survey results and action planning exercise. Gender is a cross-cutting issue that has been given particular attention and thus mainstreamed within the recommendations, as the results show that compared to men, women have less positive perceptions of the organizational culture on all Survey topic scores.

- 1) **Professional Development:** Main concerns relate to the recruitment process, career development and managerial skills and accountability. The proposed actions foresee the implementation of a transparent, streamlined set of recruitment policies, a new job growth policy and mobility framework, enhanced career support tools, management and leadership training, and mechanisms to strengthen management accountability within the Performance Evaluation and Management System (PEMS) and to gather employee feedback on managers' skills and competencies for development and performance assessment.
- 2) **Communication:** Main issues pertain to internal communications such as insufficient effort to get the opinions of employees, information overload and flow of information, lack of efficient and effective communication channels, tools and systems, and insufficient communications related training for senior managers. The proposed actions envisage more regular two-way communication channels between managers and employees to strengthen engagement and knowledge sharing, improved use of email and other communication tools/systems to enhance outreach, and targeted communications training for senior managers.
- 3) **New Ways of Working:** Main concerns refer to insufficient flexible working arrangements and support for employee wellbeing, lack of transparent, streamlined and decentralized decision-making/governance, outdated IT solutions and management practices to support remote working, need to foster more trial and error to spark innovation, and contractual modalities. The proposed actions include the development of a flexible working arrangements policy that takes into account results from the recent organization-wide 'pulse survey' on employees' experience with remote working, enhanced support to managers and employees to promote wellbeing including work-life balance, revised Delegations of Authority to streamline and eliminate bureaucracy, improved workflows to support the delivery of the new Strategic Framework, and implementation of initiatives to foster innovation and creativity.

- 4) Ethical Workplace: Main concerns point to fear of retaliation and reprisal, lack of awareness and training on ethical conduct, rules and regulations, insufficient capacity and timeliness to address issues and concerns. The proposed actions include strengthened policies and capacity to address workplace conflicts, streamlined appeals procedure, launch of mandatory training for managers on leading ethically, targeted communication on roles and responsibilities and navigating the various offices available to employees, and enhanced monitoring of mandatory training.

13. Meetings with CSH, Information Technology Services Division (CSI), Office of Communications (OCC), LEG, OIG, Ethics Office and Ombudsman Office, confirmed that several actions formulated in the E2S action plan are already being addressed by these offices and included in their work plans, which will be referred to in the E2S action plan to ensure synergies and avoid overlaps. As the mandate of the E2S Task Force is timebound, these measures have been/will be incorporated into existing plans and reporting, such as the HR Strategic Action Plan² and FAO Action Plan on Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PSH)³, as well as the work plans of relevant offices, such as OCC, CSI, etc.

14. Ultimately, the E2S and subsequent action plan are a part of FAO's ongoing efforts to promote a harmonious work environment and improve the Organization's effectiveness. This includes the implementation of the revised organizational structure, a new people-centred HR Strategic Action Plan, the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH) Taskforce, the development of FAO digital technologies and corporate initiatives focused on enhancing FAO's administrative efficiency.

15. Following consultation with the SRBs and senior leadership, final recommendations to address the main issues identified will be presented to the Director-General followed by presentation and targeted communications to all employees. Actions and achievements will be reported on through relevant divisional reports and organizational action plan updates.

² FC 183/4

³ CL 165/INF/6 Rev.1