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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Hundred and Thirteenth Session

Rome, 18 to 22 March 2013

Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Subregional Offices for Europe and Central Asia

1. This cover page provides a summary of the background and key issues for the attention and guidance of the Programme Committee on the Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Subregional Offices for Europe and Central Asia.

Background

2. In October 2011, the Programme Committee selected FAO's Regional and Subregional Offices for Europe and Central Asia as priority for evaluation in 2012.

3. The focus of this Evaluation was:

- the progress made by the Organization in implementing corporate decisions to decentralize its functions and roles to the region; and
- the results of FAO's decentralization policies and procedures on corporate delivery to its Members in the region.

Key issues in the Evaluation report

4. The Evaluation concluded that FAO had made efforts to better support member countries in Europe and Central Asia since 2004 through: i) the establishment of the Subregional Office for Central Asia (SEC), which increased its outreach and assistance to member countries in the subregion; ii) the increase in Programme of Work resources to all decentralized offices in the region; and iii) the use of the TCP to complement limited availability of voluntary funds in some countries.

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

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5. However, FAO's corporate decisions on decentralization were not designed for the specific pattern of presence at country level in this region. Thus, progress in implementation was by default, partial and hampered by inefficiencies in procedures and mechanisms of delivery. Also, there was no evidence of 'enhanced delivery'. FAO's assistance to the member countries in the region appeared, at the time of the Evaluation, to have similar strengths and weaknesses before and after the wave of decentralization policies in 2010.

6. FAO's work in the region has broadly focused on the priority areas and in the countries where its mandate and comparative advantage were most needed and where it could make a difference. In the selection of its focus countries, FAO was also consistent with most other UN agencies working in the region.

7. FAO Regional and Subregional Offices in the Europe and Central Asia have demonstrated commitment and diligence in undertaking activities under their purview to the best of their capacity, despite the complexities of the decentralization process. The process of transformational change that was launched in FAO in early 2012 already bore some results in the region - these appeared to be the right steps to address the earlier deficiencies.

8. The Evaluation formulated eight recommendations: two address governance issues; one is about FAO's presence at country level and one specifically on modalities of FAO's presence in countries without a fully-fledged FAO Representative; one tackles the implementation of 'One FAO'; and one about the use of the Russian language. The remaining two recommendations address systemic problems that will always undermine the performance of the Organization in the region, and possibly elsewhere, if they remain unresolved.

Management Response

9. Management appreciates the forward-looking approach of the Evaluation in focusing on the impacts of the ongoing reform at the decentralized level and feels that it provides a constructive vision on how the Organization could further strengthen its decentralized operations in the Europe and Central Asia region.

10. Management agrees with the main Evaluation findings and recommendations and notes that success in their implementation will be conditioned by ongoing transformational changes, as well as the synergy with the transformational change processes, as well as the willingness and engagement of member countries to prioritize their collaboration with FAO. Many of the Evaluation's recommendations are interdependent and can only be dealt with in an integrated manner (e.g. strengthened country presence, further delegations of authority in a more decentralized environment). Therefore, Management is fully committed to pursuing those changes that will result in more focused FAO programmes, and in a better performing decentralized offices network where there is due synergy and complementarity between emergency and development programmes.

11. Management believes that the recommendations of the Evaluation provide a good basis for defining a consensual agenda for change for FAO's work in the Europe and Central Asia region. Such an agenda can only be successfully addressed if it is widely understood and supported by FAO's membership in that region. It is therefore suggested that progress on the plan be reviewed by the ERC in early 2014 so that the concerned countries are fully engaged and can provide their guidance on the change process.

Guidance Sought

12. The Programme Committee may wish to provide its views and guidance on the key issues in the Evaluation Report, and to the response to the recommendations and proposed follow-up by Management.