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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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Rapid Assessment of Internal Evaluation Function

Executive Summary

- This paper provides an update of the rapid assessment, carried out from December 2012 to February 2013, to address the lack of internal evaluation focusing on lessons learned for use by Management, as well as problems of overlap, inconsistency and efficiency of oversight functions of the Organization.
- The assessment identified the clear need for an internal review function and proposed the creation of a dedicated Performance Support Review function, to be handled initially by a senior officer, so as to be used by Senior Management as a strategy to work towards this goal.
- As a secondary activity, the team also undertook an initial assessment of the inter-relation between oversight functions at FAO in country evaluations/audits. While no evidence of significant overlap was found in the 11 cases studied, the team noted that a comprehensive assessment could expand the analysis and include potential overlap and contradictions in thematic evaluations and audits.
- Management will use the analysis and findings of the rapid assessment as a basis for examining the required implementation arrangements for instituting a Performance Support Review function.

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

Mr Boyd Haight

Director, Office of Strategy, Planning and Resources Management

Tel. +39 06570 55324

Background

1. Evaluation fulfils an important role in FAO, by building a shared understanding of strengths and weaknesses, and by catalysing continual organizational improvement. As a key element of the Organization's oversight functions, it provides accountability to Members and to the Director-General, and contributes to corporate learning by supplying lessons into a robust feedback loop.
2. The functional responsibility for evaluation at FAO rests with the Office of Evaluation (OED), which was established in its current dual-reporting line format (to the governing bodies and to the Director-General) in 2010 as part of the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) for FAO Renewal. OED focuses on strategic and thematic evaluations for governing bodies, and evaluations at country levels, and projects funded by voluntary contributions.
3. At its 145th Session, the Council noted the Programme Committee's views on the Peer review of the FAO's evaluation function,¹ and agreed with the need to address the lack of internal evaluation focusing on lessons learned for use by Management, as well as problems of overlap, inconsistency and efficiency of oversight functions of the Organization.
4. The Council also welcomed the rapid review launched by the Director-General in this regard as part of his managerial responsibilities, and looked forward to a report to Members on the outcomes of the rapid review.
5. Accordingly, this paper provides an update of the rapid assessment carried out from December 2012 to February 2013 with the perspective of a possible future, comprehensive assessment of evaluative functions at FAO.

A. Rapid assessment

6. The rapid assessment was commissioned in December 2012, and its main activities were carried out by a team of two external consultants during the course of January and February 2013.
7. The main objective of the assessment team was to assess the needs and possibilities for an internal evaluative function focused on learning and use by management. In particular, such a function would aim to support: greater ownership and responsibility for organizational performance, ensuring that the benefits expected are actually delivered and reflect changing requirements and stakeholder expectations; allocation of resources in line with organizational priorities; and replication of successes and learning from challenges to achievement.
8. The rapid assessment team sought to consider solutions within the context of those applied in United Nations agencies and organizations structured in accordance to an operating model similar to that of FAO, and to identify the main potential risks associated with each option, including linkages with other oversight functions, organizational location and reporting lines.
9. The identification of solutions was thus undertaken with a view to guide the future formulation, possibly as part of a comprehensive assessment, of concrete recommendations for detailed implementation arrangements, including terms of reference for any new or adjusted functions and associated resource requirements.
10. In carrying out its main activities, the rapid assessment team held discussions with a range of FAO staff members involved in various aspects of monitoring and evaluation in the Organization. The team also had meetings with staff of IFAD and undertook exchanges with staff from WFP and the World Bank. Documents on various aspects of FAO planning, management, control and evaluation, as well as documents describing kindred procedures in other UN and other international organizations were examined.

B. Main findings

11. The rapid assessment team identified a wide range of activities relating to quality assurance within the Organization which, as an essential aspect of performance management, are integrated into various business processes in FAO.

¹ PC 112/6

12. The findings of the rapid assessment suggest that there is scope for improvement in the existing quality assurance and performance management systems in FAO. The assessment stated that while FAO has included provisions for quality assurance in many of its activities, the Organization's approach to performance management is work-in-progress, and that a reliable basis for determining managerial information requirements is not present. The assessment identified the clear need for an internal review function, producing reports for internal circulation at short notice, to be completed within a short time frame on problem areas in the Organization.
13. Specifically, the rapid assessment proposed the creation of a dedicated Performance Support Review function, to be handled initially by a senior officer, so as to be used by Senior Management as a strategy to work towards this goal. Performance Support Reviews, as foreseen for this new function, would address such types of problems for attention of Senior Management that cannot be dealt with through the existing mechanisms of independent evaluation, audit, and investigation or through the existing assurance functions.
14. The rapid assessment team noted that several UN organizations have similar functions that aim to support Senior Management in improving performance, which do not fall under evaluation, audit, investigation or inspection.
15. The team also noted that the Performance Support Review function might be a temporary measure until efforts underway to improve quality assurance and performance management mature further, and that in any case a more comprehensive assessment would be able to provide more accurate and detailed recommendations.
16. As a secondary activity, the team also undertook an initial assessment of the inter-relation between oversight functions at FAO. In view of the limited timeframe, this assessment concentrated on eleven cases where country evaluations were conducted by OED and FAO country office audits were conducted by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in the same year during the period 2008 to 2012. This assessment could not find evidence of significant overlap between OED Country evaluation recommendations and those of audits conducted by OIG. The rapid assessment team noted that a comprehensive assessment could expand the analysis and include potential overlap and contradictions in thematic evaluations and audits.
17. In the interim, the team recommended conducting joint OED and OIG missions where feasible in the future, and cross-referencing reports and clarifying potential contradictions to the extent possible.

C. Next steps

18. The initial findings of the rapid assessment launched in December 2012 focus on the need for a Performance Support Review function to address quality assurance and performance issues. It also recognizes the need to explore implementation of these findings in greater detail, as well as the benefit of a potential future comprehensive assessment.
19. Accordingly, during the first semester of 2013, Management will use the analysis and findings of the rapid assessment as a basis for examining the required implementation arrangements for instituting a Performance Support Review function.
20. The scope, need and value-for-money of a possible further, comprehensive review, which could also provide further analysis on the interrelation of oversight functions at FAO, will be assessed in the same time period, and a progress update will be provided to the Programme Committee at its October 2013 session.

Guidance sought

21. The Programme Committee may wish to take note of the update of the rapid assessment of internal evaluation function and the action being taken by Management.