

Briefing to the RBA Membership on the Senior Consultative Group and UN Reform by the IFAD VP on behalf of the RBAs

IFAD headquarters (Italian Conference room)

Wednesday, 22 May 2019

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to welcome you with my colleagues from FAO and IFAD of the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs') Senior Consultative Group (SCG) to the second informal briefing session and I am glad to introduce on behalf of the three RBAs, the main points we would like to share with you.
2. Please be informed that the Senior Consultative Group is composed of Deputies and Senior Management of the three RBAs and meets three times a year. It is hosted on a rotational basis among the RBAs. The first session of 2019 took place at FAO in early February, followed by an informal briefing to the RBA membership on 8 February. This briefing was well-received, as it stimulated an open and transparent dialogue between the RBAs and the membership.
3. The purpose of today's session is to brief you on the main outcomes resulting from Monday's SCG meeting, with particular focus on the progress in the implementation of the repositioning of the UN Development System, that is, the UN reform (UNGA Resolution 72/279).
4. In terms of format of this afternoon's discussion, after our statement, I will be happy to open the floor for comments and questions you may have. We will be delighted to provide additional information and clarifications you may like to have.
5. The second SCG meeting of 2019 was hosted at IFAD HQ on Monday, 20 May and included a number of important items - such as the RBA Joint Action Plan, the UN reform, Joint Country Strategies, and the joint informal meeting of the RBA Governing Bodies.
6. The meeting took place in a very constructive spirit, which truly reflects the willingness to cooperate. I will provide to you a brief summary on

the agenda items discussed, followed by an update on the UN reform and the RBAs key concerns and conclude with next steps.

- i. As a first item, **the RBA Action Plan** for 2019-2020 was endorsed by the SCG. It operationalizes the first tripartite MOU on RBA collaboration signed by the three RBA Principals last year. The Action Plan covers a wide array of activities at the country, regional, global, thematic and corporate service levels and provides a two year working document for the three RBAs to be further refined to include new emerging issues, if needed. The SCG is committed to ensuring the Action Plan is a standing item in its meetings. This will enable us to strengthen and deliver on our ambitious RBA collaboration agenda for achieving better collective results at different levels in a more efficient manner. Furthermore, the implementation of the Action Plan will be reported on in the Progress Report on RBA Collaboration.
- ii. **As a second item, the SCG has endorsed the countries** selected to advance the RBAs common commitment to pilot the development of joint country strategies in Colombia; Indonesia; and Niger by the end of 2019. Further details on this initiative will be reported at the joint Informal Meeting of the RBA Governing Bodies in September 2019.
- iii. Preparations are underway for the **joint Informal Meeting of the RBA Governing Bodies** scheduled for Friday 13 September. Two preparatory meetings have taken place thus far and a third is likely to take place in early July, which will enable us to draft a preliminary agenda.
- iv. **RBA Visit to Lao:** The Director-General of FAO and the Executive Director of WFP, with the Sub-regional Director of the Asia and Pacific region from IFAD, visited the Lao People's Democratic Republic from 14-16 May 2019 to raise greater awareness about the importance of integrated food systems to improve food and nutrition security, and to witness first-hand the agencies' collaborative programmes in action. During their visit, FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva, WFP Executive Director David Beasley and Country Director and Head of IFAD's Regional Hub in Vietnam, Thomas Rath met the Lao PDR Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith as well as the

ministers for Foreign Affairs and Agriculture. They visited the country's northern area where the Agriculture for Nutrition programme is benefiting around 400 villages in four provinces as well as a school programme that provides healthy meals to children and encourages local food production.

- v. The RBAs are also working on a number of other key initiatives, such as the development of an International Digital Council for food and Agriculture and the UN Decade of Family Farming. The launch of the Decade will take place next week (Monday to Wednesday) at FAO HQ, and we look forward to your participation in this important event.

- 7. Allow me to now shift the focus on the latest developments in the implementation of the UN reform and also highlight some remaining concerns on the topic shared by the RBAs.

Latest developments on the repositioning of the UN Development System

- 8. As you know, the RBAs are fully engaged in the UNDS reform as a means to strengthen coherence of the entire system and promote multilateralism. The UN reform also offers a unique opportunity to strengthen RBA collaboration for better results on the ground, towards ultimately achieving Agenda 2030, in particular to achieve improved food security, nutrition and well-being of poor communities in all regions.
- 9. The RBAs recognize that for the UN reform to be successful, partnerships have to be broad-based and purposeful. Therefore, while RBA collaboration is central to improving the three organization's effectiveness and efficiency, the RBAs must also leverage partnerships with other development actors such as with other UN entities, the Private Sector, Civil Society, IFIs and others to meet the SDGs.
- 10. On another topic, as you know, as part of the UN reform, the UNDAF – now renamed as the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) – or ‘Cooperation Framework’ for short - has been strengthened to serve as the most important instrument for planning and implementation of the UN development

activities at country level in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The RBAs are committed to working within the overall framework of the UNSDCF, and as such, have actively contributed to the preparation of the revised UNSDCF guidelines, which have been endorsed by Principals and are at the final stages of adoption. Moving forward, once finalized, the new guidelines will be piloted in several countries in 2019 and the lessons learned from these new Cooperation Frameworks will then feed into a review of the overall guidance in 2020 for future Cooperation Frameworks.

11. The reinvigorated Resident Coordinator (RC) system has been effective as of January 2019. The strengthened and impartial RC is expected to be in a better position to lead the UN Country Team and their collective contribution to the 2030 Agenda. The RBAs are committed to working closely with the RCs to ensure issues related to agriculture, rural development, food security and nutrition gain the required attention at the country level for meeting the SDGs. With regard to the RC System, the RBAs are now in full alignment with the decision by the UNSG on the role of the Resident Coordinator. The RC's will not sign off on country programmes, as envisaged originally; however they will be fully consulted with respect to alignment of the Agencies, Funds and Programmes respective Country Programmes with the UNSDCF.
12. Under the re-profiled regional approach, the regional assets of the UN system have been surveyed and analyzed to determine effective and efficient leveraging of capacities across the system at regional the country level in common premises and in support of the country level. It is proposed to expand the role of the Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) to cover the full range of sustainable development matters, to promote policy integration across the UN system and joint work on data and analysis.
13. The optimization of Regional assets is looking at establishing a single regional collaborative mechanism replacing and combining the functions of the Regional Coordination Mechanisms, currently led by the RECs and the Regional UNSDG (with UN DCO as secretariat).

14. A review of the Multi-Country Office (MCOs) essentially addressing the SIDS countries (Pacific, Caribbean and Indian Ocean SIDS), is ongoing in order to better address the needs of specific country contexts and improve the support provided by MCO's to countries and limiting the number of countries covered by MCO. Initial proposals stemming from the Review are being considered such as reviewing the RC job description for MCO, increasing human and financial resources of RC Offices in MCOs contexts and establishing a dedicated MCO in North Pacific.
15. The Funding compact aims to provide un-earmarked and pooled financial support needed for the repositioning of the UN development system to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Specifically, Member States are asked to commit to increase the level of core, pooled and thematic funding, and the UN Development System commits to increased transparency, visibility, coherence, efficiency and reporting on collective activities, spending and results. A Special Purpose Trust Fund (SPTF) was established to receive funding for the RC System. The necessary resources for funding the RC system are estimated at 281 Million USD , to be mobilized through 3 streams:
- UN entities cost sharing (overall contribution received as of April 2019 amounts to 77.5 million USD raised through the doubled cost-sharing arrangement. FAO contribution amounts for 4.70 Million USD, WFP contribution amounts for 2.91 Million USD, IFAD contribution reached 1.40 Million USD) ;
 - Member States Voluntary Contributions (120 million provided by 40 member states through voluntary contributions (top 5 donors – Germany, Denmark, Japan, the Netherlands and UK – almost 50% of total funding) ;
 - 1% development levy on tightly earmarked third party non-core contributions – implementation initiated in March 2019
 - Combined resources received for the SPTF amounts for 195 million USD a remaining funding gap of 86 Million USD is yet to be mobilized to cover the full costs of the reinvigorated RC system

16. An important emphasis is given to increasing operational efficiency and effectiveness at the country level through mutual recognition, Business Operations Strategies, Common back-offices and Common premises. As such, a mutual recognition principle has been adopted by 19 UN entities. In addition, all UN Country Teams (UNCTs) are required to formulate a joint Business Operations Strategy by 2021 and a target of 50% of UNCT's to be hosted in common premises by 2021 was set.

Issues of Concern to RBAs

17. The RBAs have also contributed inputs to other key reform elements such as the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF), Regional and Multi-country office reviews and the System-wide Strategy Document (SWSD). The RBAs are now broadly satisfied with the latest versions of these documents – except for some relatively minor agency-specific concerns.

18. Currently, the final version of the guidance document provides further flexibility to include non-UNSDCF outcomes in the country programmes to accommodate priorities that were not included in the Cooperation Framework, while stressing that this option is to be used on exceptional basis.

19. Concerns remain, for example, however, on the guidance document for the UNSDCF which could be further strengthened by better recognizing that hybrid UN/DFIs like IFAD have a distinct relationship with governments and must be fully responsive to national development plans.

20. It is also imperative for the RBAs that SDG2, along with the role of food and agriculture is explicitly incorporated in the new UNSDCF's. Also, the main UN Reform products such as the System-Wide-Strategic-document (SWSD) need to recognize explicitly that globally, extreme poverty continues to be overwhelmingly rural and most rely on activities within agri-food systems – most prominently primary production – for their livelihoods. This means transforming our agri-food systems so that they are more sustainable, inclusive and resilient to climate change.

21. With regard to Funding Compact, as RBAs, we invite Member States to pledge required contributions to ensure that the UNCTs are adequately equipped to respond to Member Countries needs and deliver on the 2030 agenda.
22. Allow me to reiterate that this year is a pilot year and by end of year we will be given the opportunity to revisit the Management and Accountability Framework (MAF) country component and guidance documents.

Concluding remarks

23. This week during the ECOSOC operational activities segment, there will be further discussions on the regional and multicountry office review, as well as on the System-wide Strategy Document. The RBAs will continue to engage in the ongoing efforts.
24. With this overview, Members may appreciate how much progress the UNDS has made against the multiple challenges under the various streams of work of the UN reform.
25. It is also important to stress how much the RBAs, with our diverse business models (UN Fund, Programme and Specialized Agency), converge in our views on what will make this reform successful and how we can influence and embrace necessary changes – towards our RBA collective actions and impacts on SDG targets and beyond. Allow me to reiterate that the RBAs are content with what has been achieved thus far and we look forward to continue working together on this journey. Given the ambitious agenda of the UN reform, we look to your support in assisting us with the successful delivery of this agenda.
26. Following this introduction, allow us to move to the questions and answers session.

Thank you

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Vice President, IFAD

Sweden – specific question, collaboration of the regional level. The RECs are quite different in the regions and the structures are quite different than the RBAs – how do you see this issue?

Norway – some of the concerns that you have are mentioned today are the same concerns share by the capitals. Can the statement be distributed? It is urgent for us to report back to our capitals and to New York regarding the ECOSOC operational segment. What is going to happen with regards to the regional approach and when it comes to the RC system - many would have liked to see it developed over a longer timeframe. So now we find ourselves working within a new system and we have to make it function as best we can. Operational efficiency and mutual recognition by the agencies – WFP signed on to this with several other agencies. We have not heard similar statements by FAO and IFAD. I want to know where you stand on this mutual recognition and when you plan to sign on. It's crucial to have the new system functioning properly.

EU – When is the will you be releasing the next progress report on RBA collaboration? What is the future of the FAO offices in the Ministries and will you be moving into UN common premises?

Amir – Regarding the RC system, have you read the SGs opening remarks at ECOSOC's operation segment? We have transitioned to a reinvigorated RC system. The SG says we have transitioned. Some of the concerns have been taken into account. It's a model we can live with. It's a pilot year, and we can look at this at the end of the year. We could've made the old system work if we had the right people and it will boil down to the right people. We started to see steps in the right direction. We have a new RC system, without new RCs. RC selection is being undertaken against the old pool. We have been advocating that we need to move quickly to a new selection model or assessment. If the ToRs and authorities have not changed, you need to reevaluate and assure us that they all pass the new assessment. 20 new RCs were chosen. WFP has 2 of them. We think it is progressing reasonably well. Some specialized agencies may opt out, and it would be sad if it happened, and it needs to be done well by the RCs and they need to show what is their added value.

Regional hubs – if we approach this like everyone has to have the same geography, we won't conclude this. The synergies between the hubs should be the consideration. Some countries might get support from different hubs in the regional commission network. We may get to a point that the only regional body is the regional commission and the rest of the bodies may disappear.

FAO – We have not signed on, but we are looking this from a legal and procedural standpoint under our internal processes. Overall, the move toward a more coherent system at the country level and towards the way we work towards achieving the SDGs, have been aligned to the ministry of agriculture. A lot of our work often has been hard to be recognized by the RCs because the Ministries of AG, Forestry and Fisheries are our interlocutors. We have two issues with the reinvigorated RC system particularly on which the degree of all activities has to be included in the country plan given the specific things that we do and the idea the RC would have to sign off on a programme. We have two FAO staff who have been selected to be RC. What we were surprised by is the fact that after all the discussion and the new roles of the RCs, is that all of the existing RCs were given the opportunity to continue. That all countries went live first of January was the excuse. The variation in the performance in RCs is quite big.

With regard to common premises, we have a high percentage of country offices provided by the government and we won't give them up. The UN common services are expensive. We are not going to give up receiving offices for free. There are country teams that are huge and you won't find a building big enough where you can put the country offices together.

We have regional offices in three of the 4 locations as the RECs, and a sub-regional in the 4th, and there is a lot of interaction. The fight is between New York and Regional offices, mainly UNDP.

IFAD - we strongly believe that decentralization will be the main strategy to achieve better coordination and collaboration. It's still too early to measure. We have seen positive results and feedback from our CDs, and life is easier to reach out to all stakeholders who have a decentralized business model. Efficiency gains, we are sharing 50 percent of our premises with WFP and FAO, we don't think colocation is a panacea, from a cost effective and pragmatic point of view and stand-alone offices are sometimes much more beneficial.

We are examining the mutual recognition framework, more than 50 percent of IFAD are collocated, and we are benefitting the services that are provided. In taking our decision we can factor in service level agreements.

Our decentralization process is wide and UN reform is wide and the results in the regions are mixed. IFAD is working with RCs usually in humanitarian emergencies like Cameroon, CAR, and DRC. IFAD is better placed with RCs in these environments. In the Sahel and in Senegal, the coordination of the activities is strong. We have a lot of coordination that isn't making the best impact. IFAD takes a pragmatic view in all cases, and we involve our RBA colleagues and they take over and represent IFAD in the processes.

Germany – RC system – indeed the RCs will have to show their added value. Is there any indication when a new selection system will be ready, and will it be open to applicants outside the UN system? It would be thinkable to recruit from national foreign service and have an ambassadorial head of office. Not all RCs have the same quality. It is better to have a recourse system and we don't have one because every RC reports to the SG and in case the RC acts as a disrupter, one would have to appeal to the SG.

France- I believe that you didn't mention anything on the regional action plan on the Sahel. Where do the RBAs stand on the regional action plan? Will it be presented at the informal boards in September?

UK – Is the Sahel action plan being agreed in parallel with 3 RBA country strategy pilots? Regarding the strategies and action plan - when will we receive a copy? Will the RBA action plan – will it be included in the progress report? Regarding the September meeting, we really need some documentation ahead of that. We have asked for a results framework and for an RBA action plan, which would allow us to have a conversation together. Measuring results – it's never too early to start planning what we want to achieve and how we want to get there. Monitoring progress is really important. Value for money – taxpayers are interested in hearing. Concrete info on this.

Amir – we need a recourse mechanism and we can't write to the SG. It's based on the regional UNDG and up until now, we have been accepting the geography of UNDP. We still have to decide if that remains the case. The current recourse mechanism works very well. It's not clear what will replace it. In the interim our ED has spoken with the SG and if in the interim and we have a problem, we expect to be able to call the SG who should do something about it quickly. However that's not a proper recourse mechanism.

13th informal meeting, this needs to be discussed at the next planning meeting. The planning meeting needs to establish the final agenda. We are looking at July. That needs to be done and done soon. In terms of the RBA action plan, and what I can say, it is an action plan and it sets out a series of activities and outputs and who is responsible and it is geared to deliverables. And it's a

move forward and it's not a document that is written in stone. It is written so that we can adapt and adjust it and there may be actions that we can deliver or not. It is a result that needs to be seen and noted in that light that - it is a management tool. We will use the action plan to drive the agenda of our RBA SCG and where are we – the RBASCG can't just be driven by UN reform. Future briefings could refer to activities in the action plan. We probably need a meeting or two of the RBA SCG to understand how the feedback mechanism is working.

There isn't a new RC selection process, there is still no indication of when this will happen. We can take up at UNSG meeting of ASGs.

Joint results framework – we have different views on how we will report on results and there is a common awareness that we have to measure results. UNDSCF provides better alignment between UN agencies and national development planning. Better analytical basis.

IFAD – I want reassure you that a lot of work has taken place on the Sahel action plan, and it's an interesting exercise and how to work together poses challenges, and we need to agree on concrete actions, and we don't necessarily work in harmony and understand what a plan is and what is workable. From our side we have endorsed the plan.