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Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<https://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

Management note to the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2019

1. Management welcomes the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services (OBD) for 2019 and continues to value the contribution made by OBD in providing an informal and confidential process for addressing conflict, disputes and complaints among employees, as well as the Ombudsman's contributions to the inter-divisional standing committee established to support implementation of the policy on protection from harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination.
2. Management acknowledges the reported increases in the number of visits to OBD, particularly on matters related to harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination, and the number of managers and supervisors requesting guidance and support regarding implementation of the harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination policy. Other entities within WFP dealing with these issues have also witnessed sharp increases in reports, which is seen as evidence of the success of ongoing corporate efforts to promote a safe and harmonious workplace, including through continued messaging from the Executive Director, as acknowledged in the annual report.

Focal points:

Ms J. Luma
Director
Human Resources Division
tel.: 066513-2923

Mr D. Marzano
Chief,
Staff Relations Branch
tel.: 066513-2441

3. In January 2020, Ms Gina Casar was appointed Senior Advisor to the Executive Director on Workplace Culture to move forward the WFP workplace culture agenda and to drive development of a comprehensive action plan (CAP) for addressing harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination in the workplace following the report of the joint Board/management working group.¹

Values and principles

4. WFP concurs with the report regarding the importance of organizational values. As part of the CAP, a WFP values consultation was conducted with all WFP employees by the office of the Senior Advisor on Workplace Culture in May 2020 to reaffirm values and behaviours that will be fully endorsed, communicated and actively applied throughout the organization.

Recommendation of Ombudsman	Management response
<p>1. The Ombudsman sees a clear correlation between the dissemination of organizational values, and the prevalence of abusive behaviour. As such, the Ombudsman supports the envisaged efforts to strengthen WFP's value framework and seconds the recommendation in the evaluation of the WFP People Strategy to define the WFP core values in a high-level policy document.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>As part of ongoing efforts aimed at improving workplace culture, management conducted a consultation on WFP values to reaffirm values and behaviours through a bespoke global consultation exercise involving all employees, which closed on 27 May 2020.</p> <p>Once the revised WFP values are finalized they will be launched in October 2020. This will be accompanied by a people activation plan identifying the symbols and systems that need to be improved in order to live WFP values and behaviours at all levels of the organization.</p>
<p>2. Once the WFP values are redefined, to have a lasting impact they need to be embedded in organizational policies and processes and anchored into everyday practices, such as team meetings, workload distribution and performance management, and applied in decision-making processes. To keep values alive, they need to be continuously communicated and reinforced as harvesting cannot take place without an ongoing process of sowing and weeding.</p>	<p>The new people policy to be presented to the 2021 first regular session and the revision of WFP's code of conduct will take into account the redefined WFP values.</p>

Promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion

5. WFP acknowledges and has identified gaps in various elements of diversity in the workforce and, more specifically, in gender parity and inclusion. A number of initiatives are ongoing to address these gaps.

¹ [WFP/EB.2/2019/9-A](#).

Recommendation of Ombudsman	Management response
<p>3. To enhance team cohesion and output, on boarding practices should become more inclusive. Those who start their first job after graduation, who have no prior United Nations or WFP experience, or who come for the first time to headquarters or the field need guidance and training on the job. Supervisors and colleagues need to value newcomers for their experiences and qualifications. Offering a sense of belonging rather than making one “fit in” are different approaches that create either an experience of inclusion or one of exclusion.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>WFP is reviewing onboarding processes to ensure that they encompass aspects of an inclusive culture including diversity and inclusion elements. As in any large organization, onboarding is decentralized and customized to the specificities of each duty station and division. While this responsibility ultimately lies with each division and country office, the Human Resources Division (HRM) is working to ensure more consistent onboarding practices across the organization.</p> <p>In addition, initiatives are being considered for adopting informal discussions with employees, “blind” lunch meetings² and other social activities that reinforce team culture.</p> <p>HRM is leading the development of leadership skill programmes for WFP managers at all levels and the enhancement of people management skills and manager accountability to equip managers to become role models for the promotion of an inclusive and respectful working environment by developing a leadership framework that guides leaders at different levels in their leadership journeys and a systematic approach to the assessment and development of management skills.</p>
<p>4. Conscious efforts are required to make teams diverse and to keep them diverse. Making sure equal opportunities are provided to both women and men as well as people from all backgrounds and regions is an important step in diversifying the workforce. This would necessitate obtaining insights on personal and policy biases and working to overcome them.</p>	<p>Partially agreed.</p> <p>In the context of the CAP, WFP will continue to implement the recommendations in the WFP gender parity action plan (2018), which incorporates gender parity in the revision and updating of human resources processes – recruitment, reassignment, career development and retention. Furthermore, the new people policy will address diversity and inclusion in addition to an enhanced gender parity action.</p>

² This would involve lunch meetings between colleagues randomly selected from different divisions/sections/departments etc. The main aim being providing the space for an intentional informal session for colleagues to get to know each other, build relationships and thus, strengthen organizational culture.

Recommendation of Ombudsman	Management response
<p>5. To help achieve diversity and inclusion various existing employee groups could be consulted more often, such as the United Nations Globe LGBTI representative, the Youth Network, the respectful workplace advisors, female employees, in addition to the staff representative bodies (Professional Staff Association and the Union of General Service Staff), and those in the field.</p>	<p>Agreed. As part of the development of the CAP, for example, consultations are ongoing with staff representative bodies, key networks including respectful workplace advisors and the Youth Network, and women working at remote duty stations. A specific initiative on developing an identity for young WFP employees is currently included in the CAP, in the core area of employee engagement.</p>
<p>6. To provide consistency and clarity in expectations and approaches, align the mandates of field “wellness” and “welfare” committees and provide a template for a terms of reference and for management-staff relations in the field.</p>	<p>Agreed. Well-being committees will be created and strengthened and support missions, outreach and guidance will be provided to country offices on the enhancement of safe and healthy work environments. Support for country offices will be provided to address workplace conflicts and the inclusion of physical and mental health-related activities in country office plans, and staff cohesion will be promoted.</p>
<p>7. To demonstrate its commitment to gender equality and eliminate any pay discrimination, WFP should conduct an equal pay certification process like the one Gavi, the global vaccine alliance, and The Global Fund have completed in 2018 and 2019 respectively. With this certification the organization would distinguish itself as an employer within the United Nations system where principles of fairness and inclusion are part of its good governance.</p>	<p>Partially agreed. In March 2020, WFP announced a new policy on salary setting which is based on relevant qualifications and years of relevant experience of candidates instead of previous earnings. The new approach aims to enhance equity, particularly for women and candidates from developing countries.</p>

Addressing abusive behaviour: using the combined strength of formal and informal internal justice processes

6. The 2018 revised policy on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination acknowledges and reinforces both formal and informal processes as a means of recourse for affected persons. Management acknowledges that not all reports are addressed most effectively through investigation and disciplinary processes, but a managerial or administrative intervention can help to address issues adequately and swiftly. Investments are being made to ensure that the formal processes, which involve investigations and possible disciplinary processes, are adequately staffed. A number of new positions, including in HRM, have been established specifically for this purpose.

Recommendation of Ombudsman	Management response
<p>8. The option to submit a formal report plays an important role in addressing abusive conduct. However, the informal process that includes dialogue, facilitation, mediation and restorative processes needs to be juxtapositioned with the formal process, as both are valid options. Corporate communication, investments, and the upcoming cultural change process that aims to create an “improved, inclusive and respectful culture at WFP” would need to focus on both.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>A number of initiatives aimed at the improvement of effective responses to abusive and disrespectful behaviour are being considered. These include undertaking continuous policy development related to abusive conduct; continuing global rollout of the “Speak Up” initiative using face-to-face awareness raising sessions on behavioural standards and protection against abusive conduct for all employees; issuing annual reports on disciplinary practices; developing tools and procedures that support HRM in addressing workplace behavioural issues; implementing revised procedures for administrative and disciplinary processes; and developing internal communications on disciplinary policies.</p>
<p>9. To confront abusive behaviour especially from “open secrets”, that cannot or does not need to be addressed through a disciplinary process but continues to cause harm, the organization should give priority to the establishment of an alternative process, complementary to existing mechanisms. Reference is made to the recommendation in the Ombudsman’s annual report for 2017.</p>	<p>In confronting abusive behaviour, whether formally or informally, management is mindful of ensuring that due process is safeguarded.</p> <p>HRM is considering the development of tools and procedures for more effectively addressing workplace behavioural issues that may not constitute misconduct or that would be more effectively handled through an administrative rather than a disciplinary approach.</p>
<p>10. Creating a respectful, dignified and diverse work culture will be supported by more listening through dialogue and by taking efforts to solve issues together. When the affected person to a conflict prefers mediation, and mediation is deemed a viable option by the Ombudsman, WFP should consider making the first session compulsory for the other party, after which the parties decide whether they want to continue. Such programmes are successfully implemented by the United Nations Secretariat and the World Bank.</p>	<p>Partially agreed.</p> <p>Management considers that the informal nature of mediation should be preserved and that while the other party could be strongly encouraged to participate in mediation an obligation to engage in its first session could not be effectively enforced by the organization. Moreover, there are situations where mediation may not be the appropriate approach, due to the nature of the disagreement or to confidentiality concerns, and mandatory mediation may affect dynamics in the workplace.</p>

Conclusion

7. WFP is committed to ensuring a respectful, safe and inclusive workplace. Work under the CAP is ongoing despite the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. While some delays and reprioritizations have taken place, significant progress has been made in the areas of reaffirming values and disciplinary processes.