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Foreword

I am pleased to present our biennial programme evaluation report, which provides highlights of the FAO Office of Evaluation's findings. During the 2017–2018 biennium, FAO made further efforts to operationalize its strategic planning approach. Consequently, our thematic evaluations focused on FAO's contributions to its Strategic Objectives. The evaluations found that FAO, as an Organization, had encountered a number of challenges in trying to adjust its fundamental approach. We hope our reports helped FAO to overcome these challenges and make further progress on its mission.

The global community is determined to push forward with 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This requires a concerted effort by all development actors to support those in need. As evaluators, we can no longer assess the actions of each organization in isolation, but must place our efforts in a broader context. The evaluation functions of governments and international organizations are now facing the complex challenge of how best to provide useful evaluative evidence to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The FAO Office of Evaluation has taken steps to make meaningful contributions and exert leadership in this multi-actor arena and, over the next biennium, will continue to innovate so as to meet this challenge.

Masahiro Igarashi
Director, Office of Evaluation

1. Delivering on the Strategic Objectives

1. The Office of Evaluation completed a series of evaluations of FAO's strategic objectives over the biennium. The findings of three major evaluations suggested ways for FAO to enable inclusive and efficient agriculture and food systems (Strategic Objective 4), eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition (Strategic Objective 1) and make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable (Strategic Objective 2).[1] We present highlights of these, as well as programme evaluations on issues such as food-chain crises and national resilience programmes, in this report.

2. The over-arching conclusion was that FAO's work remained highly relevant in all of these areas. The Organization made positive contributions, mainly through policy, normative and field-level interventions, but could step up its role in convening key actors, advising on strategies and facilitating knowledge on achieving the Strategic Objectives.

3. FAO's strategic framework introduced holistic and inter-sectoral concepts (such as the food-systems approach), integrating key elements to address major development challenges. Translating these concepts into concrete activities in the field proved challenging; traditional sectoral approaches continued to dominate the dialogue with partners (on value-chain improvements and food-safety standards, for example). Internally, this represented a challenge in conveying new concepts to staff in the field.[2]

1.1 Hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition

4. Political commitment is vital to reducing hunger and malnutrition. FAO's policy support work continued to emphasize a rights-based approach, ensuring the integration of the Right to Food into national legislation, policies and programmes. FAO successfully teamed up with ministries beyond agriculture, but still needs to broaden its reach.

5. FAO worked with the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean to get laws passed on food and nutrition security. It partnered with local governments to implement policies and programmes and with regional economic communities to develop policies, legal frameworks and strategies on issues from school feeding to national investment in agriculture and crop diversification.

6. A profusion of actors, policy initiatives, approaches and knowledge products in the food and nutrition security space led to some confusion and competition, rather than a concerted effort to build critical mass for sustained progress. FAO could use its convening power to play a greater role in policy convergence and the synthesis of narratives to aid decision-making.

[1] For more details, see Strategic Objective evaluations at www.fao.org/evaluation and PC 122/3, PC 124/3, PC 125/3.
[2] See *Synthesis of findings and lessons learned from the Strategic Objective evaluations* (PC/126/5, 2019) for more analysis.

Box 1: Evaluation of the Voices of the Hungry project

The evaluation of **Voices of the Hungry** showed the project to have been very effective in establishing a global food and nutrition security forum for all Members. The global standard it developed to measure people's experience with food security proved a robust and cost-effective indicator and, as of 2017, had been adopted by 22 countries for national household surveys.

1.2 Sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries

7. The growing need to mainstream sustainable food and agriculture into national development strategies made FAO's advocacy efforts and initiatives highly relevant. The Sustainable Food and Agriculture principles were instrumental in integrating key concepts of agricultural sustainability into FAO's technical and programmatic work.

8. FAO provided significant contributions to the formulation of national strategies and plans to promote sustainable agricultural production. However, limited progress was made on implementing practices and cross-sectoral approaches at scale and in a way that ensured their longevity. FAO would need to better integrate analysis of potential trade-offs between sustainability and productivity into its initiatives.

9. FAO should step up efforts to promote Sustainable Food and Agriculture principles and formulate clear guidelines on practices to support their implementation, explaining models and approaches. Each new Country Programming Framework presents an opportunity to translate the principles and associated actions into potential country-level results.

10. FAO needs to foster a results culture and identify lessons learned to help replicate sustainable agricultural practices. Progress was made on forging partnerships to achieve sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry, but more needs to be done to access partner resources beyond financial contributions, including expertise, networks, advocacy and investment.

Box 2: Evaluation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests

The evaluation of the **Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests** showed that by raising awareness alongside high-quality capacity-development interventions, FAO empowered various actors to influence the policy debate on tenure. The evaluation concluded that improved governance of tenure was more likely to be achieved through interventions aimed at strengthening institutional and operational frameworks and through specific support at local level where tenure mechanisms were applied.

Box 3: Lessons learned from the Global Environment Facility evaluation

A long-running work stream funded by the **Global Environment Facility** deals with Persistent Organic Pollutants, toxic substances that cause various diseases such as cancer and reproductive disorders. Evaluation synthesis produced a number of lessons, highlighting the effectiveness of a life-cycle approach for pesticide containers, providing incentives to the value-chain actors for better waste management and applying levies on pesticides to fund proper disposal, or cost-effective regional approaches, such as the African Facility for Reducing Risks from Pesticides.

1.3 Inclusive and efficient agriculture and food systems

11. There is potential to expand the uptake and scope of FAO's agriculture and food systems concept and build on Strategic Programme synergies. Themes related to inclusive and efficient agriculture and food systems were increasingly reflected in Country Programming Frameworks, including prioritisation of value-chain development, food safety and standards.

12. FAO has a comparative advantage in the formulation of standards, data provision and fostering enabling environments for value-chain development. However, when it came to offering integrated support based on food-systems concepts, some capacity gaps emerged in areas such as agribusiness and investment support.

13. FAO's Investment Centre made a sizeable contribution to results, especially in Eastern Europe. Including investment support as a distinct output underscored its value to FAO's objectives. There was inadequate liaison with regional and international financial institutions and a lack of capacity and expertise to mobilize funds to support trade, markets and value-chain development, especially in field offices.

14. FAO was operating in a crowded landscape of trade-related technical assistance when it came to food-safety control and quality systems. Much bilateral assistance was linked to preferential access, limiting the scope for FAO involvement. It was also difficult to secure resources to support countries that were not least-developed countries, forcing FAO to rely on small, regular budget projects to deliver most of its food standards assistance.

1.4 Resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises

15. FAO played a key role in building resilience to food-chain crises, having the positioning and profile to be the lead agency on a range of food-chain issues, from regulatory frameworks and standards to on-the-ground early warning systems and emergency response. FAO's partnership with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), as co-convening agencies on the global framework for transboundary animal diseases was of critical importance.[3]

16. FAO achieved many positive results in terms of normative, policy and programmatic activities to enhance food-chain resilience, but was not able to bring them all under one framework or approach, so as to avail of synergies across countries, regions and levels.

[3] See Joint FAO/OIE Evaluation of the Global Framework for Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases.

Doing so in future would bolster FAO's prominence as an Organization that can raise the level of attention, interest and financing in this key area of work.

17. FAO's emergency interventions and resilience programmes in fragile contexts were more effective when delivered through pre-existing institutions and community-level organizations, and when the design took into consideration the population's pre-existing coping strategies. Longer-term results improved when interventions were inclusive, addressing the challenges of populations with different kinds of vulnerabilities.

18. A good practice for strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus was the introduction of risk-based adaptive design into interventions for country programmes and projects. This equipped FAO and its resource partners with the flexibility they needed to select the best possible response in the face of crises, as well as safeguard development gains.

2. Addressing cross-cutting topics

2.1 Gender

19. FAO's greatest contributions to gender equality were at the policy and strategy level, where regional and national counterparts were keen to address gender issues, although most of FAO's gender-related interventions were at community level, mainly aimed at women's economic empowerment. FAO faced challenges in some countries due to insufficient political and financial priorities attached to gender issues, and little understanding thereof.

20. Many partners continued to see FAO as a technical agricultural agency. This limited its effectiveness in terms of engaging on social and normative issues. FAO should leverage its proximity to rural communities and track record in agriculture to position itself as a key actor on gender issues in rural areas, and use its agricultural and rural-sector expertise to build strategic and long-term partnerships with key actors working on gender.

21. The Gender Equality Policy remains relevant to FAO's mandate and strategic goals, but should be updated to reflect external developments, such as the SDGs and such emerging areas of work as climate change, migration, resilience building and social protection. It should be accompanied by an action plan for operationalization and progress monitoring.

22. FAO invested in mechanisms to institutionalize gender mainstreaming, such as placing gender officers in Regional Offices and bolstering the gender focal points network. In future, FAO needs to enhance the capacity of technical officers to mainstream gender in their technical work.

2.2 Nutrition

23. The rise in non-communicable diseases has heightened awareness that strategies to combat malnutrition must go beyond nutrition-specific interventions and involve changes to food environments. FAO undertook major work on food governance in Latin America on school meal programmes, food systems and obesity prevention, in Asia on the promotion of crop and diet diversity; and in Africa to boost capacity to mainstream nutrition in national agriculture and food-security investment plans.

24. FAO showed strong leadership in co-convening the Second International Conference on Nutrition with the World Health Organization (WHO), promoting the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025 and supporting actions towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. It also successfully hosted the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition at headquarters, providing many mutual benefits.

25. FAO's main achievements related to advocacy and sensitization at the global level, more than the actual delivery of tested approaches and capacities in the field. FAO Country Offices often lacked adequate nutrition-related capacity.

3. Leveraging key instruments for delivery

3.1 Country Programming Frameworks

26. FAO reformed its country-level programming based on adaptive learning and produced new guidance and tools for developing comprehensive, well-consulted programmes. The evolution of country programming since 2014 is well recognized but guidance did not always translate into desired actions and products.

27. Strengthened partnerships with state and local actors would contribute to ensuring that the programmes are grounded in accurate analyses of local contexts and drivers. During programme implementation, a more effective system is desirable, to facilitate timely support by technical experts elsewhere in the Organization, especially at the regional and sub-regional levels.

28. Country Programming Frameworks were not used effectively for results-based management or resource mobilisation. Programme delivery was reported via FAO's global monitoring system linked to Strategic Objectives. At country level, many programmes lacked results chains linking activities to higher development goals. There was no country-level governance system to monitor implementation. Resource requirements in programme documents were more aspirational than realistic, with no system for prioritizing activities based on actual resources mobilized.

3.2 Resource mobilization

29. Many evaluations recommended that FAO move from a resource mobilization/funding approach to a broader and more strategic role of advocacy and coordination, geared toward securing financing for the sectors within its mandate.

30. The mechanisms of the resource-mobilization function were refined, with Strategic Programme teams and technical units playing a bigger role in packaging, marketing and engaging with resource partners. Significant contributions to resource mobilization came from technical divisions with long-standing institutional donor relationships in their areas, as they were perceived as FAO's specialist knowledge holders and closer to the ground.

31. A key challenge to maintaining predictable and un-earmarked extra-budgetary funding was the funding preference for precisely articulated projects rather than the more complex, multi-sectoral, interconnected outcomes of the Strategic Framework. As bilateral funding moved increasingly to country level, resource-mobilization capacities in country offices were often found to be insufficient, exacerbated by some donors' shift to a competitive bidding system that required significant time in preparation. However, FAO mobilized USD 978.4 million voluntary contributions in 2018 in support of its Strategic Framework, in line with its biennial target.[4]

[4] [4] For more details, see Mid-Term Review Synthesis Report 2018 (PC 126/2-FC 175/7).

Box 4: Evaluation of the Africa Solidarity Trust Fund

> The evaluation of the **Africa Solidarity Trust Fund** found it to be a relevant and significant funding mechanism, instrumental in funding priority thematic areas for FAO's work, such as youth employment, food safety and resilience. It also helped reinforce partnerships with key development actors, such as the African Union and the Southern African Development Community.

3.3 Capacity development

32. FAO continued to be recognized for its capacity-development expertise on multiple levels, from support in key technical areas, such as forest monitoring and pesticide risk reduction, to institutional capacity building, to the creation of enabling environments and the development of guidelines, strategies and training manuals.

33. There were numerous concrete examples of FAO's capacity-building success in rural areas, for example, the Farmer Field School approach. Emerging evaluative evidence showed that regional and local project activities were well sequenced, serving as building blocks for comprehensive regulatory, institutional and technical capacity strengthening. This should serve to bolster FAO's leading role in institutional capacity development.

34. FAO made significant progress in going beyond its 'traditional' agricultural counterparts to support institutional capacity development, for example, with ministries of environment and finance. With the Strategic Framework encompassing broader development objectives, FAO should continue to broaden its capacity-building reach to ministries such as education, health, migration and women's affairs on issues of relevance to FAO mandate.

Box 5: Evaluation of the Global Strategy to improve agriculture and rural statistics

> The Global Strategy programme is the largest-ever effort to improve agricultural and rural statistics in developing countries, with 45 research topics completed, 119 documents produced and 960 participants from 82 countries trained. The evaluation suggested a strategic shift from data generation to use in the next phase, especially by policy-makers, and from purely agricultural statistics to data on the nexus between agriculture and rural development.

3.4 Partnerships and alliances

35. FAO's portfolio of partnerships grew and diversified significantly, thanks to a dedicated partnership-based strategy and a growing trend of engagement with non-state actors. Partners had positive feedback on the quality of FAO's partnerships in key areas. Cooperation with other UN agencies could be improved. The reform process initiated by the UN Secretary-General should facilitate the deepening of such cooperation.

36. Building partnerships with the private sector[5] beyond smallholders or small and medium-sized enterprises proved challenging. FAO actively partnered with civil society, but in some cases, the effective functioning of these partnerships was constrained by the short duration of letters of agreement. Opportunities were missed due to factors such as excessive country-office caution,

[5] An evaluation of FAO's strategy for partnership with the private sector is currently being conducted and will be presented at the November 2019 session of the Programme Committee.

limited influence on major players, lack of clarity on the definition of partnerships and a lack of distinction between one-off transactional engagements and structured initiatives.

37. National and local partnerships had a significant impact on facilitating innovation and change, strengthening relationships, building knowledge, enhancing trust and confidence, and ensuring a more sustainable platform for long-term development. In certain cases, the government partnerships were primarily at local, rather than national level, making it challenging for projects to address aspects of policy and enabling environments.

4. Evaluating FAO's work

4.1 Evaluations in the 2017–2018 biennium

38. In 2017–2018, the FAO Office of Evaluation issued 14 country programme evaluations (see map 1), 49 project evaluations[6] (including programme and cluster evaluations), three thematic evaluations on Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 4, and a synthesis of lessons learned on the Country Programming Framework.[7] The overall number of evaluations increased slightly from the last biennium, due to a larger number of project and country-level evaluations (48, up from 39, and 14 up from 11, respectively).

Table 1: Number of evaluations completed by region and evaluation type (2017–2018)

Geographical coverage	Country-level evaluations	Project/programme evaluations	Thematic evaluations	Total
Africa	4	15		**19**
Asia and the Pacific	5	9		**14**
Latin America and the Caribbean	3	5		**8**
Near East and North Africa	2	5		**7**
Europe and Central Asia		1		**1**
Global		14	4	**17**
Total	**14**	**48**	**4**	**66**

Source: Office of Evaluation

39. In the biennium, the Office spent USD 7.5 million for evaluations from both regular budget and extra-budgetary sources. This comprised USD 1 million for four thematic evaluations, USD 1.9 million for 14 country-programme evaluations and USD 4.6 million for 48 project evaluations[8] (see the cost per evaluation type in Table 2). Project evaluation costs greatly vary depending on type, geographical coverage and scope.

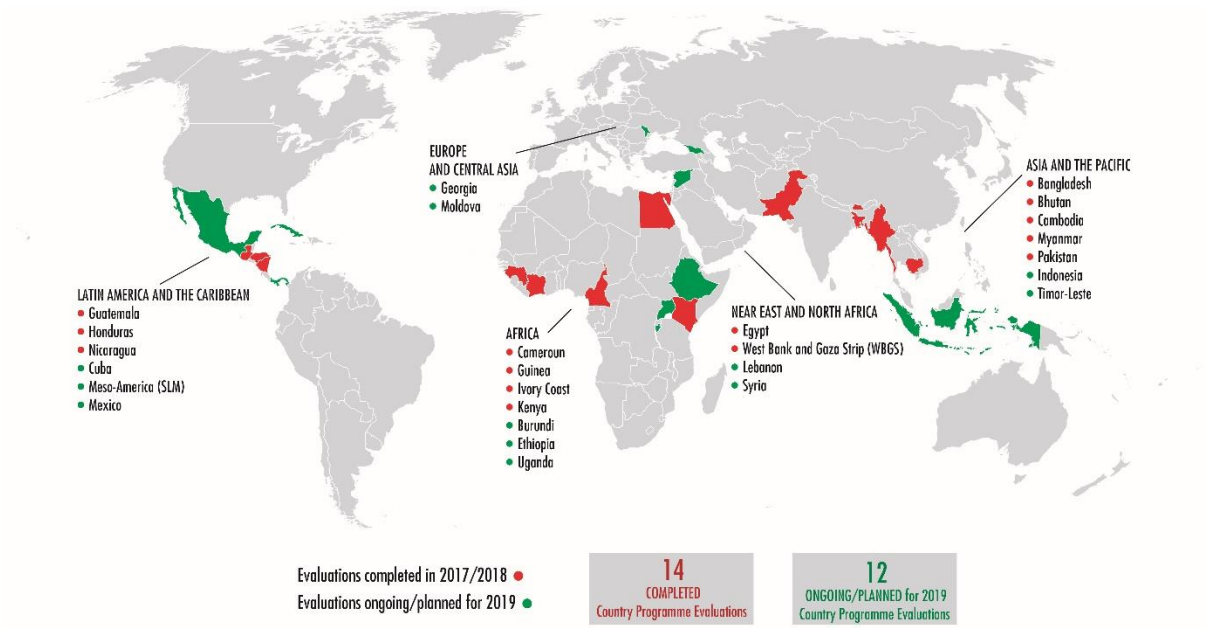
Table 2: Average cost by type of evaluation (2017–2018)

Type of evaluation	Number of evaluations	Average cost (USD)
Country programme	14	134 875
Project/programme	48	95 107
Thematic	4	263 050

Source: Office of Evaluation

[6] This includes projects and programmes funded by voluntary (extra-budgetary) contributions. The figures in the paragraph are rounded up while in the table they reflect the actual averages.
[7] All evaluations are publicly accessible and can be found at www.fao.org/evaluation.
[8] The expenditure figure for project evaluations reflects the amount spent by the Office and does not include the amount directly spent on the evaluations by respective projects.

Map 1: Country programme evaluations (2017–2018)



4.2 The Office of Evaluation reform agenda and beyond

40. The Strategy and Action Plan 2017–2019 of the Office of Evaluation was developed at the request of the FAO Programme Committee and in response to the recommendations of the independent Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function (2016). It includes eight key actions to enhance accountability and gender mainstreaming in evaluations.

41. Office management has ensured staffing is adequate to deliver its rolling work plan and other objectives. Due attention has been paid to recruiting staff and consultants with diverse backgrounds, relevant competencies and technical skills. All Office staff have attended specialized training on the use of evaluation tools and methodologies, such as quantitative data analysis, remote sensing and theory-based evaluations.

42. To ensure methodological rigor and quality, the Office has revised guidelines for country-programme and project evaluations, instituted supervisory and quality-assurance systems and stepped up the integration of gender considerations into evaluations.

43. The Office has developed a Capacity Development Evaluation Framework with a view to harmonizing, improving and enhancing its approach to assessing capacity development. Though primarily aimed at evaluation practitioners, the tool could be adapted for use by staff involved in project design and implementation and by field offices for project reviews and evaluations.

44. The Office of Evaluation remained an active partner in joint and collaborative evaluation groups, activities and products. The main partners were the evaluation offices of the other Rome-based agencies, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), the Inter-Agency

Humanitarian Evaluations Steering Group, and ALNAP[9] (a global learning network on humanitarian action). The FAO Office of Evaluation hosted, along with the other Rome-based agencies, the UNEG Evaluation Practice Exchange and Annual General Meeting 2018.

45. The Office engaged in other noteworthy initiatives: it led the revision of the UNEG Norms and Standards; it conducted a joint study with the evaluation offices of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in Cameroon that examined the comparative advantages of each agency, and scope for collaboration in view of the country needs; and with the WFP evaluation office, it held a workshop and formulated an action plan to promote joint evaluations.

4.3 EVAL-ForwARD

46. In 2018, in collaboration with the other Rome-based agencies, the FAO Office of Evaluation established a Community of Practice on Evaluation for Food Security, Agriculture and Rural Development: EVAL-ForwARD. The initiative responded to UN General Assembly resolution (A/RES/69/237), calling on entities of the UN development system to help strengthen the evaluation capacity of Members.

47. The initiative is targeted, in particular, at those engaged in evaluation in ministries and agencies. It facilitates knowledge-sharing on key topics related to evaluation practices and approaches, provides access to updated information and resources, and fosters networking within the evaluation community. As of February 2019, more than 270 evaluators, civil servants, development professionals and academics from 72 countries had joined the community.[10]

[9] Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP)
[10] For more information, visit: www.evalforward.org.