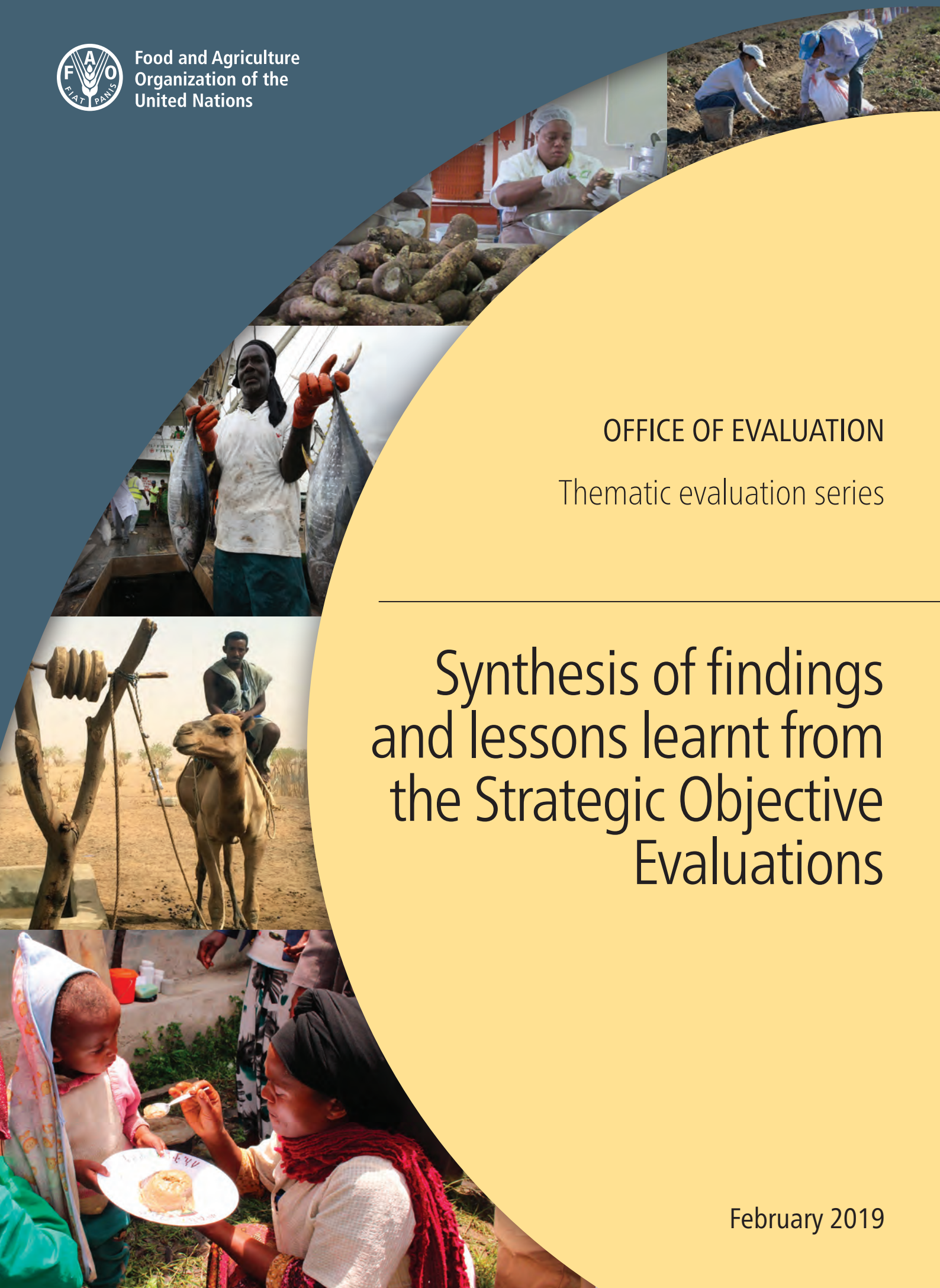




Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



OFFICE OF EVALUATION

Thematic evaluation series

# Synthesis of findings and lessons learnt from the Strategic Objective Evaluations

February 2019



**THEMATIC EVALUATION SERIES**

# **Synthesis of findings and lessons learnt from the Strategic Objective Evaluations**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE OF EVALUATION**

**February 2019**

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
COA	Corporate Outcome Assessment
COAG	Committee on Agriculture
COFI	Committee on Fisheries
COFO	Committee on Forestry
CPF	Country Programming Framework
DG	Director-General
EMPRES	Emergency Prevention System
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAOR	FAO Representation
FIRST	Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GKP	Global Knowledge Product
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
MAW	Major Area of Work
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MR	Management Response
MTP	Medium-Term Plan
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
OIE	World Organisation for Animal Health
OIG	Office of the Inspector-General
PIR	Programme Implementation Report
PIRES	Programme Planning, Implementation Reporting and Evaluation Support System
PWB	Programme of Work and Budget
RAF	Regional Office for Africa
REU	Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
RI	Regional Initiative
RLC	Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFA	Sustainable Food and Agriculture
SO	Strategic Objective
SP	Strategic Programme
SPL	Strategic Programme Leader
SRF	Strategic Results Framework
TCI	Investment Centre Division
TCP	Technical Cooperation Programme
TCR	Resource Mobilization Division
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund



USD	United States Dollar
VGGTs	Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry in the Context of National Food Security
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization



## Executive summary

1. At its 120th session, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Programme Committee endorsed the 2017–2019 Indicative Rolling Work Plan of Evaluations, which included a synthesis of findings and lessons from the Strategic Objective (SO) evaluations for consideration by the Committee at its spring 2019 session.<sup>1</sup>
2. The purpose of this synthesis is to extract key findings and lessons from the five SO evaluations and to extrapolate how and to what extent the FAO Strategic Framework (SF) has been effective as a programming tool in support of the Organization's greater development contribution since 2014. The synthesis specifically addresses the following questions:
  - Conceptualization: How relevant are the SOs?
  - Operationalization: What were the enabling and limiting factors for the implementation of the SOs?
  - Results: How and to what extent have the SOs strengthened FAO's contribution to sustainable development results?
  - Looking ahead: What are the main considerations in terms of the 2030 Agenda, UN Reform and the SDGs?
3. This synthesis presents 14 key messages that reflect the lessons learned from, and the challenges and constraints of, the conceptualization, operationalization and results of the SOs, in addition to a consideration of deliberations on recent global developments of importance to the Strategic Framework.

## Conceptualization

- 1) ***The Reviewed Strategic Framework reflects FAO's strong commitment to organizational transformation and a new way of working, with a sharper focus on development outcomes.***
4. The Strategic Framework is a significant and transformative step towards reorienting and repositioning a 70-year-old organization in a fast-evolving development landscape, to better address the emerging challenges to achieving FAO Members' global goals and FAO's vision of "a world free from hunger and malnutrition, with food and agriculture contributing to improving living standards for all, especially the poorest, in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner".
- 2) ***The SOs have helped to broaden perspectives towards more holistic food-systems thinking, foster inclusive approaches to safeguarding the interests of smallholders and marginalized producers, initiate FAO into new thematic areas towards comprehensive approaches to tackling food insecurity, with an emphasis on cross-cutting issues such as gender, and expand FAO's engagement beyond the traditional counterpart ministries.***
5. The SOs, conceived by way of an expert-facilitated strategic-thinking process, introduced cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary approaches and conceptual frameworks for FAO's engagement in relation to emerging, interconnected challenges to food security, nutrition and wellbeing, while maintaining environmental and natural-resource sustainability. The formulation of the SOs took into consideration major global and regional trends and challenges, as well as FAO's mandate, attributes and comparative advantages. A detailed

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<sup>1</sup> FAO (2016) PC 120/8 – Indicative Rolling Work Plan of Evaluations 2017–2019

results chain, with targets and indicators at output, outcome and objective level, guides results planning, monitoring and reporting. FAO is fully accountable for output-level results only, but contributes at all three levels.

6. The Strategic Framework is a living document, with the latest Medium-Term Plan incorporating major developments, such as (but not limited to) the 2030 Agenda and the Climate Change Agreement, and adjusting the results chain based on implementation experiences and new thematic areas.

## Operationalization

- 3) ***The Strategic Framework entailed significant investment in operationalization and implementation arrangements with a view to translating normative work and knowledge products into tangible policy and practices at country level. There is wide acceptance of the SOs, which are now well embedded in FAO's architecture.***

7. Major structural changes were undertaken to implement the Strategic Framework. Internal governance mechanisms were established to guide and oversee implementation arrangements, leading to a matrix management structure that blended technical divisions and Strategic Programme (SP) management teams, tasked with delivering results in line with the five SOs. Implementation was channelled through three main mechanisms: Global Knowledge Products (GKPs), Regional Initiatives (RIs) and CPFs.

- 4) ***In implementing the Strategic Framework, FAO underwent some transformational turbulence: implementation was characterized by much learning, adapting and adjusting, at both headquarters and decentralized levels.***

8. Translating the inter-disciplinarity of SOs, designing interventions around SO intervention logic and building projects around SO results chains was not easy. Understanding of the SOs and related concepts varied within the Organization. Country offices found it more difficult to grasp and translate concepts into projects than headquarters and the Regional Offices. Likewise, technical teams struggled more than the SP teams. These challenges have not been fully resolved.

9. FAO experienced challenges in packaging, communicating and marketing the SOs, especially to external stakeholders, notably government counterparts and resource partners, who saw the Strategic Framework as more of an internal FAO organizational framework than a development compact.

10. The matrix management structure brought changes to the boundaries, roles, responsibilities and mutual accountability arrangements between SP teams and the technical units in numerous areas: programme planning, budgeting, delivery, coordination, resource mobilization, monitoring and reporting. These adjustments were not easy and did not have universal acceptance and buy-in, but they gradually prevailed and are now largely blended into the organizational structure.

- 5) ***The Strategic Framework architecture fostered a culture of interdisciplinary work and promoted cross-sectoral and cross-departmental cooperation as the new way of working. These approaches enabled FAO to engage and contribute to UN System deliberations on the 2030 Agenda.***

11. The SOs helped to break down traditional silos in FAO. Notable progress has been made on cross-sectoral, cross-departmental and cross-SO work in these first five years of implementation. Over time, staff have become more and more familiar with the new

arrangements, resulting in greater interdisciplinary cooperation among technical units and SP teams. Strategic Framework thinking enabled FAO to engage with and contribute to UN System deliberations on the 2030 Agenda, particularly with regard to embedding sustainable and resilient food systems in its design and recognising the centrality of food and agriculture to attaining the SDGs. FAO's custodianship of 21 SDG indicators spanning multiple SDGs is recognition of its understanding of the interdisciplinary approaches required to achieve the interconnected SDGs.

- 6) ***Partnership is an area of positive change under the Strategic Framework. FAO's portfolio of partnerships has expanded and diversified significantly, guided by dedicated strategies.***
12. The Strategic Framework necessitated a broadening of FAO's engagement with numerous ministries besides its traditional counterpart – ministries of agriculture – to other development agencies, parliamentarians and, in particular, non-state actors, such as the private sector and civil-society groups. Government entities have remained major partners, of course, due to FAO's inter-governmental status, but there is room for improvement when it comes to partnerships with other UN agencies and the private sector.

## Challenges and constraints

- 7) ***The Strategic Framework encountered implementation challenges and constraints, largely in relation to skills and technical capacity, resource mobilization, monitoring and results reporting, operational and administrative procedures. These challenges did not necessarily stem from the Strategic Framework itself, but were rooted in the major organizational changes that were taking place at the same time.***
13. Despite strong conceptualization and commitment, the Strategic Framework encountered a number of implementation challenges and constraints, particularly in relation to the balance and distribution of skills and technical capacity (overall and in new thematic areas), resource-mobilization strategy, structure and mechanisms to deal with the decentralization of donor funding, the transaction and opportunity costs of operational and administrative procedures, and conceptual issues in defining, monitoring and reporting results.
14. The Strategic Framework's successful implementation and the efficacy of its results depend on FAO's resolution of these administrative and operational constraints, which do not emanate from the Strategic Framework itself, but the enabling environment around it. Consequently, a thorough assessment of these constraints will be included in the Evaluation of the Strategic Results Framework mandated by the Programme Committee for November 2019.

## Results

- 8) ***Contributions have been noted in three areas: support for evidence-based policy formulation, the creation of knowledge products and technical guidance, and investment in strengthening technical capacities within FAO and in counterpart institutions, supported by normative products.***
15. Given the early stages of implementation, it was premature for the SO evaluations to ascertain impacts at SO level. Nonetheless, the evaluations validated FAO's contributions to strengthening government capacity for evidence-based policy formulation in a number of interdisciplinary areas, including integrated natural-resource management, food security, nutrition, rural poverty, food systems and resilience. FAO's potential to have a major impact

at SO level is constrained by the current scale and duration of its interventions, its limited control over policy implementation outcomes, and inadequate extra-budgetary support for certain themes that are key to the Strategic Framework.

**9) *The integration of cross-cutting themes has not been systematic, with the exception of climate change.***

16. Climate change has been integrated more and more into programming, especially in relation to SO2 and SO5, and a number of scalable good practices have been developed. Funding opportunities have encouraged increased incorporation of climate change into programmes. Other cross-cutting themes, such as gender, nutrition and governance, have been addressed to varying degrees, but their inclusion has not been systematic. The recent (2018–2019) evaluations of FAO's contributions to gender equality and nutrition point to insufficient operationalization of the FAO Gender and Nutrition Policies through the Strategic Framework.

**Looking ahead: The 2030 Agenda, UN Reform and climate change**

17. Implementing the Strategic Framework has steered FAO in a new direction and better prepared the Organization for the 2030 Agenda, which will call for similar interdisciplinary approaches, cross-sectoral thinking and collaboration with diverse partners, but on a much bigger scale. FAO will need to assess the implications for FAO and the next Strategic Framework of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, UN System Reform and the repositioning of the UN Development System to deliver the SDGs, as well as the growing profile of climate change in the development landscape. What's more, faced with huge SDG financing gaps and a lack of sufficient development support, FAO needs to consider investment leverage as a major impact indicator and focus more on investment operations, including support for impact investments by the private sector.

**10) *Because of the potential programming and resource implications, the new Strategic Framework should strike the right balance between the normative aspects of FAO's work as a specialised agency and its contributions and support to countries in achieving the SDGs.***

18. With the SDGs central to the evolving development dialogue, the new Strategic Framework and its results chain will need to reflect more explicitly FAO's contributions to and support for countries in attaining their SDG targets. The narrative will need to be sharpened to reflect FAO's comparative advantages and role as a custodian agency. At the same time, specialized agencies like FAO have global obligations in relevant normative areas that have been approved and funded by their global and regional governing bodies, in addition to policy and technical programmes, which may not be adequately reflected in the UN System response, which is rooted entirely within the SDGs and mapped to SDG targets and indicators
19. The status of the new United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) as the primary UN System-wide support for delivering the SDGs will have implications for the CPF, FAO's country-level programming mechanism. CPFs have the potential to become even more important in capturing the priorities, specific targets and indicators in national SDG plans to which FAO can contribute. However, CPFs should also position relevant normative areas and scope out FAO's potential role in areas that may not be specified in UNDAF, but are requested by governments in keeping with FAO's mandate. Consequently, strengthening decentralized office capacity to effectively engage with UN Country Teams will become increasingly important.

- 11) *The rising profile of climate change, not only as major development challenge, but also as a major funding/financing theme, merits a re-examination of its prominence and position as a cross-cutting issue within the Strategic Framework.***
20. FAO's Reviewed Strategic Framework positioned climate change as a cross-cutting theme. Major developments since then on the global climate-change agenda have brought the issue into the spotlight as a major driver of development cooperation and financing. FAO's Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Strategy was formulated in 2017 along three pillars of action. A strong case exists for sharpening climate-change outputs and indicators in the results chains of specific SOs and in the main sectors – crops, fisheries, livestock and forestry – to improve visibility of the work across SOs, to make resource mobilization more effective and to avail of climate financing.
- 12) *Stepping up FAO's resource-mobilization capacity at decentralised levels will become increasingly important and require greater attention to the packaging, communication and marketing of FAO's offerings, comparative advantages and UNDAF-linked contributions to resource partners and governments.***
21. As SDG implementation is nationally owned and led, a large proportion of resources needs to be leveraged at country level for national SDG implementation plans. For countries to achieve the SDGs, far more financing needs to be raised than at present. A large portion of that financing will need to come from government funds, both revenue and debt, as well as private-sector investment. The scope and budgetary envelopes of CPFs will be informed by SDG targets and prioritized by Members and the extent to which FAO can contribute in terms of resource mobilization and investment operations. All of these things will necessitate an increase in FAO resource mobilization and investment operational capacity at the decentralized level. Regional and headquarters-based teams will also be a need to backstop programme preparation, marketing communication and business development support.
- 13) *The shift in focus from development funding to financing will require FAO to focus on investment impact beyond resource mobilization.***
22. The financial resources required to achieve the SDGs call for substantial diversification of and innovation in financing options. Development flows are transitioning from 'funding' to 'financing' and there has been greater focus on alternative financing methods, including blended finance instruments. These include impact investments aimed at attracting private investment, SDG-linked pooled funds, corporate social initiatives, social impact bonds and other instruments. With the paradigm shift from development funding to financing, FAO will need to rethink its development effectiveness in terms of investment leverage as an important indicator of impact. This will require greater attention to the scale and impact of investment operations than merely stepping up resource mobilization for programme delivery. With the private sector playing a significant role in financing the 2030 development agenda, FAO will also need to step up its private-sector engagement.
- 14) *Synergies and interlinkages among SOs in the Strategic Framework will need to be reinforced and further refined through more concrete programmes with more effective packaging, communications and marketing.***
23. The linkages between the five SOs will need to be reinforced and further refined with theories of change that seamlessly blend the interconnected themes of hunger, poverty, natural-resource sustainability and risk resilience. At the same time, they need to be packaged into more concrete programme interventions related to major challenges and incorporate results chains and narratives aligned to the priorities of resource partners and SDG targets. They

also need to be more effectively communicated and marketed to external stakeholders. In this regard, the 40 SDG targets, 20 interconnected actions and 12 focus areas for resource mobilization provide new and alternative opportunities to design flagship programmes that are cross-SO from the outset. These may require deliberations on how the SP structures and technical units can effectively lead, implement and coordinate programmes emerging from the Business Development Portfolio and support countries in achieving SDGs, while serving and fulfilling FAO's SOs.



# 1 Introduction

1. FAO's Reviewed Strategic Framework 2010–2019, approved at the 38th session of the FAO Conference in June 2013, outlined five new SOs for the areas of work on which FAO will focus its efforts in support of Members, as follows:
  - Contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition (SO1);
  - Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner (SO2);
  - Reduce rural poverty (SO3);
  - Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels (SO4); and
  - Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises (SO5).
2. At its 116th session (November 2014),<sup>2</sup> the FAO Programme Committee endorsed the Indicative Rolling Work Plan of Strategic and Programme Evaluation 2015–2017,<sup>3</sup> which proposed presenting one thematic evaluation related to the SOs in each Programme Committee session. At its 120th session, the Programme Committee endorsed the 2017–2019 Indicative Rolling Work Plan of Evaluations, which included a synthesis of findings and lessons from the SO evaluations for consideration by the Committee at its session in spring 2019.<sup>4</sup>
3. The purpose of this synthesis is to extract key findings and lessons from the five SO evaluations and to extrapolate how and to what extent the Strategic Framework has been an effective programming tool in support of FAO's greater development contribution since 2014.

## 1.1 Background

4. Upon taking office in January 2012, the FAO Director-General launched a review of the Organization's Strategic Framework,<sup>5</sup> which led to the Reviewed Strategic Framework 2010–2019, endorsed by the FAO Conference in June 2013.<sup>6</sup> The Reviewed Strategic Framework built a hierarchy of goals and objectives, based on a Vision for the Organization of "a world free from hunger and malnutrition, where food security and agriculture contribute to improving the living standards of all, especially the poorest, in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner".
5. Moreover, the Reviewed Strategic Framework set out a new way of working for FAO, stressing the importance of greater focus, collaboration between units to achieve corporate goals and better response to country needs. More specifically, the Reviewed Strategic Framework sought to improve the impact of FAO programmes through effective translation of its normative work into meaningful country-level results and its GKPs into tangible changes in policy and practice.
6. The architecture of the Strategic Framework led to the creation of a matrix structure for delivery, with SP Leaders (SPLs) coordinating the implementation of their respective SOs and the actual delivery of tasks and activities entrusted to various divisions. SO focal points were

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<sup>2</sup> FAO (2014) CL 150/5 – Report of the 116th Session of the Programme Committee

<sup>3</sup> FAO (2014) PC 116/5 – Indicative Rolling Work Plan of Strategic and Programme Evaluation 2015–17

<sup>4</sup> FAO (2016) PC 120/8 – Indicative Rolling Work Plan of Evaluations 2017–2019

<sup>5</sup> The 2010–2019 Strategic Framework was approved in 2009 as part of the Immediate Plan of Action following the Independent External Evaluation of FAO.

<sup>6</sup> FAO (2013) C 2013/7 – Reviewed Strategic Framework

appointed in regional and sub-regional centres to assist countries in understanding, adapting to and implementing the new architecture and to eventually report results in a unified manner that could be aggregated and compared at national level. RIs and country programmes were progressively designed around, and expected to report results against, the new SOs. The Medium-Term Plan 2018–2021, which took into account external developments (such as the SDGs) and lessons learned, did not lead to significant changes in the Strategic Framework architecture.

## 1.2 Scope

7. Evaluations of all five SOs, covering the period from 2014 to 2017, have been completed. This synthesis has made substantive use of the five SO evaluations, as well as other relevant thematic, project, country and global evaluations.<sup>7</sup>
8. Based on the objectives of this synthesis, a preliminary review of documents and in-house consultations, the following key questions were set:
  - I. Conceptualization: How relevant are the SOs?
  - II. Operationalization: What were the enabling and limiting factors for the implementation of the SOs?
  - III. Results: How and to what extent have the SOs strengthened the contribution of FAO to sustainable development results?
  - IV. Looking ahead: What are the main considerations in terms of the 2030 Agenda, UN Reform and the SDGs?

## 1.3 Methodology

9. The synthesis was conducted using an inclusive approach that engaged all relevant stakeholders, including FAO staff at decentralized levels and at headquarters in Rome. It relied on multiple sources for data collection and mixed methods for the analysis, validation and triangulation of evidence against the key questions. Sources of data and methods of collection included document reviews and administrative data analysis, meta-analysis of evidence from SO and other relevant evaluations (gender, nutrition), a synthesis of lessons learned from applying CPFs, OIG audit reports on the implementation of the Strategic Framework, interviews with senior management at headquarters and in regional offices and interviews with SP teams (see appendix 1).
10. The research used a systematic review approach to ensure that the findings were accurate, methodologically sound, comprehensive and unbiased. Key elements of this approach were:
  - The development of clearly defined sub-questions, based on the key questions outlined;
  - An in-depth analysis and synthesis of the evaluations, using a detailed recording grid, with at least two individual reviewers for each evaluation report as a way of controlling for inter-rater bias, before summarizing the consolidated evidence base; and
  - Interviews with key informants to better contextualize and validate the findings of the desk research and to gather relevant updates, not least because the first of SO evaluation was conducted three years ago.

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<sup>7</sup> Such as the evaluations of FAO's strategy on nutrition and policy on gender equality, expected in March 2019.

## **1.4 Limitations**

11. The synthesis exercise has two main limitations. The first is the information asymmetry arising from the two-year gap between evaluation findings and implementation follow-up reports. The SO evaluations were conducted over a three-year timespan (2016 to 2018), but to date, only one follow up report (SO5, the first evaluation) has been issued (2018). A second (SO3) is to be presented in 2019. The SO1 and SO2 evaluations were only concluded in 2018 and follow-up reports are due in 2020. Thus, the evidence base from individual evaluations is outdated to varying degrees and does not always reflect the present situation on issues addressed. The second limitation is the focus of individual SO evaluations on SO-specific issues and a lack of systematic coverage of organization-wide issues (such as planning, monitoring, and reporting, resource mobilization, human-resource and budgeting policies, contracting and procurements), which influenced implementation effectiveness. Thus, there was insufficient material for aggregation in the SO evaluations to provide lessons at the Strategic Framework level.
12. Although updating data that were more than three years old and compiling information on areas not covered by the individual SO evaluations were not within the remit of this synthesis, to make the report useful, actionable and fit for purpose, the synthesis drew on a number of complementing assessments and interviews with senior management and SP teams to: (1) establish the current status on the extent to which issues raised in the evaluations have been addressed (as stated), (2) bring attention to issues that would need to be comprehensively assessed in the upcoming Strategic Results Framework (SRF) evaluation, and (3) identify key external developments that might need to be considered in the next version of the Strategic Framework.

## 2 Findings

### 2.1 Conceptualization

#### 2.1.1 Consideration of thematic/context analyses in the Reviewed Strategic Framework<sup>8</sup>

**Finding 1. The Reviewed Strategic Framework reflects FAO's strong commitment to organizational transformation and a new way of working, with a sharper focus on development outcomes. It is the result of a comprehensive exercise, incorporating inputs from Members, external experts, partner agencies and FAO staff, to identify major global and regional trends and the main challenges shaping FAO's priority areas of work.**

13. The Reviewed Strategic Framework 2010–2019 began with a strategic-thinking process in 2012 to determine FAO's future strategic direction and to modernize and transform the Organization with a view to improving the delivery and impact of its programmes by translating normative work into meaningful country-level results and its GKPs into tangible changes in policy and practice.<sup>9</sup>
14. The strategic-thinking process initiated in 2012 was a detailed exercise involving broad consultations with staff, inputs from an external panel of strategic experts, consultations with partner agencies and dialogue with FAO Members.<sup>10</sup> The formulation of the five SOs took into consideration: (1) FAO's mandate, vision and goals, (2) the relevant Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other UN System mandates, especially in relation to food security and sustainable agriculture, (3) relevant international agreements, (4) results management methodologies used in the UN System for a small number of SOs, and (5) FAO's core attributes and comparative advantages in relation to the challenges identified.
15. The three key outcomes of the strategic-thinking process were: (a) the elevation of FAO's first global goal from "reducing" to "eliminating" hunger; (b) a new set of five SOs (down from 11 previously), closely aligned with the most relevant and urgent development problems faced by Members and the development community; and (c) a refined set of seven core functions (rather than eight previously) as FAO's means of action – normative work and standard-setting instruments, data and information, policy dialogue, capacity development, uptake of knowledge and technologies, facilitating partnerships, and advocacy and communications. Collectively, the SOs addressed issues associated with seven challenges: (1) a sustainable increase in food production, including adaptation to and the mitigation of climate change; (2) food insecurity and nutrition deficiencies, unsafe food and food-price volatility; (3) quality and balance of food consumption and nutrition; (4) rural and smallholder livelihoods, particularly for women, amid changing agrarian structures; (5) inclusiveness and efficiency in food systems; (6) resilience of livelihoods to food-security threats and shocks; and (7) governance mechanisms.
16. Action plans were formulated for each SO,<sup>11</sup> outlining FAO's overall strategy to address the issues and problems identified and, for each SO, the way in which core functions would be implemented and the areas requiring partnerships. Action plans also contained results

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<sup>8</sup> This assessment was based mainly on key documentation relating to the development and adoption of the Reviewed Strategic Framework, as the SO evaluations did not delve into its actual formulation.

<sup>9</sup> DG's foreword, Reviewed Strategic Framework and MTP 2014–2017, presented in 2013.

<sup>10</sup> FAO (2013) C 2013/7 – Reviewed Strategic Framework

<sup>11</sup> FAO (2013) C 2013/3 – MTP 2014–17 and Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2014–15

matrices, describing organizational outcomes and outputs, in addition to indicators and targets (formulated later) for each SO. Specific actions were also identified for the cross-cutting themes of gender and governance.

17. A perusal of corporate documentation shows that regular planning and reporting processes (such as the mandatory Mid-Term Reviews and the Medium-Term Plan) enabled the Strategic Framework to become a dynamic and responsive document for FAO. It retained its relevance through course correction and refinements in response to new and emergent issues. This is evidenced by the changes in the Medium-Term Plan for 2018–2021, which saw greater alignment of the Strategic Framework with the 2030 Agenda and the incorporation of SDG targets and indicators into the results matrix.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.1.2 The Strategic Framework's relevance to global events and trends

**Finding 2. The SOs aided in broadening perspectives towards more holistic agricultural food-systems thinking, emphasizing the need for inclusive approaches to safeguarding the interests of smallholders and marginalized producers and introducing new themes (including cross-cutting issues) that expanded FAO's engagement beyond the traditional counterpart ministries. These interdisciplinary approaches enabled FAO's participation in and contribution to the 2030 Agenda and the formulation of the SDGs.**

18. All of the SO evaluations reported positive findings in terms of relevance to global events, trends and countries' needs. The regional and global trends and challenges to be addressed by FAO are identified in consultation with FAO staff, development partners and Member representations, thus incorporate the views and concerns of all relevant stakeholders. Similarly, FAO's country-level engagement is reflected in the CPFs developed in consultation with government counterparts and other partners.
19. The SO evaluations found thematic areas to be generally well conceived, bringing a new multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary orientation to FAO. The SOs painted a much broader canvas for FAO than that of an agency primarily concerned with agriculture and food production: the articulation of 'food-systems' thinking (led through SO4); the sustainable food and agriculture (SFA) integrated approach (in SO2), with equal consideration of the economic, social and environmental sustainability of food systems and FAO's leading role in addressing climate-change adaptation and impact-mitigation strategies; the introduction of new thematic areas – social protection, rural women's empowerment and youth employment (in SO3) and a resilience agenda (SO5) incorporating food-chain crises and threats caused by natural, climate and weather events, man-made disasters, and crises, including conflicts.
20. Evaluations noted the relevance of specific SOs: (1) broadening perspectives from a focus on production to a more holistic agricultural and food-systems approach to optimize resource efficiencies in the production and delivery of cost-effective, healthy and safe products while ensuring the inclusion and integration of smallholder producers, vulnerable consumer groups and economically weaker countries (SO4 paragraphs 12–13); (2) public policies to address access for and the empowerment of the rural poor, as well as social protection, employment and the use of multi-sectoral responses for rural poverty alleviation and inclusive rural transformation (SO3 paragraphs 33–34); (3) mainstreaming sustainable food and agriculture into national development strategies and international processes (SO2 finding 1, paragraph 23); (4) the growing need for resilience support due to the humanitarian–development divide and the coherence of the resilience agenda with FAO's

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<sup>12</sup> The MTP 2018–2021 reflected significant changes in the formulation of SO outcomes and results matrices.

- mandate, as evident in early-warning systems and disaster risk reduction and mitigation (SO5 finding 20, ES 29–30); and (5) the rationale that hunger is just as much a governance and human-rights issue as a technical challenge (SO1 finding 1).
21. Evaluations noted that SPs placed strong emphasis on leveraging FAO's role and strength as a specialized provider of technical knowledge and enabler and facilitator of evidence-based policy dialogue. Policy engagement on food security and nutrition was particularly strong in the case of SO1 (SO1 finding 15, paragraphs 67–69) and, in SO2, on cross-sectoral, integrated approaches (aside from due consideration of sector-specific issues and governance mechanisms for sustainability) (SO2 conclusion 5). Engagement in international standard-setting and trans-border governance issues affecting food and bio safety was notable in the evaluations of SO4 and SO5 (transboundary threats). In terms of SO3 and SO2, FAO made a commendable start in formulating multi-sectoral approaches, including embarking on new themes to address rural poverty reduction. The programme logic was deemed to be "sound and helped FAO create a space for itself in new areas such as decent rural employment and social protection" (SO3 conclusion 1).
  22. The strategic-thinking process and the exercise in interdisciplinary approaches took place while the 2030 Agenda was still being drafted. Some senior managers considered the cross-cutting SO thinking to be 'ahead of the curve' and a good preparatory ground for work on the SDGs. Strategic Framework thinking was instrumental in shaping FAO's contributions to UN System deliberations on the 2030 Agenda, particularly the embedding of sustainable and resilient food systems in its design, with the recognition of food and agriculture as central to attaining the SDGs. FAO's custodianship of 21 SDG indicators spanning multiple SDGs is further recognition of FAO's maturing understanding of the interdisciplinary approaches warranted by the interconnected SDGs. FAO's inputs (through the Arria Formula Meeting) to UN Security Council Resolution 2417, which explicitly recognizes the link between conflict and hunger, the Director-General's briefing to the Executive Committee on the issue of land and conflict, and FAO's active involvement in formulating the UN Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies are key examples of the Organization's championship of issues that link food systems and livelihood systems.

### **2.1.3 Clarity, completeness and the relevance of concepts and theories of change**

**Finding 3. There were challenges in defining and articulating food-system and multi-sectoral approaches, limiting their translation and application to country programming. The understanding and articulation of these concepts have evolved iteratively during implementation.**

23. Despite significant investment in conceiving and formulating the SOs, the translation and dissemination of thematic areas and cross-cutting dimensions, and the articulation of interlinkages and inter-disciplinarity in programming were not always clear from the outset. The evaluations also noted challenges in relation to the clarity and definition of terminology for some SO concepts.
  - For example, the SO4 evaluation observed that not having an authoritative definition of food-systems approaches added to uncertainty for stakeholders. In the absence of definitions, the understanding of SO4 concepts varied from one country to another, for instance, with regard to food loss and waste, or agricultural and food systems (SO4 paragraphs 44 and 45). The Management Response (MR) to the SO4 evaluation observed that the issue was more than a lack of clarity of concept, noting that countries

were often constrained in taking a food-systems approach because of critical governance issues related to policy and strategy development, particularly weak coordination between ministries. This was reflected in the revised SO4 theory of change for the Medium-Term Plan (MTP) 2018–2021 (SO4 MR paragraph 2).

- Likewise, the SO2 evaluation noted the need for more clarity in understanding what the SO2 framework was about, how it differed from previous concepts and what was specifically needed to achieve the desired results. In many instances, the potential for implementation of the SFA vision was not supported by a clear and descriptive framework outlining the details, although it was also noted that the understanding of FAO staff had improved over time (SO2 finding 4, conclusion 2).
  - The SO3 evaluation noted that a theory of change for rural poverty reduction was developed to promote a multi-sectoral approach to poverty with differentiated strategies based on the concept of 'rural transformation'. The central idea was that there were multiple pathways out of rural poverty, such as the intensification or diversification of agriculture, the combination of agriculture with supplementary income, or an exit from agriculture to other forms of waged or self-employment, while simultaneously creating appropriate safety nets<sup>13</sup> (SO3 Box 3). It was noted, however, that greater differentiation and the more effective communication of FAO comparative advantages to internal and external stakeholders was needed (SO3 finding 8).
  - A theory of change for SO5 was adjusted and expanded by the evaluation team to clarify FAO's role and positioning on resilience (SO5 paragraph 44).
  - The SO1 evaluation noted a "realistic theory of change" (SO1 conclusion 1), but other emerging issues were identified in relation to urbanization, decentralization, migration and, in some countries, the resulting "feminization of agriculture". These may deserve greater attention in the theory of change and at country level (SO1 paragraph 144).
24. Interviews with FAO staff for the synthesis report suggested that the title descriptions and scope of the five SOs sparked some misinterpretation in terms of scope and hierarchy. There is a strong argument to be made that all of the SPs contribute to reducing rural poverty, hunger and vulnerability and, thus, that the title descriptions of SO1 (contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition) and SO3 (reduce rural poverty) create room for misunderstanding and exclusionary interpretation. In this regard, the title of SO3 was cited specifically. First, it has overlaps with one of the global goals and, second, it is seen as being at a higher level than SO2 and SO4, which deal with the augmentation of incomes and livelihood streams, which in turn contribute to poverty reduction and are linked to the resilience outcomes addressed in SO5. Third, it overlaps with SO1's focus on hunger and malnutrition, as poverty and hunger are seen as two sides of the same coin. In a similar vein, the SO1 evaluation mentioned that under the current Strategic Framework, the eradication of hunger eradication is simultaneously an 'SO', a higher 'goal' and an important element of the 'vision' (SO1 finding 2).
25. The above observations reflect the flux that is normal in any process of major transformation, such as the one FAO has undertaken. Notwithstanding the range of observations, the synthesis team found high acceptance of the Strategic Framework's core architecture. While minor adjustments could always be made – for instance, in the outcome areas for SO3 and SO4 in the MTP 2018–2021 – there was broad agreement among SP teams and technical

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<sup>13</sup> The SO3 theory of change was developed based on the concept of rural transformation and updated it in 2016–2017.

units at headquarters that the five SOs were 'workable', as any transversalization was likely to create both synergies and overlaps.

#### **2.1.4 Communicating SOs across FAO: Evidence that the new approach was understood and internalized by staff**

**Finding 4. Despite significant investment in the formulation and implementation processes, there were challenges within FAO when it came to understanding the SOs and their related concepts. People's grasp varied and uptake was slower among country offices and technical staff than among SP teams in headquarters and regional offices. The marketability of SOs was consequently a challenge.**

26. Despite the wide-reaching consultations that went into the review and reformulation of the Strategic Framework, understanding and appreciation varied, especially among staff in the technical divisions who were not part of the newly constituted SP teams. This was a recurrent observation in the SO evaluations.

- The SO1 evaluation noted that country-level assessments revealed a mixed picture of awareness, understanding and use. In many countries, the FAO Representation (FAOR) was found to be aware of the Strategic Framework and to have a reasonable understanding of the intent behind SO1, but country-office staff were found to have little or no understanding of its value addition, the implications for programming at country level and the use of related tools and guidelines developed at headquarters. Many staff at country and regional level saw the SO framework primarily as a reporting framework, a means to "tell a better, more consistent story" of FAO's programmes and results (SO1 paragraph 141).
- Likewise, the SO3 evaluation found varying degrees of understanding and appreciation of the SP3 approach, including the new themes of decent employment and social protection. Among FAO staff and government counterparts, there was a high degree of awareness about FAO's long-standing offerings on access and empowerment. This was not always the case in relation to decent rural employment or social protection, where some stakeholders (particularly national counterparts and resource partners and donors at decentralized levels) were generally unaware of SP3's areas of work and instruments (SO3 paragraph 49). Greater differentiation and more effective communication of FAO comparative advantages to internal and external stakeholders was needed (SO3 finding 8).
- The SO2 evaluation observed that the understanding of the programme and results framework varied between regions and staff. However, there has been an improvement over time and SO2 and the SFA vision have been communicated effectively by SP2 management. All FAO officers interviewed in regional offices had a clear idea of the SO2 results chain demonstrated by the alignment of their work with regional and FAO strategic priorities, as well as the low rejection rate of results submitted to headquarters for reporting (SO2 finding 5).
- The SO4 evaluation noted that the SO was regarded as too abstract and not adequately conveying concrete programmatic offerings that FAORs could 'sell'. Feedback from several country and regional offices pointed to the need to describe SO4 in a language that was more relevant to policy decision-makers (SO4 paragraphs 44 and 45). The SO4 evaluation also recommended that SP4 develop a limited number of flagships that included an all-SP4 programmatic offering and that these include the scaling up of existing initiatives, including the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia's (REU) RI 2 to improve agri-food trade and market integration, One Health and



models already being tested, such as 'food systems for urban areas' and 'trade-related capacity development' (SO4 evaluation paragraph 123). The MR to this was positive and action has reportedly been taken in this regard.

27. The Audit Capping Report 2017 on the implementation of the Strategic Framework in decentralized offices<sup>14</sup> observed a mix of perceptions in its survey of FAO staff. On the whole, country offices were positive about the Reviewed Strategic Framework as a structure that provided legitimacy for FAO in the development community and a unifying framework for accountability and reporting results. However, the framework was designed and managed as a top-down approach, without regular consultation with country offices and without full awareness of country programming. Country offices, in particular, did not consider themselves to be full stakeholders in Strategic Framework implementation and believed it needed improvements to fulfil expectations of enhanced performance.
28. At the time of the Audit Capping Report, interviewees also indicated that they believed the SOs were unclear to the outside world and, thus, not easily marketable, in contrast to FAO's offerings in relation to hunger and nutrition or the SDGs. The SOs were not seen as useful for communicating with high-level government officials. Another observation was made that while the five SOs each had their focus, they lacked an over-arching chapeau that bound them together and theories of change linking them to Members' three global goals.<sup>15</sup>

## **2.2 Operationalization**

### **2.2.1 The role and work of SPs in support of SO achievement**

29. The Guidelines for the Implementation of the Strategic Framework<sup>16</sup> contain details of the overall corporate approach and directions for putting it into operation. The major changes introduced were: vesting SPLs with overall conceptual leadership and accountability for the management and implementation of SO action plans; the introduction of three delivery mechanisms – global knowledge products, RIs and CPFs; and a matrix management structure with staffing and resources planned, managed and supervised by heads of department, Regional Offices and FAORs, in consultation with SPLs.
30. The SO evaluations did not focus on the administrative and management arrangements for the Strategic Framework, as they were not SO-specific. The role of the SPs in supporting SO achievement was brought up by several interviewees during the synthesis exercise, however. While there was consensus and conviction on the logic and clarity of the five SOs, the same could not be said of the SPs, which were introduced later as an implementation arrangement. When the Strategic Framework was developed, the SOs were designed to be objectives, not programmes. The value that the individual SO-aligned SPs bring in terms of delivering on the objectives remains questionable in the absence of objective assessment. Whether it might be appropriate to redefine the SPs to best support FAO's achievement of the SOs merits further reflection. The value added by the five SPs compared with the multiple technical divisions implementing initiatives aligned to the five SOs will only be comprehensively assessed in the upcoming SRF evaluation.
31. Further issues and challenges noted in the SO evaluations and in staff interviews conducted for this synthesis report are noted below.

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<sup>14</sup> FAO (2017) Executive summary, Audit Capping Report 2017 on the implementation of the Strategic Framework in decentralized offices

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x3551e/x3551e02.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Guidelines for the Implementation of the Strategic Framework (2014–2015 and 2016–2017)

## 2.2.2 Cross-collaboration and synergies

**Finding 5. The Strategic Framework architecture necessitated integrated approaches and fostered cross-sectoral and cross-departmental cooperation as the new way of working. Its implementation has supported a culture of interdisciplinary work. There is a gradual increase in cross-SO content in programming, led by the RIs.**

32. The SO evaluations found consistent evidence of interdisciplinary work within the SPs, in addition to several illustrations of complementarity and cross-SP collaboration. There were also mentions of practical challenges to and constraints on collaboration. The clearest examples of cross-SO work are the RIs, which were designed to incorporate thematic elements from several SOs. Evaluations cited overlaps in a number of thematic areas (such as social protection, value chains, sustainable production and youth challenges) that also presented opportunities for SP partnership and joint action at country level. Few illustrations of cross-SO work within individual projects were evident in the SO evaluations.
  - The SO4 evaluation noted that the inclusive and efficient food-systems approach considered economic, social and environmental issues and there were several areas of inter-SP synergy. There are strong complementarities with SP2 in the areas of pesticide residue limits and anti-microbial resistance in livestock and fisheries, which straddle both production and protection, as well as with SP5 on control and prevention of food-chain crises due to plant pests and animal diseases, and a close link with SP1 in the context of nutrition-related standard-setting and implementation. Linkages with SP3 are more evident in inclusive value-chain development activities, including gender-sensitive value chains (SO4 finding 5, paragraph 62).
  - The SO3 evaluation observed some good examples of how elements of SP3 were mainstreamed across FAO's work, for example, in relation to decent employment and social protection in technical areas such as fisheries and plant protection. Joint work has also started between SP3 and other SPs, including SP5 (on shock-responsive social protection, climate change, migration and resilience), SP1 (on nutrition-sensitive social protection and the linkages between social protection, food security and nutrition) and SP4 (on inclusive value chains) (SO3 finding 6).
  - The SO1 evaluation noted SP1 as being the nucleus of food and nutrition security policy work in FAO. It is working well with other headquarters units involved in policy, such as the Investment Centre Division (TCI) and the Economic and Social Development Department (ES) Governance Unit. Links between the SP1 team and technical divisions were found to be strong at headquarters, where FAO has made encouraging efforts to strengthen the coherence of policy advice provided by FAO units (SO1 finding 11).
  - The SO5 evaluation referred to collaboration with SP2 on climate change, with SP3 on social protection and with SP4 on food-chain safety, including cooperation under some RIs.
  - The SO2 evaluation observed that despite different approaches to implementation and coordination, the major areas of work (MAWs) were effective in promoting cross-sectoral collaboration within FAO (SO2 finding 27). Integrated approaches also come at a cost, however; the SO2 evaluation noted that trade-offs between agricultural development, social development and the environment (natural resources) were unavoidable and inherent to the concept of sustainable development. It also observed that the main challenge for FAO in delivering SO2 results was acknowledging and exploring these trade-offs and, in some cases, the contradictions between the three dimensions of

sustainability – economic (productivity), environmental and social. The evaluation noted the need to develop a common understanding of the practical meaning of these terms at national and local level and to propose pragmatic ways to negotiate these trade-offs using a whole-of-government approach. FAO has encountered challenges in exploring trade-offs. Yet, in many cases (and especially on small projects), it has only begun to analyse and communicate to potential beneficiaries and national governments the whole picture in terms of the trade-offs and value involved in choosing more or less sustainable or productive systems and practices (SO2 finding 4, paragraphs 36 and 37).

33. At the same time, evaluations found continued scope for greater synergies. For example, there was limited application and differentiation of the SOs in the implementation of country programmes (SO4 paragraph 69). Despite concerted efforts to mainstream certain themes, there were gaps in applying them (SO3 finding 6), and there was potential for more collaboration between SPs at headquarters (SO5 Para 69). The evaluation of SO1 found that the degree of active collaboration fell short of potential in terms of synergy building and collaboration with SP3 and SP4 (SO1 finding 11). SO2, meanwhile, failed to capitalise on opportunities to further improve GKPs with input from the Regional Offices (SO2 finding 24),
34. The SO5 follow-up report cited considerable progress on expanding SP5's collaboration with other SPs. It worked with SP1 to lend support to the FIRST<sup>17</sup> Policy Assistance Facility effectiveness analysis in conflict-affected contexts; with SP2 on climate-change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in several global policy processes and initiatives; with SP3, on a common vision and approach to social protection and migration and the development of risk-informed and shock-responsive social protection in fragile and protracted crisis contexts; and with SP4 on resilience models for small-scale processing, transforming and marketing and on One Health, a multidisciplinary approach to food-chain threats. Pastoralism is another area where multiple SOs have been able to work together, according to staff interviews.
35. Interviews with FAO management for this synthesis revealed a diversity of views on the effectiveness of inter-divisional and inter-SP collaboration, amid overall agreement that there has been a positive shift in the magnitude of interdisciplinary work, engendered by the results framework and also the matrix structure of implementation. On cross-SP work, several noted that this might be happening in a more *ad hoc* than systematic manner, although technical work remains mostly sectoral, partly due to the way the Organization is still structured. Some noted that silos remained in some areas, while others highlighted that some SPs may have become the new silos.
36. Addressing priority issues for member states often requires working across SOs, and such cross-SO work is gradually increasing, although more could be done. At the same time, some noted that cross-SO work may not be relevant in all cases and should, therefore, not be imposed as compulsory for all projects and initiatives.

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<sup>17</sup> FAO/European Union partnership on Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) (<http://www.fao.org/europeanunion/eu-projects/first/en/>)

### 2.2.3 Assessment of internal cultural changes

#### ***Has there been more cohesive FAO support? Less work in silos? Strengthened coordination? Better prioritization?***

#### **Finding 6. The SO architecture helped to break down silos and change the technical divisions' traditionally isolated way of working.**

37. Adopting cross-cutting and interdisciplinary approaches is not only about concepts, but also about changing organizational behaviour and habits. The Strategic Framework has brought about a number of changes in the traditional 'siloed' way of working at FAO and has required technical units and SP teams to work together in a more coordinated way.
38. All of the SO evaluations produced positive findings on the overall cultural shift within FAO in order to implement the strategic framework, although there were some challenges too.
  - The SO4 evaluation cited recognition that cultural shifts within FAO were essential in order to deliver results; FAO was often perceived by external stakeholders to be a production-driven organization that paid little attention to markets. The SP4 team was working to bring about these shifts. There were noteworthy examples of strong collaboration and coordination between the different SO4 outputs, with work across technical divisions to deliver a holistic 'SO4 package' of assistance to countries (SO4 conclusion 6).
  - The SO3 evaluation noted that the Strategic Framework had reinforced the formulation and screening process of programmes and projects for social and environmental management standards, in particular, the inclusion of decent work (EES7) and gender equality (EES8) social standards in the FAO project-cycle guide and the systematic review of project proposals by the relevant SP management team (SO3 finding 5, paragraph 41).
  - The SO5 evaluation noted that the (SP5) team had provided leadership and helped to break down silos in a useful and credible manner. Processes and a supportive attitude made SP5 one of the most present and visible SPs at country level. There was a gradual shift in the reviewed portfolio towards more genuine resilience programming, with closer coordination and collaboration with programme-country governments and regional institutions, and away from unsustainable and disjointed interventions. However, country office progress on implementing the Reviewed Strategic Framework remained extremely varied, pointing to an uneven rollout of the Strategic Framework at country level (SO5 conclusions 2 and 3).
  - The SO2 evaluation reported that many FAO staff noted improvements in cross-sectoral collaboration within the context of SP2. MAWs and GKPs were successful at breaking down some of FAO's long-standing technical silos by promoting cross-sectoral discussion, connecting the worldwide network of practitioners and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and expertise. The efforts made under SO2 to bring together some of the largest technical divisions and departments within FAO to promote cross-sectoral dialogue at country level made SO2 highly complex and challenging in its design and implementation (SO2 paragraph 111).
  - The SO1 evaluation emphasized the importance of policy and pushed FAO beyond its traditional technical space. Nutrition concerns featured more prominently in the new framework. Positioning FAO's support at the 'upstream' policy level, SO1 stressed to a greater extent than before the primacy of political commitment, the connection between policy implementation and investment, and the need to ground policy support in solid political-economic analysis, while also assisting in the application and use of Committee

on World Food Security (CFS) products (the right to food, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry in the Context of National Food Security (VGGTs), the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems, etc.) and principles at country level, through a rights-based approach as and when the environment was conducive (SO1 finding 2, conclusion 1).

39. Interviews with FAO management for the synthesis confirmed that adopting and implementing the Strategic Framework was a major undertaking and involved heavy investment and teamwork that has transformed the organization in mostly positive ways. The Strategic Framework has brought about a dramatic shift and placed new emphasis on working in an integrated manner, simultaneously, on the three pillars of sustainability: social (hunger, poverty, social protection), economic (technical sectors) and environmental (biodiversity, climate change). Many respondents were convinced that, despite challenges and limitations, the changes over the past five years were significant in the context of FAO's 70-year history.
40. The revamping of the previous 11 SOs (aligned to departmental interests) into the current five helped simplify the outcome architecture and forced units to work together on major thematic areas towards development outcomes measured in terms of contribution to livelihoods. This was particularly significant in the case of SO2, which subsumed several previous SOs. The other major change – although this had more to do with decentralization than SO thinking – was the stronger connection between global and country-level work, especially with regard to rethinking global instruments and guidance from a national perspective and making them more useful to countries. There are several illustrative results from the cross-disciplinary collaborative approach, including the Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture, the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) and social protection. The collaboration became possible by focusing on people, livelihoods and the planet using a systems approach (food systems and ecosystems, for example).
41. Regional Offices had positive opinions of the framework and noted that the SOs defined FAO's niche and had opened opportunities for wider engagement and cross-sectoral interaction in areas such as food systems and One Health. They added that the SOs had changed perceptions of FAO as a production-oriented organization mainly aligned with ministries of agriculture.
42. Staff interviewed for the synthesis also voiced a number of contrarian views, in particular, that the current SOs necessitated a lot more communication with Members and required clearer narratives that were easier to convey. In the past, they said, when FAO had 11 functionally aligned SOs, it was easier to speak with the relevant line ministries and to classify country requests on issues such as rural development and urbanization, policy advice (EU policy, land consolidation), trade, agriculture, transboundary diseases, food safety (anti-microbial resistance), climate resilience, forests (tree diseases) and SDGs (statistics). How these requests are interpreted under the new SO structure and led/coordinated by SP teams and divisions is not always clear, especially to country offices, external stakeholders and resource partners.

## 2.2.4 Role of the Regional Initiatives and the 'focus country' system

**Finding 7. Regional Initiatives have proved a useful delivery mechanism for translating the Strategic Framework into tangible contributions to regional priorities and contexts. They have served as entry points for seeding and field-testing interdisciplinary offerings and concepts and acted as technical-capacity hubs for new and emerging themes. However, they have also faced constraints in terms of scale and country coverage and lacked resource-mobilization strategies.**

43. RIs are a mechanism for ensuring the effective delivery and impact of FAO's priority regional contributions to the SOs. They address a main theme of the SOs and a related priority or issue at global, regional or country level in a time-bound manner.<sup>18</sup> Following consultations at the Regional Conferences, 15 RIs were designed (three in Africa, three in Asia and the Pacific, three in Europe and Central Asia, four in Latin America and the Caribbean and three in the Near East and North Africa). They are interdisciplinary and tied to more than one SO, though led by a primary SO. They have been implemented in a few countries in each region and are largely funded from regular budget resources.
44. The findings of the SO evaluations were positive overall on the relevance of the RIs. Some initiatives received specific mention for good practice or demonstration of results, though performance has been mixed and results have been varied between regions.
  - The SO4 evaluation cited the RI on Agri-food Trade and Regional Integration (implemented by REU, together with the Trade and Markets Division at headquarters) as a good example of the potential and effectiveness of using RIs to spearhead and coordinate thematic technical assistance in diverse country settings (SO4 box 3).
  - The SO5 evaluation noted the strong prospects of success of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean's (RLC) approach of using RIs as flagship initiatives and vehicles for knowledge sharing and awareness raising, in collaboration with regional and national partners with extra budgetary funding (SO5 conclusion 4).
  - The SO2 evaluation observed that the RIs were deemed to be well targeted, responsive and effective delivery mechanisms for SO2 and had evolved to meet emerging issues faced by the regions. In RLC, regional and sub-regional office management consider RIs to be a necessary and beneficial operational structure that break down silos, mobilize funding and help build multi-disciplinary teams. In Europe and Central Asia, the RIs are used as a medium- and long-term platform for aligning regional priorities, the SDGs and FAO's corporate vision with country priorities. Similarly, the Regional Office for Africa's (RAF) RI on Sustainable Production Intensification and Value Chain Development focuses on tackling sustainable production needs, while taking into account region-specific issues, such as value chains and transboundary trade, land tenure and sustainable intensification. Some Regional Initiatives have been effectively used to attract and channel resources for sustainable production activities (SO2 finding 26).
  - Similarly, the SO1 evaluation noted national counterparts' appreciation for RIs that supported RLC countries in translating 'SO thinking' into concrete regional and national policy initiatives. Examples cited included the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States' Plan for Food and Nutrition Security and Eradication of Hunger 2025 and Parliamentary Front Against Hunger. RIs are also seen as important platforms that facilitate the exchange of best practices and build a shared understanding of important

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<sup>18</sup> Guidelines for the Implementation of the Strategic Framework 2016–2017, p. 21

FAO tools and concepts, such as the VGGTs and the typology of small farms. However, the evaluation also noted that results varied from region to region and very much depended on the degree of engagement with regional integration bodies (SO1 paragraph 38, finding 16).

- In contrast, the SO3 evaluation observed that the performance of SO3 RIs was mixed when it came to translating the Strategic Framework's intervention logic into concrete initiatives. The RIs provided flexible and innovative support for engagement with regional partners and field-testing SP3 concepts, but proved limited as regards context-specific and multi-sectoral country support. In addition, some RIs had 'regional' agendas that did not always chime with 'national' priorities, making them less useful at country level. FAO did not capitalize on the advantages of RIs to target context-specific issues, such as youth employment in Africa or inclusive social-protection programmes for indigenous groups (SO3 finding 3 and paragraph 39).
45. The Audit Capping Report 2017 observed that there was inadequate consultation on RIs with country offices, so they did not foster co-ownership. In some cases, they did not fit with national government priorities. In others, scarce regular-budget resources (in particular, for Technical Cooperation Programmes, or TCPs) were channelled into the design of initiatives that might not have region-wide relevance.
  46. Interviews conducted by the Synthesis team revealed that the RIs were conceived rather late in the strategic-thinking process. They were intended to act as a bridge to facilitate transmission of FAO's global technical knowledge and the Strategic Framework into country-level initiatives in areas identified as regional priorities at the Regional Conferences. However, unlike the CPFs, RIs did not constitute formal development compacts approved by institutional counterparts. They were implemented by RI Delivery Managers in selected countries over a medium-term horizon.
  47. In 2016, the position of RI Delivery Manager was formalised and renamed Regional Programme Leader in a demonstration of institutional commitment to the delivery structure. The Synthesis Team also learned that there was no standardised guidance or uniform understanding of implementation arrangements, in particular, how the results would be disseminated to inform the replication of good practices elsewhere. This explains some observations made in the evaluation reports. In addition, RIs did not have a specific resource mobilization strategy, despite the wide regional relevance of the issues they sought to address, so could not expand their delivery footprint. National focus was changed after two years in some cases, posing challenges of continuity and upscaling. The upcoming evaluation of the SRF could focus on the effectiveness of RIs as a delivery mechanism.

**Finding 8. The concepts of 'focus countries' and 'countries under active observation and coordinated support' underwent several iterations, but continued to face challenges in fulfilling their purpose as showcases for the Strategic Framework.**

48. The concept of 'focus countries' and, later, 'countries under active observation and coordinated support' was introduced to serve as a showcase for the results of the new way of working that the Strategic Framework had established at FAO. However, the manner in which the concept was implemented was not fit for purpose. With each SO and each RI establishing its own 'focus country' list, the final list (of over 100 countries) was too long for any 'focused' approach. The SO evaluations had some observations on the limitations of the 'focus country' approach, however, there was no in-depth analysis of why the approach did or did not work.

- The SO5 evaluation cited less value in the 'focus countries' system, perhaps because two-thirds of all FAO programme countries were designated 'focus countries' (SO5 ES 18–20).
  - The SO1 evaluation noted the multiple lists of 'focus countries' at play – focus countries identified by Regional Representations for RIs (RI focus countries), SO focus countries selected by SP teams based on documented need, political will and a sizeable SO-related portfolio in country, and countries included in the Corporate Outcome Assessment 2014–2017. With the sheer number of 'focus countries' posing a risk to the coordination of country support, FAO recategorized 13 nations as being 'countries under active observation and coordinated support'<sup>19</sup>. The evaluation noted that FAO gave priority support to 'countries under active observation and coordinated support', then to 'RI focus countries' and then to other focus countries.<sup>20</sup> (SO1 paragraphs 19–21).
49. Interviews conducted for this synthesis report revealed that the concept of 'focus countries' was intended to identify countries with the potential to demonstrate rapid results (the potential to promote several SOs, strong national leadership, strong country office representation and a vibrant donor environment). Country offices also noted a lack of clarity in the 'focus country' selection criteria and in expected results, in addition to the sensitivities associated with not being declared a 'focus country'. The concept raised both expectations of additional resources for country programmes – which were not forthcoming – and apprehension as to high engagement and transaction costs (multiple SP teams, observation and backstopping missions, and transactions for monitoring and reporting, without creating corresponding incentives. In the end, the process became somewhat politicised, leading to fuzziness over the concept itself and an impracticable list. Now that the Strategic Framework has become entrenched, some staff noted, the need for 'showcasing' no longer exists.
50. The Synthesis Team noted the logic of 'countries under active observation and coordinated support'; they were to benefit from the coordinated technical backstopping of all SPs in a structured manner, as detailed in FAO guidance on RIs and 'focus countries'. The key distinguishing feature of being under 'active observation and coordinated support' is a detailed action plan and the creation of cross-SO country teams in consultation with FAORs, Regional Initiative Coordinators, and SPLs. The selected countries were expected to generate lessons that could be applied in other 'focus countries'.
51. In principle, in a tight resource environment, the idea of 'focusing' appears logical. Therefore, notwithstanding the experience to date, the conceptual approach should not be shelved without assessing the results and issues with implementation. With ever more SDG implementation plans being unveiled by many Members (of varying scale and with varying financing gaps), the 'focus' concept will need to be revisited. The upcoming evaluation of the SRF could look into the results achieved in 'focus countries' and assess the effectiveness of the approach.

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<sup>19</sup> SP1 – Bangladesh, the Lao People's Democratic Republic; SP2 – Rwanda, Zambia; SP3 – Egypt, Guatemala, Paraguay; SP4 – Fiji, Grenada, Kyrgyzstan; SP5 – Chad, Mali, Palestine. Countries under 'active observation and coordinated support' derive the benefit of coordinated technical backstopping from all Strategic Programmes in a structured manner, as detailed in FAO guidance on RIs and 'focus countries'.

<sup>20</sup> FAO (2015) SO Programmes 2016–2017 – 'focus countries'; FAO (2016) Coordinated Support Arrangements – RIs and 'focus countries'



## 2.2.5 Implementation capacity

**Finding 9. The Strategic Framework was implemented in the midst of a major organizational restructuring that entailed decentralization and austerity measures, including a hiring freeze. Unfilled posts and unaddressed skills gaps affected FAO's capacity to lend technical support to decentralized offices in some areas. Corresponding adjustments were made over time, however, resulting in a net increase in technical posts without adding to headcount.**

52. Several SO evaluations noted insufficient capacity to respond adequately to country demands and effectively promote cross-disciplinary offerings and new themes in the Strategic Framework. Only the SO2 evaluation had no strong observations on the lack of capacity (perhaps because SO2 is the traditional area of FAO expertise and accounts for more than half the of the Organization's technical-resource headcount). The lean structure of country offices meant they relied heavily on sub-regional and regional offices for technical backstopping, even though regional and sub-regional offices also faced capacity and resource constraints.
  - The SO4 evaluation noted inadequate expertise in country offices to promote and formulate value-chain and food-systems approaches and to engage in agriculture and trade policy-coherence dialogue. It also observed limited regional and sub-regional office capacity and expertise to provide technical backstopping for the wide range of SO themes. The evaluation also flagged capacity gaps at headquarters in the areas of food safety, trade, value-chain development, agribusiness and value-chain finance, which not only constrained the scope of the programme, but also posed reputational risk (SO4 finding 4, conclusion 2, paragraph 92). The MR indicated that a capacity-development programme on sustainable food systems had been created and was in the process of being delivered in several regions. There has been considerable progress since then, which will be presented in the follow-up report to be submitted in 2019.
  - The SO5 evaluation noted strong capacity in livestock health, Farmer Field Schools, locust control, water management and, to some degree, in climate-change adaptation, but less robust capacity in disaster risk reduction and management, insurance and cash-based approaches, with almost zero capacity in conflict and political analysis (SO5 finding 13).
53. Programmes sought to overcome capacity constraints by procuring short-term external expertise through field programmes. This was observed to a greater degree in relation to SO5 and SO1. Both evaluations noted the negative effects on staff morale, the continuity of support and administrative efficiency of prolonged dependence on areas of core expertise (disaster risk reduction and management, insurance and cash-based approaches, conflict and political analysis, as highlighted in the case of SO5, and policy engagement in the case of SO1) (SO5 ES 39, SO1 finding 9).
54. The above observations, while valid, are not directly ascribable to the Strategic Framework; they need to be viewed in light of the decentralization process underway at the same time, which saw the devolution and redistribution of technical capacity from headquarters to regions and sub-regions. The corporate austerity policy of a hiring freeze and a 15 percent vacancy rate sparked a critical trade-off between shoring up human resources and reskilling competencies and freeing up critical non-staff resources for programming in a flat regular-budget environment. During this period, there were greater incentives to keep posts empty, as the budgets for unfilled posts became non-staff resources under the direct control of technical units, while SP teams and decentralized offices struggled to mobilize resources for SO themes.

55. The Synthesis Team also learned of certain facts that had not been available at the time of the SO evaluations pertaining to the perception of an attrition of technical capacity. According to the MTP 2018–2021, in 2016, significant staffing adjustments were made to beef up technical posts in areas where capacity was considered low (for example, in climate change, statistics and sustainable production), without altering the total head count. An additional 58 new technical posts (including eight at D level) were created and these were offset by freeing up 59 posts in other support functions (such as the Shared Services Centre and Protocol). Thirty-five of the 58 new posts were created at headquarters and 22 Investment Centre posts were transferred to decentralised offices to strengthen investment mobilization support in the regions.

## 2.2.6 Work planning, monitoring and reporting arrangements

**Finding 10. FAO underwent some transformational turbulence in implementing the Strategic Framework. Implementation challenges and constraints arose in relation to skills and technical capacity, resource mobilization, monitoring and results reporting, and operational and administrative procedures. Some of the challenges were rooted in other major organizational changes taking place at the same time.**

56. Though the SO evaluations referred to constraints arising from operational arrangements, they did not systematically examine these arrangements in detail, as the underlying issues were not SO or SP specific. The complexities of the matrix management system and multiple results monitoring and reporting arrangements were cited as challenges in interviews for the SO evaluations and for this synthesis report.
57. SO evaluations' references to operational challenges can be summarised as follows:
- The SO2 evaluation observed that in the first two biennia, many FAO staff perceived work planning to be problematic, with many of them struggling to understand their roles and the new reporting requirements. Staff noted improvements in cross-sectoral collaboration, however. MAWs and GKPs were deemed successful in breaking down some of FAO's long-standing technical silos by promoting cross-sectoral discussion, connecting the worldwide network of practitioners and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and expertise. There was general agreement that the introduction of the SO2 Results Framework helped structure the corporate reporting of FAO and provided a mechanism for better communicating FAO results to key donors and other partners (SO2 finding 20, paragraph 111).
  - The SO1 evaluation included general feedback that the planning procedures and systems that accompanied the Reviewed Strategic Framework had often outweighed its advantages. The service-level agreements entered into by SP teams and other units to plan for joint work were cited as a case in point, described as "a good idea gone wrong", with both sides left feeling dissatisfied. The SP1 team, for instance, believed it was not getting enough technical support from the technical units, while the technical units found that the amount of effort required to develop and manage a service-level agreement was not commensurate with the potential benefit. The planning and budgeting processes, they noted, often pertained to small financial amounts that could have been planned or reported in lesser detail and effected through simpler or more informal means. These transactions were processed through complex information systems and it was recommended that they be merged into one encompassing multifunctional management information system (SO1 paragraphs 49 and 50).

58. The Strategic Framework led to a reallocation of fixed regular-budget resources to enable the SP teams to promote cross-divisional and cross-SP work. The SP teams were largely made up of existing positions, with a biennial multidisciplinary funding allocation of USD 10 million (1 percent of the regular budget) for SPs to promote multidisciplinary, cross-SP work. FAO ensured the continued and consistent delivery of key normative products and outputs by ring-fencing budgets for specified corporate technical activities, in particular, normative work and standard setting, international instruments and technical committees.<sup>21</sup> The ring-fenced biennial budget for treaty bodies and conventions was USD 22.3 million and that for gender equality was USD 21 million, together amounting to more than 4 percent of FAO's regular budget.<sup>22</sup>
59. All SPs received equal shares of the multidisciplinary fund allocation and human resources, even though they differed considerably in magnitude and delivery footprint. Allocations were further distributed among technical units to highlight or promote specific areas or additional actions, in addition to other (much larger) amounts already allocated from other sources. However, according to several staff interviewed for this synthesis report, these were rather small amounts (in some cases, as little as USD 15 000) and not considered commensurate with the transaction costs (in terms of planning and formulation) of the SP teams.
60. Despite having the lead role in coordinating the implementation of FAO's programme of work, SPs have faced a resource dilemma. The programming budgets available to SP teams are relatively miniscule: an annual budget of USD 1 million per SP, with less than USD 200 000 per SP for travel and backstopping. The relatively low financial contribution generated by the SPs has undermined their leadership role in a scenario in which practically all programmes are financed by extra-budgetary resources, largely negotiated by technical departments and decentralized offices. Consequently, many deem the implementation arrangements to entail high transaction costs without commensurate returns or benefits. SP teams are seen as another layer (a "clearing house") in decision-making, budget allocation and reporting, rather than as facilitators of collaboration between departments.
61. Although the SO evaluations did not delve into the details of reporting-system challenges, interviews conducted for this synthesis report highlighted concerns over the multiple planning, monitoring and reporting systems in operation (for example, the Integrated Management Information System, the Country Office Information Network and the Field Programme Monitoring and Information System). These have placed an excessive reporting burden on decentralized offices and hamstrung effective results-based management. Several senior management staff emphasized the need to harmonize these systems into one comprehensive results-monitoring and reporting system. The synthesis team learned of a new initiative being developed to create such a system. The upcoming evaluation of the SRF may cover this aspect in greater detail.
62. Organizational changes will inevitably cause apprehension among staff. The SO evaluations did not have the remit to look into change management and related behavioural issues. However, the importance of these issues needs to be recognised in assessing Strategic Framework implementation. Building a matrix organization is a complex process: the *Harvard*

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<sup>21</sup> These include the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the FAO/WHO joint technical committees, the Rotterdam Convention and the UN Standing Committee on World Food Security, among others.

<sup>22</sup> MTP 2018–2021, resources for commitments to conventions, treaty bodies and gender, page 17.

*Business Review* documented the challenges of matrix management back in 1978, but also acknowledged that its success had spurred growing acceptance and legitimacy.<sup>23</sup>

*Ills of the matrix: tendency towards anarchy; power struggles; severe groupitis; excessive overhead; uncontrolled layering; navel-gazing; decision strangulation; sinking to lower levels ... When business declines, the matrix becomes the scapegoat for poor management and is discarded ...*

*However, the matrix structure is acquiring increasing legitimacy through its success; as more organizations travel the learning curve, the curve itself becomes an easier one to climb.*

63. In this regard, the Audit Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Framework observed that the creation and empowerment of SP teams involved a major shift and rebalancing of the roles, responsibilities and accountability of the technical divisions. While these have had positive results in terms of fostering interdisciplinary work and greater orientation to outcomes, elements of the matrix management system also curbed support for the change. A major factor has been the shift of control over work planning and the allocation of financial resources to the SPs.
64. The Audit Report noted the sense of uncertainty and isolation perceived by technical officers under the new Framework. Technical officers at decentralized levels that did not have posts in the SP management teams were uncertain about their roles and delivery expectations. Often, they did not have the mix of skills required to engage in the new and broad SP concepts. At the same time, because of the subsidiarity principle and with decentralized technical posts reporting to Regional Representatives, the technical departments at headquarters felt disconnected from those on the ground (country office needs and challenges) and devoid of opportunity to share cutting-edge technical knowledge.
65. Interviews carried out as part of this synthesis process also highlighted issues of role clarity. By design, SP teams are in charge of planning, providing expert guidance associated with the relevant SO and monitoring progress, while implementation is carried out by the technical departments and decentralized offices. Some interviews raised concerns over cases in which SP teams were implementing programmes directly (with external experts) rather than entrusting these to technical units. At the same time, some SP team members pointed to the lack of technical capacity and/or staff with suitable expertise in specific areas, in exceptional cases, compelling SP teams to take a more direct role in delivery. Another expectation was that SP teams would provide monitoring support and guidance for course correction; according to some, this has not been borne out.
66. A point of concern over the revised implementation arrangements is the severance of direct communication channels ('firewalling') between technical departments and country offices. While the empowerment of regional offices and SP teams was welcomed, there were views that these arrangements should not be a substitute for the quality of technical expertise of the technical units in engaging with decentralised offices and counterparts. Another element of concern was that SP management teams had not yet been formally institutionalised into FAO's architecture. The team members (on secondment from technical units) can be recalled after two years. This raises issues of continuity and structure within the SP management teams. These are topics that the upcoming SRF evaluation could address in its assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation arrangements for the Strategic Framework.

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<sup>23</sup> Davis, S. and Lawrence, P. (1978) Problems of Matrix Organisations. *Harvard Business Review*, May 1978 issue (also available at <https://hbr.org/1978/05/problems-of-matrix-organizations>)

## 2.2.7 Resource mobilization

**Finding 11. The Strategic Framework architecture necessitated changes to resource allocations for SPs from the regular budget and to resource mobilization mechanisms for extra-budgetary resources. The resource-mobilization function has evolved steadily and resource-mobilization mechanisms have been refined, with increasing representation of the SP teams and technical units in packaging, marketing, communications and engaging with resource partners.**

67. The SO evaluations contained observations on resource-mobilization challenges, but limited analysis of resource-mobilization trends under the Strategic Framework and inter-SO comparisons. Corporate documentation and interviews with staff provided additional information for this section.
68. The Programme Implementation Report (PIR) 2016/17<sup>24</sup> reported that in 2016–2017, FAO's total expenditure reached USD 2.6 billion, of which USD 1.6 billion was extra-budgetary expenditure. Over the past four biennia, FAO has operated with a flat regular budget (net appropriations) envelope in the region of USD 1 billion per biennium. With a significant part (more than 75 percent)<sup>25</sup> of the regular budget going on staff costs, programme delivery (especially for field programmes) has depended to a large extent on voluntary contributions. Extra-budgetary resources in 2016–2017, at USD 2.1 billion, saw a 16 percent increase from 2014 to 2015. Resources for country, sub-regional and regional projects accounted for 79 percent of those funds, a consequence of the increase in decentralized delivery mechanisms (a 24 percent increase on 2014–2015 levels). TCPs, FAO's regular budget-supported instruments, spent USD 136 million, a 7.8 percent increase on 2014–2015 levels.
69. Although the past four biennia saw a steady rise in voluntary contributions, from USD 1.39 billion in 2012–2013 to USD 1.6 billion in 2016–2017, two aspects are significant. First, almost 75 percent of the extra-budgetary resources went to SO5 (40–50 percent) and SO2 (25–30 percent).<sup>26</sup> Second, a large part of the increase came from contributions for humanitarian and emergency response support for SO5. The real challenge has been to draw greater levels of resource-partner support to the newer themes under SO1, SO3 and SO4.
70. Predictable and un-earmarked extra-budgetary funding remained elusive, despite FAO's corporate commitment and investment in the Strategic Framework. A key challenge was the continued funding preference for precisely articulated projects rather than the more complex, multi-sectoral and interconnected outcome pathways of the Strategic Framework. Another was the limitation caused by the shorter horizons of most extra-budgetary funding compared with the longer impact horizons of the Strategic Framework.
  - The SO5 and SO1 evaluations pointed to the high dependence of field programmes on voluntary contributions, which tended to be short term in nature and based on resource-partner preferences beyond FAO's control (SO5 ES 25, ES 27).
  - The SO1 evaluation noted that these resulted in fragmentation and discontinuity (SO1 finding 14, paragraph 66.)
  - The SO3 evaluation noted that resource partners had provided limited support for the new themes of social protection and decent rural employment. Some reasons given for

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/I9563EN/i9563en.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Reviewed Strategic Framework and MTP 2014–2017, paragraph 122

<sup>26</sup> SO5 and SO2 accounted for the bulk of voluntary contribution targets, accounting for 40–50 percent (SO5) and 25–30 percent (SO2) for both 2016–17 and 2018–19 biennia.

FAO's inability to raise resources for new themes included the incorrect targeting of institutional entry points of resource partners and a lack of coordinated outreach strategy on SP3 themes. This was underpinned by the perception among some resource partners that FAO was not a major player in the rural poverty agenda (SO3 paragraph 56).

- The SO2 evaluation also noted that in view of the complexity and magnitude of the issues to be addressed and the need for significant shifts in the enabling environment and mindsets of producers and decision-makers, the amount of resources available to departments, divisions, regional offices and country offices for effective implementation of the SP2 programme was limited. This was considered by many interviewees to be a potential hindrance to the success of SFA-type interventions, which require continuity and time for the testing and validation of optimal and sustainable practices and their subsequent replication on a larger scale (SO2 paragraph 110).
  - The SO4 evaluation noted challenges in non-least developed countries linked to the reducing levels of official development assistance support and the need to access non-traditional funding opportunities. This, coupled with difficulties in raising resources around specific SPs, led to reliance on small TCPs to deliver most of the assistance in standards compliance areas. Inadequate engagement with major regional and international financial institutions (IFIs) that support trade, markets and value-chain development, as well as the insufficient capacity of regional and country offices to engage with IFIs and mobilize funds, in general, were viewed as constraints (SO4 paragraph 93.)
71. A few of the examples of predictable (multi-year horizon) and lightly earmarked funding for SOs were the EU-funded FIRST Policy Assistance Facility (to support a budgeted EUR 8 billion investment in more than 60 countries from 2014 to 2020), the FAO Multi-Partner Support Mechanism supported by Belgium, Netherlands and Sweden, based on the principle of no or light earmarking, and the Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities, operating since 2004. However, these are outliers in the FAO development-funding arena, which, according to the Audit Report on Resource Mobilization, is a fragmentation of small trust funds (according to the Audit Report, it comprised around 900 funds with an average value of less than USD 1 million), thus involving high transaction costs.<sup>27</sup>
72. SP teams interviewed for this synthesis pointed out that the SOs did not get sufficient traction with resource partners or Member governments as a basis for engagement. The Strategic Framework was viewed by external stakeholders as more of an internal organizational framework than a statement of intent on FAO engagement in areas of donor and country priority. This was explicitly clear in the SO3 evaluation.
- In the case of SP3, in particular, the uptake of new themes attracted low levels of donor funding, notably for social protection and decent rural employment. The reasons included the fact that donors did not perceive to be as a player in the rural poverty agenda (SO3 conclusion 4, paragraph 75). The SO3 evaluation observed a need for greater differentiation and more effective communication of FAO's comparative advantages to internal and external stakeholders (SO3 finding 8). Another observation was that although SPLs and SP teams had lead responsibility for implementation and were better placed to market the SO logic, they were not explicitly tasked with resource mobilization and remained minor players in that regard (SO3, paragraph 56).

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<sup>27</sup> Audit Report on Resource Mobilization (2016)

73. These observations point to a need for greater attention to packaging, communication and marketing of the Strategic Framework and the inter-disciplinarity of SPs, as well as the coordination of resource-mobilization arrangements at various levels.
74. Resource-mobilization arrangements in the Strategic Framework have evolved. It was traditionally carried out by technical divisions at headquarters and relied heavily on long-term relationships between lead technical officers and development-partner counterparts. "Before, anybody in FAO could reach out to donors and get money," according to one interviewee. According to staff interviewed by the synthesis team, this resulted in fragmentation and sub-scale, disconnected interventions. Also, corporate-level accountability for results remained limited in the absence of a corporate results management and reporting system. The Strategic Framework architecture brought a centrally coordinated approach to resource mobilization, to avoid situations in which employees might approach donors: (1) with different messages and/or competing priorities and (2) to fund activities not in line with FAO's agreed priorities.<sup>28</sup> The MTP 2014–2017 included a Resource Mobilization and Management Strategy aimed at ensuring more predictable, adequate and sustainable voluntary contributions from resource partners to support the SOs.
75. The Audit Report on Resource Mobilization in 2016 observed that although resource-mobilization responsibilities spanned several levels, there was no mobilization target below the aggregate corporate level linking total biennial targets to country-level and regional targets based on programme planning. Also, resource-mobilization duties were not explicitly made clear in the functional responsibilities of FAORs, SPLs and RI Delivery Managers, and there were no formal resource-mobilization action plans at regional level. Likewise, there was no logging of resource-mobilization activities or criteria to establish accountability in the decentralized offices.<sup>29</sup>
76. The synthesis team was informed that when the Strategic Framework architecture was rolled out, SP teams were not given resource-mobilization responsibilities. However, the role and involvement of SP teams in resource mobilization has increased over time. Staff from TCR have been deputed to SP teams, SPLs have played an increasing role in donor dialogues and the newly constituted Business Development Task Force includes SP teams and technical unit heads.
77. Interviews also revealed that significant contributions to resource mobilization still come from technical divisions, which have long-standing institutional relationships with key donors in their respective thematic areas. They are also perceived as being FAO's specialist knowledge holders and closer to the ground. In some instances, such as fisheries and aquaculture, because of the strong sectoral dimension, resource mobilization by technical units and divisions has been more effective than through cross-sectoral SPs.
78. The resource-mobilization function has evolved steadily, incorporating lessons learned during implementation. Key milestones in this progression include: (1) a delineation of resource-mobilization channels into 11 corporate areas for resource mobilization,<sup>30</sup> which

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<sup>28</sup> FAO Guide to Resource Mobilization (2016)

<sup>29</sup> The audit recommended four key actions: more detailed RM responsibilities for FAORs and SPLs and the setting out of accountability in work plans and performance appraisals; an improvement in data quality and pipeline management to gain a realistic picture of resources; RI Delivery Managers to develop official regional RM plans; and TCR and Office of Support to Decentralized Offices support to fill capacity gaps in regional offices.

<sup>30</sup> They are: Climate-Smart Agriculture, Blue Growth, Statistics, Food-Chain Crisis Emergency Prevention System (FCC-EMPRES), Hunger-Free World, Sustainable Intensification of Agriculture, Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture, Rural Transformation – Smallholder Family Farming and Rural Employment, Social

span multiple SOs, 15 RIs, focusing on SO-specific results addressing regional priorities, and CPFs that address agreed country-level priorities; (2) SO-specific communications materials aimed at donor partners; (3) strategic dialogue events with key donors; (4) donor mapping and market-intelligence actions; and (5) the establishment of a Business Development Task Force (BDTF) to respond to the challenges of communicating and marketing the SOs.

79. The BDTF is a mechanism for coordinated action and a new generation of strategies and approaches that reflect a transition from funding to financing, from projects to investment opportunities, and from donor-recipient schemes to resource partnerships. There is now notable proactive engagement between TCR and the SPs, technical divisions and regional offices through this task-force mechanism. Twelve focus areas aligned to the SDGs have been identified for business development. In addition, SP teams are increasingly involved in engagement missions with resource partners, especially 'strategic dialogue' events. A Business Development Portfolio comprising 12 major areas of focus and nearly 50 cross-SO programmes has been developed in consultation with the SP teams and technical units to support discussions with resource partners. According to FAO staff, this has served to 'unpack' the SOs and identify a set of themes that could resonate with external resource and other partners at country level.

**Finding 12. Resource mobilization capacities and staffing at decentralized (country) offices were inadequate to deal with the increasing levels of decentralization of donor funding.**

80. A large share of extra-budgetary resources is mobilized for country programmes. Around 79 percent of resource mobilization in 2016–2017 went to decentralized offices, while 84 percent of extra-budgetary resources was spent on field programmes that were not global or interregional. A large share of is likely to have been for country programmes.<sup>31</sup>
81. While bilateral funding has increasingly moved to country level, resource-mobilization staff resources and capacities in country offices are insufficient to initiate and follow up on proposals to multiple resource partners. In some countries, with major donors shifting to a competitive bidding system, significant time and money need to be invested. This has significant implications for country offices, as FAORs are the main point persons for donor engagement. The major support needs are in business development, rather than donor negotiation. Donor and market intelligence, writing concept notes, project proposals and submitting pre-bid and bid documents are time-consuming activities for which decentralized offices do not have appropriately skilled or qualified staff.
82. In interviews for this synthesis report, the team was briefed on actions being taken to address these challenges: guidance courses for decentralized offices; an FAOR academy with e-learning tools on soft-skills, such as donor engagement, diplomacy, selling and positioning; an FAOR network for peer-to-peer learning; and, more recently, initiatives to develop a Business Development Portfolio toolbox for use by country offices. There is recognition that, in a competitive environment, resource mobilization needs effective marketing and business-development skills, not unlike any commercial product or service, and calls for a good understanding of products and markets and the image/positioning of FAO among prospective resource partners.
83. Discussions also gave a different perspective on resource mobilization issues. While resource mobilization is about raising extra-budgetary funds for the key themes advocated by the

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Protection for Food Security and Rural Poverty Reduction, Efficient and Inclusive AFS, Building Resilience in Protracted Crises and Natural Disasters.

<sup>31</sup> PIR 2016/17



Strategic Framework and the reduction of unfunded gaps in work programmes, a more meaningful measure of effectiveness would be the leverage effect of FAO's investment operations, as investment – be it by governments, IFIs or the private sector – is the main factor translating policies into development outcomes. Thus, investment leverage is a far more important determinant of FAO's impact than the size of FAO's programmes. Using it as a potential metric to gauge the contribution of FAO's work to development results merits a more detailed assessment.

## 2.2.8 Partnerships

**Finding 13. The portfolio of partnerships has expanded and diversified significantly, guided by a dedicated partnership-based strategy and the growing trend of engagement with non-state actors, especially the private sector and civil-society organizations. Partners have positive impressions of the quality of FAO's partnerships in key areas. Cooperation with other UN agencies and the private sector could be improved, however.**

84. The Strategic Framework identifies partnerships as one of FAO's core functions. FAO's organization-wide strategy on partnerships provides broad guidance on partnerships and is supported by specific strategic partnerships with UN agencies, the private sector and civil-society organizations.
85. The Strategic Framework necessitated a broadening of FAO's engagement with government ministries other than its traditional counterpart, ministries of agriculture, as well as other development agencies. It called for a new emphasis on partnering with non-state actors, especially the private sector and civil society. Government actors remain major partners, because of the inter-governmental status of FAO.
86. Because of FAO's inter-governmental status, its charter and the thrust of its work (policy engagement and institutional capacity development to realize food security and nutrition objectives), FAO's primary engagement has been with state entities. However, FAO partners with a huge range of actors: UN agencies, funds and programmes, academia and research institutions, IFIs and inter-governmental entities. FAO also partners with governments, civil-society groups (including both people's organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), producers' organizations and cooperatives) and the private sector.<sup>32</sup> In 2016 alone, the Partnerships and South–South Cooperation Division facilitated 97 partnerships. As of January 2019, FAO has 248 partnerships with non-state actors in support of the SPs.
87. All five SO evaluations took positive note of the diversity of FAO partnerships. While ministries of agriculture, forestry and fisheries have been its long-standing traditional counterparts, the Strategic Framework has necessitated a broadening of engagements with new ministries relevant to various SOs: ministries of planning and finance (in relation to agricultural investment plans, the MDGs and now the SDGs); environment (climate change and resilience – SO2, SO5); women, children and social welfare (gender equality, women's empowerment, youth employment and social protection – SO1, SO3, SO5); food processing, trade and industry (markets, value chains and food systems – SO4); and health (nutrition, food safety and One Health – SO2, SO4). The major areas of partnership were policy dialogue-linked to agricultural development and action plans, and the development of institutional capacity and mechanisms.
88. The evaluations were positive on the thematic partnerships developed around SO themes. Examples (non-exhaustive) cited included: work with African Regional Economic

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.fao.org/partnerships/background/en/>, accessed 21 January 2019

Commissions to develop draft policies on gender and agricultural development, adding data from country gender assessments and building action plans (SO4); strategic collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) based on demonstration of FAO value-addition in SP3 areas (SO3); work with the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger to encourage the inclusion of food and nutrition security into the political agenda in Latin America, as well as the formulation and approval of food and nutrition security-related laws (SO1); and going beyond 'traditional' counterparts to support capacity development, for example, with ministries of the environment (SO5) and finance (SO1). The SO2 evaluation highlighted progress on efforts to engage with ministries other than agriculture, in cross-sectoral programmes (SO4 paragraph 96; SO3 finding 9; SO5 finding 23; SO2 findings 22 and 33).

89. The evaluations noted partners' appreciation for FAO's efforts at transformation and engagement in new areas, with specific mentions of rural employment and social protection, in RIs and country gender assessments.
  - The SO2 evaluation noted that FAO's relationships with both government and civil society was deemed to be an important determinant of the quality of its support for the VGGTs (SO2 conclusion 6.)
  - The SO3 evaluation reported positive mutual perceptions of the partnership with ILO on decent rural employment, both at headquarters and in the field. ILO staff consider FAO to be a strong partner with the right entry points for reaching out to new constituencies, such as farmer and youth organizations and cooperatives. At regional level, and largely thanks to the RIs and inter-country programmes linked to SP3, there is increasing awareness and appreciation of FAO's work and value addition by regional processes and actors (SO3 paragraph 38).
  - The SO4 evaluation observed that anchor partnerships with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) in relation to animal health have been instrumental in FAO's food safety work and that these partnerships are strengthening in tandem with the growing need for One Health approaches (SO4 paragraph 97).
90. However, there were also observations that improvement was necessary in cooperation among UN agencies and in engaging with NGOs and civil-society organizations as implementation partners on the ground.
  - The SO3 evaluation noted that following a gradual reduction in international aid, UN agencies had become more prone to competition. Interviewees from several institutions emphasized the need to communicate more extensively the differences in FAO's role from that of the World Food Programme (WFP), particularly in the area of social protection (SO3 paragraph 55).
  - The SO1 evaluation observed school feeding as an area of both collaboration and overlap between FAO and WFP and noted the need for stronger engagement in the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) coordination and UNDAF processes (SO1 finding 34).
  - The SO5 evaluation referred to good collaboration with WFP on the food-security cluster, but noted limited cooperation in the field (SO5 paragraph 204).
91. Partnerships with the private sector were more evident in SO4 than in other evaluations, thanks to its coverage of trade, markets and value chains. There have been some good

examples of involvement with the private sector and NGOs in terms of work on value-chain development at country level, for example, the Cassava value chain supported in Barbados, the Safe Vegetables value-chain project in Viet Nam, which linked farmers to supermarkets, and collaborations with coffee and cacao cooperatives in Bolivia (SO4 paragraph 100).

92. Some SO evaluations mentioned challenges in partnering with the private sector, such as a degree of caution among decentralized offices, limited influence on major players, ambiguity as to the *definition* of partnerships and a lack of distinction between one-off transactional engagements and more structured corporate initiatives. These have led to missed opportunities (SO3 paragraph 55, SO4 paragraph 102, SO2 paragraphs 106–108).
93. The synthesis team's attention was drawn to the absence of clarity in evaluations over the definition of partnerships, the distinction between donors and implementing partners, and mixing up issues of resource mobilization, contracting, and procurement with issues relating to partnership policy and strategy. Some evaluations incorporated resource-mobilization, programme-implementation and even procurement process-related issues in their observations on partnerships, which are not ascribable to FAO's partnerships definitions and strategies. This points to a need for more clarity in future evaluations in assessing the objectives, implementation and results of FAO's partnerships. Some key illustrations of this lack of clarity and conflation of issues follow:
  - In the SO4 evaluation, FAO's corporate due diligence in partnership agreements and lengthy procurement processes have been cited as constraints on the effective delivery of partnership initiatives, prompting decentralized offices to be reluctant to and excessive cautious in pursuing partnerships (SO4 paragraph 101).
  - The SO2 evaluation noted the complexity, magnitude and innovative features of SO2 work within the context of limited financial, technical and human resources, as well as the need to identify areas of synergy and take full advantage of the potential for more extensive collaboration with well-established and new alliances (SO2 conclusion 6).
94. While the success of partnerships depends on several factors, it is important to establish whether the challenges cited flow from the partnership strategy itself or from other organizational processes. In the above cases, resource-mobilization engagement, managing donor perceptions and procurement-related challenges are not within the remit of the partnerships function per se. In addition, as a clear definition of and criteria for what constitutes a partnership exist, any ambiguity is one of interpretation and application rather than definition. The observations highlight the need for refresher training courses and awareness programmes in decentralized offices.

## 2.3 Results

95. The Reviewed Strategic Framework<sup>33</sup> makes clear that objective-level results are development impacts at the global level to which FAO contributes, but over which it does not have control. At the outcome level, FAO has some accountability, but delivery is the responsibility of all partners. Outputs (in terms of processes, products and services) are the tangible and direct contributions that FAO makes and controls, and for which it is fully accountable for delivery, with full attribution. Indicators and targets have been established for each output and are measured annually.

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<sup>33</sup> Box 3, Reviewed Strategic Framework and MTP 2018–2021

96. The biennial Corporate Outcome Assessment (COA) reports on FAO's performance at output and outcome levels. Output target-setting was made more stringent in 2016–2017, with targeted performance levels raised to 100 percent from 75 percent in 2014–2015). The COA 2016–2017 reported that FAO had fully met 82 percent (45 out of 55) of its output indicator targets in 2016–2017. Outcome indicators are reported as a percentage of countries whose scores have improved and as a percentage of countries with medium to high scores. The results are measured through a detailed survey of key stakeholders' perceptions (FAOR, counterpart ministries, resource and implementing partners) in a representative sample of countries, supplemented by desk reviews.
97. The COAs show improvements in a significant proportion of countries, based on stakeholder perception. This synthesis was unable to delve deeper into methodology, sample sizes and other important aspects of the COAs, such as continuity of interviewed stakeholders over the assessed period 2013–2017, but these elements will be assessed in detail in the upcoming SRF evaluation.
98. The SO evaluations did not assess the effectiveness of Strategic Framework results at outcome or higher levels, because of their short implementation history. Also, observations on the quality of interventions and approaches were from scratch, rather than in comparison with the previous architecture.
  - The SO4 evaluation noted that the traction of SO4 was "too early to call", partially owing to organizational and personnel changes in SP4 in the period under evaluation, accentuating the limited clarity on SO4 at country level in most regions (SO4 finding 7).
  - Likewise, the SO3 evaluation observed that given the early stages of development of some of these products and the focus of the evaluation on implementation progress, it was not yet feasible to gather comprehensive evidence on their use or application. The evaluation thus limited itself to an assessment of their relevance and potential contribution to the work of SO3 within their thematic area (SO3 paragraph 28).
99. For the purpose of this synthesis, it was considered more appropriate to report contributions through FAO's core functions as interim results. In this context, contributions to policy processes and global knowledge, as well as support to institutional and technical capacities, have been identified below.

### 2.3.1 Assessment of SO contributions

**Finding 14. There are signs of positive contributions to evidence-based policy formulation and the strengthening of capacity for policy formulation and analysis. However, the translation of policy into action and the scalability of FAO's field pilots are not automatic, due to the experimental nature of a considerable part of FAO's work.**

100. Evaluations found signs of improvement in FAO's capacity for evidence-based policy formulation and the application of knowledge and analysis on a number of SO themes.
  - The SO4 evaluation (finding 8) reported good progress on meeting organizational targets and fair technical results at the country level, with institutional capacity and legislative reforms/improvements showing the areas of highest impact.
  - The SO3 evaluation noted that in a relatively short space of time, SP3 had begun raising FAO's profile in areas outside its traditional domains. FAO has made a commendable start in formulating multi-sectoral approaches, as well as embarking on new themes, to address rural poverty reduction. The programme logic is sound and has helped FAO to create a

space for itself in new areas, such as decent rural employment and social protection. There is evidence of success in articulating a more multidisciplinary response to poverty issues, in breaking ground with new government counterparts (such as ministries of labour and social development) and in demonstrating FAO's potential to contribute to rural poverty reduction through engagement in these domains. Guatemala, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal and Zambia would appear to be leading examples in this regard (SO3 conclusion 1, paragraph 58, finding 11).

- The SO5 evaluation highlighted contributions to the institutionalization of early-warning and information systems, such as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA) and the Early Warning/Early Action system. It cited encouraging examples of comprehensive and potentially useful policy support in disaster risk reduction and management. There are signs that FAO is adopting a multi-pronged livelihood approach in its support of disaster risk reduction and management. This reflects an institutional shift under the current Strategic Framework towards more county-led, collaborative and focused ways of working. In headquarters and the regional and sub-regional offices, SO5 showed itself to be supporting this cultural shift by helping countries and regions access a range of livelihood support from various FAO units (SO5 paragraph 111).
- Under SO1, FAO has promoted the integration of the right to food into national legislation, policies and programmes and many Members have adopted constitutional or legal amendments to protect it. The VGGTs provide options and best practices for tenure-related policies, laws, strategies and practices in a sufficiently flexible format to be applicable in a wide range of countries. Other normative products and support for national statistics were also found relevant (SO1 findings 4, 5, 18, 19 and 20).
- The SO2 evaluation found that FAO had effectively used global and regional platforms, as well as national coordination mechanisms, as entry points for policy dialogue and influence on SFA issues and to promote their integration into national legislation. The evaluation found many examples where progress had been made on embedding principles of sustainability into knowledge products, the strategies of global commissions, regional dialogue and approaches, and national policies (SO2 conclusion 3, findings 9 and 11).

101. At the same time, challenges and constraints were noted in policy implementation and in the upscaling of FAO's pilot projects. Four evaluations referred to a lack of scale.

- FAO contributed to the design and approval of several policies and legal frameworks on food security and nutrition. The challenges have tended to lie in implementation. Support for policy implementation is sorely needed and some good practices are already in place, but far more resources and different skillsets are required (SO1 finding 24).
- The SO2 evaluation noted very limited progress in implementing sustainable practices and cross-sectoral approaches at scale. Valuable work contributing to the adoption of sustainable, more productive practices has been carried out in all regions and various thematic areas. However, the sustainability of and ability to scale up results from SO2 interventions has been variable, depending on a range of factors, including economic and social sustainability, suitability to the local context and country priorities (SO2 finding 7, paragraph 51).
- In the case of SO4, TCP projects have been the mainstay of support, but have often lacked continuity and scale (SO4 finding 8).

- Similarly, for SO5, a large body of FAO community-based work on disaster risk reduction and management has been carried out through numerous small pilot projects. A review of past evaluations indicates that despite their quality, these small pilot projects often fail to influence national policy (SO5 ES 25.)

102. In some interviews for this synthesis, it was noted that scalability was not always incorporated into policy advice work. Governments often request FAO to test out new approaches and ideas prior to scaling them up. Here, 'piloting' could be key to influencing what might (or might not) become larger policy reforms. Specifically, the adoption of technologies has not always been scalable and has had mixed results. Success is not always guaranteed in the research-extension-adoption continuum and the knowledge gained from this pilot testing of sustainable technologies may still be valuable. However, the evaluations could not cast light on how the knowledge from both successful and failed pilots had been harvested.

**Finding 15. Achieving major impacts from FAO interventions depends largely on policy uptake and investment mobilization. FAO investment operations have made strong contributions to the translation of policy and scalable initiatives into investment programmes.**

103. Though the SO evaluations highlighted issues of scalability, FAO's interventions alone cannot be expected to have a major impact, given the limited scale and duration of typical FAO projects. Rather, success depends on the adoption of policy advice into major policies and programmes and the translation of these into investments by governments, IFIs and other partners. In this sense, FAO's communications, positioning and marketing of critical analysis and policy messages to inform policymakers are an important influence, disproportionate to the magnitude of FAO's invested resources. For instance, FAO's impact on policy has been amplified by the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) process in Africa, whereby FAO lends technical assistance to an African Union-driven process, in which many other partners are also engaged, to support country-led policy and investment processes.
104. The role of FAO's investment operations is key to achieving impact. Interviews for the synthesis exercise revealed the importance of TCI in integrating FAO's technical work into investments by its long-standing partners, the World Bank and IFAD, and an increasing number of regional development banks. TCI's work cuts across all SOs and its global footprint, specialist expert resources and large portfolio of investment operations for international institutions provide important entry points for demonstrating FAO's expertise and strategic approaches. According to its first annual report (2017), TCI supported 153 investment operations in 68 countries and mobilized USD 6.5 billion for 55 investment projects in 35 countries.<sup>34</sup> TCI was also instrumental in FAO's new partnership with the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which has supported the design of more than ten projects to date.
105. The SO4 evaluation cited illustrations of investment supported by TCI in several regions, including years of policy dialogue, sectoral-platform and institutional-support work in Ukraine, which was later replicated in Serbia's meat and dairy industries and Egypt's grain sector. TCI's specific technical agricultural knowledge was acknowledged by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development as being useful in its private-sector focused operations. In sub-Saharan Africa, TCI assisted more than 20 countries and Regional Economic Communities, such as the Economic Community of West African States, the Intergovernmental Authority for Development and the Southern African Development

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/CA0238EN/ca0238en.pdf>

Community by improving policy frameworks for agriculture and food security, including support for the formulation of National and Regional Agriculture Investment Plans under the CAADP framework, in close coordination with the RAF. TCI also supported the design of 72 agricultural development and food-security investment projects in nearly 40 African countries (SO4 paragraph 84).

### 2.3.2 Global knowledge products (GKPs)

**Finding 16. The development of GKPs is a key element in the Strategic Framework and is tied to FAO's mandate as a specialist knowledge organization. The SO evaluations referred to a number of knowledge products, though did not substantiate to what extent they were being used by countries.**

106. Under SO3, a wide range of knowledge products were developed during the review period, including toolkits on decent rural employment, an online policy database, handbooks on child labour in agriculture and universal social protection. As some of these products are still in the early stages of development and as the focus of the evaluation was on country-level results, it was not feasible to gather comprehensive evidence on their use or application (SO3 paragraph 28).
107. In SO2, it was noted that FAO effectively supported the generation and dissemination of knowledge, data and evidence for decision-making towards sustainable production and natural resource management. The evaluation team found clear contributions in all of these areas. FAO's global statistical databases, such as FAOSTAT and AQUASTAT, were broadly recognized as authoritative and useful sources of agricultural, forestry and fisheries statistics. Tools for assessing the water use of crops (AQUACROP and SIMWAT) and publications (such as manuals on brackish water management and evapotranspiration) were mentioned by staff in various national ministries as being useful in project implementation and research. One of the most notable examples was FAO's leading role in the development of methodologies for several SDG indicators, especially indicator 2.4.1 which aims to measure the "proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture". Similarly, the global Open Foris initiative to support national efforts in gathering, producing and disseminating reliable information on the state of forest resources is vital to decision-makers and other stakeholders. The World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies promotes documentation sharing and the use of knowledge to support adaptation, innovation and decision-making in sustainable land management (SO2 finding 12, paragraphs 69, 73, 79 and 80).
108. The SO4 evaluation found that FAO's market information and analysis products were trusted by governments and intergovernmental agencies as being authentic and authoritative and were used particularly in the consideration of policy decisions and market intervention. FAO's agricultural statistics were the official data used by the World Trade Organization to assess national policies and aggregate measures of support for agriculture. FAO had developed unique expertise in food loss and waste reduction and built capacity together with a broad range of stakeholders on topics such as post-harvest management, value-chain development, food processing, the marketing of agricultural commodities and statistics. While the focus was more on food loss, FAO also raised awareness among consumers and worked with markets and supermarkets to reduce waste (SO4 paragraphs 82 and 84).
109. The SO1 evaluation identified insufficient systematization, translation and dissemination of good practices as a bottleneck and found that the innovative aspects of SO1 were not well known in country offices and could have been disseminated more broadly within the Organization. "The adoption of the most innovative aspects of SO1 has been uneven

throughout the Organization, with a high heterogeneity observed in the approaches followed in different countries and regions. The FIRST facility set up a strong link with 33 countries with in-placed policy officers; however, beyond FIRST countries the team did not establish and maintain strong-enough linkages with regional and country offices to provide conceptual leadership and foster a better coherence in policy assistance for FNS across the Organization.” (SO1 finding 31 and conclusion 2).

### 2.3.3 Technical capacities

#### **Finding 17. Investments have been made in strengthening technical capacities within FAO and in counterpart institutions, supported by normative products.**

110. Three evaluations made specific mention of strengthening technical capacities within FAO and in counterpart institutions.
111. The SO3 evaluation noted that FAO had invested in building strong technical capacity in thematic teams at headquarters, based on skills-gap analysis, and in developing tailored learning products and programmes for decentralized offices and national counterparts on every SP3 theme. At country level, capacity was sometimes inadequate to promote and manage SP3 interventions. The sustainable impact of SP3 will, in large part, depend on building such capacity (SO3 conclusion 3, paragraph 74).
112. In terms of SO5, FAO has made major improvements in surge capacity and mechanisms by applying ‘level 3’ standard operating procedures that support a well-coordinated and well-functioning chain of support. There are encouraging examples of comprehensive and potentially useful policy support by FAO in disaster risk reduction and management (SO5 findings 16 and 17).
113. In the case of SO4, technical support, capacity building and normative products have supported the development of policies and strategies in topics such as contract farming, the design of agribusiness policies, data and statistics, strategic reserves and public procurement, linking smallholder producers and processors to school feeding programmes via municipal contracts, improved labelling and support for nutritional laws. In Viet Nam, FAO provided contract farming advice in areas including feasibility analysis, beneficiary selection, preparedness, operations, monitoring and evaluation, and legal issues. Its advice has been used in a curriculum for training institutions in Viet Nam (SO4 paragraph 83).

### 2.3.4 Contributions to cross-cutting issues

*To what extent have SPs incorporated gender, nutrition, governance and statistics objectives into their focus/strategy?*

#### **Finding 18: Cross-cutting issues (gender, nutrition, statistics, governance and climate change) have been addressed to varying extents by the SPs. Specific policies exist for gender (2012), nutrition (2012) and climate change (2017), but not for governance or statistics. The application and implementation of policies has not been systematic and has varied from issue to issue.**

114. The Strategic Framework identified cross-cutting issues that were to be embedded within the SPs. Thus, SO results chains do not necessarily have separate indicators for these cross-cutting issues. In the case of gender, qualifiers have been set for a number of SO outcome indicators for 2018–2019. However, under objective 6, some additional indicators inform progress on the footprint of cross-cutting areas alongside a few qualitative aspects.



115. The approach to mainstreaming these issues into the individual SPs has been outlined in the MTPs. FAO has formulated specific policies and strategies for gender (in 2012), nutrition (2012) and climate change (2017), which shape its approach to incorporating these cross-cutting issues into its work. There are no equivalent documents for governance or statistics, so these areas were not examined in detail during the SO evaluations (although governance was referred to in the SO1 evaluation and is, therefore, included in this synthesis). Findings from the SO evaluations on gender, climate change, nutrition and governance are summarized below. Evaluations of FAO's contribution to gender equality and nutrition were recently completed and the main findings of these assessments are summarized here.

*i) Gender*

116. FAO's performance on gender equality is reported annually to the Organization's governing bodies in conjunction with the results reported by each of the SPs and through specific gender-sensitive qualifiers integrated into the corporate monitoring framework. Gender-related achievements are also reported through two key performance indicators as part of the Organization's Mid-Term Reviews and PIRs.

- The SO3 evaluation noted that SP3 had duly considered gender equality in its results frameworks and work plans and made a wide array of contributions at both global and country levels, especially in relation to enhancing equal access to decent employment, income and productive resources. It observed that more could be done to better understand the effects of SP3-related interventions on gender equality (SO3 finding 12). FAO, through SP3-related interventions, has supported enhanced gender equality at community level in 72 countries, provided gender-inclusive policy advice in 42 countries and supported the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data in 27 countries (SO3 paragraph 65). The evaluation also noted that FAO had a well-designed programme and structure to address gender equality in SP3 and a broad knowledge base, resulting in its meeting relevant minimum standards and making sizeable contributions to gender equality, particularly in the areas of equal access by men and women to income, labour and productive resources (SO3 conclusion 6).
- The SO4 evaluation cited gender-related work focused on value-chain activities, cross-border trade and food loss and waste activities as being areas with the most potential for results with the resources available. Valuable efforts were made to apply the lessons of gender and value-chain analyses, but examples were limited (SO4 paragraphs 70, 71 and 86).
- The SO1 evaluation noted substantial collaborative efforts between the SP1 team and the Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division to implement FAO Policy on Gender Equality. Support for accession to and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the availability of sex-disaggregated data through the development of the Food Insecurity Experience Scale and Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women indicators were cited as important examples (SO1 finding 26).
- In the case of SO5, participatory and gender-responsive approaches were put to "excellent use" during the response to Typhoon Haiyan (SO5 ES 47).
- The SO2 evaluation noted that gender mainstreaming is an integral part of Sustainable Food Farming and Agriculture vision and specifically noted the increasing instance of REU's integration of gender into the project cycle in accordance with requirements of

climate-financing instruments such as the GCF and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (SO2 paragraph 84).

117. The evaluations also noted a number of challenges. The SO3 evaluation (paragraph 63) found low levels of gender analysis in a random sample of SP3-related projects (33 percent). The SO1 and SO5 evaluations observed that 39 percent of the project documents had some form of gender analysis. The SO4 evaluation (paragraph 114) highlighted continued uncertainty over to how to mainstream gender into SO4, budget and capacity constraints, and many projects missing gender markers, despite their becoming mandatory. Some regions reported that it was more challenging to work on gender issues in SP4. For instance, there was feedback that some countries were more interested in value chains than in gender-sensitive value chains. In particular, some FAO staff said they encountered difficulties in discussing gender issues when cultural norms were very conservative towards gender equality or women's empowerment. The SO2 evaluation noted that large gaps remained in terms of internal understanding and capacity, and that low implementation capacity persisted in terms of human and financial resources, as well as the ability to translate FAO's Policy on Gender Equality into action. The monitoring and evaluation of projects related to gender rarely led to lessons learned.
118. The Gender Evaluation (2018–2019) found that FAO's Policy on Gender Equality was intended to provide guidance on incorporating gender into the design of SP interventions and mainstreaming gender across the organization. Guidance materials and training sessions were developed to support the increased inclusion of gender in design, the rise in country gender assessments and the introduction of gender markers in projects. However, insufficient application of the guidance impeded greater contributions.

*ii) Climate change*

119. Only two evaluations (SO2 and, to some extent, SO5) offered specific observations on climate-change integration into SPs. Climate change has increasingly been integrated into FAO's programming, especially in the case of SO2 and SO5. Several good practices with the potential for upscaling have been developed. Funding opportunities encourage the inclusion of climate change in programmes.
- With its work on climate change being largely integrated into its programmatic work, FAO elucidates the link between sustainable agriculture and climate-change mitigation and adaptation at the global, regional and national levels. Climate change was found to be well integrated into the design of SO2 initiatives, delivery mechanisms and normative products. Furthermore, due to emerging funding mechanisms specifically related to climate change (such as the GCF and GEF), it is now a major dimension of many FAO interventions in the field. FAO has pursued a cross-sectoral approach in its wide portfolio on climate change, spanning forestry, livestock and agriculture, as seen in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Morocco, Rwanda and Viet Nam. The Organization has managed to operate at multiple levels, from global negotiations to national policies and field activities. In the context of the Paris Agreement, FAO has helped to ensure the consideration of agricultural issues in (Intended) Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), including by helping countries to formulate their NDCs. Although FAO used the integrated approaches in climate-change activities prior to the establishment its SFA approach, SO2 has continued to promote this integration (SO2 finding 15, paragraphs 94 and 95).

- The SO5 evaluation pinpointed a number of good practices as having potential for upscaling resilience, including climate-change adaptation work. It noted that these services and approaches were all anchored in significant FAO experience, demonstrated impact and adapted to both development and resilience. Moreover, these approaches focused on local capacities, economic sustainability and market linkages. However, they all required investment over the long term, while being easily scalable and de-scalable temporarily. Developing such a menu of signature resilience services could help FAO develop a stronger, more diversified resilience programme at scale, by standardizing approaches and reducing programme design and roll-out time, while adapting the services to local contexts as required (SO5 ES 82).
120. Although other evaluations did not highlight climate-change aspects, the synthesis team acknowledges that climate change is being integrated into other SOs as well: SO1 – building capacity to generate and use data to model production forecasts, and advocating that successful adaptation means food security and proper nutrition; SO3 – the social and economic impacts of climate change and linkages to stress migration, conflict over resources and the formulation of climate-informed rural development policies; and SO4 – climate-change impacts on agricultural and food systems, such as the increase in incidence of pests and diseases, and the adoption of climate-smart value chains, including reduced energy and natural-resource consumption. The synthesis team also notes FAO's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, formulated in 2017, which outlines 32 actions cutting across all of FAO's work, to support adaptation and mitigation.

*iii) Nutrition*

121. There was limited coverage of nutrition-related issues in the SO evaluations. The Nutrition Evaluation (2018–2019) concluded that FAO's involvement in nutrition-sensitive agriculture initially and then food systems for nutrition has grown significantly and evolved qualitatively. FAO has the mandate and reach, technical strengths and standing with partners to take a leadership role in this domain.
122. Results so far are concentrated in policy work and global advocacy. There was less progress on strengthening regional and country-level capacities and on the production of data and evidence. The evaluation noted that the Strategy and Vision for Nutrition lacked an accountability framework and a corporate resource-mobilization instrument dedicated to this "new area of work". The lack of a clear, enforced accountability framework hampered mainstreaming and reporting on nutrition.

*iv) Governance*

123. The treatment of governance within each SO was not clear in the SO evaluation methodologies. Most references to governance related to SO1, SO2 and SO4, which service most of the statutory institutional mechanisms enshrined in FAO's charter. FAO's credibility as an honest broker and trusted partner played a key role in engendering governance results.
124. The SO2 evaluation observed that the quality and consistency of FAO's contribution to global and regional governance mechanisms in the areas of SO2 was generally well regarded and had contributed to its ability to promote the principles of sustainable production within global and regional commissions. Further steps need to be taken to link public discourse of these global governance mechanisms to concrete actions at local level. With regard to challenges in supporting national and sub-national governance mechanisms, there needs to be a more systematic analysis of the enabling environment required for behavioural and

institutional change and the comparative advantages of the proposed technologies and approaches.

125. As a trusted and neutral government partner, FAO contributes to strategic processes related to the formulation of policies and programmes by coordinating various fora and platforms. At global and regional levels, FAO has supported mechanisms that provide international norms and standards and foster participatory decision-making and policy discourse. These include FAO Technical Committees, as well as Regional Conferences and Regional Economic Communities. The evaluation team found successful cases of FAO support for governance at various levels in the countries visited, including the Country Investment Plan in Bangladesh, the Agricultural Restructuring Plan and the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade plan in Viet Nam, national programmes for integrated pest management in three Commonwealth of Independent States countries, and water governance in Morocco (SO2 conclusion 5 and SO2 finding 16, paragraphs 96, 97 and 99).
126. In SO1 areas, it was found that FAO continued to play a key role as a facilitator of inclusive multi-stakeholder platforms (for example, the CFS), as a convener of policy-setting meetings (such as the Committee on Agriculture, COAG, the Committee on Fisheries, COFI, and the Committee on Forestry, COFO) and as an 'honest broker' in a number of technical sectors relevant to food and nutrition security. It acts as secretary to countless global and regional networks, commodities and natural-resource management bodies. At national level, FAO actively supported coordination fora devoted to food security and/or agriculture in all country case studies, for instance, in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mozambique and Nigeria. The Dominican Republic and El Salvador are two examples where FAO has promoted the creation of inter-sectoral groups to discuss food security and nutrition strategies and a consultation process on food security and nutrition bills (SO1 finding 20, paragraphs 79 and 80).
127. In SO4, good progress was made towards the organizational targets, with indicators achieved or exceeded in most cases. At country level, fair technical results were evident in projects, with institutional capacity and legislative reform/improvement the areas showing greatest impact. An important positive development in recent years has been the increase in national reporting of pest outbreaks by Members, a result of proactive engagement by the International Plant Protection Convention following the adoption of reporting procedures at the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures in 2015. FAO, including its statutory bodies and anchor partners, WHO and OIE, played a central role in supporting national and regional governments and institutions in implementing policies and institutional measures to strengthen sanitary and phytosanitary controls in line with international regulations. Important breakthroughs have also been achieved after long-standing efforts in forestry (through the Forest Legal Enforcement programme) and fisheries governance (the Agreement on Port State Measures) (SO4 finding 8, paragraph 82).

v) *Statistics*

128. Statistics are a key area of FAO's work to support evidence-based decision-making for governments and the international community and in monitoring progress towards national and international development goals and targets. FAO is acknowledged as an authoritative source of data and statistics in food and agriculture, including livestock, fisheries, forestry sectors (FAOSTAT is the world's biggest database of food and agriculture statistics).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> FAO Statistics website (<http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home>), SO4 evaluation report paragraph 53.

129. As a cross-cutting area, statistics are integrated into all five SPs: SP1 – data and analysis on all forms of malnutrition; SP2 – high-quality data and analysis related to agriculture, land use and change, and forestry; SP3 – data on rural income and the rural livelihoods monitor; SP4 – data on agriculture, food markets, investment and other topics; and SP5 – methodologies for measuring damage and loss, conflict, displacement, etc. There are statistics-related outcome indicators embedded within SO indicators, for example, 2.4A and 2.4C, as well as two key performance indicators for the statistics function.
130. Statistics were not covered separately in the SO evaluations, however, there were references to the usefulness of FAO's statistics work in the evaluations of SO2 (paragraphs 39, 73 and 74), SO1 (paragraphs 23 and 85), SO3 (paragraph 53), SO4 (paragraph 53) and SO5 (paragraphs 99 and 165).
131. The upcoming evaluation of FAO's work on statistics will cover the Organization's statistics programme of work in detail.

### **3 Lessons learned**

132. The following are the key lessons identified in this synthesis.

#### **3.1 Conceptualization**

The Reviewed Strategic Framework reflects FAO's strong commitment to organizational transformation and a new way of working, with a sharper focus on development outcomes.

The SOs aided in broadening perspectives towards more holistic food-systems thinking; fostered inclusive approaches to safeguarding the interests of smallholders and marginalized producers; led FAO into new thematic areas with a view to comprehensive approaches to tackling food insecurity, including an emphasis on cross-cutting issues, such as gender; and broadened FAO's engagement beyond traditional its counterpart ministries.

#### **3.2 Operationalization**

The Strategic Framework entailed significant investment in operationalization and implementation arrangements with a view to translating normative work and knowledge products into tangible policy and practices at country level. There is broad acceptance of the SOs, which are now well entrenched in FAO's architecture.

In implementing the Strategic Framework, FAO underwent some transformational turbulence: implementation was characterized by much learning, adapting and adjusting, at both headquarters and decentralized levels.

The Strategic Framework architecture fostered a culture of interdisciplinary work and promoted cross-sectoral and cross-departmental cooperation as the new way of working. These approaches enabled FAO to engage and contribute to UN System deliberations on the 2030 Agenda.

Partnerships is an area of positive change under the Strategic Framework. The portfolio of partnerships has expanded and diversified significantly, guided by dedicated strategies.

#### **3.3 Challenges and constraints**

The Strategic Framework encountered implementation challenges and constraints in relation to skills and technical capacity, resource mobilization, monitoring and results reporting, and operational and administrative procedures. These challenges did not necessarily stem from the Strategic Framework itself, but from other major organizational changes taking place at the same time.

#### **3.4 Results**

Contributions have been noted in three areas: support to evidence-based policy formulation; creation of knowledge products and technical guidance; and investment in strengthening technical capacity within FAO and in counterpart institutions, supported by normative products.

The integration of cross-cutting themes has not been systematic, with the exception of climate change.

133. This report does not issue any recommendations but has identified a number of potential efficiency and effectiveness-related issues that could be assessed in the upcoming evaluation of the Strategic Results Framework:

- The extent to which the introduction of the Strategic Framework has led to a stronger prioritization process
- The extent to which the Strategic Framework improved scale and more sustainable interventions
- The extent to which Strategic Framework supported country level programming and results
- The extent to which SPs and technical units can more effectively lead, implement and coordinate FAO's programmes, and support countries in achieving SDGs, while serving and fulfilling FAO's SOs
- The effectiveness of matrix management structure and processes implemented
- The effectiveness of results based budgeting and resource allocations under the matrix arrangements
- The effectiveness of results planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms
- The effectiveness of RIs and 'focus country' approaches

## **4 Looking ahead: The 2030 Agenda, UN Reform and the SDGs**

134. The following analysis, though it draws on the SO evaluations, does not flow directly from them. Rather, it highlights the need for further analysis of the implications of the 2030 Agenda, UN System Reform and the enhanced profile of climate change in the development dialogue.
135. Implementing the Strategic Framework has steered FAO in a new direction, making it more prepared for the 2030 Agenda, which will call into play the same interdisciplinary approaches, cross-sectoral thinking and collaboration with diverse partnerships, albeit on a much bigger scale. Going forward, FAO will need to pay greater attention to and assess the implications for FAO and the next Strategic Framework of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, UN System Reform and the repositioning of the UN Development System to deliver the SDGs, as well as the increasing profile of climate change in the development landscape.

### **4.1 New realities, trends and challenges for consideration in the Strategic Framework**

136. In preparation for the MTP, FAO conducted an analysis of global and regional trends that identified ten challenges to FAO's vision of a world free from hunger and malnutrition, where food and agriculture contribute to improving the living standards of all, especially the poorest, in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner.<sup>36</sup> These are:
- Sustainably improving agricultural productivity to meet increasing demand;
  - Ensuring a sustainable natural resource base;
  - Addressing climate change and intensification of natural hazards;
  - Eradicating extreme and persistent poverty and reducing inequality;
  - Ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition;
  - Making food systems more efficient, inclusive and resilient;
  - Improving income-earning opportunities in rural areas and addressing the root causes of migration;
  - Building resilience to protracted crises, disasters and conflicts;
  - Preventing transboundary and emerging agriculture and food-system threats; and
  - Addressing the need for coherent and effective national and international governance.
137. In addition to the above, there were two key global developments in 2015 and 2016: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which provide the broad context in which FAO will operate and adapt for enhanced delivery and impact. Other important developments in the areas of FAO's mandate included the Rome Declaration on Nutrition (Second International Conference on Nutrition) and the Decade of Action on Nutrition, the entry into force of the Port State Measures Agreement (a key element in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. In addition, there were the outcomes of the deliberations of the World Humanitarian Summit and the Agenda, Habitat III, focusing on urbanization, the Agenda for Humanity, and the XIV World Forestry Congress and Ministerial Declaration of the United Nations Forum on Forests. Although these are all separate frameworks and covenants, they are interconnected, with the SDGs including several targets linked to these areas. Thus, the

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<sup>36</sup> MTP 2018–2021, paragraph 5



2030 Agenda can be considered the primary (but not the only) reference framework for FAO's contributions.

#### **4.1.1 The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**

138. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs were still under discussion when the Reviewed Strategic Framework was adopted, so there was no opportunity for direct alignment with specific SDGs at the time. Thus, direct linkages to SDGs were not found in the MTP 2014–2017, the focus of the SO evaluations. However, after the formal adoption of the SDGs in 2016, SPs began to incorporate them into strategies and programming. The SO3, SO4 and SO2 evaluations refer to SDG alignment.
139. Although the Strategic Framework preceded the 2030 Agenda, several elements of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs were incorporated into the Strategic Framework by way of the MTP 2018–2021. The SDGs have been widely discussed by FAO's governing bodies, including the FAO Conference and Regional Conferences. Accordingly, the Results Framework for 2018–2021 aims to sharpen the focus of SOs, outcomes and outputs to improve the quality of the results chains, to provide a clear, coherent and concrete view of how FAO's can support country-level implementation and monitoring of the SDGs (MTP 2018–2021, paragraph 30).
140. To this end, FAO analysed the full set of 169 SDG targets and 230 indicators for which FAO could provide national support through the SO programmes and incorporated them into the Strategic Framework (MTP 2018–2021, paragraphs 30 and 31). A mapping of SOs and their contributions to various relevant SDGs has been completed and FAO's readiness to implement the SDGs has been reviewed to identify gaps and areas of improvement. All SO-level results now exclusively use relevant SDG targets and indicators for monitoring. Outcome-level indicators have been simplified by adopting SDG indicators wherever appropriate. Thus, all 38 objective-level indicators are SDG indicators, and 24 of the 42 outcome-level indicators are SDG indicators.<sup>37</sup> In all, FAO's work will contribute to 40 SDG targets, measured by 53 unique SDG indicators. Special attention was given to the 26 indicators for which FAO is a custodian (21) or contributing (5) agency (MTP 2018–2021, paragraph 32).
141. The adoption of SDG targets and related indicators in the Results Framework helps to improve FAO's results planning and monitoring system. First, it facilitates a direct relationship between CPFs and nationally owned SDG monitoring frameworks. Second, outcomes will be measured by progress against SDG indicators rather than against targets, as countries will be setting their own targets at national level. Third, several non-SDG outcome indicators will be retained as measures of FAO contributions to outcomes not measured by SDG indicators (MTP 2018–2021, paragraph 33).
142. FAO has prepared various guidance materials on how to incorporate the SDGs into FAO's work and identified priorities and mechanisms for reporting results. These include:
- Building a common vision for sustainable agriculture – principles and approaches (FAO, 2014, box 8).
  - FAO and the SDGs: Indicators – Measuring up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (FAO, 2017);
  - Food and Agriculture: Key to achieving the 17 SDGs (FAO, 2016);
  - Food and Agriculture in the 2030 Agenda (FAO, 2016);

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<sup>37</sup> FAO (2017) C 2017/3 Web Annex 11: Results Frameworks, comparing 2014–2017 and 2018–2021, paragraphs 2 and 3

- Sustainable Development Goals (FAO, 2016);
  - How to place food and agriculture in the SDGs on the national planning menu: A 10-point guide (FAO, 2017);
  - Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs: 20 interconnected actions to guide decision-makers (FAO, 2018).
143. A perusal of these materials shows the presence of several narratives – the 17 SDGs, the five SOs, the five principles and 20 interconnected actions, and 12 focus areas (for resource mobilization) – which, while not mutually contradicting, create ambiguities as to what needs to be done by FAO and partners. Lacking is more pointed guidance or a single handbook that explains:
- How food and agriculture systems are key to achieving SDGs;
  - How FAO can support countries in achieving the SDGs related to agriculture and food systems; and
  - Guiding narratives for FAORs and counterpart ministries to identify SDG priorities linked to FAO’s vision and mandate and using SDG indicators in CPFs.
144. FAO is the custodian agency for 21 SDG indicators spanning SDGs 2, 5, 6, 12, 14 and 15 and a contributing agency for six more. The custodian agency is responsible for collecting data from national sources, providing the storyline for the annual global SDG progress report, providing and updating the indicator documentation, working on further methodological development and contributing to statistical capacity building.<sup>38</sup> While this does not imply primary responsibility for achieving the targets (SDG plans are nationally led), it does imply a major role for FAO in supporting countries in measuring progress and an opportunity to take a leadership role in facilitating implementation of the 2030 Agenda in a number of areas linked to the custodianship. There is not much detail in the MTP 2018–2021, nor the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2018–2019 as to how FAO will fulfil its role as custodian and the implications in terms of resource investment.
145. **OIG review of FAO readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda.** In July 2018, OIG presented the results of its review<sup>39</sup> of FAO’s readiness for implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to support countries in attaining their SDGs. The assessment identified two main roles for FAO related to the SDGs: (1) as a custodian agency of indicators, ensuing work on methodologies, data collection, analysis, dissemination and capacity development, and (2) as an agent of transformational change, which will depend on its ability to forge critical partnerships and support governments in achieving their SDGs.
146. The review observed a lack of consistency in the collective understanding of FAO’s main roles with regard to the 2030 Agenda, a lack of clarity on what is expected from country office management and a lack of clarity on the impact of impending UN Reform on FAO’s role and configuration, which could potentially alter its contribution to the SDGs. In terms of resources and capacity to support SDG implementation, the risks are: (1) that country offices are not fit for purpose to support member states; (2) there is a lack of capacity in Regional Offices and sub-regional offices to support technical and statistical needs; (3) there is a lack of adequate human resources and an appropriate skill mix across FAO to support Members with the SDG agenda; and (4) there is a lack of effective partnerships, including with private sector.
147. As regards clarity over external stakeholders’ expectations, the assessment identified risks of: (1) a lack of clarity over roles and unclear expectations between FAO, Members and resource

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<sup>38</sup> Source: FAO and the SDGs, Indicators: measuring up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

<sup>39</sup> Assessment of FAO’s SDG Readiness in support of implementation of 2030 Agenda (July 2018)

partners; (2) a lack of consistency in the use of prescribed SDG-related indicators and those FAO is not tracking; (3) missed opportunities for FAORs to engage in substantive debates and coordinate FAO's work with other agencies; (4) not enough support for countries not showing interest or appetite; and (5) unwillingness in some countries due to uncertainties, including over committed funding.

#### 4.1.2 UN System Reform implications

148. In May 2018, the UN General Assembly approved by consensus an ambitious, comprehensive plan for the repositioning of the UN Development System, entailing significant changes to the setup, leadership, accountability mechanisms and capacities of the UN System, to ensure that it meets national needs for the implementation of the SDGs and climate-change commitments of the Paris Agreement. The major elements of the reform proposals<sup>40</sup> are:

- Reinforcement of the Resident Coordinator system to coordinate the activities of UNCTs;
- Elevation of UNDAF as a system-wide plan to respond to national priorities, with a compact on results linked to SDGs, underpinned by a budgetary framework;
- A new generation of lean, efficient country teams, determined by national governments on the basis of national priorities outlined in the SDG frameworks, with physical presence to be based on objective quantitative criteria (ratio of programme expenditure to the cost of country presence and share of UNCT expenditure);
- Increase in core contributions from the present level of 21.5 percent to 30 percent over five years, with a view to ensuring greater predictability of programming and balancing the programmatic thrust across SDGs.

149. For individual UN agencies, the reforms, if endorsed, will have major implications. They will have to sign individual compacts with the Resident Coordinator outlining specific contributions and accountability to the system-wide mandate and UNDAF; commit to increase non-core programme resources for joint inter-agency pooled funds (the current average is 6 percent; the reforms intend to increase this to 15 percent); undertake more joint analysis, programme formulation, implementation and monitoring, including UN flagship initiatives, such as climate change, equality, gender based violence and data; and double annual corporate contributions to fund the Resident Coordinator system under cost-sharing arrangements.

150. A key issue for FAO as a specialized agency is that FAORs will continue to be accredited to governments and have direct access and working relationships with ministries of agriculture and other relevant technical ministries, building on FAO's Strategic Framework, the CPFs and the Organization's normative and standard-setting role. FAORs will also need to report to the Resident Coordinator on the UNDAF planning and results for which FAO is responsible at country level. As far as the CPF is concerned, FAO<sup>41</sup> agrees with the need for consultation with UNCTs and Resident Coordinators with a view to adding value and ensuring consistency with the UNDAFs, but believes it would be simpler to keep the accountability lines for the CPF between FAO and host governments.

<sup>40</sup> UN Secretary General reports (2018) UNGA/A 72-684-E/2018/7 and [A/72/124-E/2018/3](#)

<sup>41</sup> FAO (2018) JM 2018.2/3 Implications of Implementation and Funding of UN Development System Reform

## What elements should the next Strategic Framework consider as an effective strategic plan for FAO in support of the SDGs?

151. The UN Secretary General reports that 114 countries have submitted requirements for assistance to mainstream SDGs into national development planning and governance. Over 90 countries have made some SDG implementation plans. As of 2017, 44 countries had presented Voluntary National Reviews of their two-year progress on SDG implementation and a similar number will have presented reviews in 2018. However, there continues to be some scepticism over the state of implementation, especially with regard to resource-mobilization arrangements.
152. **Balancing FAO's mandate and SDGs.** Considering the centrality of the SDGs in the evolving development dialogue, FAO's mandate and state of readiness, the new Strategic Framework 2020–2030 should balance the normative aspects of FAO's work and sharpen the narrative on how FAO will support countries in realizing SDG targets that are relevant to FAO's mandate and based on FAO's comparative advantage. While recognizing the primacy of the UNDAFs, which are likely to be based entirely on SDGs, it is also important to note that specialized agencies, such as FAO, have global obligations approved and funded by their global and regional governing bodies for relevant normative areas, as well as policy and technical programmes, which need to be duly recognized, incorporated and resourced in the UNDAFs. Food and agriculture are critical to achieving the SDGs. It is important to ensure that important areas of FAO's work, such as that on transboundary pests and diseases, food safety standards, forecasting and early-warning systems, and climate-change modelling to inform adaptation processes, statistics, nutrition, gender and governance, are not excluded or under-prioritized because there are no specific SDG targets or indicators for them. Many of these are and will continue to be areas of special focus for FAO.
153. **Country programming.** It would be reasonable to expect all new CPFs to capture the national challenges to sustainable food and agriculture, the priorities outlined in national SDG plans, including specific targets and indicators to which FAO can make a contribution. Results matrices for the CPFs should draw as much as possible on SDG targets and indicators that are already adopted by FAO's Strategic Framework. However, though reflecting the SDGs prioritized by member countries, CPFs should not become subsets of national SDG implementation plans, especially as there are no SDG indicators for a considerable part of FAO's normative work, such as: transboundary pests and diseases, food safety standards, forecasting and early-warning systems and climate-change modelling. These areas should not lose visibility or priority because there are no specific SDG targets or indicators for them. In all of this, strengthening decentralized office capacities to effectively engage in the UNCT will become increasingly important. The work plans of headquarters units should have more consistent inclusion of technical support based on CPF-enlisted priorities.
154. **Resource mobilization.** The 2030 Agenda has some important ramifications for FAO's resource-mobilization strategy and processes. First, the magnitude of commitments entailed by the SDGs necessitates far higher levels of financing than those being raised at present, with a large part to be mobilized through government financing, both revenue and debt, in addition to private-sector investment. Second, as SDGs are nationally owned, a large share of resources will be raised at country level in relation to national SDG implementation plans and, consequently, the UNDAFs. This could have important implications for FAO's resource-mobilization narratives. Whether communications and donor engagement should be based around SDGs, SO themes or the 12 focus areas currently identified for business development needs to be well thought through.

155. **Shift in focus from 'funding' to 'financing' and investment impact.** For countries to achieve the SDGs will require far more financing than is being raised at present. The financial-resources needed to meet the SDGs are far bigger than for the MGDs and call for substantial diversification and innovation when it comes to financing options. According to UNDP's SDG Impact Finance,<sup>42</sup> achieving the SDGs will cost between USD 3.3 trillion and USD 4.5 trillion a year, with an investment gap in developing countries of about USD 2.5 trillion annually. In 2016, total official development assistance peaked at USD 142.6 billion, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Cooperation Directorate (OECD-DAC).<sup>43</sup> The World Bank has estimated that between 50 percent and 80 percent of the financing required will need to come from domestic funding and private capital. Development flows are transitioning from 'funding' to 'financing' and there is growing consideration of alternative financing, including blended finance instruments and tools to assist in the formulation of integrated national financing frameworks (recommended under the Addis Ababa Action Agenda). These include impact investments aimed at drawing in private investment, SDG-linked pooled funds, corporate social initiatives, social impact bonds and other instruments.
156. With the paradigm shift from development funding to financing, FAO will need to rethink its development effectiveness in terms of investment leverage as an important indicator of FAO impact. This will require it to pay greater attention to the scale and impact of investment operations, rather than merely stepping up resource mobilization for FAO's programme delivery. All of this will necessitate an increase in FAO's resource mobilization and investment operation capacity at the decentralized level and there will be a need for backstopping in programme preparation, marketing communications and business development support from regional and headquarters teams. TCI, which has been instrumental in catalysing investments from IFIs, is well positioned to steer FAO into this evolving space. In this regard, the presence of 22 TCI staff in decentralized offices<sup>44</sup> puts the Organization in a better position to engage with these alternative and blended financial instruments to lead towards greater levels of public and development investment in sustainable food and agriculture.
157. **Positioning of climate change.** FAO's Reviewed Strategic Framework, adopted in 2013, positioned climate change as a cross-cutting theme. Since then, there have been major developments in the global climate-change agenda, in particular, the adoption of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. FAO's Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Strategy was formulated in 2017, with three pillars of action: to engage with climate finance instruments, strengthen FAO's coordination capacity and deliver climate-change work on the ground. FAO (especially SP2 and SP5) have been working on the integration of climate change and disaster risk responses to align the need to meet both Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework targets. The SFA approach is also providing a fulcrum for the transition of some FAO concepts, such as Climate-Smart Agriculture, towards a more comprehensive sustainable approach. Efforts have been stepped up over the past few years to attract climate finance, particularly from the GCF. However, with the increasing importance of climate change as a major driver of development cooperation and financing, sharpening FAO's narrative and ensuring its high visibility across the Strategic Framework would be important in harnessing emerging opportunities. Currently, 'climate change' does not feature in any SO title or in the outputs or outcomes of the Strategic Framework results-chain model.

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<sup>42</sup> UNDP's SDG Impact Finance website

<sup>43</sup> OECD-DAC Report 2017

<sup>44</sup> 22 TCI staff were transferred into decentralized offices in 2013

158. The design of the new Strategic Framework could benefit from more systematic consultation and deliberation on the repositioning of climate change. A case exists for reviewing and sharpening climate-change outputs and indicators in the results chains of specific SOs and within the main sectors – crops, fisheries, livestock and forests – to improve visibility of the work being done across SOs and to mobilize resources and to make better use of climate financing. The following are examples of such indicators:
- SO2: Climate-smart practices standardized by FAO/partners and applied at country level; sustainable production and natural-resource management measures introduced in crops, livestock, fisheries and forests;
  - SO3: Analyses of climate change-induced impacts on rural poverty;
  - SO4: Climate-change analysis in the design of value chains (climate-resilient value chains); and
  - SO5: International climate finance flowing to agriculture, livestock, fisheries and forestry.
159. **Refining and reinforcing cross-SO elements in programmes.** Incorporating a broad agenda of priorities and inter-sectoral cross-cutting approaches into concrete programmes is not easy, as experienced in the implementation of the Strategic Framework. It is particularly challenging to develop theories of change that encompass the intervention logic of the constituent SOs and seamlessly weave in the interconnected themes of hunger, nutrition, poverty, natural-resource sustainability and risk resilience, while balancing the sustainability challenges of food systems and livelihood systems.
160. At the same time, for external stakeholders, these cross-SO approaches need to be packaged into more concrete programme interventions around specific challenges, with results chains and narratives aligned to resource partners' priorities, requirements and SDG targets. They also need to be more effectively communicated and marketed to external stakeholders. In this regard, the 40 SDG targets, 20 interconnected actions and 12 focus areas for resource mobilization provide new and alternative opportunities to design flagship programmes that are cross-SO from the outset. This would facilitate an improved results framework for individual programmes that addressed country priorities and resource partners' requirements in relation to more concrete SDG targets. At the same time, SO-level monitoring and reporting could still be conducted at the corporate accountability level, drawing on the links already mapped between all SO outcomes and SDG indicators.
161. Deliberation may be required on how the SP structures and technical units can effectively lead, implement and coordinate programmes emerging from the Business Development Portfolio and support countries in achieving SDGs, while serving and meeting FAO's SOs.

## 5 Appendices

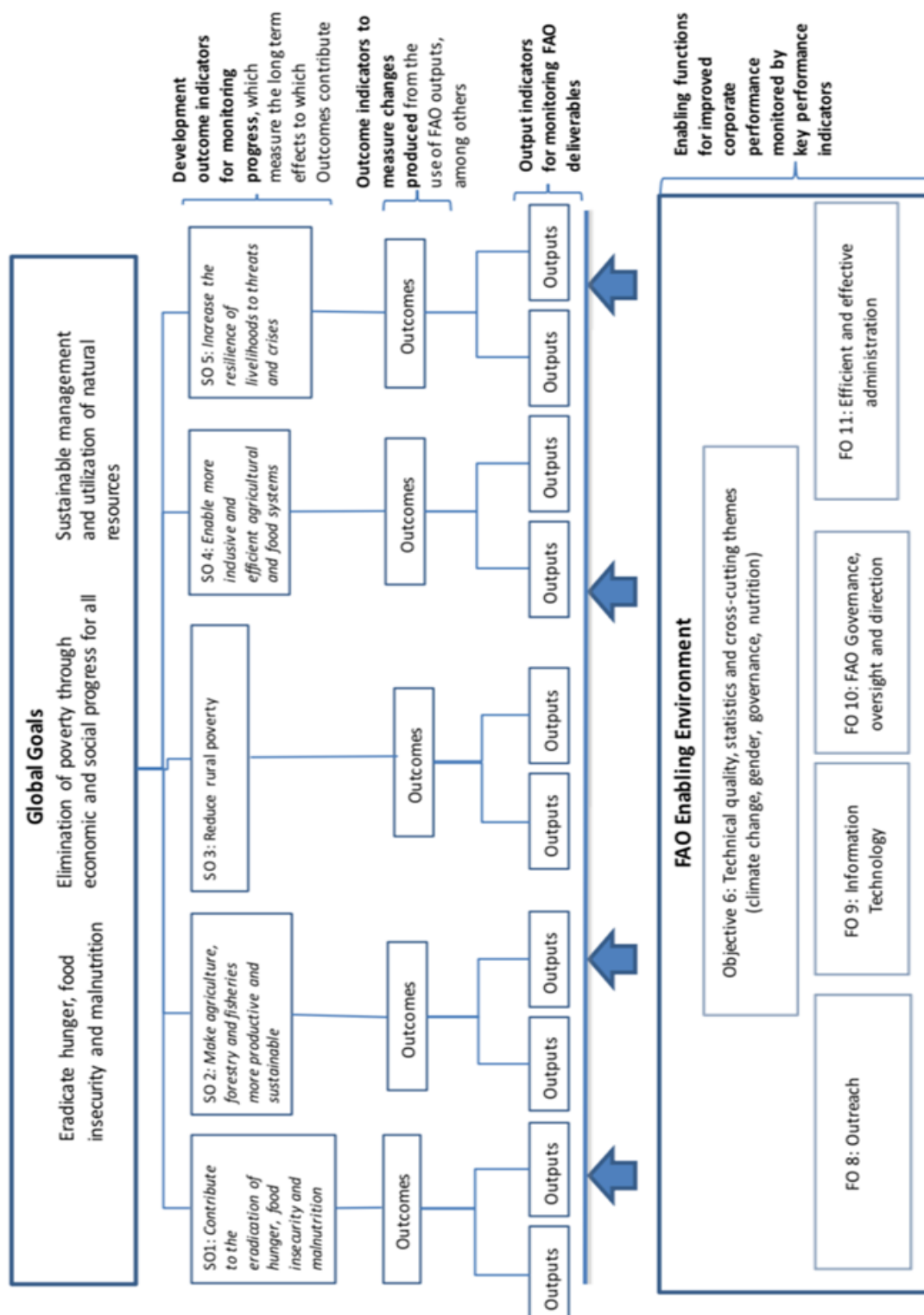
### Appendix 1. List of people interviewed

	Name	Surname	Role
1	Vera	Agostini	Deputy Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Resources Division (FIA)
2	Festus	Akinnifesi	Senior Coordinator, Multi-Partner Initiative, Resource Mobilization Division (TCR)
3	José	Alejandro Rosero Moncayo	Director, Statistics Division (ESS)
4	Dubravka	Bojic	Programme Officer, Economic and Social Development Department (ES)
5	Dominique	Burgeon	Leader, SP5 Team and Director, Emergency and Rehabilitation Division (TCE)
6	Marisa	Caipo	Food Safety and Quality Officer (RLC)
7	Karel	Callens	Deputy SP1 Leader
8	Clayton	Campanhola	Leader, SP2 Team
9	Luiz	Carlos Beduschi	Policy Officer, SP3 Focal Point (RLC)
10	Rodrigo	Castaneda	Deputy Director, Partnerships and South–South Cooperation Division (DPS)
11	Christine	Chaperon	Senior Advisor, (DDO)
12	Michael	Clarke	Senior Coordinator, Economic and Social Development Department (ES)
13	David	Conte	Programme Coordinator, SP3 Team
14	Antonio	Correa do Prado	Deputy Director, Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division (ESP)
15	Beth	Crawford	Director, Office of Strategy, Planning and Resources Management (OSP)
16	Rimma	Dankova	Senior Adviser, Investment Centre Division (TCI)
17	Benjamin	Davies	Leader, SP3 Team
18	Rodrigo	de Lapuerta	Director, Liaison Office with the EU and Belgium (LOB)
19	Marianne	El-Metni	Programme Officer, Investment Centre Division (TCI)
20	Gustavo	Gonzalez	Director, Resource Mobilization Division (TCR)
21	Daniel	Gustafson	Deputy Director-General – Programmes (DDP)
22	Takayuki	Hagiwara	Chief, Asia and the Pacific Service, Investment Centre Division (TCIB)
23	Abebe	Haile-Gabriel	Regional Programme Leader for Africa, Regional Office for Africa (RAF)
24	Mohammad	Hosseini Emadi	Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to FAO
25	Anastasiya	Idrisova	Programme Officer, Forestry Department (FO)
26	Patrick	Jacqueson	Senior Programme Officer, SP5 Team
27	Raimund	Jehle	Regional Programme Leader, Regional Representative, Regional Office for Europe (REU)
28	Indira	Joshi	Liaison and Operations Officer, SP5 Team
29	Kazuki	Kitaoka	Team Leader for Marketing Outreach and Reporting, Resource Mobilization Division (TCR)
30	Victor	León	Strategy and Planning Officer (OSP)
31	Mohamed	Manssouri	Director, Investment Centre Division (TCI)
32	Eduardo	Mansur	Director, Land and Water Division (CBL)
33	Alberta	Mascaretti	Chief, Africa Service, Investment Centre Division (TCIA)
34	Arni	Mathiesen	Assistant Director General, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department (FI)
35	Yasaman	Matinroshan	Programme Officer (ODF)

36	Hui	Ming Tan	Seniro Auditor (OIG)
37	Hiroto	Mitsugi	Assistant Director General, Forestry Department (FI)
38	Victor	Mol	Programme Officer, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP)
39	Jamie	Morrison	Leader, SP4 Team
40	Reza	Najib	Programme Coordinator (CBL)
41	Dorian	Navarro	SDG Indicators Coordinator, Office of the Chief Statistician (OCS)
42	Tacko	Ndiaye	Senior Officer, Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division (ESP)
43	Brave	Ndisale	Leader, SP1 Team
44	Hivy	Ortiz	Forestry Officer, SP2 Team (RLC)
45	Halka	Otto	Senior Advisor (DDN)
46	Abdessalam	OuldAhmed	Assistant Director General – Regional Representative, Regional Office for the Near East (RNE)
47	Stacey	Pollack	Monitoring and Evaluation, SP3 Team
48	Thierry	Rajaobelina	Inspector-General (OIG)
49	Valdimir	Rakhmanin	Assistant Director General – Regional Representative, Regional Office for Europe (REU)
50	Ricardo	Rapallo	Food Security Officer, SP1 Team (RLC)
51	Anna	Rappazzo	Technical Advisor 2030 Agenda, Economic and Social Development Department (ES)
52	Adoniram	Sanches	Regional SPs Coordinator, Regional Office for Latin America and Caribbean (RLC)
53	Junko	Sazaki	Director, Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division (ESP)
54	Maria-Helena	Semedo	Deputy Director-General – Knowledge (DDN)
55	Vimlendra	Sharan	Director, Liaison Office for North America (LOW)
56	Ahmed	Shukri	Senior Economist, SP5 Team
57	Hélène	Sow	Strategy and Planning Officer (OSP)
58	Pasquale	Steduto	Regional SPs Coordinator (RNE)
59	Clare	Sycamore	Director, Resource Mobilization Division (TCR)
60	Katrin	Taylor	Programme Officer, Resource Mobilization Division (TCR)
61	Laurent	Thomas	Deputy Director-General – Operations (DDO)
62	Máximo	Torero	Assistant Director General, Economic and Social Development Department (ES)
63	Anna	Trolle-Lindgren	Team Leader, Resource Mobilization Division (TCR)
64	Carlos	Vaquero	Technical Officer (DDN)
65	Benoist	Veillerette	Senior Economist, SP1 Team
66	Marcela	Villareal	Director, Partnerships and South–South Cooperation Division (DPS)
67	Sylvie	Wabbes Candotti	Emergency and Rehabilitation Officer, SP5 Team
68	Yao	Xiangjun	Regional Programme Leader, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP)



## Appendix 2. FAO results chain model



### Appendix 3. List of documents consulted

**FAO. 2009.** Medium Term Plan 2010-13 and Programme of Work and Budget 2010-11 (C 2009/15). Available at: <http://www.fao.org/tempref/docrep/fao/meeting/017/k5831e.pdf>

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