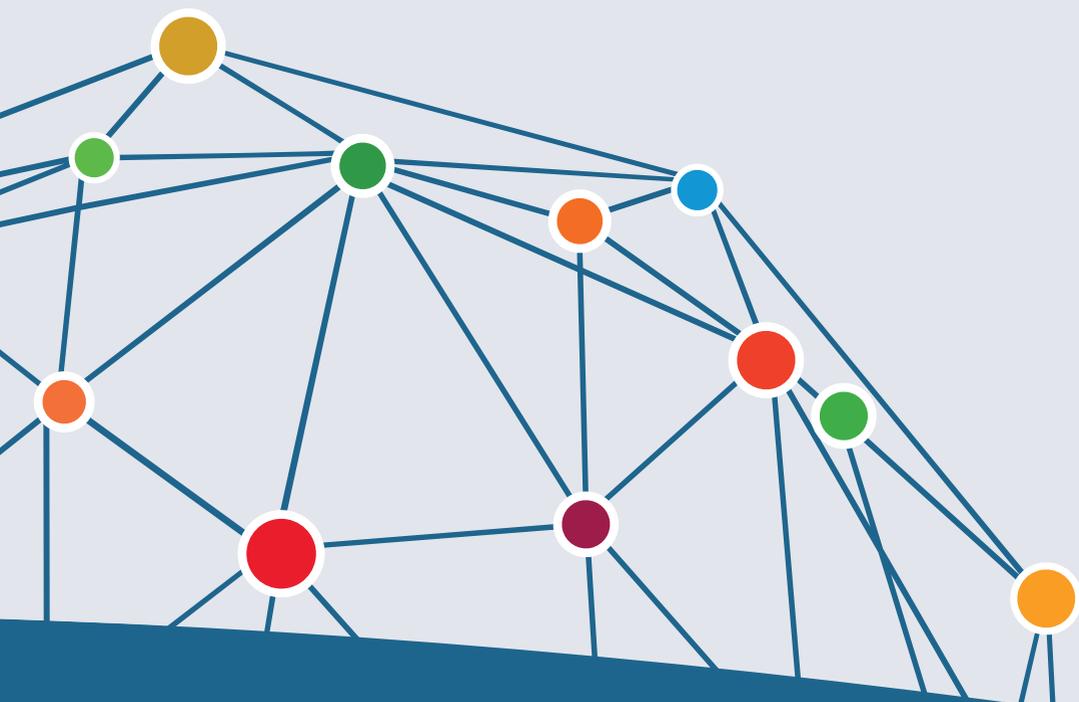




Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



EUROPEAN UNION



FIRST

FAO–EU Partnership
Policy Assistance Mechanism

Preparing the ground to end malnutrition

Today, despite the efforts against hunger, the world still hosts over 820 million undernourished people. On top of this, some of the food systems transformations that contributed to reducing undernourishment have taken a hefty toll on the planet and on human health and nutrition. Besides natural resources depletion, biodiversity loss and climate change, we are witnessing a surge in obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases worldwide.

All these challenges share a common ground: agriculture. Therefore, it is essential to refocus the way we produce food — and that we strengthen our focus on agriculture — in order to make it sustainable, so that it helps us to effectively address all the above issues.

The **food security and nutrition impact, resilience, sustainability and transformation (FIRST) programme** is a strategic partnership between the European Union and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) that has been working hand-in-hand with governments since 2015. Through its **network of policy officers** embedded in the relevant ministries, FIRST aims at ensuring that policies set the right conditions for investments in agriculture and food systems to have a real impact on reducing hunger and all forms of malnutrition while contributing to solve other issues.

While new challenges emerge and priorities shift, it is clearer than ever before that **governments cannot bear all the responsibility** for the profound transformations that are needed in the ways we produce, process, distribute, access and consume our food. Thus, it is crucial to **create an enabling environment** that allows for the private sector (from smallholder farmers to big corporations) to push for agriculture and food systems transformations.



About the FIRST programme

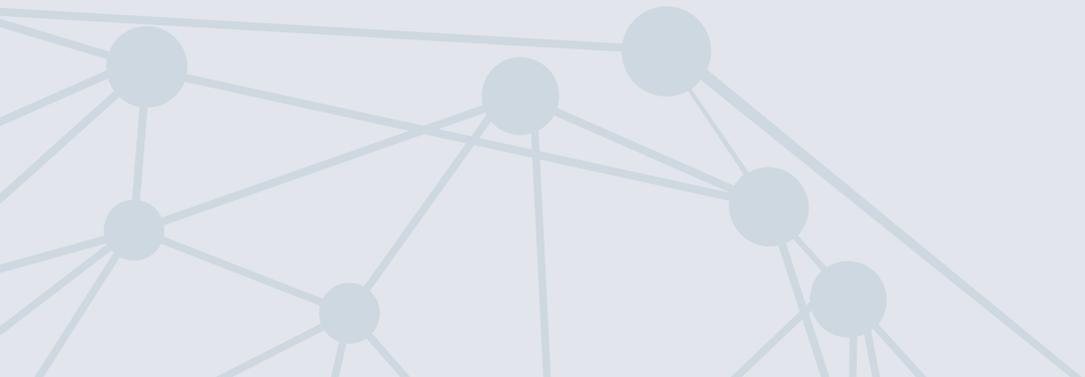
FIRST is a **strategic partnership** between FAO and the European Union, and it acts as a broker between those parties who pursue change, various governments, those willing to support those efforts with additional funding, like the European Union, and those who can provide expertise and technical assistance, like FAO.

Through the services provided to governments in setting the conditions for investments to achieve impact, FIRST adds value to every euro invested in food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture and food systems.

FROM ETHIOPIA TO PAKISTAN AND FROM FIJI TO LIBERIA

FIRST supports governments in identifying national priorities and addressing context-specific bottlenecks so that the conditions are set for sustainable agriculture to blossom and work for nutrition, health, welfare, economic growth and stability.

In **Guatemala**, for example, FIRST is supporting the government in the implementation of its flagship agricultural programme in support of family farming to ensure its effectiveness in the face of the big gender gap among rural farmers. Meanwhile, in **Palestine**, FIRST is assisting in setting up a monitoring and evaluation system to track how money is used and judge whether it is allocated for the previously identified priorities. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, FIRST is accompanying the government in setting a friendlier legal, financial and market environment for smallholder farmers.



FIRST supports countries in paving the ground so that investments in sustainable agriculture contribute to eradicating hunger and all forms of malnutrition through:



ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICIES, PLANS AND PROGRAMS

Through its network of policy officers, FIRST carries out thorough assessments of the effectiveness of existing policies, plans and programmes related to food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture. The goal is to identify the main bottlenecks that prevent efforts from achieving impact and obtaining evidence to inform policy design.



In **West Africa**, for example, FIRST has assisted member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in **reviewing their fisheries policies** and discovering why the fisheries and aquaculture sector in the region has not unlocked its potential to contribute to food security and nutrition, job creation or income generation. Similar assessments undertaken in other countries have informed decision-making and policy design. Taking stock of the experience acquired since its inception, FIRST has also carried out comprehensive diagnostics on the situation of food security and nutrition in over 23 countries, which allow governments **to assess the effectiveness of their efforts** and identify common trends and challenges.





SUPPORTING CAPACITIES THROUGH POLICY ASSISTANCE

FIRST provides policy assistance to governments and institutions to improve their capacities to design and implement effective policies and programs, both at the national and subnational level. It also assists in identifying priorities for budget allocation, investments and interventions.

In **Myanmar**, where robust rice production is a priority, the country was not making sufficient progress in improving nutrition. Cultivating diverse and varied crops was extremely difficult due to rice-centred policies and legislation. With the assistance of FIRST, the **government addressed the link between land-use planning and nutrition-sensitive agriculture**. Legislative changes regarding land-use now support and allow for crop diversification and encourage farmers and other actors to invest in different farming activities, from fruit production to aquaculture. This transformation is setting the groundwork for families to access a wider range of nutritious foods and thus configure healthier diets.





PROMOTING INCLUSIVE POLICY DIALOGUE

FIRST supports the strengthening of governance and coordination mechanisms to make them more inclusive so that they allow for an open policy dialogue in which all sectors, including the most vulnerable, have their say.

In **Chad**, for example, FIRST has organized seminars on **policy dialogue**, involving ministries' staff, non-state actors (corporations, producers' associations and civil society organization) FAO and the European Union. Participants learned on the importance of multi-stakeholder coordination and policy dialogue and discussed different issues, for example, the need to fund an **effective information system for better preventing and managing food crises**.





LEARNING TO ACHIEVE IMPACT

Taking stock of lessons learnt and sharing knowledge is essential for improving effectiveness. On the one hand, FIRST assists countries in establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that allow for effectiveness assessments, accountability and evidence-based decision-making. On the other hand, it facilitates experience and knowledge-sharing among countries, then collects and manages that knowledge and the lessons learnt to achieve greater impact.



FIRST supported **Lao People's Democratic Republic** in setting up a data-sharing system that allows nutrition coordination mechanisms in 11 provinces and 82 districts to apply evidence-based analysis for planning, reporting and coordination. In **Kenya**, government officials had the chance to participate in a study tour to **Ecuador, Indonesia, Malaysia and Peru** to exchange their experience with colleagues. The policy officers network participates in different events and conferences to share their knowledge, and the program holds different workshops for them to discuss peer-to-peer.

FIRST has also produced different learning and knowledge products such as the **Policy Guidance Notes** series to support policymakers in understanding how sectoral issues affect food security and nutrition and recognizing how to incorporate these considerations into their policies. Drawing from the aforementioned country diagnostics, a vast literature review and other studies carried out together with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), FIRST is also producing a global think piece around how to accelerate the progress towards ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition.



CONTACT

FIRST programme

Deputy-SPL1@fao.org

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)



www.fao.org/europeanunion/eu-projects/first/en



Some rights reserved. This work is available under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence