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الغذية والزراعة
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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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Synthesis of findings and lessons learnt from the Strategic Objective evaluations

MANAGEMENT OBSERVATIONS

Guidance sought by the Programme Committee

The Programme Committee may wish to provide its views and guidance on the key issues in the Evaluation report, and to the response to the recommendations and proposed follow-up actions by Management.

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

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1. FAO management welcomes the Synthesis Report and finds it constructive, portraying a positive picture of the significant changes that the development of the Reviewed Strategic Framework brought about. The report also recognizes that the implementation of a transformative agenda brings with it a degree of turbulence and the need for flexibility, learning-by-doing and adaptation. It highlights the “culture change” that came with this transformation, especially in terms of more interdisciplinary work, partnership engagement, new ways of thinking about funding and financing, and others. Management agrees with the findings of the Report that attribute a number of positive outcomes to the introduction and implementation of the Strategic Objectives (SOs). These include achieving a more holistic approach to its work, a multi-sectoral response to demands raised by countries, and better leveraging of the Organization’s comparative advantage as UN specialized agency.

2. Given the time that has passed since the first of the five evaluations came out and the evolution and dynamic nature of the implementation arrangements, Management also appreciates that the Report goes beyond a summary of the five evaluations and considered the relevant Management Responses and more recent updates produced. It also recognizes the vigorous consultation undertaken by the Synthesis team with key stakeholders at headquarters and decentralized levels.

3. Management agrees with the *Lessons Learnt* and considers that the items presented reflect the topics raised in the five evaluations. Management also welcomes the suggestions in the section on *Looking Forward* and will incorporate them in the next planning phase. While there are no explicit recommendations for Management, it may be useful to provide observations on three themes that relate to key issues and challenges raised by the Synthesis. They are: i) situating the discussion in a longer time frame, ii) funding structure, resource mobilization and investment support, and iii) management and implementation issues.

Situating the discussion in a longer time frame

4. It is important to view the findings, lessons and forward-looking comments within a longer perspective to appreciate how much has changed and is changing in the overall environment in which the Organization works. Looking back, it is important to see how the Reviewed Strategic Framework responds to earlier demands from Members for reform. Looking at more immediate challenges, it is critical to understand how FAO’s work relates to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, particularly in light of current UN reform efforts. Looking ahead, FAO needs to be engaged much more deeply with the scientific community, to reflect on the policy implications of new scientific insights and to inform the research agenda.

5. Specifically:

- a) The historical context: The FAO Conference in 2007 called for a transformational change to become an Organization that manages for results and that “functions as one” for improved delivery, with more teamwork and collaboration between headquarters and decentralized offices, between Members and Management, and between FAO and its partners. FAO reviewed its Strategic Framework 2010-19 as part of the established planning, programme and budget system. This was guided by the Strategic Thinking Process introduced by the current FAO Director-General upon taking office in January 2012. The core concepts behind the Strategic Programmes respond explicitly to the demand to manage for results and to integrate internally across disciplines and locations, and externally with partners.
- b) Alignment with Agenda 2030 and the SDGs: Although Agenda 2030 was launched after the SOs had been defined, they contain conceptual parallels, particularly in areas where FAO contributed to the design of specific SDGs. In essence, the five Strategic Objectives now enable the alignment of FAO’s work to countries’ implementation of the SDGs as well as increase the Organization’s focus on country-level results. Moreover, following the introduction of the 2030 Agenda it is no longer adequate to support countries in addressing single objectives in isolation of each other (for example, improvements in nutritional status, reduced pressure on natural resources through more sustainable management practices, reductions in poverty and inequities, among others). Management believes it would not have

been possible for the Organization to accommodate these changes without the Reviewed Strategic Framework and the corresponding Strategic Programmes.

- c) The growing complexity of problems to be addressed: The complexity and inter-relatedness of the challenges to which FAO contributes will only grow, requiring even greater collaboration with science and research institutions, among other partners. For example, the scientific community now accepts that those factors in agriculture and the food system that drive climate change are, by and large, the same factors that drive the obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases epidemic. This, along with many other findings across the fields of FAO's work, requires a continuing examination of how we address these drivers in an integrated manner and with an increasing number of partners.

Funding structure, resource mobilization and investment support

6. FAO's funding structure and overall resource mobilization have significant implications, raised throughout the Report, and that bear highlighting. They may be summarized as follows:
- a) The predominance of voluntary project-funding is a major challenge to a more robust programmatic approach, particularly at the country level. The Report highlights problems in the distribution of skills and technical capacity, resource mobilization constraints, and the weaker programmatic approach at the country level than at headquarters and Regional Offices. More programme funding at the country level, along with lightly earmarked or unearmarked funding globally is necessary.
 - b) The Report singles out climate change as a key area of successful engagement in cross-cutting work. The opening up of major new funding windows around climate change has been an important incentive for this. However, such incentives have largely been absent for nutrition, gender and governance.
 - c) The shift in resource mobilization focus from funding towards financing is appreciated and needs to go further. The question is not only one of attracting more money, but also of how to get a better return from already available money. There is an important window of opportunity for FAO to engage with policy makers and public sector investors on creating a policy and institutional environment that stimulates "responsible" investment and enhances impact on SDG-relevant development outcomes. Better leveraging FAO's catalytic work to stimulate and guide investment, and in private sector partnerships, is increasingly important.
 - d) The Report rightly spells out the need to engage with private sector on investment. While that is important, the engagement with private sector needs to go beyond investment. Private sector players need to be involved in policy dialogue around their role in preventing problems of obesity and non-communicable diseases, climate change, environmental pollution, poverty, among others.

Management and implementation issues

7. The Report discusses several management and implementation issues. Overall, Management recognizes the challenges and areas of improvement raised in the report and the need to analyze implementation bottlenecks. Management accepts this finding but believes that this exercise should become part of a regular organization-wide performance assessment.

8. Some statements in the Synthesis Report may appear to call into question the value of the Strategic Programme Teams in the overall matrix management arrangements. Elsewhere in the report, however, they are cited as having catalyzed cross-cutting work and driven a major organizational shift towards achievement of outcomes. Management stresses the need to build on the successes observed and to continue to improve the functioning of the Strategic Programme arrangements and related matrix structures. It also notes that many of the constraints are rooted in operational arrangements beyond the scope of the Strategic Programmes and understands that these will be examined in the upcoming evaluation of the Strategic Framework due in November 2019. Management looks forward to this evaluation and expects it will provide significant and important complementary information to the present Synthesis.

Going forward

9. The Synthesis Report is supplementary to the regular updates on each of the five SO Evaluations, which are regularly discussed in the Programme Committee and where progress is reported on the specific recommendations of the individual evaluations. In addition, Management welcomes future discussions with Members on the larger topics identified in Section 4 of the Report *Looking ahead: The 2030 Agenda, UN Reform and the SDGs*. These discussions will arise in the context of the next *Director General's Medium Term Plan and Programme of Work and Budget 2020-21*, in the ongoing series of briefings to Members on UN Reform, and other formal and informal discussions targeting the specific elements identified.