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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

## Thirty-fifth Session

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## FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: a New Approach

### Executive Summary

This paper summarizes the essential elements of the Hand in Hand (HIH) Initiative and reviews progress in implementation in the period from December 2019 until mid-May 2020. Despite the lockdown of FAO facilities since 11 March 2020, significant advance has been registered in every aspect of the Initiative: underlying principles have been clarified along with the basic analytical framework and engagement approach. Fourteen countries have begun initial engagement in the HIH process, and several others, including middle-income countries, have expressed strong interest in joining. A multidimensional, Organization-wide support framework has been put in place. Key public and private institutional partners have been engaged and possible areas of country-level engagement have been identified. A robust, technology-aided monitoring and evaluation framework has been outlined and proposals for implementation are under review.

Despite these important advances, full-scale implementation remains work-in-progress, with the HIH Initiative being, by design, highly flexible and oriented to innovation and learning by doing. Clearly defined objectives and a strong systems-supported commitment to transparency and regular reporting ensures mutual accountability among partners, including the Organization, for performance and achievement of the agreed objectives.

Enhancing country ownership and leadership is a foundational objective of the Initiative: all systems and partnerships are intended to strengthen national authorities' capacities for analysis, decision-making, implementation, partnering, innovation, investment, transparency, monitoring and evaluation of performance and outcomes.

To date, FAO has invited 44 countries with limited capacities for achieving sustainable development or in protracted crisis due to natural disaster or conflict to join the Initiative as beneficiaries. FAO has also invited more than 80 countries to become contributor countries in the Initiative to provide material support, whether as donor or as contributor of in-kind support services. Some 20 countries, including middle-income countries with areas that have high poverty rates, have expressed interest in participating as both beneficiaries and donors. For the 44 designated beneficiary countries, FAO has committed to support out of its own resources; for middle-income countries, FAO works with Members to identify sources of additional funding required to enable scaled-up FAO support.

<sup>1</sup> Rescheduled from 17-20 February, Thimphu, Bhutan

The accelerated implementation of the Initiative has coincided with the onset of COVID-19 and the urgent need to cope with the combined impacts on agri-food systems of the pandemic, necessary suppression measures, and a major global economic recession. In most cases, the HIH approach to analysis and partnership-building has proven to be a useful model for coordinating integrated rapid response to COVID-19 impacts on food systems, particularly at the local or territorial level. It is also proving useful for enabling evidence-based anticipatory approaches to preventing broader food systems breakdown and for accelerating investment to address emerging threats to food system functioning.

The Initiative is being implemented with an eye toward fulfilling the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's vision to bolster the UN system's data management and analytics, integrated policy services, partnerships, and finance and investment. It strives to position the UN as an effective and trusted partner to Members by redeploying the system's assets and capabilities to enable better targeted and more effective *collective* action by diverse partners. FAO Regional and Country Offices work in close consultation with the UN Resident Coordinators and Country Teams. FAO makes its data and technical expertise available to all. This technical support includes the Initiative's Geospatial Platform functioning as a tool for the Common Country Analysis and for developing more ambitious Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks that recognize the high importance of agricultural and rural transformation for sustainable development.

#### **Suggested action by the Regional Conference**

- Recognize the role that the HIH Initiative can play in strengthening national ownership and capacities to accelerate progress to end poverty and hunger and promote rural development and economic growth;
- Appreciate the strengthened Organizational focus on accelerating agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development for the eradication of poverty (Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] 1), hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2), and confirm the potential contribution of the Initiative to the achievement of all other SDGs;
- Underscore the benefit of improved use of data and analytics to enable better informed decision-making for innovation in practices, technology, investment, policy and institutions;
- Welcome the flexible and innovative matchmaking approach to building multidimensional partnerships that strengthen mobilization of means of implementation (including knowledge, know-how, technology, digitalization, market access, capacity development, and finance and investment) to accelerate progress toward achievement of national sustainable development priorities for food and agriculture;
- Provide guidance on the importance of the underlying market-oriented, agri-food systems approach to support agricultural, rural and food systems transformation as integral components of structural transformation to achieve economic, social and environmental dimensions of national sustainable development objectives;
- Recognize the importance of strengthening national capacities for improved data integration, analysis and visualization in order to identify interactions and quantify trade-offs among actions designed to address multiple objectives under the 2030 Agenda;
- Consider ways to enhance and extend the HIH approach to strengthen FAO country support to achieve other FAO priority objectives and, especially, for response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated impacts.

*Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:*

APRC Secretariat

APRC@fao.org

## Introduction

1. Hand-in-Hand (HIH) is an evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2). By promoting progress to achieve SDGs 1 and 2, foundational objectives of the 2030 Agenda, HIH contributes to the attainment of all the other SDGs.
2. The initiative adopts a robust matchmaking approach that proactively brings together beneficiary countries with donors, private sector organizations, international financial institutions (IFIs), research institutions, and civil society organizations to mobilize means of implementation that support accelerated action. HIH prioritizes countries and territories within countries where poverty and hunger are most concentrated or where national capacities are most limited owing to history, conflict or natural disasters. It also introduces a framework for monitoring and impact analysis.
3. To guide concerted action among partners and in keeping with national sustainable development priorities, the initiative deploys sophisticated tools, including advanced geospatial modelling and analytics, to identify the largest opportunities to raise the incomes and reduce the inequities and vulnerabilities of the rural poor. It uses these tools to present an evidence-based view of economic opportunities and to improve targeting and tailoring of policy interventions, innovation, finance and investment, and institutional reform.
4. HIH adopts a market-oriented agri-food systems approach to increase the quantity, quality, diversity and accessibility of nutritious foods available in local, territorial, national and regional food markets while also finding additional markets for food and non-food agricultural products that enable the rural poor to improve incomes and access to healthy diets. The initiative prioritizes countries where national capacities and international support are most limited or where operational challenges, including natural or human-induced crises, are greatest. This is in keeping with the UN's commitment to "leave no one behind."
5. The HIH Initiative was launched in October 2019 when the FAO Director-General wrote to 44 countries identified as potential beneficiaries and to many other countries as potential partners. Since then, numerous contacts have been made with potential country participants, as well as donors and IFIs, private sector entities, research institutions and civil society organizations who have expressed interest in participating in the initiative.
6. To date, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mali, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tajikistan, Tuvalu, Yemen and Zimbabwe have confirmed participation. Several contributor countries have expressed initial interest in working with the initiative in select locations, and another 20 countries, including middle-income countries with large populations or high levels of rural poverty, have expressed interest in participating in HIH as either beneficiaries or both beneficiaries and donors. The outreach to countries is also generating proposals for South-South and interregional partnerships.
7. The remainder of this progress report outlines progress in development and implementation of HIH as it has developed during the first half of 2020. It begins by explaining why a new approach to FAO country programming is necessary, highlights six principles guiding the HIH, provides selection criteria for beneficiary countries, explains how the approach is being supported by the Organization and operationalized to strengthen national ownership in current countries, details progress made toward development of the main technical supports provided by HIH, and explains how HIH will conduct matchmaking and provide coordination, transparency and mutual accountability to all stakeholders for performance while also providing regular reporting to FAO Governing Bodies, annual review, and quadrennial impact assessment.

## **The Need for a New Approach to Support Sustainable Development of Food and Agriculture**

8. The HIH responds to several well-known limitations affecting many international development assistance projects. These limitations include fragmentation of effort among development partners; failure to identify and capture synergies or address trade-offs among development actions; insufficient transparency to host governments and competition among development partners and agencies; weak capacities to provide adequate data and evidence-based analysis of local conditions within a sufficiently comprehensive SDG framework; weak analysis and prioritization of development projects and investments in relation to national sustainable development targets; weak and inconsistent data collection and analysis of impacts over time; uncertain attribution of results and a limited culture of accountability for direct as well as indirect impacts; and inability to demonstrate development impact at scale aligned to the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

9. HIH has been developed as an innovative, comprehensive and fully integrated approach to addressing these issues. The initiative is not designed as a stand-alone programme, but as a country-level approach to providing holistic and effective development assistance that tackles each of the foregoing limitations within a disciplined and accountable, but also pragmatic and flexible partnership framework. As such, HIH responds to the call of the 2030 Agenda for market-oriented, partnership-based approaches to ending poverty, hunger and all forms of malnutrition while simultaneously promoting sustainable use of natural resources and protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services (SDGs 1 and 2) and while contributing materially to the achievement of all other SDGs, 3-17. HIH also responds to the proposals of the UN Secretary-General, mandated by the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR, 2016), for repositioning the UN development system (UNDS) to redeploy and strengthen the assets of UNDS entities, especially the specialized agencies, for improved data collection and analysis, policy and technical support, facilitation of robust partnerships to provide non-financial means of implementation, and scaled-up finance and investment. FAO Conference documents C2019/28 on FAO support to the SDGs/2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>2</sup> and C 2019/26 on the Interim Report on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System<sup>3</sup> both highlighted this urgent priority for FAO field-level programming.

### **Guiding Principles for the Analytical Framework**

10. The Initiative seeks to eradicate poverty and hunger. The focus is on enhancing agricultural productivity to improve nutrition, raise rural living standards and contribute to global economic growth in accord with the mandates of the FAO Constitution. FAO is committed to working together with priority countries to ensure national ownership and leadership, drawing for support on the goodwill of all FAO Members and their many development partners.

11. The Initiative seeks to empower poor and vulnerable rural populations, and ramp up their net earnings from both farm and off-farm occupations. This is in line with the 2030 Agenda and the recognition that equitable growth and inclusive structural transformation are key to lifting people out of poverty. As such, FAO works on the principle that the positive impact of the Initiative should be available to as many stakeholders as possible through improved agricultural practices, upgrading and diversification of post-production value chains that generate employment, especially for women and youth, and by strengthening models for improved incomes and profitability for diverse agri-food partners.

12. Six principles guide the development and implementation of the HIH analytical framework:

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. [C2019/28](#), Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals/2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. [C2019/26](#), Interim Report on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System.

- a. *Principle 1: Target the poorest* – The framework identifies and provides tools to enable policy-makers to develop interventions that benefit the poorest of the poor, who also suffer from high rates of hunger.
- b. *Principle 2: Differentiate territories and strategies according to agro-economic potential* – The framework recognizes that agricultural and rural transformation may not offer a relatively short-term pathway out of poverty and hunger in all areas, and distinguishes between areas with and without agricultural potential. For areas without agricultural potential, the framework will suggest alternative strategies and partners.
- c. *Principle 3: Bring together all dimensions of agri-food systems to understand the full impact of alternative interventions* – For areas with sufficient agricultural potential, FAO data and technical knowledge on biodiversity, water, land, soils, forestry, water, and greenhouse gas emissions make this possible.
- d. *Principle 4: Collect information on existing donor interventions* – FAO will work with partners to develop a subnational database of donor activities in food and agriculture. This strengthens country ownership, supports sharing of data and analysis, enables mapping of activities at territorial level, and promotes better integrated, more holistic development programming.
- e. *Principle 5: Develop a geospatial platform* – FAO will provide a web-based dashboard with a suite of geospatial data for use by host countries and their development partners, promoting transparency and collaboration.
- f. *Principle 6: Develop a prioritization metric* – The proposed metric for FAO intervention and impact is hunger.

### **Selection Criteria for Beneficiary Countries**

13. The list of HIH priority countries has evolved and will continue to evolve in light of rapidly changing needs. The Initiative prioritizes those countries in situations that put large numbers of people at risk of being left behind. The intention is to provide a special level of support to help the countries overcome limited capacities or natural or human-induced crises in order to accelerate progress toward SDGs 1 and 2. These countries can largely coincide with those that have been classified as off-track, off-target or both for meeting national targets for SDGs 1 and 2. “Off-track” hunger and extreme poverty are rising, not falling; and “off-target” means countries will not be able to achieve the SDGs indicators by 2030.

14. Five groups of countries were initially considered for prioritization under HIH:

- a. *Least Developed Countries (LDCs)*, a UN-maintained list of 47 developing countries<sup>4</sup> that exhibit the lowest levels of socio-economic development according to three criteria: poverty, human resources (which includes nutrition, health and education) and economic vulnerability.<sup>5</sup>
- b. *Land-Locked Developing Countries (LLDCs)*, which contains a list of 32 developing countries that lack territorial access to the sea, a situation that imposes serious constraints on their economic and social development.<sup>6</sup>
- c. *Small Island Developing States (SIDS)*, which contains 58 countries that, given their geographical characteristics, share similar economic and social challenges that hinder their

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-data-retrieval.html>

<sup>5</sup> The UN Economic and Social Council’s criteria for identification of LDCs.

<sup>6</sup> <https://unctad.org/en/pages/aldc/Landlocked%20Developing%20Countries/List-of-land-locked-developing-countries.aspx>

development progress.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, these characteristics make them highly vulnerable to climate variability and extreme weather events.

- d. *Food crisis countries*, which is the list of 25 countries considered to have been in an extreme situation of acute hunger in 2018, requiring urgent humanitarian assistance.<sup>8</sup>
- e. *Highly populated countries*, which is a list of 15 developing countries whose population is above the average of the LDCs, but which have large populations of poor and hungry.

15. FAO combined these five categories, to create new categories to select the priority countries. The first set of 44 countries emerges from this revised combination of country categories.

16. **Least Developed Land-Locked Countries (LDLCs)**, which results from the intersection of the LDCs and the LLDCs. This results in 17 countries:

1	Afghanistan
2	Bhutan
3	Burkina Faso
4	Burundi
5	Central African Republic
6	Chad
7	Ethiopia
8	Lao People's Democratic Republic
9	Lesotho
10	Malawi
11	Mali
12	Nepal
13	Niger
14	Rwanda
15	South Sudan
16	Uganda
17	Zambia

17. **Least Developed Small Island Developing States (LD-SIDS)**, which results from the intersection of the list of the LDCs and the SIDS. This results in nine additional countries:

18	Comoros
19	Guinea-Bissau
20	Haiti
21	Kiribati
22	Sao Tome and Principe
23	Solomon Islands
24	Timor-Leste
25	Tuvalu

<sup>7</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sids/list>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fsinplatform.org/report/global-report-food-crisis-2019/>

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 26 Vanuatu
 

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18. Conditional to not being already in the list of countries that resulted from the two combined categories, FAO added a second set of countries in a sequential manner. They were added if they were part of the list of food crisis countries, and then if they were part of the list of highly populated countries. This led to the addition of 14 food crisis countries, and four highly populated countries, respectively.

19. The additional countries included by the food crisis criteria:

27	Bangladesh
28	Democratic Republic of the Congo
29	Djibouti
30	Eswatini
31	Iraq
32	Kenya
33	Madagascar
34	Mozambique
35	Pakistan
36	Somalia
37	Sudan
38	Syrian Arab Republic
39	Yemen
40	Zimbabwe

20. Finally, the countries included due to the high population criteria:

41	Angola
42	Myanmar
43	Nigeria
44	United Republic of Tanzania

21. More recently, countries have begun to seek assistance using the HIIH approach to provide analysis and policy, technical and investment support to cope with the impacts of COVID-19, seeking assistance to identify potential vulnerabilities as well as implementable solutions to prevent food supply disruption.

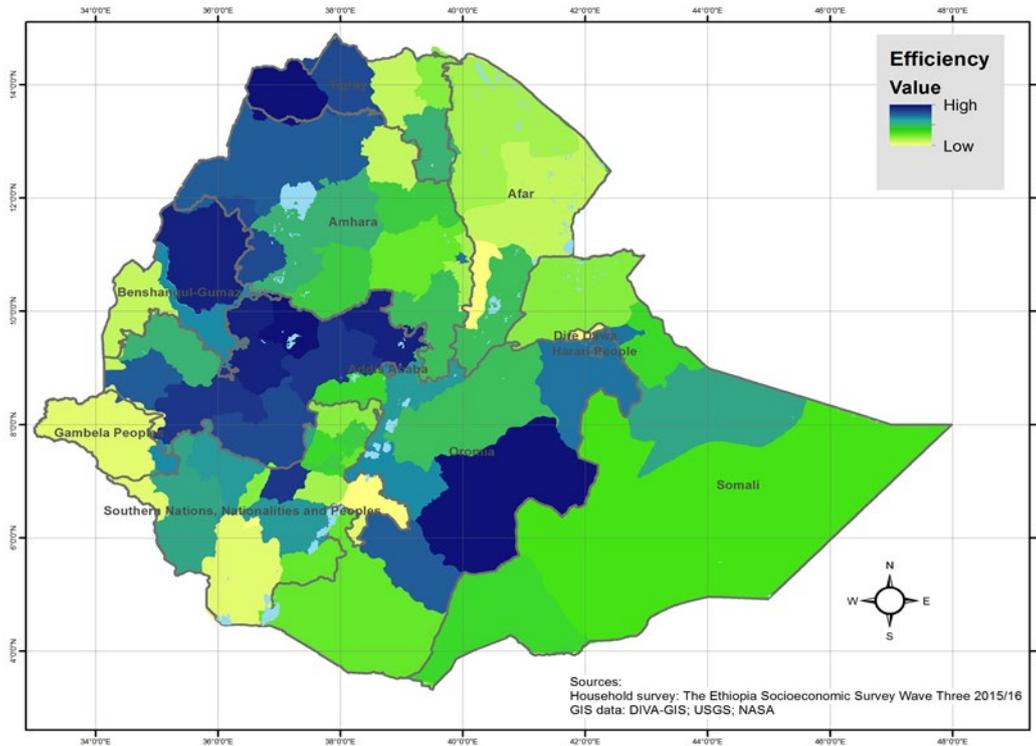
### Analytical Framework

22. The analytical framework for the HIIH uses a wide range of data provided by FAO, participating countries, and a large number of development partners including donors, IFIs, research institutions and others to create national typologies that help governments, national stakeholders and international partners determine the types and geospatial locations of agricultural, fishery and forest-related interventions that have the highest potential for sustainably reducing poverty and hunger. A simplified explanation of the process proceeds in five steps:

23. First, a great variety of geospatial and bio-physical data is integrated to create a mapping of the

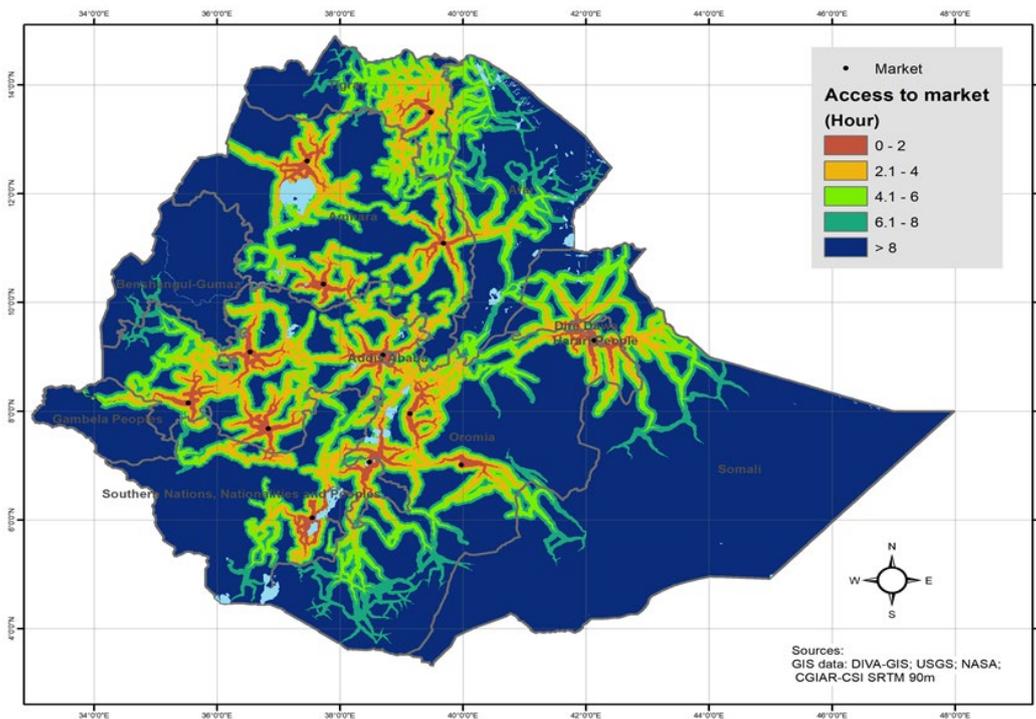
efficiency of the current utilization of national territories and, if relevant, territorial waters for current agricultural, pastoralist, fishery, and agro-forestry uses. Figure 1 shows a sample map for Ethiopia showing the degree of efficiency of current methods of utilization in different micro-regions of the national territory.

Figure 1. Efficiency values of national territories



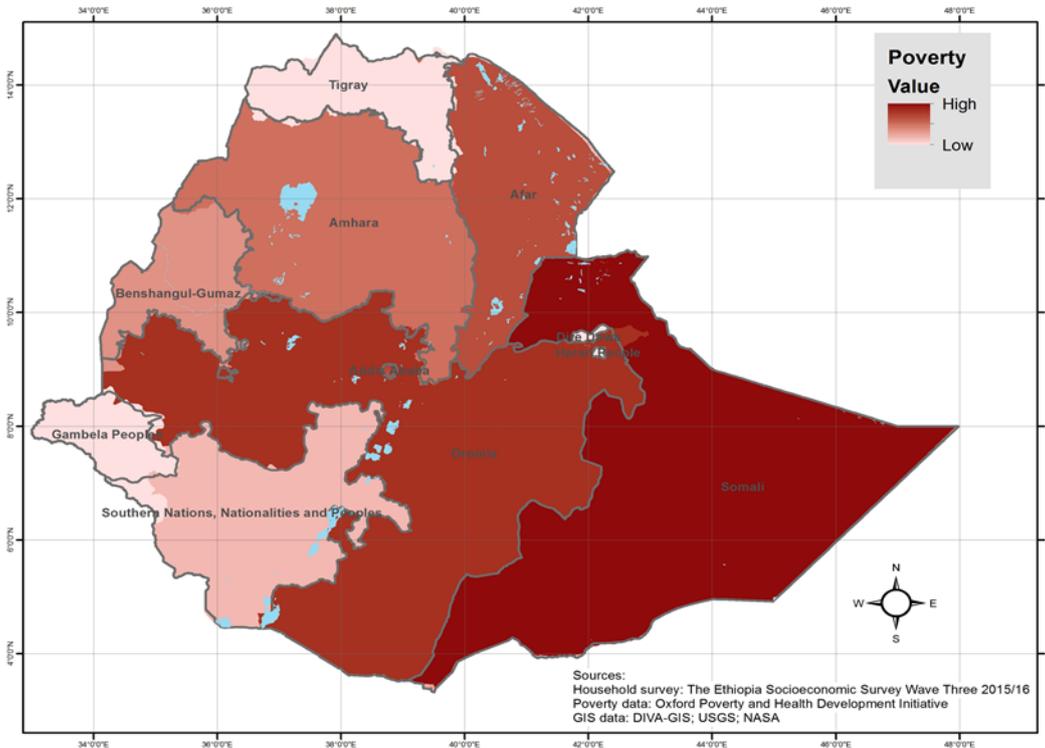
24. A second step maps national communications systems and other factors relevant to the marketability of commodities produced, for local, national or international markets.

Figure 2. Access to Market



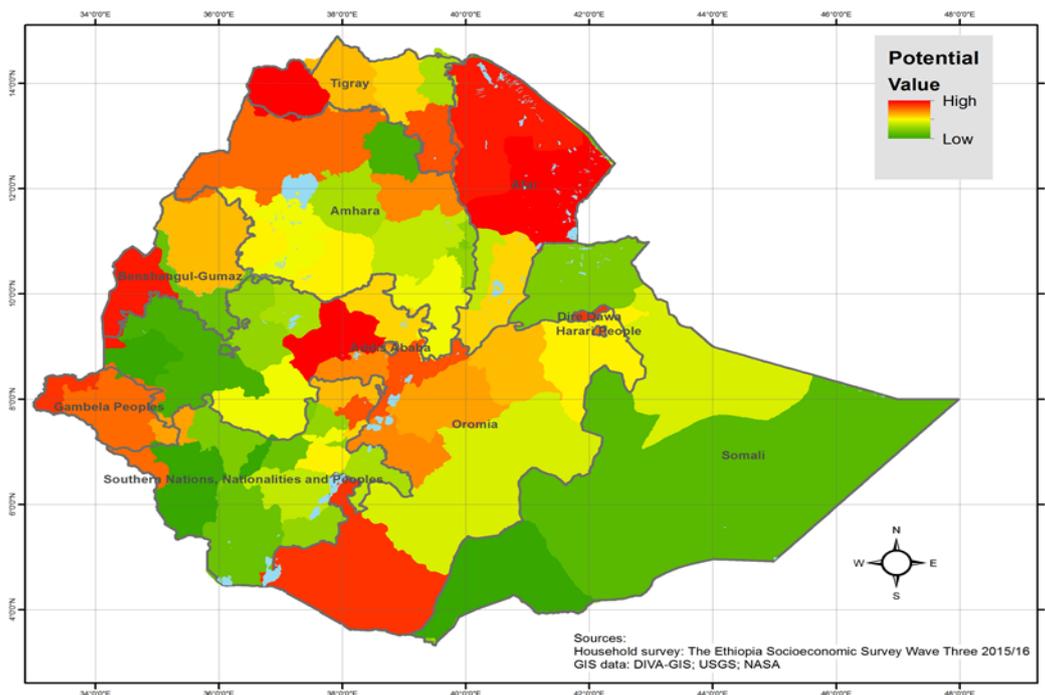
25. A third step uses a variety of data sources, including household surveys and Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) data, to map poverty and/or hunger and malnutrition and identify target populations.

Figure 3. Poverty Value



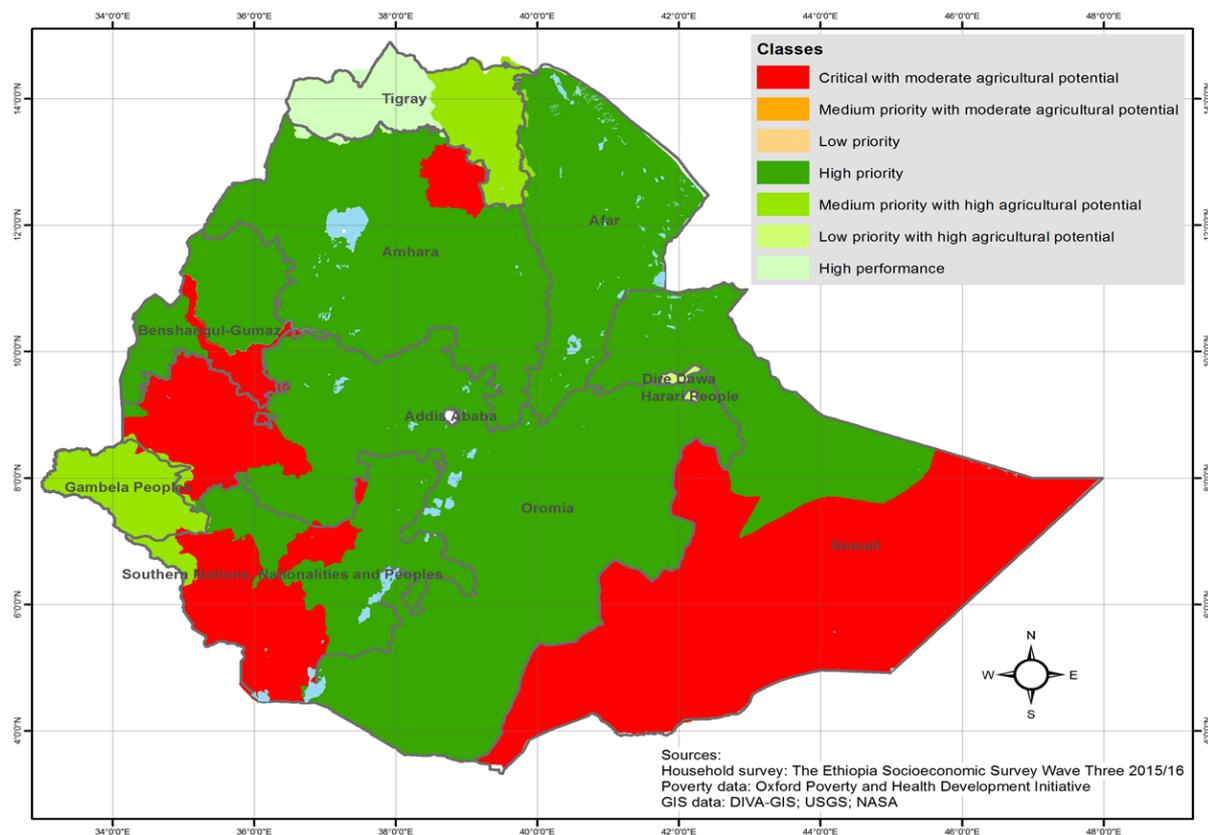
26. A fourth step maps national territory against its potential value with alternative practices and methods, or feasible alternative cropping and utilization patterns.

Figure 4. Potential value



27. Finally, data and analysis are combined to provide a set of national typologies to construct a mapping that shows, by varying degrees, the territories where (1) market-oriented agricultural transformation has potential to lift large numbers of people out of poverty and hunger; (2) areas where poverty cannot be addressed in this way; and (3) areas where there is already a high level of attainment of agricultural potential. Areas in darkest green in Figure 5 indicate the territories where the potential of agricultural and rural transformation is highest, while red areas indicate areas where alternative policies will need to be developed to address poverty and hunger. Areas in lightest green indicate where current agricultural exploitation is already at or near its potential; these are areas that call for further research into the conditions that have enabled accelerated learning and investment.

Figure 5. Typologies combining figures 1-4



## Technical Platform

28. More than 20 technical units, from animal health to trade and markets, across headquarters have come together under a mandate from the Director-General to develop common rules and an overall architecture to enable sharing and integration of all FAO data through an open, standards-based platform. Overall responsibility for this undertaking was delegated to the Chief Economist, with support from the Office of the Director-General (ODG) and IT Services Division (CSI). Initial peer-to-peer discussion was begun in early December 2019, with an ambitious goal to establish common standards and protocols and a preliminary estimate of the quantity, quality and accessibility of all data in FAO by end January 2020. The goal was met, even though undocumented data assets proved to be as large as known data assets.

29. Having achieved a first milestone, a second set of objectives was established to be achieved by the end of March 2020. These were (1) to put in place with consent of all in-house data “owners” or custodians common principles for data-sharing, maintenance, and protection; (2) to adopt a common



- c. Level 3 combines the GIS-linked FAO data from level 2 with data from other sources, including data sets shared by partner institutions and non-traditional data generated through, inter alia, big data and artificial intelligence applications. To date, FAO has signed formal data-sharing agreements with the World Bank Group, International Labour Organization, International Telecommunication Union, World Trade Organization, World Health Organization, World Food Programme (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Inter-American Development Bank. Level 3 is important for validating existing country data, which may be subject to a number of deficiencies, and for filling important known data gaps. FAO has established a Data Lab within the Statistics Division, and in collaboration with the Office of the Chief Statistician, to address critical data needs for the prioritized HIIH beneficiary countries.
- d. Level 4 introduces sophisticated model-based analytics to create the typologies described above, which go beyond layering to analyse interactions among alternative choices of products, markets, practices, technologies and institutions. This information is essential for strengthening decision-support for all countries participating in HIIH.
- e. Level 5 utilizes the previous four layers to identify programmatic requirements, including investments, to unlock the identified agro-economic potential identified through analysis. This level of information goes beyond pure data analysis to include information garnered from stakeholder consultations organized to identify and address key ground-level socio-economic and environmental obstacles and risks to be addressed through the programme.

33. It is important to note that all data accessible through the platform is not only country-specific, but also specific to the level of micro-territories. This is because the operational approach is decidedly territorial, rather than national or regional in scope. This emphasis on territorial approaches notwithstanding, the HIIH approach can be applied at regional level, with the relevant market analysis and territorial differentiation being carried out at the regional/interregional level.

34. The FAO platform's model-based analytics and territorial approach are intended to enable policy-makers and stakeholders to better recognize and pinpoint areas of opportunities for maximum impact, unlocking synergies and identifying and addressing trade-offs that might stymie progress. The platform can also generate scenarios that better quantify and visualize the impacts of alternative courses of action with more accurate cost-and-benefit estimation. Finally, the platform, as it develops over time, will enable policy-makers and other stakeholders to better analyse, quantify and address trade-offs among different courses of action, thus fulfilling a major unmet need presented by the holistic and cross-cutting vision of interlinkages among actions embedded in the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

## **Governance**

35. As stated previously, HIIH is country-owned and country-led; the HIIH approach to field-level work is designed to strengthen national decision-support capacities and to provide transparency and mutual accountability between all participating governments and their development partners. Participation in HIIH is voluntary; FAO support methodologies are consistent with these commitments and aligned to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

36. Key decisions within the HIIH framework, including the decision to participate, remain with national governments. FAO support is built from the ground up, with FAO Representatives (FAORs) having lead responsibility for coordinating communications with the FAO member country. Focal points at national, regional/subregional, and headquarters levels and a representative of the FAO Investment Centre, who may be located at national, regional or global level form the backbone of cross-Organizational support for the programme. Focal points organized into country-specific, virtual Task Teams are responsible for working together to mobilize relevant technical expertise wherever it may be found within the Organization. This support structure represents a fundamental overcoming or inversion of the top-down or dualistic structures that have traditionally characterised the

interrelationships between FAO technical and policy support at headquarters and in the field. Under HIH, demands for support do not originate with headquarters or regional initiatives, but from the integrated analysis provided by FAO and policy dialogue convened by the host government with its diverse development partners.

37. Overall supervision of the implementation of the initiative is led by the Chief Economist, supported by the Director of the FAO Investment Centre, the Senior Officer responsible for the Global Network against Food Crises (OER), and the Senior Officer responsible for Governance and support to Hand in Hand (DDGC). This Core Team is supplemented by designated focal points in each of the five FAO regions. The augmented core group initiates each HIH engagement with the FAOR and country support team, and conducts monthly progress reviews for each country engagement.

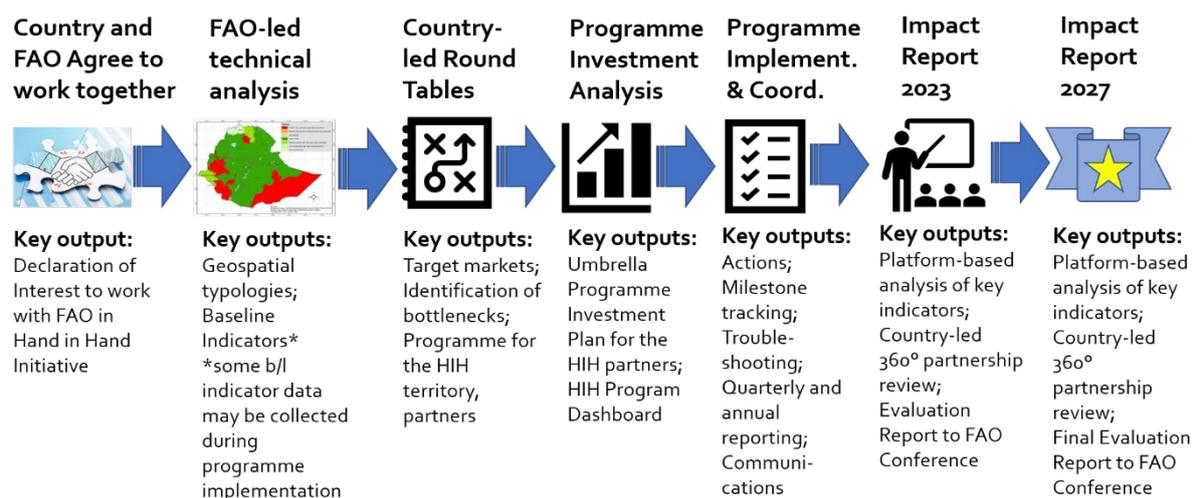
38. Reporting, monitoring and evaluation of HIH engagements will be supported by country dashboards that track partner commitments and performance under HIH at country level. The idea is to enable improved transparency and coordination of actions, as well as timely troubleshooting of delays or remedial action in the case of implementation failures. Dashboards will be developed based on an agreed programme of work developed by the host government with its partners.

39. The FAO geospatial platform will enable objective, evidence-based impact analysis, using the initial platform-based data and analysis to establish baselines for poverty and hunger as well as several other measures of incomes, inequalities, profitability, environmental sustainability and resilience. Follow-up assessments at years 4 and 8 will be used to provide core measures of impact analysis.

### HIH Country Engagement Model and Implementation Roadmap

40. Figure 7 (below) provides a simplified graphic roadmap for the country-by-country implementation of the HIH initiative. In each country, the process begins with a voluntary agreement between the beneficiary FAO Member and the Organization to explore the possibility of initiating a HIH process. The form of this agreement is typically a reply letter from the beneficiary country to the Director-General expressing the country's desire to explore development of a HIH engagement.

Figure 7. HIH engagement roadmap



41. As soon as an initial expression of interest is received, FAO begins a process of internal consultation to establish and launch a multilevel Task Force as described above. The corporate level Core Team then organizes a meeting with the FAOR, the designated country focal point and the rest of the Task Team. The Chief Economist reviews the HIH engagement model, introduces the Task Team, and outlines an initial set of activities selected to kick-start the collaboration. The process usually begins with a review of existing engagements, as well as sharing of existing studies, data sets and analyses. All Task Team members commit to an in-depth study of existing project and programme reports, studies and analyses. A common repository is established, and a programme of work defined

jointly by the members of the Task Team, which is often expanded to include additional officers with complementary knowledge or country experience. Task Team members, guided by the FAOR and the country focal points, also review existing programmes and map donor activities related to food and agriculture. Investment Centre representatives, similarly, examine current and proposed IFI programmes. A key objective at this initial stage is to assess available data and to identify possible ways of addressing key data gaps.

42. After a relatively brief period of information collection and sifting, a mission is planned to prepare the initial assessment outlined above. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, it was expected that such missions would be at least partially field missions conducted by regional and headquarters offices. Today it is understood that the initial assessments and follow-on consultations can be conducted virtually, so long as appropriate data, and reliable video connections, can be found.

43. In principle, the initial assessment, once completed, is shared with the host government and a series of consultation begun to review the main findings and select the principal areas for intervention. Early experience suggests that the initial analysis may be used in various ways: to adapt, combine or scale up existing programmes; introduce new practices or identify new target markets; improve tracking and expected benefits to the poor and hungry; improve programme environmental sustainability and climate resilience; enhance climate mitigation properties.

44. The bigger payoff from the assessment comes from the additional information that is provided to help improve understanding of needed support. After achieving agreement with the host country on beneficiary territories and populations, a second round of stakeholder consultations is organized in the form of Executive Round Tables to highlight ground-level issues and impediments that may prevent successful realization of the programme and its intended results.

45. The additional knowledge gained from the Roundtables is used by the FAO Investment Centre, in consultation with the host government, FAO technical experts on the country Task Team, and key stakeholders to develop a comprehensive Programme Investment Plan and also to identify key partners who can help meet various identified programme support needs. In addition to FAO and the UN country teams, each participating FAO Member can expect to have at least one of five different types of partners selected for their relevance and capacity to mobilize necessary means of implementation: donor, IFI, research, private sector and civil society partners each of whom is selected to provide highly specific forms of support linked to the HIH programme developed by the host country.

46. Once a programme is agreed and partner commitments have been consolidated, FAO will implement monitoring dashboards to enable frequent reporting to capture, analyse and visualize data on programme implementation. The dashboards will help address a core challenge of development programming at scale: ensuring adequate coordination among diverse actions and investments. They will enable proactive consultation among partners to address emerging operational bottlenecks, and they will ensure effective government control as well as mutual accountability among the partners.

47. Finally, FAO will release the first benchmark impact evaluations prior to the FAO Council in 2023, four years after the start of the HIH initiative. FAO will use the SDG indicators as the core monitoring tools to assess progress, and for HIH programme impact will measure progress against baseline assessments conducted in 2020. FAO welcomes external evaluation of its progress by other agencies.