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**Evaluation of the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society
Organizations**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has a long history of engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs) in the fight against food insecurity, malnutrition and rural poverty. The Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations, endorsed by the Organization's Governing Bodies in 2013, has reaffirmed FAO's intention to build upon and expand its long-standing collaborations with CSOs, with a view to achieving strategic development results. This evaluation provides an assessment of FAO's progress in implementing the Strategy, and examines the efficiency of related processes, mechanisms and implementation arrangements. The results of the Strategy are assessed at the global, regional, and country levels.
- The evaluation notes the relevance of the Strategy in providing a framework for enhanced partnerships and collaborative initiatives, and its role in supporting the engagement of CSOs in policy dialogue through a range of multi-stakeholder platforms and international forums, and initiatives to foster regional and South–South Cooperation. FAO's partnerships with CSOs have contributed to its Strategic Objectives and the substance of the Strategy has remained relevant in the context of global commitments, emerging development priorities and the 2030 Agenda. While this is commendable, most partnership initiatives with CSOs, particularly at the country level, were found to be lacking strategic focus on long-term relationship building, co-creation, and burden-sharing.
- FAO's partnerships with CSOs have contributed to several areas of work identified in the Strategy, most notably in field programme implementation and policy dialogue. However, the majority of partnerships at regional and local level have been limited to one-time engagements, with limited replicability and sustainability of results. Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) were meant to be the main instrument for implementing the Strategy and identifying potential CSO involvement areas. However, in most FAO CPFs reviewed for this evaluation, partnerships with CSOs were either not mentioned or given minimal consideration. Most CSO collaborations at country level are not planned through the CPF but formed based on specific project needs, generally through service-delivery arrangements, referenced as implementing partners or beneficiaries. Nevertheless, FAO's interventions designed to foster civil society engagement have resulted in productive partnerships. FAO's efforts to support the national implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), in particular, have been an effective avenue for greater civil society engagement at country level.
- The challenges in establishing collaborations and partnerships between FAO and civil society were attributed to time-consuming and complex processes, inconsistent procedures and reactive rather than strategic approaches. FAO's risk management and due diligence mechanisms have served the purpose of protecting the Organization from potential risks, but have been perceived to be cumbersome, lengthy, and restricting greater collaboration. In dealing with a wide variety of organizations, FAO must duly consider partners' capacity, and make further efforts to clarify the taxonomy, roles, levels, scope, and principles of demand-based engagement. The evaluation concluded that:
 - a) **Conclusion 1.** The Strategy underlines FAO's commitment to continued engagement with CSOs. Despite the limited number of formalized partnerships, there has been an increasing trend towards greater collaboration with civil society entities. FAO needs to capitalize on these arrangements and effectively guide its units towards strategic, long-term engagements to achieve the SDGs.
 - b) **Conclusion 2.** Most of FAO's partnerships with CSOs have not been strategically planned, with minimal integration into FAO programmes and work plans. To fully capitalize on the potential for joint global action for the 2030 Agenda, FAO needs to make a concerted effort to forge demand-based partnerships, effectively identifying and engaging appropriate CSOs

as equal and long-term development partners, rather than contracting their services for short-term assignments.

- c) **Conclusion 3.** The overall method of operation for partnership arrangements appears to be limited to a few models for and instruments of collaboration that do not foster demand-based engagement with CSOs as development partners. FAO needs to consider improving its procedures for entering into partnerships by expanding its range of agreements and partnership instruments.
- d) **Conclusion 4.** Partnership development efforts are not underpinned by an effective guidance and knowledge management system that could serve as an organizational hub for best practices and well-documented approaches to partnership development and collaboration.

➤ Therefore, the evaluation recommends that:

- a) **Recommendation 1.** The Strategy should continue to serve as a framework for FAO's engagement with civil society, facilitating shared-value collaboration based on equality, trust, inclusion and mutual benefits. The Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division (PSU) should guide the FAO technical divisions in undertaking an analysis of the opportunities and benefits of bringing CSOs into their main work streams, focusing on partnerships that would mobilize an appropriate mix of knowledge and resources to achieve organizational objectives and the 2030 Agenda. Each programme country should undertake a mapping of relevant non-state actors and an analysis of where and how demand-based engagement with them could contribute to the objectives of the new UN Cooperation Framework and CPFs. As stipulated in the Strategy, PSU should enhance its efforts to assist the decentralized offices in conducting these mapping exercises.
- b) **Recommendation 2.** In the context of the 2030 Agenda, FAO should consider expanding its engagement in effective multi-stakeholder partnership networks and mechanisms, moving beyond bilateral partnership agreements. FAO Country Offices should assess complementarities and synergies with other development actors' work in priority areas of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), and choose to lead or participate in forming multi-stakeholder partnerships between CSOs, the UN agencies and other development actors in UNSDCF priority areas.
- c) **Recommendation 3.** FAO should review and develop a coherent approach to developing partnership arrangements, streamline its processes and revisit its instruments for engaging with CSOs to ensure that safeguards are commensurate with the level and scope of the engagement. In this regard, FAO could seize opportunities for innovation and for building on and scaling up best practices and existing models that may inform the creation of a one-stop-shop official portal through which it can interact with (prospective) partners.
- d) **Recommendation 4.** FAO should improve its assessment of the value and impact of ongoing and past partnerships and draw lessons learned to develop updated guidance for initiating effective collaboration approaches, making necessary updates to the Strategy implementation. In line with the originally proposed arrangements for the Strategy implementation, PSU should significantly strengthen its partnership monitoring system, ensure timely updates of the partnerships database, and assess the impact and benefits of partnerships and the challenges faced for accountability and learning purposes. The resulting information should be included in guidance materials and knowledge products, as well as in regular reporting to the FAO Programme Committee and other reporting mechanisms.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of the document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFA	Asian Farmers Association
ANGOC	Asia NGO Coalition
AVSF	Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières
AVSI	Association of Volunteers in International Service
CBO	Community-based organization
CECI	Quebec Centre for International Studies and Cooperation
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
CI	Consumers International
COAG	FAO Technical Committee on Agriculture
COFI	FAO Technical Committee on Fisheries
COFO	FAO Technical Committee on Forestry
CONSAN	Food and Nutritional Security Council
CPF	Country Programming Framework
CPLP	Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa
CSM	Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DPS	Partnerships and South-South Cooperation Division
DyTAES	Dynamics for Agroecological Transition
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAOR	FAO Representative
FBRN	Food Bank Regional Network
FIAN	First Information & Action Network
FLEGT	FAO-EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Programme
FMM	Flexible Multi-partner Mechanism
FNPC	Fédération Nationale des Producteurs de Coton
FOCSIV	Federazione Organismi Cristiani Servizio Internazionale Volontario
GAFSP	Global Agriculture and Food Security Program
ICN	International Conference on Nutrition
ICO	International cooperation organization
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPC	International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
KPI	Key performance indicator
OPA	Operational partner agreement
OPC	Office for Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
NGO	Non-governmental organization

OED	Office of Evaluation
OPIM	Operational Partners Implementation Modality
PC	Partnerships Committee
PKH	Pastoralist Knowledge Hub
PS	Programme Support and Technical Cooperation Department
PSA	Personal Services Agreement
PSD	Private Sector Development Division
PSDU	Due Diligence and Prospect Research Unit
PSP	Partnership Division
PSU	Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division
PSUF	Family Farming and Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations Unit
RTO	Responsible Technical Officer
SALMA	Smart Adaptation of Forest Landscapes in Mountain Areas
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRB	Senegal River Basin
SubCom-RFA	Sub-Committee for the Review of Financial and other Agreements
SUCO	Solidarité Union et Coopérative
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
VGGTs	Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WRF	World Rural Forum
WVI	World Vision International

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

1. This report outlines the main findings and conclusions of an evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations.¹ The evaluation was requested at the 125th session of the FAO Programme Committee.² (November 2018)
2. The main purpose of the evaluation is to provide an objective assessment of FAO's progress on implementing the Strategy and to examine the extent to which it has contributed to FAO's overall Strategic Objectives.

1.2 Scope and objectives

3. The evaluation covers the period Strategy adoption in 2013 to end 2019. It examines whether the Strategy's design and approach to partnerships are appropriate, assesses its implementation and reports on the achievements of its CSO partnerships. It also provides an analysis of why certain results did or did not materialize. The evaluation encompasses all FAO processes, mechanisms and other strategic implementation arrangements, including Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs), guidance, tools, capacity and resources used. The results of the Strategy are assessed at global, regional and country level, according to the Strategy's key categories of CSO contribution.
4. The evaluation uses the definitions of 'partnership' and 'civil society organization' used by FAO in its Strategies on partnerships³ if there is active engagement in a joint or coordinated action by two or more partners, with a long-term commitment, where all parties contribute to the output towards achieving a common goal.⁴ Civil society has been described as "the sphere in which social movements organize themselves around objectives, constituencies, and thematic interests"⁵ and organizations often share certain common goals, resources and/or approaches to maximize their decision-making capacity, advocacy and knowledge.
5. The evaluation focuses on partnerships formalized through a legal agreement, such as memorandum of understanding (MoU), partnership agreement or exchange of letters, all of which are tracked in the Partnership Division's (PSP) database (currently 28 partnerships). It also reviews partnerships based on letters of agreement in selected countries, as well as examples of collaborative initiatives with CSOs that have not been formalized.
6. The evaluation focuses on three overarching questions:
 - **Strategic relevance:** To what extent has the formulation and implementation of the Strategy responded to global development priorities and the needs of FAO Members and provided strategic direction and guidance to FAO units?

¹ FAO (2013a)

² CL160/3. <http://www.fao.org/3/my401en/my401en.pdf>

³ FAO (2012a), FAO (2013a).

⁴ FAO (2012a)

⁵ UNGA (1998)

- **Effectiveness and contribution to results:** To what extent have FAO's partnerships with CSOs contributed to FAO's Strategic Framework results and to results at regional and country level?
- **Efficiency of partnership development modalities:** Do the Strategy and its implementation mechanisms provide a coherent framework for promoting CSO partnerships?

1.3 Methodology

7. The evaluation was conducted by the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) with the support of a team of external consultants with thematic and country-specific expertise. The evaluation benefited throughout the process from the insights of the Family Farming and Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations (PSUF) Team and other FAO units. Further information on the methodology can be found in the evaluation terms of reference in Annex 1.
8. The evaluation relied on multiple sources and mixed methods of data collection: document review, data analysis, a meta-analysis of evidence from past evaluations and interviews with stakeholders at global, regional and country level. Country selection was based on the extent and diversity of FAO's engagement with CSOs, identified through a secondary data review, in consultation with Family Farming and Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations (PSUF) Team. The Evaluation Team conducted case studies of the following countries (in addition to interviews with all Regional Offices and headquarters):
 - Africa: Cabo Verde, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Tanzania
 - Asia and the Pacific: the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines and Viet Nam
 - Europe and Central Asia: Georgia, Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Portugal
 - Latin America and the Caribbean: Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala and Paraguay
 - Near East and North Africa: Jordan and Lebanon

1.4 Limitations

9. As mentioned, in defining its scope, the evaluation focused on CSO partnerships according to the definition of 'civil society organizations' and 'partnerships' set out in the FAO Strategies on partnerships. The Evaluation Team found different interpretations of these definitions within FAO. Consequently, the evaluation focused its analysis on partnerships formalized through legal arrangements, such as MoUs, partnership agreements and exchanges of letters, which were referenced in the progress reports submitted to the FAO Governing Bodies. The team complemented this analysis with an assessment of selected partnerships formed at country level.
10. The Evaluation Team faced challenges in terms of travel and working arrangements due to COVID-19 and experienced delays in reaching key informants and in compiling and obtaining data and information. Because of the travel restrictions in many countries during the evaluation period, the methodology was adjusted to include a mix of country case studies conducted by consultants based in those countries, and interviews and case studies

conducted remotely by consultants with specific expertise. Because of these limitations, the evaluation does not pretend to be exhaustive in its description of the achieved results.

2. FAO Strategy for Partnerships with CSOs

2.1 The Strategy

11. FAO's Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations was endorsed by the Organization's Governing bodies in 2013. FAO partners with CSOs on the understanding that "the basic texts, rules, procedures or composition of FAO's Governing Bodies will not be affected".⁶ The basic texts⁷ define FAO's relationship with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and set out the procedures and policies for the involvement of CSOs in FAO's standard-setting processes.
12. Recognizing CSOs as a key stakeholder in the fight against food insecurity, malnutrition and rural poverty, FAO has endeavoured to ensure better coordination and collaboration between public organizations and CSOs, in a bid to engage and scale up successful programmes in the transformation of agricultural production and to meet future food and employment needs. It pays particular attention assessing the mutual benefits of partnerships and the risks that could potentially affect FAO's objectives as an impartial forum and knowledge-based intergovernmental organization. The Strategy identified six areas of collaboration and two levels of interaction with CSOs, with different rationale and methods of operation: global, headquarters-based cooperation and decentralized (regional, national, local) collaboration. The main focus of the Strategy is FAO's work with CSOs at the decentralized level.

2.2 Strategy implementation arrangements

2.2.1 The Family Farming and Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations Unit (PSUF)

13. The responsibility for Strategy implementation rests with the Family Farming and Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations Unit (PSUF), which lies within the former Partnerships and South–South Cooperation Division (DPS). In January 2019, DPS was integrated into the new Programme Support and Technical Cooperation Department (PS) and rebranded the Partnership Division (PSP). PSP's mandate includes initiating proposals in coordination with technical divisions and Regional and Country Offices, vetting proposed partners through a due diligence process, and submitting proposals to the Sub-Committee for Review of Financial and Other Agreements (and, on rare occasions, to the Partnership Committee) for approval. At the time of evaluation, PSP's database included 28 partnerships formed with CSOs since 2013. PSP's key performance indicators (KPIs) included 30 strategic partnerships brokered and sustained by end 2019 and 30 for the period ending 2021.

2.2.2 Implementation mechanisms

14. Arrangements for implementing the Strategy were first established for the 2014–15 biennium and complemented by a set of principles and guidelines for partnering with CSOs. In 2013, FAO adopted the Guidelines for working with CSOs for FAO staff and

⁶ FAO (2013)

⁷ FAO (2017a)

guidelines for ensuring the balanced representation of civil society in FAO meetings and processes.⁸ The FAO Logo Policy⁹ and Guidelines also regulate the conditions under which the FAO Logo can be used within the framework of partnerships with CSOs.

15. FAO's intention is to rely on a network of partnership focal points to support engagement with the CSOs and to ensure coherent and effective implementation of the Strategy across the Organization.¹⁰ For partnerships at global level, discussions are held between PSP and FAO's Strategic Programmes in the course of the annual planning processes, manifesting in service agreements with each SP. FAO's partnership focal points in technical divisions at headquarters and partnership officers in the regional centres guide the decentralized offices on identifying and submitting all proposals for partnerships with non-state actors. At national level, Strategic Programme managers and FAO Representations determine whether prospective CSO partners can help bring about the delivery of specific CPF outputs.¹¹
16. PSUF has established a system for monitoring the implementation of partnerships in line with the Strategic Programme framework, which is applied across the Organization, in liaison with the Responsible Technical Officers (RTO). RTOs prepare annual progress reports on the partnership(s) for which they are responsible. The PSP consolidates these reports into an annual report to FAO's Governing Bodies. Since 2018, PSP has maintained a corporate database of past and ongoing partnerships that serves as a repository of accumulated experience of working with CSOs (see Figure 2, Annex 2).

2.2.3 Due diligence process for the approval of partnerships

17. FAO has established mechanisms to identify and manage potential risks that could affect its intergovernmental character, independence and impartiality. Its risk management and due diligence function aim to provide data and metrics to assess these risks and support informed decision-making on engagements with non-state actors, including CSOs.

2.2.4 Resources

18. The number of human resources dedicated to the headquarters team responsible for CSO partnerships has been largely stable since 2012, at two staff members (P4 and P1) and three consultants.

⁸ FAO (2013c) FAO (2013d)

⁹ FAO (2017d).

¹⁰ FAO (2013)

¹¹ Ibid

3. Findings

3.1 Strategic relevance

Finding 1: The Strategy reaffirms FAO's intention to build upon, expand and improve its long-standing collaborations with CSOs, providing a framework for enhanced partnerships and collaborative initiatives with a view to achieving strategic development results and meeting the Organization's mandate.

19. The evaluation found broad consensus among FAO management, staff and selected CSO representatives that the Strategy had built on the foundations of past FAO engagement and collaboration with CSOs, aimed at enhancing collaboration, streamlining associated processes and providing strategic direction for possible areas of cooperation around strategic development outcomes set out in FAO's reviewed Strategic Framework.
20. FAO has a long tradition of collaboration with the CSOs and its partnership development efforts saw renewed impetus with the 1992 Rio Summit on Environment and Development, a recognized milestone in global efforts towards sustainable and equitable development. Since then, the United Nations has called for the increased engagement of civil society in a participatory development process, building on Agenda 21, adopted at the Rio Summit, which formalized nine sectors of society (dubbed the "major groups")¹² as the main channels through which the United Nations would facilitate broad participation in activities related to sustainable development.¹³
21. The 1996 World Food Summit, hosted by FAO, was a turning point in ensuring the participation of a wide range of CSOs in global policy dialogue. Civil society's participation was prominent during the preparatory process, with NGOs contributing to summit documents, regional and global consultations, and meetings of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Some 500 CSOs attended the summit, while an NGO forum held in parallel welcomed 1 300 representatives from 80 countries. These meetings prompted the creation of global networks on food security that continued to function after the summit.
22. After the summit, FAO issued policy statements intended to act as a basis for greater collaboration. From 2000, it supported a series of regional NGO/CSO consultations, culminating in a joint pledge at the 26th session of the CFS to reinforce their activities in support of food security. Key initiatives included the participation of CSOs in the preparation of the Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides (adopted by the FAO Council in 2002),¹⁴ the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security (adopted by the FAO Council in 2004),¹⁵ the inclusive process for developing the Voluntary Guidelines on

¹² The "major groups" include women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, NGOs; local authorities, workers and trade unions, the scientific and technological community, farmers, business and Industry.

¹³ United Nations (1992)

¹⁴ FAO (2002)

¹⁵ FAO (2005)

the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGTs)¹⁶ in 2009–2010 and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in 2015.¹⁷

23. In preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, FAO supported broad networking processes around the world to promote the active engagement of farmers' representatives and CSOs in the conference and related events. Since 2012, FAO senior management has continuously emphasized the need to strengthen partnerships with all non-state actors, including CSOs, in light of FAO's reviewed Strategic Objectives to step up progress towards ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. This renewed focus was reflected in the process to develop the updated Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations, which was the result of extensive engagement with Members and civil-society representatives, in line with the participatory approach promoted in the Strategy itself.
24. The consultation process with Members started with a provisional outline of the Strategy in March 2011 and the Strategy was only endorsed in April 2013. The Strategy's acknowledgement of the mutual benefits of collaboration with CSOs was seen as a significant step forward, by FAO and by civil-society representatives alike. The strategy identified key areas of collaboration on top of CSOs' traditional engagement in field-programme and capacity-development activities. Since the Strategy was adopted, the number of partnership initiatives and thematic areas engaging CSOs has increased significantly, reflecting FAO's efforts to promote their participation in development work, as well as in the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) and FAO Conferences with observer status. FAO achieved its KPI of 30 strategic partnerships with non-state actors to be brokered and sustained by 2019 in 2015. While the Strategy was developed before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, its main principles seem consistent with the prevalent United Nations-wide approach to building open and collaborative engagement with key stakeholders and non-state actors in the context of sustainable development.

Finding 2: Per the Strategy's objectives, FAO has been promoting greater participation of CSOs in global policy discussions, regional and national consultations and multi-stakeholder mechanisms, and international forums associated with the Organization's mandate.

25. FAO supports the engagement of CSOs in policy dialogue with Members and decision makers through a range of multistakeholder platforms and international forums. Such engagement spans the facilitation of intergovernmental platforms, such as the CFS, to the promotion of exchanges of knowledge in thematic forums and conferences, initiatives to foster regional and South–South Cooperation, the FAO Regional Conferences, Technical Committees and other processes, such as the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Convention on Biological Diversity.
26. **The Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM)**, set up in 2010, serves as an autonomous, self-governed space for social movements and civil-society actors to discuss and coordinate on food security- and nutrition-related issues. The CSM facilitates the participation of non-state actors in the main CFS processes, fostering their engagement

¹⁶ FAO (2012b)

¹⁷ FAO (2015a)

in policy discussions, developing guidelines and policy recommendations, and contributing to the formulation of global policies on issues of food security and nutrition.

27. Since the Civil Society Forum held in conjunction with the World Food Summit in 1996 and following its formalization in 2003, the **International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)** has been creating alliances between social movements and institutions, providing space for the effective participation of representatives of small-scale food producers and indigenous peoples' organizations in international forums on agriculture and food systems. FAO has contributed to the IPC's work, formalizing its first MoU in 2003, then renewing in 2014 and updating it in 2019.
28. The new Strategy in 2013 prompted FAO to engage CSOs in a global debate on nutrition, organizing meetings in Rome in June 2014 in preparation for the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2). The ICN2 Civil Society Organizations Liaison Group was set up to support effective communication between a large group of interested parties and to facilitate positive engagement in the ICN2 process and outcome documents (the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and Framework for Action).¹⁸ Similar FAO-led global events provided opportunities for CSOs to engage in policy dialogue in other thematic areas, such as the International Symposium on Agroecology for Food Security and Nutrition (Rome, September 2014) and the International Symposium on the role of Agricultural Biotechnologies in Sustainable Food Systems and Nutrition (Rome, February 2016).
29. The **International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM-Organics International)** contributes to policy dialogue on topics related to sustainable agriculture through the CFS, focusing on advocacy for agroecology and nutrition and taking part in relevant negotiations and discussions with FAO Member delegates. It has contributed to normative activities, such as the drafting of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management¹⁹ and the International Code of Conduct on Sustainable Use and Management of Fertilizers,²⁰ and provided inputs into FAO statistical data on organic agriculture. IFOAM actively participates in global events, such as the International Year of Family Farming, International Year of Soil, and the Decades of Nutrition and Family Farming, through the Coordination Committee for civil society.
30. The initiative focusing on pastoralism within FAO, **the Pastoralist Knowledge Hub (PKH)**,²¹ provides an institutional space for coordinating work on pastoralism and channels relevant information across the pastoralist–science–policy interface. The PKH strives to provide authoritative advocacy on pastoralists' right for representation in decisions concerning the future of their livelihoods. PKH acted as a sounding board in the dissemination and implementation of the VGGTs, reaching out to pastoralist communities, organizing training and producing requisite information in local languages. In July 2015, FAO's PKH coordinated and financed the regional meeting for Central Asia, culminating in the creation of the **Pastoralists Assembly of Central Asia**, representing 400 communities in Mongolia, two in Russia, two in Kazakhstan and one each in Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz Republic and India. The Assembly makes policy suggestions and advocates for mobility rights, customary laws and traditions, and pastoral community products.

¹⁸ FAO and WHO (2014)

¹⁹ FAO (2017b)

²⁰ FAO (2019)

²¹ Project codes: GCP/GLO/536/GER and GCP/GLO/611/GER

31. **La Via Campesina** is an international movement with the world's largest constituency of smallholders and farmers. It comprises around 150 organizations in 70 countries and represents more than 200 million farmers. It had a long track record of working with the United Nations System, particularly with FAO, to defend policies and positions that support smallholder-based sustainable agriculture and fisheries and food sovereignty. LVC developed a strategy to bring smallholder and peasant voices to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in (2012), notably, that of the Farmers Major Group.²² LVC promoted the agroecological production model as a way to cope with sustainable development, stressing the need for a new value-chain approach and formulating proposal contributions relevant to the Rio+20 agenda. Via Campesina, the World Farmers' Organization and the World Rural Forum were also engaged in consultations to develop the Global Action Plan for implementing **the UN Decade of Family Farming**, a joint initiative by FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).
32. The **Development Association World Rural Forum (WRF)**, as an international association gathering 42 partner organizations, including national and regional farmers' organizations – such as the Confederación de Organizaciones de Productores Familiares del Mercosur (COPROFAM), the Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network, the Programa Diálogo Regional Rural, the Pan African Farmers Organization and the Asian Farmers Association (AFA) – rural associations (such as Inades) and agricultural research centres (such as CIRAD) in 45 countries. It promotes family farming and sustainable rural development. The informal relationship between the WRF and FAO dates back to 2010 and has been by coordination on international events of mutual interest. The first letter of agreement was signed in 2012 and, in 2015, the WRF won FAO's Jacques Diouf Award. The Organization signed its first MoU with WRF in 2019, focusing on advocating for and raising public awareness of family farming to enhance sustainable agriculture, ensure food security and nutrition, and advance rural development.
33. The Global Food Security Cluster, led jointly by FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP), has been operating since 2011 as part of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. It is a partnership of 64 institutions, including NGOs, such as **RedR Australia** and the **International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**, focused on coordinating the food-security response in humanitarian crises, and addressing issues of food availability, access and utilization. The non-governmental partners make their personnel and in-kind resources available to United Nations agencies operating in humanitarian contexts.
34. Regional consultations with CSOs prior to the FAO Regional Conferences have proved effective in securing civil-society inputs to discussions on development challenges pertinent to the regions. These consultations are organized by the IPC, a global platform of small-scale food producers, rural organizations and social movements. More recently, the organization has engaged with CSOs to solicit innovative ideas relevant to FAO's work, for example, through the FAO Innovation Symposium (Rome, 2018) or the framework of

²² For more, see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/farmers>.

the FAO Symposium on the Future of Food (Rome, 2019), where CSOs shared their experience and innovative ideas on sustainable food systems and healthy diets.

Finding 3: At decentralized level, FAO efforts to develop partnerships with CSOs are guided by the local context and Member priorities, yet these efforts are not reflected within CPFs and related workplans.

35. The Strategy declares its main focus to be working with civil society at the decentralized level, with CPFs the main instrument of implementation. The evaluation found a diverse range of engagement in this regard, with some offices and technical divisions interacting more with CSOs, partly due to the focus and nature of their work, and others mainly engaging in policy dialogue. Depending on the national development context, in certain countries, FAO's engagement with CSOs has come fairly naturally as part of its activities, while in others, such engagement has proved more challenging. The evaluation found that FAO has generally made efforts to promote CSO participation, even where this has been taxing. Even so, in the majority of FAO CPFs reviewed for this evaluation, partnerships with CSOs were either not mentioned or given minimal consideration, referenced only briefly as service providers or beneficiaries.
36. For example, FAO's Smart Adaptation of Forest Landscapes in Mountain Areas (SALMA) project in **Lebanon** includes extensive interaction with CSOs and local communities and is perceived to be contributing to the National Afforestation and Reforestation Plan. FAO's efforts to sensitize the government to the role of CSOs in forest management culminated in the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform, enabling collaboration between CSOs, the Ministry of Agriculture, local authorities and communities in forest management and reforestation initiatives. At the same time, the 2016–2019 CPF document for Lebanon include only general references to the involvement of CSOs, mainly as part of value-chain or agri-businesses development, with limited indications as to their involvement in other development aspects.

Finding 4: FAO's partnerships with CSOs have contributed to its Strategic Objectives and the substance of the Strategy has remained relevant in the context of global commitments, emerging development priorities and 2030 Agenda. While this is commendable, further work is needed to systematically assess and document the contributions of these partnerships, their value and their overall development impact.

37. The expected contributions of FAO's partnerships with CSOs have been linked to specific Strategic Objectives. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other international agreements (such as the Paris Agreement and Addis Ababa Action Agenda) accentuated the potential role of CSOs in helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the Strategy was developed before the 2030 Agenda, its substance and approaches are consistent with the prevalent United Nations-wide approach to building open and collaborative engagement with key stakeholders and non-state actors in the context of sustainable development. Since adopting the 2030 Agenda, FAO has endeavoured to link any partnership agreements to support for one or more of the SDGs as a precondition to completing the signing process. At the same time, the Evaluation Team did not find any evidence of a systematic assessment of the contributions of partnership initiatives to Strategic Objectives and/or -related indicators, or to SDG targets.

3.2 Effectiveness and contribution to results

Finding 5: FAO's partnerships with CSOs have contributed to several areas of work identified in the Strategy, most notably in field-programme implementation and policy dialogue. However, the majority of partnerships at regional and local level have been limited to one-time engagements, with limited replicability and sustainability of the results achieved.

38. The evaluation categorized the results of partnerships with CSOs according to the six areas of work identified by the Strategy. However, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as a single partnership (or partnership-related output, in some cases) can produce results in more than one area. While results were evident in all areas, the evaluation found the most meaningful results to be the areas of programme implementation and policy dialogue. Most partnerships in these areas have also produced results in other areas, such as emergency response, knowledge generation and normative activities. The likely explanations for this are (1) that these are some of FAO's major areas of operation (regardless of partnerships efforts) and (2) that these are also the areas that CSO interviewees identified as their primary area of interest in collaborating with FAO. We provide a selection of global, regional and national-level examples in the following paragraphs.
39. Of the 28 partnerships with CSOs formalized since the Strategy was adopted in 2013, 21 were ongoing and implemented, 2 were being discussed for possible renewal and 5 were inactive as of June 2020. While these partnerships generate positive results, much fruitful cooperation between FAO and many NGOs continues at the technical level. The evaluation found that most FAO collaborations and partnerships with civil society have been one-time events specifically designed to form or promote partnerships around specific development issues in the context of dedicated initiatives or programmes. There is potential to develop longer-lasting collaborations and partnerships with CSOs that could translate into more sustainable and scalable solutions to meet the SDGs.

Global level

40. The Strategy recognizes FAO's facilitation and brokerage roles in global policy discourse processes as one of the key ways of ensuring greater civil-society representation. The evaluation noted FAO's effective role in promoting civil-society participation in these processes, acting as a trusted and neutral broker.
41. Prior to the Strategy, one of the major achievements of FAO-CSO engagement had been the establishment of regional CSO consultations to collate views and priorities and provide inputs to FAO Regional Conferences and Technical Committees (Committee on Fisheries, Committee on Forestry, and Committee on Agriculture). This links CSOs directly to the FAO Governing Bodies, as the Regional Conferences and Technical Committees report to the FAO Conference. Such consultations are organized through the **IPC**, formally established in 2003 when FAO signed its first civil-society MoU. An additional regional mechanism, the **Ad Hoc Committee**, was established in the Asia-Pacific region in 2010. After FAO adopted the Strategy in 2013, the CSOs engaged in these processes recognized its renewed efforts

to ensure that civil society's voice was heard by FAO Members. Examples include FAO's role in supporting the **CFS** and in developing the **VGGTs**.

42. FAO's technical support for the IPC and its coordinating role for several CSOs also resulted in the publication, in 2016, of the IPC People's Manual on the Guidelines on Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forests.²³ The manual was developed with the participation of several IPC organizations, with technical support from FAO. Among other things, the manual offers ways in which social movements and organizations can contact FAO Country Offices to propose joint activities and invite FAO or other organizations to take part in civil-society activities, and suggests avenues to help secure funding for activities related to the VGGTs and governance of natural resources, as well as possibilities for technical assistance from FAO and other mechanisms (to conduct studies on the governance of land tenure, for instance).
43. In October 2016, FAO published a manual developed in collaboration with several NGOs to provide information for project managers on the right to free prior and informed consent. The work was undertaken through participatory consultative processes, involving **Action Aid, Action Against Hunger, Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and World Vision International (WVI)**. Similarly, FAO's collaboration with **Consumers International (CI)**, a global federation of consumer rights groups and observer on the Codex Alimentarius, resulted in a regional study in Latin America on the role of consumer organizations in transforming food systems, making them fairer, more transparent and better able to deliver on the Zero Hunger Challenge. CI used the study's findings in the publication it launched during the Global Forum on Food and Agriculture in Berlin in 2020 and contributed to the Guide to Consumers' Right to Food. FAO and CI have also conducted training and awareness initiatives globally to highlight the potential role of consumer organizations in steering agricultural production towards a more sustainable pathway.
44. Other global partnerships, such as that with the **Self Employed Women's Association**, which promotes a gender-sensitive approach to supporting poor women in accessing resources, highlight the funding challenges involved in carrying out the activities set out in the MoU, which depend on project funding from FAO's technical divisions. FAO's partnership with **RedR Australia**, an organization specializing in disaster response, relief, risk management and medical assistance in the Asia-Pacific region, for example, yielded much lower-than-expected results. So, too, did FAO's partnerships with **The Food Bank Regional Network (FBRN)** on food-loss and waste-reduction initiatives and with **Asociacion Panamericana de Ciencias Veterinarias** on antimicrobial resistance training in Latin America.
45. One area for improvement noted by CSOs involved in FAO's global processes is a perceived lack of coordination within FAO when it comes to presenting itself to members of CSO coordination platforms (such as the IPC and Ad Hoc Committee). In addition to participating in global meetings and developing guidelines, CSOs want to engage FAO's technical departments and offices in implementing the guidelines and recommendations. Here, they come up against difficulties, however, as each FAO division/office pursues its

²³ IPC (2016)

partnerships independently. Several CSOs noted that the PSP would benefit from a strengthened role as broker between the multitude of FAO offices and programmes and civil-society platforms.

Regional level

46. FAO also participates in multiple regional policy processes, where it actively involves CSOs. These events, which focus on regionally relevant themes and priorities, are perceived as important opportunities for CSOs to connect with each other, with governments and with other stakeholders.
47. In **sub-Saharan Africa**, regional meetings in Senegal in 2015, organized jointly with CSOs, brought together 300 representatives of government, civil society, research and the private sector to make recommendations on agroecology and sustainable food systems. Building on these recommendations, CSOs in Senegal, with the support of FAO, set up a multi-actor platform for policy dialogue, called Dynamics for Agroecological Transition (DyTAES). With technical and financial support from FAO and other partners, DyTAES organized a third series of agroecology days in Senegal from 30 January to 28 February, 2020, bringing together more than 400 participants, including representatives of CSOs, the private sector, the governments of Senegal and Burkina Faso, technical and financial partners, and countries in the West African subregion, Europe and Canada. The FAO agroecology platform has published a total of six scientific outputs on agroecology in Senegal.
48. In **South-East Asia**, a notable example is FAO's Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP, 2009–2013), an initiative to strengthen capacity among participating small-scale fishing communities and their supporting institutions in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam. In Viet Nam, RFLP supported the initiation of fisheries co-management systems in Quang Nam and Quang Tri provinces and facilitated a series of community consultation meetings based on a needs assessment. FAO worked with local partners, mobilized local inshore fishers and assisted in the establishment of five pioneer fisheries associations in Quang Tri province and six in Quang Nam province. The fisheries associations were established to facilitate dialogue on fisheries resource management between local government and communities.

National level

49. At national level, the Evaluation Team found that the majority of results stemming from partnerships with civil society involved facilitating CSOs' participation in policy processes (for example, in developing national policies, strategies and normative products) or engaging CSOs as implementing partners in FAO's field programmes, including in emergency situations. Such engagement was found to have clear mutual benefits, as the Strategy projected, however, it was usually something that arose from an identified need rather than a planned initiative through the CPF.

Finding 6. Certain FAO interventions promoted partnership between Members and CSOs on national policy dialogue and multi-stakeholder coordination forums. They contributed to

the establishment and functioning of national platforms and consultations mechanisms for governments and civil society, allowing CSOs to participate more actively in policymaking.

50. The **FAO-European Union (EU) Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Programme** funds the forest governance projects of governments, civil-society and private-sector organizations, seeking to reduce illegal logging. Among these, 64 projects were implemented by CSOs, with a majority related to ensuring their broader representation and participation in multi-stakeholder negotiations. The FLEGT programme helped to build a coherent and informed civil-society voice on forest governance in many of the countries supported, in particular, in Cameroon, Ghana and Viet Nam.
51. In **Paraguay**, CSOs widely acknowledge FAO's role in promoting participatory approaches and integrating civil-society perspectives in the design of public policies. FAO has supported the government in the design and implementation of a draft law on the right to food and food and nutritional security, the National Plan for Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security, as well as policies on gender equality and interculturality in agriculture. The Organization has, therefore, created space for policy dialogue on issues relevant to numerous CSOs, including those representing indigenous peoples. In 2014, a National Committee was established for the International Year of Family Farming, which brought together the country's most active peasant organizations.
52. In **Lebanon**, within the framework of the "Support to the Ministry of Agriculture to update its National Strategy integrating the SDGs in its National Agricultural Planning" (TCP/LEB/3702 C2) project, FAO undertook consultations with CSOs on the formulation of the Agriculture Sector Strategy for 2021–2025. In October 2019, FAO assisted the Ministry of Agriculture in launching the strategic formulation process by organizing a high-level workshop, engaging representatives from government, private sector, civil society, research organizations, academia and international organizations. The event culminated in a ministerial decision to intensify multi-stakeholder consultations to produce a vision document for the strategy, highlighting the respective roles of each stakeholder. FAO also assisted the Ministry in developing forestry and fishery laws, integrating the consultative processes and ensuring the engagement of relevant NGOs and the fishers' association.
53. In the **Kyrgyz Republic**, FAO has availed of emerging opportunities to engage CSOs in interventions that respond to national priorities. FAO has collaborated with CSOs in supporting the development of the National Food Security and Nutrition Program, in undertaking forestry assessments, in introducing the VGGTs and in developing the capacity of the non-state actors and other partners. In **Portugal**, FAO's Lisbon office built a wide network of civil-society contacts and assisted CSOs working in the food-security area in creating a unified stance through initiatives such as the Family Agriculture and Food and Nutritional Security Forum and meetings with all of the political parties with parliamentary seats. FAO's lobbying efforts within the Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP) resulted in the signing of the Lisbon Charter (of which IFAD is also signatory) for the Development of Family Farming. This was followed by the creation of the Council of Food and Nutrition Security for the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CONSAN-CPLP), which gathers the agriculture ministers of all of member states, along with its civil-society mechanism.

54. FAO played an essential role in facilitating the participatory process for the development of the PROBOSQUE law in **Guatemala**,²⁴ as well as providing technical assistance on specific topics. FAO supported the Alianza Nacional de Organizaciones Forestales Comunitarias of Guatemala by facilitating the start of community forestry organizations, which initially lacked human and financial resources. FAO also created training and dialogue opportunities, rolled out a communications strategy and strengthened capacities for participation in forest-policy dialogue, micro-enterprise development, the collective restoration of natural resources, and the development of inclusive rural businesses in indigenous peasant organizations. FAO also engages CSOs in other processes related to agricultural development policies, food security, and implementation of the VGGTs, especially on actions against land- and water-grabbing and on the land rights of rural women, peasants and indigenous people.
55. In **Senegal**, at the institutional and political level, the Evaluation Team noted the establishment of a national multi-stakeholder platform on the VGGTs, which held five national workshops between 2014 and 2018 and comprises more than 100 members, including CSOs, several ministries, the private sector, universities, research institutes and local authorities. One of the collaboration's most significant achievements is a land policy document, which includes substantial references to the VGGTs and was submitted to the President of the Republic of Senegal on 7 April 2017. Furthermore, the consultation process resulted in a strengthening of the technical capacities of several CSOs, which in turn contributed to the creation of a 2016 proposal document on land reform, entitled "Position paper of the Framework for Reflection and Action on Land reform in Senegal".²⁵
56. In **Jordan**, the Evaluation Team found that interaction with CSOs was recent and limited in scope. For the past two years, FAO has been coordinating the Jordan Development Partners Group on agriculture, food security and water, which includes United Nations agencies, international NGOs, embassies, international donors, the private sector and producers' associations. Government representatives attend some group meetings. The international NGOs and producers' associations, however, are the sum total of CSO participation, which may reflect the difficulties CSOs face in engaging in policy discussions. One of the CSOs interviewed reported having participated in meetings FAO organized to get feedback on the design of a strategy for extension services for the Ministry of Agriculture. In 2013, a stakeholder consultation was held to develop a water-harvesting sub-strategy and policy options, in which the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD, a Jordanian NGO) and farmers' cooperatives participated. However, JOHUD says it did not receive any feedback from those meetings or on the finalized strategy. In 2016, FAO and WFP supported the government in updating its draft food security strategy, engaging non-government actors in reviewing existing food-security information systems together with government bodies.
57. In **Nepal**, the policy dialogue on the right to food, initiated by FAO in 2012, offered a platform for interaction with both the government and CSOs. The FAO global project on Integrating the Right to Adequate Food and Good Governance in National Policies, Legislation and Institutions (GCP/GLO/324/NOR) supported extensive dialogue and

²⁴ Centro Nacional de Análisis y Documentación Judicial (2015)

²⁵ For more, see <https://www.ipar.sn/DECLARATION-DU-CADRE-DE-REFLEXION-ET-D-ACTION-SUR-LE-FONCIER-AU-SENEGAL-CRAFS.html?lang=fr>

workshops with parliamentarians, government institutions, farmer organizations, national human rights institutions and CSOs, culminating in the inclusion of the Right to Food in the country's new constitution in 2015. The project combined technical assistance, capacity development, awareness-raising and advocacy to bring on board wide-ranging segments of the civil society (from the Peasant Coalition to right-leaning groups). The Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act was enacted in 2018 and, in November 2019, the Civil Society Working Group on the Right to Food, led by Food First Information & Action Network (FIAN) Nepal, submitted its recommendations for its practical implementation to the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Livestock.

58. In **Viet Nam**, FAO supported the government in organizing consultations to establish an alliance for climate-smart agriculture in the Asia-Pacific region, which have gathered more than 100 participants, including representatives from farmers' organizations and unions and civil society. Consequently, the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture was launched in 2014. It is an inclusive, voluntary and action-oriented multi-stakeholder platform – a coalition of 14 governments and 32 organizations – which aims to catalyse and help create transformational partnerships to encourage the three pillars of climate-smart agriculture – productivity, adaptation and mitigation. Similarly, in 2015, FAO supported the Government of Viet Nam in launching the National Zero Hunger Challenge, which provides a platform that convenes governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations System and others for collective impact in the area of food security, nutrition and sustainable food systems.
59. In the **Philippines**, FAO partnered with the national branch of the Asia NGO Coalition (ANGOC) to facilitate a multi-stakeholder dialogue to draft the national Land Use Law (negotiations are ongoing). ANGOC coordinated and facilitated meetings and workshops, involving an extensive network of CSOs, in consultation with the government and parliamentarians. While the legislative drafting process on issues of land use is long and complex, the CSOs interviewed expressed their appreciation to FAO's support and facilitation of their involvement and contribution to the process.

Finding 7: CPFs were meant to be the main instrument for implementing the Strategy and identifying potential areas for local CSO involvement. However, most CSO collaborations at country level are not planned through the CPF, but formed based on specific project needs, generally through service-delivery arrangements in letters of agreement.

60. Most of the 21 CPFs reviewed for this evaluation make generic reference to or a broad call for partnerships and lack specific plans for strategic engagement with non-state actors. Thus, country-level partnerships identified by the evaluation were mostly formed within project-level interventions and in reaction to emerging needs, rather than strategically planned through CPFs or strategic work areas. The most common partnership tool by far for engaging CSOs in FAO field programmes at country level is the letter of agreement, a contract signed between FAO and a registered non-profit entity, requiring that entity to deliver a set of products or services. Letters of agreement entail a transfer of financial resources from FAO to the CSO, under the procurement rules set out in the FAO Administrative Manual.²⁶ Many

²⁶ FAO. 2011. *FAO Administrative Manual*, Chapter V – Property and Services, Section 507 – Letters of Agreement, Rome, FAO MS 507.2.15 and MS 507.8.3 on Direct Selection.

See also FAO. 2015. *FAO Administrative Manual*, Chapter VII – Operational Modalities, Section 701 – Operational Partners Implementation Modality, Rome, FAO. https://home.fao.org/faohandbook/fao_manual/.DanaInfo=intranet.fao.org+

of these contracts analysed by the Evaluation Team showed that while the collaboration was fruitful and, in some cases, the CSO had retained some contact with FAO, there was limited follow-up and collaboration after the contractual arrangement had concluded.

61. In **Senegal**, the integration of CSO partnerships into CPF planning from 2013 to 2019 was found to be weak, unlike other United Nations System agencies, which made clearer commitments to partner with CSOs in their programmes. IFAD, in its Country Strategic Opportunities Programme (COSOP) 2019–2024, notes its commitment to strengthening partnerships with CSOs and other actors at national and sub-regional levels, to implement pro-poor policies in rural areas, and scaling up of good agricultural practices. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), has identified CSOs among the list of strategic partners for collaboration towards accelerating structural transformations for sustainable development, as defined in the country programme for Senegal 2019–2023. WFP plans to collaborate with CSOs and other partners to achieve its second strategic objective, aimed at improving the nutritional status of children, girls, and pregnant and lactating women. Despite the lack of strategic planning, FAO programmes in Senegal effectively engaged CSOs in project activities and regional policy dialogues (see Finding 5).

Finding 8: FAO interventions to support national implementation of the VGGTs have offered an effective avenue for greater civil-society engagement at country level.

62. FAO has promoted the implementation of the VGGTs in more than 58 countries since their endorsement in 2012, providing technical assistance, training and capacity development, as well as support for the assessment, formulation and implementation of associated national policies and laws. FAO's main activities with a view to implementing the VGGTs at country level revolve around building awareness and capacity, multi-stakeholder consultations and promoting the VGGTs in national policies, laws and strategies.
63. Through its global project to "Increase the use of the VGGT among CSOs and grassroots organizations (FMM/GLO/111/MUL) (2015-2018)", FAO partnered with CSOs in 21 countries to enhance civil-society knowledge and capacity to advocate for the VGGTs and boost their participation in policy dialogue. The evaluation found several examples of FAO's role in promoting and implementing the VGGTs at national level, particularly in **Colombia, Guatemala, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines, Senegal, Tanzania and Viet Nam**. Most of these involved training and awareness-raising for senior and technical staff of government institutions and CSOs, as well as the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms. In some cases, such as in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, these processes have reached the stage where proposals and policy papers are being submitted to the national parliament.

Finding 9: In general, the results arising from CSO partnerships tend not to be directly linked to the Strategy, but to the specific needs of FAO programmes or activities. However, in a few cases, the Organization's drive for more civil-society engagement has resulted in the fostering and implementation of productive partnerships.

64. Some Country Offices said their engagement with civil society was inspired by the Strategy and that they had stepped up their efforts to partner with CSOs since its roll-out. The FAO Country Offices in Paraguay and the Philippines, for instance, have been very responsive to corporate efforts and have drawn on the Strategy to steer their engagement with CSOs.

Other offices, however, have demonstrated limited knowledge of the Strategy or its implementation mechanisms (such as the guidance materials developed by FAO headquarters and Regional Offices or other corporate initiatives). In most countries analysed for this evaluation, CSO engagements were pursued without the specific intention of following the Strategy (or, indeed, knowledge of it). The impetus provided by the Strategy was mostly felt at headquarters level, where several partnerships were signed in the years following its approval.

Finding 10: The limitations to further engagement with CSOs at country level stem from country context, FAO's positioning as a primarily government-oriented organization and the limited resources available to FAO offices to proactively seek out new partnerships.

65. A country's civil-society context is one of the main determinants of the extent of CSO involvement in FAO programmes and processes. Countries such as the **Nepal, Colombia** and **Senegal**, for example, where civil society is active and organized, with strong capacity, are more conducive to extensive partnerships than countries such as Jordan or Tajikistan, where civil society is a relatively smaller player in the food and agriculture sectors. This is down to historical and institutional dynamics, over which FAO has limited control. Within these diverse contexts, FAO's overall approach to engaging CSOs inevitably leads to different outcomes and levels of interaction.
66. The strong positioning of some CSOs in areas that tie in with FAO's mandate also limits the opportunities for collaboration in some countries, as these CSOs promote an agenda that does not align with that of FAO's government counterparts. In such situations, FAO has had to balance its primary role of supporting its government counterpart with its facilitating role of ensuring outreach and the participation of all development stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable. Such issues occur rarely, however, and were not found to be major limitations on effective and productive collaboration between FAO and civil society.
67. As mentioned, the main partnership tools used by Country Offices are letters of agreement, which provide for clear and time-bound engagement with CSOs. This suggests that FAO can only seek out such partnerships when implementing a funded project. Consequently, engagement with CSOs and with other non-state actors is perceived by decentralized offices to be constrained by funding. Decentralized offices often cite dedicated funds for partnership development as necessary seed-funding for engagement with multiple stakeholders, which can then produce momentum or ideas for new activities and resource mobilization.
68. FAO's Identification of civil-society actors at country level occurs mostly through networking and events, through which FAO offices build their lists and knowledge of potential partners. Open calls for expressions of interest for potential implementing partners are also a means of identifying new partners, however, they are often too time-consuming and hinder the timely implementation of activities. In such cases, known CSOs are frequently selected based on their positive track record.

Finding 11: Collaborations and partnerships with CSOs have broadly resulted in mutual benefits, as envisaged by the Strategy. FAO benefitted from CSOs' knowledge of local context, better understanding of the needs of beneficiaries, and the ability to implement

interventions in remote, hard-to-reach areas or crisis-affected settings. The CSOs have benefitted from accessing FAO knowledge and information on innovative practices and sustainable food and agriculture approaches, and capacity-development activities organized for CSOs and other stakeholders.

69. FAO has drawn on CSOs' comparative advantages, including their knowledge of local context and ability to implement interventions in remote, hard-to-reach areas, crisis-affected settings and vulnerable communities. Furthermore, FAO's policy-support activities, both at country and global level, have benefited from CSOs' inputs and knowledge, for example, of the needs of specific stakeholder groups (such as indigenous peoples and small-scale farmers) and of specific technical aspects. We provide some non-exhaustive examples in the following paragraphs.
70. In **Viet Nam**, in its 2017 response to Typhoon Damrey, which caused an estimated economic loss of USD 996.92 million, FAO signed a letter of agreement with the Vietnam Red Cross to implement a cash transfer programme funded from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). The "Restoring food security and provide livelihood support to rural communities affected by Typhoon Damrey in the Central region of Viet Nam" project (OSRO/VIE/703/CHA) supported more than 29 872 individuals in the two worst-affected provinces, distributing 1 250 vouchers for agricultural inputs and 6 218 unconditional cash grants (a total of USD 602 016 in cash grants).
71. In **Lebanon**, under Project OSRO/LEB/601/NET, together with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), FAO has successfully partnered with the Association of Volunteers in International Service (the AVSI Foundation) to carry out short-term vocational training courses for Syrian refugees. Another Lebanese NGO is developing curricula for agricultural training. The networks, as well as the technical and programmatic expertise of these CSOs, were instrumental to the successful delivery of FAO's activities. In a separate project, jointly implemented with WFP, FAO collaborated with WFP's cash-for-work scheme and with the local NGOs tasked with reforestation activities to create synergies that led to a larger area of reforestation, as well as greater financial benefits to the Lebanese and refugee communities involved in the activities.
72. In the **Philippines**, during FAO's response to Typhoon Haiyan in 2014–2015, FAO projects engaged community-based organizations (CBOs) in relief and recovery activities. The CBOs were chosen for their existing networks among farmer and fisher communities, their knowledge and their capacity to organize and mobilize rural people. FAO engaged with the CBOs to conduct needs assessments, to implement distribution and rehabilitation work, and to sustain the productive activities after the projects closed. However, the informal and, in some cases, unstructured nature of some CBOs was a hurdle to greater collaboration, as they lacked the necessary capacity to implement activities such as the restoration of mangroves or management of fish nurseries.

3.3 Efficiency of partnership development modalities and approaches

Finding 12: Civil society is a broad category encompassing a wide variety of organizations, from extensive networks and platforms involving key interest groups to NGOs and CBOs. Collaboration with such diverse group has not been accompanied by required clarity

on taxonomy and principles of engagement, roles, levels and the scope of demand-based engagement.

73. The Basic Texts²⁷ noted that growth in the number of organizations working with FAO called for proper classification of those ties and a formalization of ongoing fruitful cooperation.²⁸ The evaluation notes that from September 2014 to February 2020, only **BROOKE – Action for Working Horses and Donkeys** has been granted specialized consultative status, while the number of CSOs with liaison status has increased by only one (**URGENCI**) for a total of 76. The Strategy aimed to involve networks and organizations with the broadest possible representation. However, the PSU database, internal SharePoint, indicates that since the Strategy was adopted, out of the 43 international NGOs with specialized consultative status and the 9 with consultative status, only 4 have a partnership with FAO with a formal agreement.²⁹ Of the CSOs with liaison status, only five have a partnership with a formal agreement that sets out the framework for joint activities.³⁰ Thus, since 2013, **only 9 of the 129 CSOs listed as having formal status**³¹ have signed a formal partnership agreement with FAO. Put differently, only 9 of FAO's 28 partnership agreements are with CSOs, which, particularly at the technical level, fruitful cooperation has been recognized by the organization in granting them formal status.
74. Different types of engagement require different partnership arrangements to reflect varying levels of commitment and accountability.³² Partnerships may be formalized through a MoU³³ to establish a framework for collaboration of significant importance, or an exchange of letters if the collaboration is limited in time or scope and does not entail any financial commitment. In the presence of political pressure to formalize a partnership, it may be advisable to start the formalization process by signing a letter of intent, which establishes the intention and process for the preparation of a more comprehensive agreement. This tool offers the opportunity to explore partnership opportunities and come to an agreement that serves both parties.
75. Civil society is a broad category that encompasses a wide variety of organizations,³⁴ with diverse expertise, human and financial capital, assets and capacity-development strengths,

²⁷ FAO (2017a).

²⁸ The criteria for granting consultative status and specialized consultative status are outlined in FAO's Policy on Relations with International Non-Governmental Organizations (Resolution No. 74/51 of the sixth session of the Conference, Resolution No. 37/53 of the seventh session; Resolution No. 39/57 of the ninth session).

²⁹ Consumers International (ex-IOCU), the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) (specialized consultative status), Caritas Internationalis and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (consultative status)

³⁰ The five partners are IFOAM, the International Slow Food Movement, the International Union of Latin Notaries, URGENCI and the World Rural Forum.

³¹ As of February 2020, 9 international NGOs had been granted consultative status, 43 held specialized consultative status and, in recognition of their cooperation, particularly at the technical level, 76 had been granted liaison status.

³² These include MoUs, exchanges of letters, cost-sharing agreements, contribution agreements, pro bono agreements, small grants/contributions agreements, knowledge management and dissemination statements, partnership statements (which are formal documents, usually signed by an Assistant Director-General or Division Director) and project documents/grant agreements approved by donors, pre-defining the implementing partner(s) (on the initiative of FAO, so as to avoid any potential question of tied aid), operational partners agreements and letters of agreement.

³³ However, it is noted that nothing in a MoU imposes financial obligations on either party. Per the above, and particularly for the implementation of joint activities within the MoU framework that might involve payment of funds, a specific separate legal arrangement will be entered into by the parties, as appropriate, taking into account relevant administrative and financial rules and applicable procedures. See FAO MoU template, Article 3(8).

³⁴ See FAO (2013a; 2013b). FAO has identified 12 different constituencies in line with the main groups of FAO beneficiaries. They are: small farmers, the landless, agricultural workers, fishers and fish workers, pastoralists and herders, forest dwellers,

as well as challenges, such as staff turnover, financial constraints and competition for resources. Engagement with civil society entails negotiating targets, providing support and incentives to reach those targets and facilitating shared-value collaboration. Demand-based and results-driven engagement is a responsibility shared on numerous levels, depending on the scope of the engagement. When pursuing fit-for-purpose collaborations and shared-value partnerships with CSO, FAO must duly consider partners' capacity – based on their expertise, resources and access – throughout the partnership-building process. Concretely, this translates in FAO headquarters exercising its powers when Country Offices are unable to achieve the objectives of a proposed action satisfactorily and where added value can be provided at global (headquarters) level. FAO may consider the following when determining levels of demand-based engagement with partners in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity: (a) the area concerned does not fall within the competence of FAO headquarters (Country Office competence); (b) the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Country Offices (necessity); (c) the action can therefore, by reason of its scale or effects, be implemented more successfully by FAO headquarters (added value).

76. A global-level example is that of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (**IUCN**), which signed a MoU with FAO in 2014. From IUCN's perspective, the MoU was meant to help address some of its challenges in advocacy and communication as well as field programming. However, the two organizations not only overlap in terms of work areas, but compete with one another on fundraising and policy outreach. The MoU does not set out a clear differentiation and delineation of competencies, calling into question the effectiveness and sustainability of the partnership. Referring to the newly signed MoU in 2018, IUCN does not believe this to have made any difference to the collaboration to date. Moreover, FAO's economies of scale allow it to extrapolate IUCN policies and transform them into more significant initiatives, creating friction when IUCN fails to get appropriate international recognition. Also, FAO has tended to expect IUCN to play more of a subcontracting role and implement its policy initiatives. Thus, the relationship with FAO tends to be hierarchical and is not methodologically replicable among IUCN's other international partnerships, limiting the mutual benefits.
77. **We Effect's** experience and presence through long-term agreements on the ground, and capacity-building and networking with local staff, coupled with FAO's considerable influence and ability to secure governmental attention mean this partnership should be a mutually beneficial arrangement. Nevertheless, while the Swedish organization wants to take on a more policy-oriented role and is striving to become involved with FAO on gender issues, it has assumed more of an implementing role. FAO has faced challenges in developing joint proposals with We Effect, which has undergone some turnover in personnel, reportedly due to structural changes at headquarters. The partnership has trickled down to forest-producer organization relationships, but the results have been scattered. We Effect has a significantly decentralized structure, which poses a challenge to deepening the strategic collaboration. Ultimately, the MoU signed in 2015 seems to serve We Effect more as an added layer of political legitimacy but is not operationally crucial for FAO or the Forest and Farm Facility.

78. Interviews suggest that partnership activities carried out at the decentralized level do not stem from formalized agreements at FAO headquarters, but from the proactive initiatives of stakeholders. The partnership agreements signed between FAO and La Via Campesina and ActionAid International lack visibility. In **Senegal**, a partnership formed locally between FAO, ActionAid and the Conseil National de Concertation et de Cooperation des Ruraux (CNCR), a member of La Via Campesina, received USD 2.48 million in funding from the World Bank's Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) to implement a project on "Strengthening the livelihoods of rural women for sustainable economic development in the Tambacounda region". Even so, the project document does not make any reference to the partnership agreement.
79. In Senegal, the FAO has favoured partnership with local CSOs – **Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (AVSF)**, the **Fédération Nationale des Producteurs de Coton (FNPC)**, **Symbiose Sénégal** and the **National Network of Trainers in Integrated Production Management** – and other institutions for implementing the Global Environment Facility-funded project GCP/SEN/065/LDF, "Integration of climate resilience in agro-sylvo-pastoral production for food security in vulnerable rural areas through the farmer field school approach". Civil society has benefited from FAO's agro-pastoral field-schools experience, which has lent support to pastoral households in setting up 80 village chicken coops and vegetable community gardens. AVSF, meanwhile, has made its Pastoral Warning and Information System for Ferlo available to the FAO project, providing SMS alerts to 518 participants.
80. FAO should ensure the resulting collaborations and partnerships are of mutual value and share the burden by mobilizing an appropriate mix of resources to achieve jointly defined and common objectives. FAO should review its principles of engagement and ensure roles, levels and scope of demand-based engagement are conducive to developing strategic and sustainable collaborations and partnerships with civil society.

Finding 13. FAO's risk management mechanisms, due diligence and associated processes were embedded in Strategy implementation, so that the neutrality, independence and impartiality of FAO as an intergovernmental institution was in no way compromised. While these mechanisms served the purpose, these are perceived to be cumbersome, lengthy and restrictive, limiting the number of partnerships struck.

81. The Strategy states that a thorough risk assessment process has been developed to assess proposed partnerships with CSOs and may be further improved as more experience is gained in this area.³⁵ FAO embedded risk management mechanisms in its implementation of the Strategy, due to the various standards that must be reached in developing food and agriculture systems and the need to ensure that the neutrality, independence and impartiality of FAO as an intergovernmental institution was in no way compromised.³⁶ Similar risk management mechanisms prevail across the UN System, where functions related to the assessment and management of risks are separate to partnership advocacy and catalytic functions. Some UN agencies have tailored and adapted their prospect

³⁵ FAO (2013a).

³⁶ Ibid.

research and risk management functions for effectiveness and efficiency; these are carried out in proximity and even under co-working arrangements with partnerships teams.

82. DGB 2014/14 sets out FAO's corporate risk factors and corporate social responsibility standards and provides the framework for the formal risk assessment and approval process of all partnership proposals.³⁷ While the due diligence functions were previously assigned to individual staff members/or consultants of the PSP, the Due Diligence Team was formally established in May 2019, reporting to the PSP Deputy Director's Office. This change was initiated on the recommendation of the recent internal audit, which identified a lack of dedicated capacity for this function.
83. The Strategy established the Partnerships Committee (PC) as the approving body for proposed partnerships. It follows that, in practice, the Sub-Committee for the Review of Financial and other Agreements (SubCom-RFA) is the body with the power to endorse or recommend proposed partnerships (see Figure 1, Annex 2). In January 2020, the Due Diligence team was transferred to Private Sector Development (PSD) division to establish a dedicated Due Diligence and Prospect Research Unit (PSDU), comprising two staff (one P3 and one P2) and two non-staff (one COF.LOC and one via Personal Services Agreement, or PSA). In the period 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2020, the team received a total of 641 screening requests (including those withdrawn and ineligible and/or outside the PSP remit), as well as requests for co-publication, the co-sponsoring/co-organization of events, participation in meetings, the disposal of assets and information/guidance.
84. The non-staff budget allocated for due diligence activities for 2020 is USD 40 000. Since March 2020, PSDU reports to the Deputy Director General, while the people and non-staff budget continue to sit with PSP. It would, therefore, seem that PSDU is ill-equipped to adequately support timely and well-developed analysis for decision-making on engagement with non-state actors (including CSOs). Moreover, as previously noted, the current taxonomy – including roles, levels and scope of engagement – does not differentiate between civil-society entities. There is, therefore, currently no differentiated and simplified risk assessment mechanism in place.

Finding 14: The challenges in establishing collaborations and partnerships between FAO, its Members and civil society lie in limiting policies, time-consuming and complex processes, inconsistent procedures and reactive, rather than strategic approaches.

85. The Strategy is intended to be a framework for collaboration with civil society. It also outlines institutional arrangements for its implementation, offering FAO staff guidance on establishing effective partnerships with CSOs. Even so, the Evaluation Team found that FAO staff at country level and in some technical divisions have a somewhat limited

³⁷ Director-General's Bulletin (DGB) No. 2014/14, published 31 March, says "a revised DGB on Policy Guidelines on the Preparation, Clearance, and Signature of Agreements is under review" (FAO, 2014a). However, DGB No. 2014/13 on the "Procedures for the preparation, clearance and signature of Agreements" (FAO, 2014b) had already been published on 18 March. DGB 2014/13 and DGB 2014/14 were, therefore, not connected. Moreover, DGB No. 2014/14's "Review of Partnerships with Non-State Actors and Composition of the Partnerships Committee and the Sub-Committee for the Review of Financial and other agreements" did not specify which financial agreements the Due Diligence Unit would handle. It stated that all "eligible proposals will be passed on to the Sub-Committee for Review of Financial and other Agreements (SubCom-RFA), along with recommendations regarding benefits and potential risks", without specifying which were eligible to go through to the Sub-Committee.

understanding of the scope of FAO's policies and instruments on collaborative arrangements and the regulations governing various levels and types of interaction with civil society. This limited knowledge has resulted in a risk-averse approach to partnerships and has meant little action on building the foundations of strategic partnerships.

86. Several interviewees, both internal and external, cited the administrative procedures involved in setting up partnerships as cumbersome and time-consuming. CSO representatives observed that the short-term duration of the letters of agreement and the limited flexibility to adjust planned activities were not conducive to developing prolonged, longer-term collaboration for strategic and sustainable results. Smaller NGOs with few personnel often found themselves in unfair competition with larger international NGOs or CSOs that were more experienced in dealing with the administrative issues involved in major development-partner agreements. Furthermore, complex and time-consuming reporting requirements were seen as incommensurate with the level and size of the interventions involved. Interestingly, that already at the time of the Strategy adoption in 2013, the civil society organizations have been requesting that FAO reviews and upgrades some of its administrative tools³⁸.
87. The Strategy recognizes that a legal structure is necessary to conclude formal agreements. Civil-society platforms or CBOs with no legal status need the assistance of CSOs with juridical standing to enter into any structured cooperation agreement with FAO. FAO has developed tools and procedures for any collaboration with CSOs, involving several steps before signing. These coupled with FAO's rules and regulations on the procurement of goods and services have, in several cases, delayed the implementation of activities. It is noted that among the tools for collaboration set out in the Strategy, **the Letter of Agreement (LoA)** - an administrative tool for contracting services from CSOs - should not exceed 18 months unless justified by the Authorized Official only after assessing the potential risks. FAO's **Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM)** allows potential operational partners to be identified and chosen without a competitive selection process - among other listed - when these are considered FAO Strategic Partners and are subject to a framework partnership agreement such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).³⁹ The prescribed administrative tools state that where the service provider can be referred to as an **implementing partner**, a formal partnership agreement may preclude a competitive selection process to obtain the best value for money to meet FAO's requirements.
88. The evaluation notes, however, that nothing in the MoU imposes financial obligations on either Party. Thus, joint activities implemented within the MoU framework that might involve the payment of funds will be set out by the parties in a separate legal arrangement that takes into account all relevant administrative and financial rules and applicable procedures.⁴⁰ Among other things, the names and signed declarations of recommended non-state operational partners and their subcontractors must be submitted for a due

³⁸ FAO (2013a).

³⁹ These organizations are in a unique position to leverage political support, specialized expertise and/or operational capacity to achieve results. Also, their technical capacity supports or complements FAO's mandate.

⁴⁰ Article 3(8) of the FAO MoU template.

diligence screening per DGB 2014/14 and, where applicable, FAO's Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations (FAO, 2015).

89. In the Strategy, FAO acknowledges that the chain of accountability to affected populations stretches from the funding source to the end recipient. Between 2013 and May 2020, five civil society implementing partners were awarded a total of eight operational partner agreements (OPAs) or execution agreements,⁴¹ through direct and comparative selection, worth a total USD 32 395 950. As per reviewed records and references available in the SubCom-PC-Archive mailbox at the end of June 2020, showed none of the 8 OPAs/execution agreements have been endorsed by the SubCom-RFA/PC on OPIM/OPA.⁴²
90. During the same period, through partnership arrangements, direct selection, FAO signed six OPAs/execution agreements with four formalized civil society partners, worth a combined USD 11 096 206. In 2016–2017 alone, FAO signed three OPAs with two of these partners by direct selection, worth a total USD 4 018 555. Two of the OPAs were for work to be undertaken on a regional project in Latin America, while the other was for a global project spanning Burkina Faso, Kenya, the Kyrgyz Republic, Niger and Uruguay. The

⁴¹ OED notes based on information received from PSDN/OPIM that execution agreements were signed with the following CSOs in 2014 (as the OPA instrument did not exist before the release of MS701):

Deutsche Welthungerhilfe

- 1) GCP/MAG/081/EC, "Actions Intégrées en Nutrition et Alimentation (AINA)", USD 2 191 543 (signed July 2014), and
- 2) GCP/ZIM/025/UK, "Livelihoods and Food Security Programme (LFSP) Agricultural Production and Nutrition (APN)", USD 11 836 577 (signed November 2014)

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) – United States

- 1) GCP/GLO/365/GFF, "Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ)", USD 4 386 108 (signed September 2014).

⁴² The FAO Administrative Manual, Chapter VII, Operational Modalities, Section 701, Operational Partners Implementation Modality came into effect on 30 September 2015 (FAO, 2015). However, the two DGBs had been in place since the first execution agreement on the list was signed in July 2014. Reference was made to:

DGB 2014/13 (FAO, 2014a) and DGB No. 2014/13 (FAO, 2014b). Paragraph 2 of DGB 2014/13 states that "the term 'agreement' is a generic one [...] *irrespective of their actual denomination*, entered into by FAO and establishing relations with partners such as [...] civil society organizations. Footnote 3 says: "For the policies and procedure governing agreements with civil society organizations [...] reference should also be made to [...] the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations (Council document CL 146/8). Footnote 8 states: "Agreements providing for a collaboration to be executed under an existing project (TCP, GCP, UTF, etc.) will only require clearance by the technical department concerned and the Legal Office. Clearance by OPC, Sub-Committee for Review of Financial and other Agreements and/or Partnerships Committee should be sought, if necessary. The duration of these agreements cannot go beyond the duration of the project under which they are being implemented." Paragraph 4 of DGB 2014/13 says: "Agreements with Non-State Actors: In addition to the procedures set out in this Bulletin, draft agreements with Non-State Actors (for example [...] civil society organizations) must be first submitted to the Office for Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development (OPC) at an early stage to ensure coherence as well as consistency with the corporate strategies and specific rules of the Organization. OPC will perform functions related to brokering the partnerships, performing due diligence processes, coordinating global and regional frameworks of collaboration, maintaining oversight, quality review and clearance by the Sub-Committee for Review of Financial and other Agreements and/or Partnerships Committee, as described in the relevant Director General's Bulletin." DGB 2014/14 says: "In order to ensure effective risk management in the implementation of FAO's partnerships with non-state actors, the Director-General has decided to streamline the procedures for reviewing and assessing such proposals for partnerships. These include [...] NGOs, social movements, cooperatives, farmers' organizations [...]. The Office for Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development (OPC) will coordinate the process." On the review process, it says: "All partnership proposals from Headquarters and Decentralized Offices, including FAO Representations, should be sent to OPC. OPC will review all proposals through a due diligence screening in accordance with the common UN and FAO principles for partnerships. *All eligible proposals will be passed on to the Sub-Committee for Review of Financial and other Agreements (SubCom-RFA)*, along with recommendations regarding benefits and/or potential risks. The SubCom-RFA will then perform an in-depth analysis and directly approve any proposed partnerships which are considered unlikely to present any significant risks and entail clear benefits."

evaluation further notes that notwithstanding its application to both direct selection and comparative selection of non-state operational partners, no screening of the recommended non-state operational partners and their subcontractors as per DGB 2014/14 and FAO's Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations by the headquarters Partnerships Division (PSP) was conducted. The Office for Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development (OPC) confirmed that because the partners had collaborated with FAO in the past and had partnership agreements,⁴³ it did not believe Sub-Committee clearance was necessary. Between 2013 and May 2020, these same two partners, this time through letters of agreement, had been granted (through direct and competitive selection) service contracts worth a total USD 7 797 512.

91. The Evaluation Team further noted that from 2013 to May 2020, the letter of agreement had been used extensively, whereby 21 partners listed as CSOs received service-provider contracts, through direct and competitive selection, worth a combined USD 25 569 839.⁴⁴ In the same period, 11 partners listed as CSOs received implementing partner/service-provider contracts through direct selection, alone, worth a combined USD 2 492 316.
92. An example at the global level is **IUCN**, global organization of public conservation institutes, focused mostly on projects in Africa, with 1 400 member entities. Consequently, its influence and reach in environment ministries around the world is on a par with FAO's relationships with ministries of agriculture. In practice, however, FAO enjoys far greater resources and political currency, and its work often juxtaposes with IUCN's perceived mandate. Consequently, IUCN is frequently a service provider/funding recipient, while FAO takes on the contractee/donor position.
93. The partnership signed in 2018 between FAO Country Office Senegal and **six international cooperation organizations (ICOs) (Quebec Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI), Carrefour International, Solidarité Union et Coopérative (SUCO), Union des Producteurs Agricoles – Développement International (UPA-DI), Société de coopération pour le développement international (SOCODEVI) and Mer et Monde)** aimed to establish a community of practice on resilience to climate change for food and nutritional security in Senegal. It led to the mobilization of USD 5 million (through the Ministry of International Relations and La Francophonie of Canada) for the financing and joint implementation of project GCP/GLO/921/GQC on "Capacity-building for climate change adaptation planning for food security and nutrition in Senegal," or SAGA-Senegal. However, the negotiation and signing phase for letters of agreement saw numerous delays due to ICOs' difficulty in following FAO procedures. Furthermore, the funding model of pre-financing the ICO, then reimbursing the second and third tranches was a substantial constraint on some organizations, such as SUCO, which is voluntary. All ICOs bemoaned the sluggish pace of negotiations and signing of letters of agreement with the Senegal Country Office. The longest delays were on the agreement with **UPA-DI**. Talks started in November 2018 and only culminated in a signed agreement in February 2020. Further

⁴³ In both cases, the recommended non-state operational partners had already signed formal partnership agreements (MoUs) in 2014, endorsed by the Partnership Committee.

⁴⁴ Of the 21 partners, 6 had letter-of-agreement service-provider/implementing-partner contracts worth a combined USD 21 714 097: Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (USD 3 838 138), WWF (USD 2 270 900), WVI (USD 6 150 301), Action Aid (USD 1 168 727), PLAN INTERNATIONAL (USD 2 759 418) and IUCN (USD 5 526 611).

delays were caused by FAO's validation of technical and financial reports, which stalled the payment of second instalments for CSO services and, thus, the progress of activities in the field. Also, cumbersome FAO procurement procedures were cited as a factor limiting the achievement of project results.

94. The "Emergency assistance for securing the livelihoods of vulnerable pastoralists affected by the pastoral crisis in Senegal" project (OSRO/SEN/801/BEL) has helped to strengthen the resilience of 7 199 affected households. From May-December 2018, the FAO Country Office in Senegal signed letters of agreement worth USD 400 000 with local CSOs AVSF and Réseau Billital Maroobe.
95. Determining the appropriate instrument and procedure is a matter of judgement.⁴⁵ The decision should take into account all relevant factors.⁴⁶ An eligible entity that is uniquely qualified, mandated and/or alone in offering to provide the services effectively has a monopoly. However, the Evaluation Team notes that while evidence of an entity's eligibility – including under manual section (MS) 507.3.12 (iii) partnership arrangements – is a prerequisite to choosing a letter of agreement, it may not, alone, provide sufficient reason for doing so. FAO may also contract a legal NGO entity to procure goods, works or services under MS 502.⁴⁷
96. Accordingly, the evaluation notes that while a letter of agreement may be used to obtain services related to the implementation of activities, sub-components or components of a project or programme, the regulations and associated procedures for service-provider selection, as well as for quality assurance and letter-of-agreement approval, as set out in MS 507, are not adequate for managing the additional risks associated with outsourcing the implementation of an entire project or major component of a project. FAO is responsible for ensuring that the funds entrusted to it are expended correctly and transparently, in accordance with the highest standards of accountability, to ensure the utmost degree of public trust. The evaluation notes the crucial importance of respecting rules and regulations. The Organization must pursue a coherent approach, ensuring that the safeguards in place are commensurate with the level of engagement and, above all, that no exceptions are made.

Finding 15. The majority of partnership initiatives with CSOs, particularly at country level, are not focused on long-term relationship building, co-creation and burden-sharing. This is partly due to limited planning, a lack of appropriate knowledge management and a dearth of guidance on capitalizing on and nurturing existing partners or seeking out new ones.

97. In the face of current trends and challenges, strategic partnership-building is necessary to find long-term solutions to the root causes of global problems. Even so, there is a perceived lack of **dedicated action plans** capitalizing on and nurturing existing partners and seeking new strategic areas of collaboration. FAO engagements with CSOs are not based on strategic

⁴⁵ Options include a contract under MS 502, a letter of agreement under MS 507, an OPA under MS 701 and others.

⁴⁶ In other words, the nature of the services, availability in the place where they are to be delivered and characteristics of the service provider.

⁴⁷ For example, the procurement of services and inputs typically available on the commercial market, as well as the procurement of works, should be undertaken in accordance with MS 502.

assessments of potential complementarities and synergies with its programme areas, particularly at the technical level. Interviews with decentralized offices and technical divisions indicate that collaborations and partnerships with civil society are mostly confined to current cycles of programme implementation, generally based on current needs and not planned to address long-term strategic imperatives.

98. Except for the progress reports on partnership development required to be submitted to the FAO Programme Committee annually, FAO's knowledge-management, monitoring, and reporting systems for partnerships are inadequate to facilitate the sharing of best practices or lessons learned for Strategy implementation. This is partly due to its limited technical and human capacity. Effective management of partnerships first requires clarity as to the divisions and/or individuals within the Organization responsible for managing specific partnerships, as well as an ability to maintain that clarity when individuals move to other positions. **FBRN** claims that FAO has not been adequately committed to their partnership. While expectations were high, the collaboration has not progressed as hoped, aside from some preparatory study work. The level of engagement has also been affected by FAO staff turnover, a lack of continuous cooperation and failure to ensure a holistic and sustainable approach. Notwithstanding an invitation to attend the 2020 Regional Conference, there have been no discussions on scaling up the partnership.
99. Second, FAO staff need clear operational guidelines, coherent guidance on mechanisms and tools to support partnership efforts, practical advice and streamlined internal processes to ensure responsiveness and avoid delays in addressing partners' concerns. Bureaucratic procedures were cited as the main difficulty at the start of FAO's **partnerships with Slow Food** and **URGENCI**. FAO's City Region Food Systems Programme offered opportunities for collaboration with URGENCI through a mapping and multi-stakeholder decision-making processes. In practice, FAO suggested working in cities where URGENCI did not have an active network on the ground, while the cities proposed by URGENCI were not of interest to donors, leading to missed opportunities. Subsequently, following FAO staff turnover, the partners had to establish new contacts and interact with a different FAO department, as well as deal with the reporting requirements of the new workplan template. At country level, the start of the "Improved Land Governance for Shared Prosperity in the Senegal River Basin (SRB)" project was delayed by two years. A lack of clarity over institutional arrangements and the management of resources between FAO and the Agricultural and Rural Prospective Initiative, which jointly developed the Senegal River Basin project, funded by Germany, have reportedly contributed to this delay.
100. It became evident from interviews and reports that PSU had limited ability to render effective and timely advice on partnership approaches or guidance on identification of prospective partners. The e-learning tools it provided were perceived to provide general introduction on the need for partnering with CSOs, with limited practical guidance on how to go about it. The capacities and skills of regional partnership officers varied by region, with most acquiring on-the-job experience of engaging with CSOs and lacking systematic training on the subject. No specific backstopping for establishing partnerships was expected from or provided by PSU or the Regional Offices to the Country Offices during the evaluation period.
101. **WVI** has an extensive network in 100 countries and 30 000 staff, presenting unique outreach opportunities. In developing this partnership, FAO wanted to draw on WVI's ability to

distribute funding and materials for generating sustainable sources of income and improving food and nutrition security in vulnerable rural communities in Africa and Asia. FAO and WVI also signed a MoU in 2015, extended to 2023 in 2018. The partnership's first workplan was deemed too vague, while the next envisioned closer collaboration at country level. These have been operationalized exclusively through letters of agreement. Interviews conducted with both FAO and WVI officials concur that FAO provides irregular responses and has different priorities at local level, while more prominent Country Offices tend to be more reactive. Conversely, Regional Offices are helpful, in general, on administrative procedures, funding and intermediary work. Despite efforts by PSU focal points, both at headquarters and at regional level, to streamline cooperation, the consensus is that the approach must be bottom-up from Country Offices.

102. Collaborations and partnerships at country level are handled according to the pre-defined areas of specific interventions, as the Country Offices do not have a dedicated function for promoting a holistic approach to partnerships. Collaborations with CSOs are primarily project based, with projects allocating budgets for advocacy and communication. These funds are mainly used to sensitize potential partners on critical issues being addressed by the project. Still, they are not sufficient to ensure a strategic and holistic approach to partnerships. According to some stakeholders involved in FAO's projects, funds are allocated only for the implementation of activities, leaving a gap when it comes to partners' management and administrative costs and hampering the possibility of more structured involvement. Furthermore, the Country Offices are not making use of any formal system to evaluate or document lessons learned in order to capitalize on the work done by CSOs. Thus, knowledge acquired at country level is not valued beyond those individuals involved in the partnerships, and capitalization on results is challenging.
103. In the framework of the "Strengthening the governance of food and nutritional security in Senegal" project, CNCR, a member of La Via Campesina, expressed interest in promoting CSOs' active participation in a political dialogue on agriculture, food security and nutrition by carrying out broad consultations and complimentary, parallel or contradictory studies. However, this collaboration did not materialize, reportedly as FAO officers opted to not take risks by limiting their partnerships to state institutions. In the framework of the "Strengthening the livelihoods of rural women for sustainable economic development in the Tambacounda region in Senegal" project, jointly implemented by FAO, ActionAid and CNCR, disagreements over the latter's positioning continue to delay the formalization of the collaboration, with negotiations ongoing since October 2019.
104. While some knowledge exchange happens at special events, the Organization does not have a distinct platform for sharing its expertise in developing and implementing partnerships with interested users, resources, experts or units. Communication on partnership development practices between the various FAO units was limited, even among regional partnership officers. Aside from the latest news, the FAO partnerships website is not updated regularly with documented best practices on partnerships.
105. Most of interviewees both from CSOs and FAO Country Offices have limited knowledge of regional and global processes and opportunities for engagement. In **Lebanon**, this has hindered potential participation in wider dialogue and the opportunity for enhanced capacity in terms of policy dialogue, which is quite weak among Lebanese CSOs. In **Asia**, collaboration

with FAO has significantly expanded the AFA's sphere of influence, increasing its regional and global space for policy dialogue and expanding the network through new alliances. AFA is represented at regional level, with little to no engagement of farmers' organizations at country level. While the workplan attached to its MoU with FAO mentions involvement in the CPF, and some actions have been effectively implemented in several countries, AFA did not report any participation by its members in the CPF – another missed opportunity to engage with farmers' organizations on national initiatives. In **Sierra Leone**, the FAO Country Office team lacked knowledge on the Strategy, its principles and CSO partnership guidelines, experiencing delays in forming partnership agreements, partly due to lengthy procedures for procurement and the approval of deliverables. FAO has collaborated with several local CSOs under letters of agreement on project implementation in the field. This collaboration was confined to specific activities, however, and was not strategically planned. As in several other Country Offices, the Sierra Leone office does not have a focal point for partnerships. The only partnership focal point is based in the Regional Office, covering several countries, suggesting a considerable workload and scant support and assistance on partnerships for Country Offices.⁴⁸

106. Notwithstanding the Strategy's emphasis on monitoring and evaluation systems to measure the performance of partnership initiatives, the corporate partnerships database, internal SharePoint, lacks such information. The evaluation notes that there may be gaps in institutional memory of partnerships established prior to the Strategy, however, documentation was also missing on partnerships established after its adoption. PSU also noted that it did not receive some information from the technical units responsible for these partnerships. Some of the progress reports on partnerships were either missing or not duly prepared.
107. PSU does not perform any quality assurance for completeness and content of the progress reports submitted by the RTOs. Indeed, the evaluation notes that partnerships are not part of technical officers' workplan, nor are they included in the Performance Evaluation and Management System. Although the database is available to other divisions, its use across the Organization is minimal. The Evaluation Team communicated at length with PSU, identifying and retrieving missing supporting documents on formal partnership agreements. However, in most cases, the information provided in the progress reports was minimal for assessing the results or level of the engagement. For example, in the case of FAO's partnership with FBRN, the progress reports for 2014, 2015 and 2019 were missing from the internal partnerships database.
108. In a further example, the PSU database documentation on FAO's partnership with Caritas Internationalis (accessed in April and May 2020) consisted of a MoU signed with Fondazione Caritas Roma in 2016, although the partnership in the database was entitled "Caritas Internationalis", as well as progress reports for 2017 and 2018 and an empty 2019 progress report. The 2017 and 2018 progress reports referred to activities implemented both with **Fondazione Caritas Roma** and **Caritas Internationalis**, without any distinction. An interview with PSU confirmed that the MoU pertained to the channelling of FAO's food and

⁴⁸ Despite repeated requests, FAO Country Office Sierra Leone was unable to provide the independent evaluator with signed agreements and progress reports on implementation for CSOs listed as partners of FAO. Also lessons from partnerships with CSOs were not provided, while the results of the collaborations were only partly provided.

non-food surpluses to Caritas. As far as the awareness and communications activities cited in the reports were concerned, PSU confirmed that those were not included in the MoU, but implemented as supplementary joint actions.

109. The interview with MoU contact person clarified that the agreement was signed with Fondazione Caritas Roma to distribute excess food, beverages and self-medication products from the FAO's commissary, which was closed in 2017. The MoU signed specifically for that purpose was facilitated by Caritas Internationalis, which had no further engagement in MoU implementation. Caritas Internationalis is independent of Fondazione Caritas Roma and has consultative status with FAO. In 2014, an exchange of letters aimed to reinforce their collaboration on knowledge-sharing, advocacy and communication, including FAO's participation in the One Human Family Food for All campaign, by advocating for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, including the development of proposals for model framework laws, joint resource mobilization and alignment of international campaigns and mutual visibility.^{49, 50}
110. A further example can be found in the case of **Federazione Organismi Cristiani Servizio Internazionale Volontario (FOCSIV)**. While this MoU was signed in 2017, planned activities to deploy Italian volunteers in Colombia, Guatemala, Senegal and Tanzania have not materialized. FOCSIV required FAO accreditation, which was not completed until the end of 2019. The first two pilot projects (in Ecuador and Peru) were started in February 2020, with the first operations to be launched by the end of 2020. Lastly, due diligence processes and reviews of partnership proposals are not well documented, so do little to facilitate further development based on lessons learned. The records available on formalized partnership agreements with CSOs in the SubCom-PC-Archive mailbox offer only a partial trail of the review processes.

⁴⁹ FAO (2005)

⁵⁰ Following an interview with Caritas Internationalis, as suggested by the PSU Liaison Officer, the independent evaluator requested that the PSU focal point provide further documentation on implementation of the MoU with Fondazione Caritas Roma to assess the quantitative and qualitative data and information on food and non-food distribution. However, the evaluation notes that the independent evaluator did not receive any feedback, and it was not fully clarified who the evaluand should be.

The evaluation notes that in June 2020, the Partnership Database was eventually titling the partnership "Fondazione Caritas Roma" instead of "Caritas Internationalis" (as previously titled). In June 2020, the 2019 progress report was probably updated and was providing brief information on the conclusion of the partnership with Fondazione Caritas Roma. The partner's contact person had not been changed and was still as indicated by Caritas Internationalis. The 2017 and 2018 progress reports as well continued to enclose information on both Fondazione Caritas Roma and Caritas Internationalis.

3.4 Integration of cross-cutting themes

Finding 16: Effective gender mainstreaming has been demonstrated to some extent in the design and implementation of the partnership initiatives developed.

111. As noted by the Evaluation of FAO's Work on Gender (2019), while FAO has lagged in forging collaborations with non-state actors in promoting gender issues and women's empowerment, there were instances, in some of the countries visited by the Gender Evaluation Team, where CSOs had a growing role in raising awareness and advocating for gender issues, such as women's access to land, IT services, the economic empowerment of vulnerable women, and women's representation in farmer and producer organizations. Noteworthy examples were found in Paraguay, Guatemala, Mauritania, Tunisia, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, Georgia, Turkey and the Kyrgyz Republic. The Strategy explicitly recognizes gender equality among the mutual principles that must form the basis of its partnerships with CSOs for food security and improved livelihoods. At country level, the evaluation noted some initiatives that incorporated gender issues in developing partnerships.
112. In **Cape Verde**, Caritas projects in the field of family farming feature women in both coach and trainee roles. Lending institutions working in micro-credit have also conducted workshops aimed at women to balance the tendency for men to take charge of financial matters as heads of household. Project approval requires, in some cases, up to 70 percent female inclusion. FAO has set an example by having mostly female local staff and insisting on a minimum of 40 percent of women and youths as project beneficiaries. The Morabi association carries out such projects in some of the most vulnerable communities in Praia and Santo Antão. In **Lebanon**, FAO organized dedicated training on "Gender in Forestry", targeting representatives from CSOs, municipalities and the Ministry of Agriculture. Moreover, the Organization ensured equal participation of male and female representatives in community meetings, training and awareness activities. Through CSOs, it also facilitated women's direct involvement in reforestation.
113. In **Paraguay**, gender aspects are addressed through collaboration with CSOs that work with indigenous groups, on the situation of women and the youth in rural areas, particularly indigenous women, and the nutritional and food security and sovereignty of rural people. In **Senegal**, as part of efforts to promote the right to development of indigenous peoples, ActionAid and FAO published the 2016 manual, *Prior, free and informed consent: A right of indigenous peoples and good practice for local communities*.⁵¹ FAO, in collaboration with AVSF, FNPC and Symbiose Sénégal, has enabled 7 245 women to participate in the planning of their villages' development and the implementation of economic, cultural and religious activities at community level through Dimitra Clubs, a local platform for consultation. In **Tanzania**, the FAO Country Office has conducted a gender stocktaking exercise, which also assessed the level of gender integration in projects and programme formulation and implementation, as part of improving FAO Representation in the United Republic of Tanzania (FRURT) gender work for 2020 and the years ahead.⁵² The VGGT multi-

⁵¹ FAO (2016)

⁵² This exercise forms part of the minimum standard requirements under the FAO Gender Equity Policy to provide a basis for gender mainstreaming. It is also part of the periodic review to assess how well gender equality has been incorporated into FRURT projects and programmes. See FAO (2019), p. 1.

stakeholder platform in Tanzania mainstreams gender as one of its 10 principles of VGGT implementation.

Finding 17: Climate-change adaptation and resilience considerations are integrated to some extent into partnerships with an explicit focus on promoting environmental sustainability.

114. The Strategy's basic principles imply that partnership activities should be planned to promote economic, environmental and social sustainability. The evaluation found examples of partnerships formed for climate-change adaptation and the promotion of environmental sustainability. Action Against Desertification was launched in 2014 to support local communities, government and civil society in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal in combating the effects of climate change and desertification, by promoting the sustainable management and restoration of dryland forests and rangelands. The National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management of **the Lao People's Democratic Republic**, developed with FAO's technical support, calls for cross-sectoral partnerships to address the complexity of climate change. In light of this, partnerships with farmers' groups and NGOs were formed as part of the Disaster Risk Management Working Group, contributing to national efforts on climate-change adaptation and disaster risk reductions. The members of this group are active in all 17 provinces of the country, offering an ability to respond more flexibly and quickly to urgent needs in communities affected by disasters. **Tanzania's** climate-smart agriculture guidelines were developed between 2014 and 2016, in a partnership-driven multi-sectoral approach, led by multistakeholder task force comprised of agriculture, environment, climate and development experts from the public and private sectors, as well as CSOs.⁵³

Finding 18: In terms of public discourse on governance-related issues, FAO's Basic Texts provide mechanisms for the engagement of non-state actors, including CSOs.

115. Non-state actors and international NGOs can attend and participate as observers in FAO Governing Bodies and Technical Committees and may be invited to expert meetings, conferences and seminars.⁵⁴ Some of these associates participate in the CFS through the CSM and contribute to the negotiation of CFS policy outputs. FAO has supported multi-stakeholder forums and platforms that set international norms and standards and foster participatory decision-making and policy discourse at global and regional level. FAO ensures CSO engagement in these platforms, such as the International Plant Protection Convention, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and the FAO Technical Committees on Fisheries (COFI), on Forestry (COFO) and Agriculture (COAG), as well as the FAO Regional Conferences and regional bodies, such as Africa's regional economic communities. The Evaluation Team also found examples of FAO support for integrating the VGGTs into national policy based on participatory consultations with CSOs. The IPC Working Group on Fisheries was recognized in the background papers for COFI 2016 and 2018, with specific mention in COFI 2014 for the high participatory level of small-scale fisheries organizations for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication.⁵⁵

⁵³ FAO (2017c)

⁵⁴ FAO (2017a) Basic Texts, Volume II, section M

⁵⁵ FAO (2015a)

116. Through advocacy by La Via Campesina, with the support of FAO and other partners, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted **the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas** in September 2018. La Via Campesina subsequently published an illustrated booklet on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas in March 2020, which it is popular among its members.

Finding 19. Nutrition considerations have not been well-integrated in partnerships, apart from few initiatives specifically targeting nutrition-related issues.

117. FAO engages CSOs in the global debate on nutrition-related issues through consultations within the framework of the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition and the International Conferences on Nutrition (ICN) and through global events, such as the International Year of Pulses, or the Symposium on the Future of Food. However, these efforts have not led to any significant partnerships with CSOs on nutrition-related issues. Still, there is great potential for more emphasis on nutrition-related topics in future FAO partnership initiatives. A recent agreement with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition offers the potential for a more active collaboration to increase the availability of nutritious food in developing countries.
118. **Brazil's** Zero Hunger programme has proved effective in reducing food insecurity. With strong civil-society participation, it serves as a model to be replicated in other countries through South–South cooperation. The Brazilian National Council for Food and Nutritional Security, a policy coordination body established under the Office of the President, has been promoted as a successful model for integrating various policy areas (such as social protection, agriculture and health) towards the elimination of hunger. FAO has worked with Brazil to disseminate best school food, nutrition and education practices, based on lessons learned from its experience of food acquisition.
119. In **Guatemala**, FAO has collaborated with Asociación de Desarrollo Integral de Jóvenes Emprendedores (ADIJE)⁵⁶ to support the use of sustainable agricultural products for school feeding. In the **Kyrgyz Republic**, FAO's "Productive Social Contract/Cash Plus" project, implemented together with the Alliance of Civil Society for Nutrition and Food Security, has promoted the cultivation of nutritious crops and nutrition education among low-income residents of the Jalal-Abad region. In the **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, the REACH initiative is a government-led inter-agency process that engages stakeholders across different sectors, including international NGOs, to tackle the causes of child undernutrition and food insecurity.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. The Strategy underlines the Organization's commitment to continued engagement with civil society in its programmatic, operational, policy and advocacy work. Despite the limited number of formalized partnerships, there has been an increasing trend towards greater collaboration with a variety of civil-society entities across FAO's

⁵⁶ ADIJE provides services for the implementation of risk-management practices in the agricultural business.

thematic areas of work, particularly at the technical and decentralized level. FAO needs to capitalize on these arrangements and effectively guide its units towards strategic, long-term engagements with a view to achieving the SDGs.

120. During the evaluation period (2013-2019), a total of 28 CSOs partnerships were formally established, of which 21 are still active, five are inactive and two are being considered for renewal. The evaluation notes that only 9 of the 129 partnerships listed as having formal status⁵⁷ have signed a written partnership agreement with FAO since 2013. This aside, FAO's technical divisions and decentralized offices have been pursuing engagement with civil-society entities and there are positive examples of engagement with CSOs, in broad alignment with the Strategy's main principles. FAO should draw valuable lessons from these areas of work to produce more transformative and sustainable development solutions.

Conclusion 2. Despite the progress made since 2013 and the opportunities arising from the growing contribution of CSOs to achieving the SDGs, most of FAO's partnerships with CSOs have not been strategically planned, with minimal integration into FAO programmes and workplans. To fully capitalize on the potential for joint global action for Agenda 2030, FAO needs to make a concerted effort to forge demand-based partnerships based on equality and mutual trust, effectively identifying and engaging appropriate CSOs as equal and long-term development partners, rather than the prevailing practice of contracting their services for short-term assignments and interventions.

121. While FAO partnerships with CSOs have, to some extent, realized mutual benefits, these have generally been based on arrangements where CSOs were either service providers or beneficiaries of capacity-development or knowledge transfer. The evaluation found good examples of fruitful cooperation, yet most of FAO's partnerships with civil society have been opportunistic and/or one-time events in the context of dedicated initiatives or programmes designed to address specific development issues or problems. Except for partnerships forged around global policy discourse and initiatives that required the active engagement of civil society (such as the introduction of VGGTs), the majority of partnership contributions have not been very visible or sustainable beyond the duration of the agreement. FAO should consider taking a more strategic approach to mapping, identifying and planning partnerships with CSOs, fostering inclusive and mutually beneficial partnerships to promote innovative, sustainable food and agricultural practices, and to develop the capacity of CSOs and other key stakeholders.

Conclusion 3. The overall method of operation for partnership arrangements appears to be limited to a few models for and instruments of collaboration that do not foster demand-based engagement with CSOs as development partners. FAO needs to consider improving

⁵⁷ As of February 2020, 9 international NGOs had been granted consultative status, 43 held specialized consultative status and, in recognition of their cooperation, particularly at the technical level, 76 had been granted liaison status.

its procedures for entering into partnerships by expanding its range of agreements and partnership instruments to facilitate collaborative and mutually beneficial cooperation.

122. The Strategy is intended to be a framework for collaboration and partnership with civil society. When selecting CSOs to work with, it says the Organization must consider the level of collaboration with other institutions and actors in the country, their technical expertise and their outreach capacity in rural areas.⁵⁸ Paradoxically, the collaborative tools used to manage such partnerships have notably been limited to letters of agreement, which place external partners in a broad category of 'service providers'. Moreover, there have been issues in relation to co-publishing and copyright, as well as an overall sense of hierarchy between FAO and its partners, for instance, where deliverables are to FAO and not to both parties.
123. The original intention was that FAO staff be offered guidance on establishing effective partnerships with CSOs. However, it is generally agreed that the main factors limiting the success of CSO partnership arrangements within FAO include a limited understanding of the scope of FAO's policies and instruments on such collaborations, coupled with limited knowledge of the appropriate areas and levels of interaction with CSOs, based on varying rationale and methods of operation. Time-consuming and complex processes, inconsistent procedures and unsophisticated (reactive) tactics, combined with risk-averse approaches to partnerships, are mechanisms that protect FAO from risk, but give staff and the Organization little flexibility in dealing with external partners, limiting fruitful partnership opportunities with civil society.

Conclusion 4. Partnership development efforts are not underpinned by an effective guidance and knowledge-management system that could serve as an organizational hub for best practices and well-documented approaches to partnership development and collaboration.

124. While the Strategy stipulated the development of a results-oriented monitoring and evaluation system, the current reporting system, including the internal SharePoint on formalized partnerships, is inadequate for measuring the performance and effectiveness of partnership initiatives. Apart from rather general guidance on integrating partnerships into CPFs and a limited content offering in terms of online training courses, Country Offices do not have access to guidance materials or a well-constructed knowledge base for capitalizing on best practices and results of partnership initiatives. FAO needs to establish a system for the robust monitoring and assessment of partnership efforts to assist the Organization in improving the quality of its partnerships and making changes to Strategy implementation based on the information generated. This system would also respond to the recent call by FAO's Governing Bodies for an assessment of progress against objectives as well as a focus on the impact on the ground, the benefits achieved, the challenges faced, an exchange of experiences and lessons learned, constraints within partnerships and Strategy implementation.

⁵⁸ FAO (2013a)

4.2 Recommendations

Rating criteria	Potential impact			Urgency (years)		
	High	Medium	Low	<0.5	0.5-1	1-2
1. Ensure mapping and strategic planning of potential partnerships						
2. Engage in multi-stakeholder initiatives, moving beyond bilateral partnerships						
3. Review and further develop partnership arrangements and processes						
4. Improve monitoring and knowledge management system						

Recommendation 1. The Strategy should continue to serve as a framework for FAO's engagement with civil society in the broad areas of food security and agricultural sector development, facilitating shared-value collaboration and demand-based partnerships based on equality, trust, inclusion and mutual benefits.

(i) In each technical area of work, PSU should guide the FAO technical divisions in undertaking an analysis of the opportunities and potential mutual benefits of bringing CSOs into their main work streams, focusing on partnerships that would mobilize an appropriate mix of knowledge, resources and assets to achieve organizational objectives and the 2030 Agenda.

(ii) Each programme country should undertake a mapping of relevant non-state actors and an analysis of where and how demand-based engagement with them could contribute to the objectives of the new UN Cooperation Framework and CPFs. As stipulated in the Strategy, PSU should enhance its efforts to assist the decentralized offices in conducting these mapping exercises.

125. The 2030 Agenda, with its commitment to leave no one behind, calls for robust partnership development efforts. To respond to the new development paradigm, in which civil society is no longer only a development tool, but a development agent, FAO will need to expand its engagement with non-state actors, including CSOs, and focus on fostering partnerships centred on inclusion and equality, which target common solutions and mutual benefits and move beyond information-sharing and consultations to embrace effective involvement, mutual empowerment and a collaborative drive to eradicate hunger and food insecurity. PSU should provide guidance to both technical divisions and Country Offices in mapping and identifying potential opportunities for and the effective realization of partnerships. It should also provide advisory support on developing and maintaining regular dialogue and broadening consultations with civil-society partners, as well as in designing and implementing collaborative partnerships and initiatives.

Recommendation 2. In the context of the 2030 Agenda, FAO should consider expanding its engagement in effective multi-stakeholder partnership networks and mechanisms, moving beyond bilateral partnership agreements.

(i) FAO should become more responsive to growing partnership opportunities, particularly when it comes to implementing the 2030 Agenda and promoting the establishment of multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at the inclusive and effective engagement of civil society and other actors to achieve the SDGs.

(ii) FAO Country Offices should assess complementarities and synergies with other development actors' work in priority areas of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Drawing on FAO's comparative advantages, Country Offices may choose to lead or participate in forming multi-stakeholder partnerships between CSOs, the UN agencies and other development actors in UNSDCF priority areas.

126. The organization should take necessary steps to **reinforce synergies at all levels**, making FAO open to collaboration with all relevant actors, while pursuing **fit-for-purpose** collaborations and shared-value **partnerships**. FAO may consider the following preconditions when determining levels of demand-based engagement with partners in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity: (a) that the area concerned does not fall within the purview of FAO headquarters (Country Office competence); (b) the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Country Offices (necessity); (c) the action can, therefore, by reason of its scale or effects, be implemented more successfully by FAO headquarters (added value).

Recommendation 3. FAO should review and develop a coherent approach to developing partnership arrangements, streamline its processes and revisit its instruments for engaging with CSOs to ensure that safeguards are commensurate with the level and scope of the engagement.

(i) In this regard, FAO could seize opportunities for innovation and for building on and scaling up best practices and existing models that may inform the creation of a one-stop-official portal through which it can interact with (prospective) partners.

(ii) The newly established PSDU should be adequately organized and equipped to manage potential demand and exercise its role in the most objective and effective way possible.⁵⁹

(iii) FAO could explore the circumstances under which a letter of agreement, and the use of the letter-of-agreement accountability framework alone, is deemed sufficient to achieve the FAO's objectives without necessitating additional or different partnership arrangements, such as those under the OPIM.

⁵⁹ It is composed of two staff (one P3 and one P2) and two non-staff (one COF.LOC and one PSA). For the period 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2020, the same team has received a total of 641 screening requests. The non-staff budget endowed per 2020 is USD 40,000, allocated for due diligence related activities. Since March 2020, PSDU reports to DDG-Bechdol. However, the evaluation notes that despite the change in reporting line, the PSDU posts and the non-staff budget continue to be based in Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division (PSU) (Formerly Partnerships Division (PSP))

127. The Strategy states that it is crucial to involve networks and organizations with the broadest possible representation. FAO must use its existing tools and technical expertise to bring about better quality, increased accountability and transparency. A **one-stop-shop portal** could serve as a tool for integrity, openness, transparency and accountability. It would facilitate inclusive, transparent and streamlined engagement and help to improve efficiency, while ensuring that rules and regulations were respected. The portal could also include **due diligence and related approval procedures** tailored to the level of risk presented by the partnerships in question. In this regard, FAO could consider delegating authority for initial screening and risk assessment to (sub)regional and Country Offices, provided that the due diligence review does not reveal any risks to the Organization. The *ex-ante* assessment and due diligence process should be reinforced by a retrospective analysis based on performance benchmarks, with indicators connected to the fulfilment of SDG contributions, civil society partners' fulfilment of their commitments and the value generated by such partnerships. FAO could also consider more flexible approaches that offer additional means of engagement with CSOs, perhaps on an ad hoc basis (for example, in relation to knowledge or skills transfer). This could entail a less formalized approach if the relationship were not structured as a "partnership", but as "knowledge exchange," dialogue or interaction.
128. The following provisions of the FAO Administrative Manual could be considered in deciding on the proposed partnership arrangements, particularly when the service provider can be referred to as an **implementing partner**.
129. *Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM)*. The description of the purpose of OPIM overlaps with the Organization's definition of 'partnership'.⁶⁰ It may be used when there is a definitive advantage for FAO in terms of achieving and supporting the sustainability of results based on shared and jointly defined objectives within individual projects. It is a structured approach that culminates in an OPA, a legally binding instrument that outlines both FAO and the operational partner's roles and responsibilities, as well as other conditions for collaboration. It incorporates embedded due diligence screening of the recommended non-state operational partners and their subcontractors, ensuring that FAO's neutrality and impartiality is not compromised.
130. *Letter of agreement*. Over the years, FAO has disbursed large amounts to CSOs through letters of agreement. While useful, this tool comes with its own risk to transparency, accountability and, ultimately, the Organization's efficiency in conducting its core work. First, it relegates civil society to the role of service provider and, if used extensively, adds to the risk of perpetuating a civil-society 'dependency' on donor resources. Its limited 18-month duration often coincides with limited scope and impact. The evaluation notes that when the selection of a service provider under a letter of agreement is precluded by the upstream process, such as the signing of a partnership agreement, discontinuity or the risk of moral hazard may ensue. The authorized official that signs the letter of agreement is required to validate a previous decision, while accepting full accountability under MS 507 rules for the selection and its approval, among other things. FAO should explore when and under what circumstances a letter of agreement, and the use of the letter-of-agreement accountability

⁶⁰ FAO (2012a; 2013a)

framework, alone, is deemed sufficient to achieve FAO's objectives without necessitating additional or different partnership arrangements, such as the OPIM. The evaluation notes the utility of this exercise, especially as, for example, the avoidance of conflicts of interest and adherence to the procurement code of ethics may not apply equally and in the same manner to the signing of letters of agreement and partnership agreements.

Recommendation 4. FAO should improve its assessment of the value and impact of ongoing and past partnerships and draw on identified best practices and lessons learned to develop updated guidance for initiating effective collaboration approaches and partnership initiatives, making any necessary updates to Strategy implementation.

(i) In line with the originally proposed arrangements for Strategy implementation, PSU should significantly strengthen its partnership monitoring system, ensure timely updates of the partnerships database and develop tools to measure partnerships' effectiveness.

(ii) In addition to strengthening its monitoring system, PSU should assess the impact and benefits of partnerships and the challenges faced for accountability and learning purposes. The resulting information should be included in guidance materials and knowledge products, as well as in regular reporting to the FAO Programme Committee and other reporting mechanisms, such as the Programme Implementation Report, Mid-Term Reviews and Resources Partnership Impact reports.

131. FAO should expand its monitoring efforts beyond simple references to activities and outputs and focus on generating evidence to help assess the development outcomes and effects of partnership initiatives. This would provide FAO management with valuable information for determining the most effective ways to partner with CSOs. FAO should ensure that, as part of its organizational learning and accountability process, it measures performance, impact and outcomes of engagement with CSOs; adapts such engagement as needed to ensure it meets its intended purpose and objectives; and produce relevant guidance materials and knowledge products to guide FAO units in developing and implementing partnership initiatives.
132. An effective system should be put in place to develop an evidence-based database of successful collaborative initiatives and best practices to assist FAO in improving the quality of its partnerships. This information could be used to make necessary updates and improvements to Strategy implementation. Current reporting mechanisms, including the biennial report to the Programme Committee on partnerships and progress reports for each partnership, should be strengthened by incorporating a detailed assessment of progress against objectives, the impact on the ground, the benefits achieved, challenges faced, experience exchanged, lessons learned, and any constraints on the partnership and/or implementation of agreed strategies.

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Appendix 1. People interviewed

No.	Name	Position	Organization
1	Abdou Aziz Sow	Project Coordinator	Projet Agriculture Irriguée et Développement Economique des Territoires Ruraux (Podor-Sénégal)
2	Abdou Badiane	Nutrition Consultant	FAO
3	Abdoul Karim Dosso	Programme Director	Energy For Impact
4	Abdoulaye Niokane	GAFSP National Project Coordinator	FAO
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Annexes

Annex 1. Terms of reference

Annex 2. Evaluation synthesis study

Annexes are available to download at: <http://www.fao.org/evaluation/en/>