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## PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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**Evaluation of FAO's contribution to the eradication of hunger, food  
insecurity and malnutrition (SO1)**

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**Evaluation of FAO Strategic Objective 1: Contribute  
to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and  
malnutrition**

**SUMMARY REPORT TO THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE**

**OFFICE OF EVALUATION**

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

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of the evaluation

1. This report outlines the main findings and conclusions from an evaluation of Strategic Objective 1 (SO1) – Contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, in application of the Indicative Rolling Work Plan of Strategic and Programme Evaluation 2015-17 endorsed at the 116th session of the FAO Programme Committee.

## 1.2. Scope and objectives

2. The evaluation scope encompasses FAO efforts to contribute to SO1 at the global, regional, and national levels, whether these efforts were supported by the Strategic Programme 1 (SP1) team or not. The period covered by the evaluation is 2014-2017, i.e. the period since the adoption of the new strategic framework, but programmes relevant to SO1 that started before 2014 were also considered.<sup>1</sup> The evaluation also reviewed the Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation facility (FIRST). Moreover, the Voice of the Hungry project was also evaluated in a coordinated manner with the SO1 evaluation, although the result of this work is described in a separate project evaluation report.
3. The evaluation objectives emphasised accountability towards FAO Members and partners. The evaluation assessed progress towards SO1 and examined its value added to FAO's efforts to promote Food and Nutrition Security.<sup>2</sup> Given the short history of FAO Strategic Objectives, the evaluation was not intended to assess impacts.<sup>3</sup>
4. The evaluation was focused on four main evaluation questions<sup>4</sup>:
  - i. **Strength of the result framework and delivery mechanisms:** clarity of FAO's SP1, its relevance to countries' needs, and the degree to which it is likely to be effective.
  - ii. **Progress achieved towards SO1:** how has SO1 added value to FAO's effort to improve Food and Nutrition Security and, what are results evident in this regard?
  - iii. **Progress achieved under cross-cutting themes:** has the new strategic orientation helped attained results towards cross-cutting issues, in particular gender and nutrition?
  - iv. **Strategic Positioning and Partnerships:** have FAO's positioning, comparative advantage and effectiveness of partnerships been strengthened under SO1 and SP1?

## 1.3. Methodology

5. The evaluation was conducted by the FAO Office of Evaluation with the support of a team composed of external consultants with geographic and thematic expertise. The evaluation benefitted from insights and comments from the SP1 team throughout the evaluation process.
6. The evaluation relied on multiple sources for data collection and mixed-methods: document review and administrative data analysis; meta-analysis of evidence from previous evaluations<sup>5</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> Such as the Right to Food, the Voluntary Guidelines on tenure of land, fisheries and forestry, the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger, the Special Programme for Food Security, and National Programmes for Food Security.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase "food and nutrition security" is used in this report preferably to the more common "food security and nutrition", as a way to emphasize the need for greater integration of nutrition into food security policies and programmes. Both combinations are in use in FAO English documentation. FAO's publications in Spanish and French tend to favour "*seguridad alimentaria y nutricional*" and "*sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle*", respectively, i.e. the equivalent of "food and nutrition security". For an in-depth review of this issue, see the document CFS 2012/39/4 - Coming to Terms with Terminology.

<sup>3</sup> Strategic Objective 1 came into force in 2014, while the creation of the SP Management Teams dates only from September 2015. FIRST had only been implemented for two years at evaluation time.

<sup>4</sup> Further detail on evaluation questions and sub-questions is provided in the full evaluation report.

<sup>5</sup> Country Programme Evaluations in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Guatemala, Honduras, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Niger, Eastern Caribbean States & Barbados, Pakistan, Tanzania; and Programme Evaluation in West Bank & Gaza.

one survey<sup>6</sup>; and interviews of almost 500 persons at global, regional and country levels. The evaluation team also visited the Regional Offices for Africa, for Asia and the Pacific, and for Latin America and the Caribbean as well as the Sub-Regional Office for Mesoamerica, where most of the SO1-related programmes were concentrated.

7. Eight country case studies<sup>7</sup> were conducted during the evaluation process. The case countries were selected based on the significance of their SO1-related portfolio. Data collection in the sampled countries was complemented with a synthesis of past evaluation findings in other countries and regions, which amongst other things, shed some light on SO1-related work in Europe and Central Asia, and Middle East and North Africa.

#### **1.4. Limitations**

8. Hunger eradication has historically been at the core of the FAO's mandate. Due to the broad evaluation scope, it was impossible for the Evaluation Team to identify and absorb the entire body of literature and documentation available on SO1-related topics throughout the assigned evaluation period. The evaluation does not pretend to be exhaustive in its description of achieved results.
9. Given that many SO1-related activities started before 2014, it was not always possible to attribute achievements in policy work to SO1.
10. The evaluation of the Nutrition Strategy was postponed to allow more profound assessment of activities related to nutrition, which go well beyond SO1. It will be reported in the autumn 2018 session of the Programme Committee.

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<sup>6</sup> To collect data on FAO's work on gender equality under SO1.

<sup>7</sup> Brazil, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria.

## 2 Description of FAO's Strategic Objective 1

### 2.1. The Reviewed Strategic Framework

11. FAO has long been committed to the notion that increasing food production was a sufficient condition for food security, and achievable primarily by technical means, for example in the Special Programme for Food Security initiated in 1995. However, it became increasingly clear that beyond technical issues and solutions, the national and international policy environments were important determinants of investment and productivity in agriculture.
12. The food price crisis in 2007–2008 and the subsequent period of high food prices volatility sparked a global rethink of Food and Nutrition Security and sustainable agriculture, and led to the rise of Food and Nutrition Security on the agendas of political leaders in many countries. The Second International Conference on Nutrition held in Rome in November 2014 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development called for bold, transformational change to achieve a world that is more inclusive, fair, sustainable and resilient.
13. Upon taking office in January 2012, the FAO Director-General launched a revision of the Organization's Strategic Framework, which led to the reviewed Strategic Framework 2010-19, endorsed by the FAO Conference in June 2013. The reviewed Framework built a hierarchy of goals and objectives, starting with a vision for the Organization of "a world free from hunger and malnutrition, where food security and agriculture contribute to improving the living standards of all, especially the poorest, in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner". The Strategic Framework defines a new way of working for FAO, stressing the importance of greater focus, collaboration across units to achieve corporate goals, and better response to country needs.
14. Its first Strategic Objective (SO1) was devoted to improving the enabling policy, regulatory and programmatic environment for Food and Nutrition Security, i.e. the design and implementation of policies, laws, regulations, programmes and investment plans contributing to improved Food and Nutrition Security, excluding therefore from SO1 those FAO's activities and programmes implemented directly with communities and food producers, meant to be captured by other Strategic Objectives.
15. In September 2015, programmes and associated resources were set up, led by the respective Strategic Programme Teams to bring coordination, collaboration and focus to the different programmes, policy advice and data collection mechanisms developed by FAO, and facilitates FAO country offices access to technical support from headquarters and regional offices.

### 2.2. The SO1 Programme

#### 2.2.1. The SO1 Programme and Team

16. The SO1 *programme* ("Strategic Programme 1" or "SP1") is articulated along four outcome areas, namely policy-setting (outcome 1), inclusive governance (outcome 2), evidence-based decision-making (outcome 3) and implementation (outcome 4).
17. The SP1 team and afferent planning, budgeting and reporting mechanisms contribute to SO1 by bringing coordination, collaboration and focus to the different programmes, policy advice and data collection mechanisms developed by FAO on Food and Nutrition Security, and facilitate FAO country offices access to technical support from headquarters and regional offices. It is important to stress that the role of the SP teams is *not* to manage these other units nor to

implement programmes, and that therefore the SP1 team is only responsible and accountable for a fraction of the SO1-related activities reviewed in this report.

### 2.2.2 Regional Initiatives and Country Programming Frameworks

18. Currently, it is in the lead for three regional initiatives in three regions: the Africa's 2025 Zero Hunger Challenge, the Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean Initiative and the Asia and the Pacific's Zero Hunger Challenge. As of date, FAO does not implement hunger-oriented Regional Initiatives in the Europe and Central Asia region nor in the Near East and North Africa region, and there appears to be limited SO1-related activities in these regions.<sup>8</sup>
19. At the national level, a set of "focus countries" has been identified. A first set was defined by the respective Regional Representatives for each Regional Initiative in June 2015. Another set was selected by the SP teams based on the presence of documented need, political will to address it, and a sizeable SO-related portfolio in country. Countries selected as "focus countries" by more than one Strategic Objective Regional Initiatives were defined as "countries under closer and active observation and support". For each of them one Strategic Programme was designated to facilitate, coordinate and monitor support to Regional Initiatives and country offices. SP1 is the designated "facilitator" for Bangladesh and Laos.
20. At the country level, the primary delivery channel is the Country Programming Framework, which is an agreement between the Government and FAO defining where FAO should focus its activities over a period of two to four years.

### 2.2.3 Thematic areas and resources

21. SO1 is the third Strategic Objective terms of financial size, comprising an estimated 14 percent of all total budgetary and extra-budgetary resources linked to the strategic objectives during the evaluated period. Within SO1, a majority of resources have been spent on outcome 1 (56 percent); followed by outcome 3 (30 percent) and outcome 2 (14 percent).<sup>9</sup> For the 2016-17 biennium, the estimated allocated budget to SP1 was USD 294 million with commitments from extra-budgetary resources amounting to USD 212 million.
22. The agreements signed by the SP1 team with various FAO divisions in 2016-17 amounted to USD 31.5 million, while those with regional and sub-regional offices equalled USD 18.7 million. An analysis of letters of agreements demonstrates that the SP1 team closely collaborated, amongst other divisions, with the Nutrition and Food Systems Division, the Agricultural Development Economics Division, the Investment Centre and the Statistics Division. In terms of agreements signed with FAO regional offices, the largest proportion was allocated for work with the Regional Office for Africa, followed by the Regional Offices for Asia and the Pacific and for Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>10</sup>
23. An analysis of FAO's Field Programme Management Information System shows that there are 352 projects tagged to SO1 outcomes during the period 2014-2016 with a total budget of USD 773 million. Many of these projects contribute to more than one Strategic Objective; the estimate budget share dedicated exclusively to SO1 is USD 582 million.
24. Country-level projects represent the largest share of the programme budget (56 percent). Regionally, the majority of the SO1 programme funds have been spent in Africa (34 percent),

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<sup>8</sup> There are a few interesting examples in the Near East where FAO has worked on SO1 issues, including FAO's support to the United Arab Emirates to develop a food diversification strategy, and FAO Oman working with the Ministries of Agriculture and of Education to establish a home-grown school feeding programme. Both Oman and UAE are higher income countries and exemplify that FAO can mainstream SO1 in these contexts. Europe and Central Asia is the region with the lowest proportion of countries reporting SO1-related activities. The only country with a significant SP1 presence (through FIRST) in the region appears to be Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>9</sup> Author's calculation based on PIR 2014-15 (Web Annex 5) & Programme of Work and Budget 2016-17.

<sup>10</sup> Author's calculation based on corporate database.

followed by Asia and Latin America (18 percent), while various global projects accounted for 26 percent of all the resources.

25. Projects funded by bilateral donors (FAO-Government Co-operation Programmes) are the largest in terms of value at 68 percent of the total budget, followed by those funded by the recipient countries (Unilateral Trust Funds projects) at 17 percent. Nine countries in Africa, six countries in Asia and 16 countries in Latin America signed and funded such Unilateral Trust Fund agreements with FAO to conduct projects related to Food and Nutrition Security policies in their own country.

#### *2.2.4 Global platforms, products and services*

##### Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and Voluntary Guidelines

26. SO1 includes support to a number of global platforms and initiatives of a distinct normative nature, notably the Committee on World Food Security and the promotion and application at country level of various guidelines adopted by the FAO Council and/or the Committee, such as the Voluntary Guidelines on Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry in the context of National Food Security, the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems, and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication.

##### Voices of the Hungry

27. The Voices of the Hungry project was launched in November 2013.<sup>11</sup> Building on prior efforts in the US and Latin America, the project developed a global food insecurity experience measurement tool called the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, which offers an experience-based measurement of the severity of food insecurity that relies on people's direct responses to questions regarding their access to adequate food. The project was evaluated in a coordinated manner with the SO1 evaluation but this work reported separately, in a dedicated project evaluation report.

##### Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST)

28. The EU-funded Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) facility aims to strengthen the enabling environment for Food and Nutrition Security and sustainable agriculture in selected priority countries and when appropriate regional bodies. The FIRST facility has hired a network of policy officers and placed them in country, typically within the Ministry of Agriculture highest echelon, in now 33 countries.

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<sup>11</sup> Project title: PGM/MUL/2013. Funded by the United Kingdom, the Kingdom of Belgium and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and coordinated by the FAO Statistics Division.



### 3. Assessment of FAO's Contribution: Summary of Findings

29. In this chapter, the findings emerged from the assessment of FAO's contribution to SO1 are provided. The data and analysis supporting each finding is found in the full report and its supporting documents.<sup>12</sup>

#### 3.1. Strength of the result framework and delivery mechanisms

##### 3.1.1. Relevance of the new strategy to countries' needs

*Finding 1: The rationale behind SO1 is that hunger is a governance issue as much as a technical challenge, and that improving Food and Nutrition Security requires a coordinated and comprehensive effort, better enabling policies and institutional environment for agriculture, and greater protection of the rights of the most vulnerable. This rationale was found sound and relevant.*

##### 3.1.2. Added value of the new strategy and result framework as designed

*Finding 2: SO1 is integral to the FAO mandate, and as such less amenable to being approached as a stand-alone programme than other Strategic Objectives. Nevertheless, SO1 is well delimited around improving the design and implementation of policies, strategies, laws, programmes and investment plans aiming to improved Food and Nutrition Security. The SO emphasizes the importance of policy and pushes FAO beyond its traditional technical space. Nutrition concerns also feature more prominently in the new framework than in the past.*

##### 3.1.3. Relevance of knowledge and normative products

*Finding 3: The Committee on World Food Security represents at the global level the type of multi-stakeholder coordination forum to which Outcome 2 is dedicated. It is recognized as the most inclusive international coordination mechanism for Food and Nutrition Security.*

*Finding 4: A large number of states have adopted constitutional or legal amendments to protect the Right to Food, and FAO has embedded it in its new Strategic Framework. The Right to Food Guidelines remain an important and pertinent tool, promoted by project-funded staff and non-staff human resources in the SP1 team and the Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division respectively.*

*Finding 5: On a crucial subject, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry provide countries with options and best practices in tenure-related policies, laws, strategies and practices in a flexible-enough format to be applicable in a wide range of countries. Other normative products were also found relevant.*

##### 3.1.4. Cross-cutting themes in programme design

*Finding 6: While the SP1 result framework does not explicitly mention gender equality, the gender team in the Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division has worked with the SP1 team to systematically identify entry points for gender-related work within SO1.*

*Finding 7: FAO has reinforced its commitment to nutrition. A new Strategy and Vision for FAO's Work in Nutrition has been endorsed. The Second International Conference on Nutrition)*

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<sup>12</sup> Available at the FAO website on evaluation (<http://www.fao.org/evaluation>) or upon request to the FAO Office of Evaluation.

organized by FAO and WHO in 2014 and the launch of the UN Decade on Nutrition (2016-2025) were important testimony to this renewed commitment.

### 3.2.1. The SP1 Team

*Finding 8: Links between the SP1 team and technical divisions at headquarters were found generally strong. An important achievement in this respect was the development of a series of Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Policy Guidance Notes, which the SP1 team developed with a dozen technical units. In contrast, insufficient connections were maintained with country offices to provide conceptual leadership and foster greater coherence in policy assistance for Food and Nutrition Security across the Organization, with the exception of countries with a FIRST policy officer.*

*Finding 9: Most of the SP1 team is funded from secondments and projects, which has led to a rapid staff turnover and loss of key expertise and, at times, momentum. The SP1 team was also left without a team leader for over a year after its forming, initially depriving SP1 of a high-level corporate champion of its approach.*

### 3.2.2. Planning, management and reporting arrangements

*Finding 10: "Matrix management" and related "Service Level Agreements" prepared between Strategic Programme and technical divisions and regional offices to plan for technical support to the SPs appear to generate a level of effort not commensurate with the potential benefit.*

### 3.2.3. Policy Support at Headquarters

*Finding 11: SP1 is considered the nucleus of Food and Nutrition Security policy work in the Organization. It has worked well with other headquarter units involved in policy, such as Investment Centre and the Economic and Social Development Department's Governance Unit and has identified potential areas of collaboration with SP3 and SP4.*

### 3.2.4. The Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation

*Finding 12: The effectiveness of the Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) – a policy assistance facility funded by the EU and administered by the SP1 team, which assigns Policy Officers to selected priority countries and regional organizations – has often developed strong partnerships at country level.*

### 3.2.5. SO1 in regional and country offices

*Finding 13: Appropriately, the regional initiatives related to the 'Zero Hunger Challenge' take different shapes in different regions.*

### 3.2.6. Resource mobilization

*Finding 14: The FAO capabilities in policy are almost entirely funded out of extra-budgetary projects, resulting in fragmentation and frequent interruptions. With a few exceptions, FAO has found it easier to raise funds for global and regional policy initiatives than to mobilize resources for policy assistance at country level.*

### 3.2.7. Capacity for Cross-Cutting Themes: Gender and Nutrition

*Finding 15: Gender and nutrition were reflected in the result framework and in the work programme of SP1. There is a tight link between SP1 and the Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division on gender, and the SP1 team acts as the main channel between the Nutrition and Food Systems Division and country offices, with half of the FIRST country programmes having a strong nutrition focus.*

### 3.2. Progress achieved towards SO1

30. SO1 outcomes constantly inform and feed into one another. Although it is somewhat artificial to report results under specific outcomes, findings below are allocated under the most relevant outcome for them.

#### **Outcome 1: Countries make explicit political commitment to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by 2030**

*Finding 16: Three Regional Initiatives leveraged the Zero Hunger Challenge in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific, with different areas of emphasis. Results were uneven across the regions, and very much depended on the degree of engagement with regional integration bodies.*

*Finding 17: The CFS products were found highly relevant, but not always easy to promote in country. FAO's relationships with both government and civil society was found an important determinant for the quality of its support to the implementation of the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry. The most promising results so far were achieved in countries where land reform was already part of the political priorities, and FAO helped raise awareness about the guidelines and build capacity to implement them.*

*Finding 18: FAO has promoted the integration of the Right to Food into national legislation, policies and programmes in a number of countries. However, the Right to Food is not always actionable. The poor and landless may experience considerable difficulties in accessing judicial redress mechanisms, and legal recognition is not always followed by policies and programmes explicitly designed, implemented and monitored to address territorial and social inequalities.*

*Finding 19: By providing policy support, FAO contributed to the design and approval of several policies and legal frameworks on Food and Nutrition Security. However, the current problem often resides not in the absence of policies, but in the challenges related to their implementation. Consequently, the demand from member countries is shifting to other steps in the policy cycle, namely coordination (covered by outcome 2), monitoring and evaluation (outcome 3) and implementation (outcome 4).*

#### **Outcome 2: Countries implement inclusive governance and coordination mechanisms for eradicating hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition by 2030**

*Finding 20: At global level, FAO supports inclusive multi-stakeholder platforms (e.g. the Committee on World Food Security) and acts as an 'honest broker' within a number of technical sectors relevant to Food and Nutrition Security. At national level, FAO actively supports coordination forums devoted to food security and/or agriculture in all country case studies.*

*Finding 21: There is a proliferation of coordination spaces, making it difficult for FAO country offices to follow them all. In particular, FAO was insufficiently present in nutrition-specific coordination forums to promote Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture.*

*Finding 22: With the exception of the Committee on World Food Security, these coordination platforms do not typically engage with farmer organizations and the private sector.*

**Outcome 3: Countries make decisions based on evidence for the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition by 2030**

*Finding 23: FAO maintains SDG indicators such as the Prevalence of Undernourishment and the Food Insecurity Experience Scale and publishes credible global outlooks and regional panoramas through the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) reports. FAO also support national statistical offices in a number of countries. However, in all countries there is a need to 'make sense' of the data collected in order to assess policy and implementation gaps. Evidence-based decision making goes beyond data management. It is about interpretation, synthesis of data streams and context-specific assessments, leading to learning and motivation. In this respect, the capacity to assess policy impact emerged as a key function within the policy cycle, one for which FAO has limited capabilities.*

**Outcome 4: Countries implement effective policies, strategies and investment programmes to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition by 2030**

*Finding 24: Supporting policy implementation is sorely needed and some good practices are already in place, but it requires far more resources than policy setting and calls for different skills. The FIRST programme could bring a useful complement in this regard, as many FIRST Policy Officers are already focusing on implementation support.*

*Finding 25: FAO has achieved significant success in its collaboration with local governments on such topics as school feeding and nutrition education.*

### **3.3. Progress achieved under cross-cutting themes**

#### **3.4.1. Gender**

*Finding 26: The SP1 team and the Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division are making a substantial collaborative effort to implement the FAO Policy on Gender Equality. Support to the countries on the accession to and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women appears particularly worthwhile, and some progress was reported on the availability sex-disaggregated data through the development of the Food Insecurity Experience Scale and Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women indicators.*

#### **3.4.1. Nutrition**

*Finding 27: SO1 has mainstreamed nutrition to a significant extent as compared with other SOs. FAO tools on Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture are widely used and referenced. Interestingly, the Nutrition Division invested in building the capacity of FAO staff themselves to include nutrition within FAO's work, an approach which the SP1 team could usefully emulate.*

*Finding 28: At country level, there is still a strong disconnect between agriculture and health policies, as well as between health and agriculture actors, coordination spaces, and even target populations. FAO needs expand its focus beyond pregnant women and young children and meet needs of women as laborers, farmers and decision-makers rather than as child bearers.*

### 3.4. Strategic Positioning and Partnerships

#### 3.5.1. Comparative Advantage

*Finding 29: FAO's overall comparative advantage includes convening power, high visibility, data custodianship and statistical strength, technical capacity including in a number of areas – agriculture, food systems, food safety – which are gaining in importance in the global debate on nutrition, opportunities for advocacy, a leadership position in the area of its mandate and a role in setting international norms and standards. These comparative advantages are typically stronger at the global level than at the national level, where FAO's capacity is often limited and the space for policy support varies with the governance systems of countries.*

*Finding 30: FAO does policy work and advocacy in a quiet way, especially at country level. Its normative work and policy advice tends to be measured and discreet, and grounded in data rather than ideology, appropriately so for a technical agency of the United Nations. As a result, the Organization's policy role is more visible globally than at country level.*

#### 3.5.2. Strategic Use of the New Strategic Framework

*Finding 31: The evaluation identified insufficient systematization, translation and dissemination of good practices as a bottleneck. The innovative aspects of SO1 are not well known in country offices and could have been disseminated more broadly within the Organization.*

#### 3.5.3. Partnerships

*Finding 32: FAO has leveraged its partnership with Ministries of Agriculture to support policy development, and is beginning to establish relationships with Ministries of Health, Education and Women's Affairs in the area of nutrition. FAO's engagement with Ministries of Finance and Ministries of Foreign Affairs is still insufficient in all visited countries.*

*Finding 33: Regional collaboration has been an entry point of choice for FAO's policy support under SO1, through the development of regional policies, legal frameworks and strategies. The Parliamentary Fronts Against Hunger have played an important role to encourage the passing of laws related to Food and Nutrition Security. Local governments and municipalities are also key partners in countries with decentralized systems of governance.*

*Finding 34: Collaboration between FAO, IFAD and WFP on Food-and-Nutrition-Security policy, strategies and programming has increased in some regions. There exist also real incentives for competition. School feeding is both an area of overlap and collaboration between FAO and WFP. A stronger engagement in UN Country Team coordination and the UNDAF process could help FAO push for some resolution of these issues.*

*Finding 35: Among resource partners, FAO's most important partnerships are with the EU, and to a lesser extent the World Bank, with the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP) emerging as a strategic partner for FAO in Food and Nutrition Security. In Latin America, Brazil and Mexico funded most of FAO's regional work under SO1.*

*Finding 36: There is room for improvement in liaising with national academic and technical training institutions and with the CGIAR system (notably the International Food Policy Research Institute), for information and analysis on Food-and-Nutrition-Security policy at the country level, as well as with the private sector, civil society organisations and producer organizations to engage them in efforts to achieve Food-and-Nutrition-Security policy goals.*

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

### 4.1. Conclusions

**Conclusion 1:** Strategic Objective 1 was well designed, based on lessons learnt from a variety of contexts, with a realistic theory of change, and implemented through a set of relevant initiatives, e.g. the Zero Hunger Challenge. Premised on the assumption that hunger is as much a governance issue as a technical challenge, SO1 pushes FAO beyond its traditional technical space, tries to integrate right-based advocacy, and stresses the need to work with 'non-traditional partners' such as Ministries of Finance, of Health, and of Education. Nutrition concerns also feature more prominently in the Strategic Framework and Objectives than they did in previous ones.

31. SO1 tries to stimulate, upscale and adapt good practices in Food-and-Nutrition-Security policy support, understood as policy formulation, coordination, evidence for policy, and support to resource allocation and policy implementation. In doing so, it inevitably built upon a series of older lines of work, such as assistance to the adoption of the Right to Food in national legislations, support to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme formulation and financing, support to the Committee on World Food Security, etc. Even the Zero Hunger Challenge predates SO1. The evaluation found that this pre-existing body of policy work had been consciously capitalized upon in the design of SO1, leading to a well-designed and truly strategic SO1.
32. Positioning FAO's support at the 'upstream' policy level, SO1 stresses to a greater extent than before the primacy of political commitment, the connection between policy implementation and investment, the need to ground policy support in solid political economy analysis, while also assisting in the application and use of CFS products (Right to Food, the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, the Principles for Responsible Investment, etc.) and principles at country level through a right-based approach, where and when the environment is conducive.

**Conclusion 2:** The adoption of the most innovative aspects of SO1 has been uneven throughout the Organization, with a high heterogeneity observed in the approaches followed in different countries and regions. Thanks to the FIRST facility, the SP1 team set up a strong and direct link with 33 countries where a FIRST Policy Officer is present. However, beyond FIRST countries the team did not establish and maintain strong-enough linkages with regional and country offices to provide conceptual leadership and foster a better coherence in policy assistance for Food and Nutrition Security across the Organization.

33. Links between the SP1 team and technical divisions were found strong at headquarters, where FAO has made several encouraging efforts to strengthen the coherence of the policy advice provided by various FAO units, such as the recent launch of the policy portal.
34. The FIRST facility helped set up a strong and direct link between the SP1 team and some 33 countries where a FIRST Policy Officer is present, through the development of country profiles describing in some detail the policy framework in countries prioritized by FIRST, and through dedicated staff in the SP1 team following and backstopping the FIRST Policy Officers in real time.
35. However, beyond FIRST countries the SP1 team did not establish and maintain strong-enough linkages to provide conceptual leadership and foster a better coherence in policy assistance for Food and Nutrition Security across the Organization. The innovative aspects of SO1 highlighted

in conclusion 1 could have been disseminated more broadly within the Organization, as they are not well known in country offices. Links could be strengthened between the SP1 team and regional, sub-regional and country offices, where the capacity of FAO to support policy is often quite low, resulting in slow implementation of SO1 and other SOs at a country level.

36. Many FAO staff at country and regional level see the SO framework primarily as a reporting framework, a means to 'tell a better, more consistent story' of FAO's programmes and results. The view is not without merit, given that a well-designed strategic framework does help communicate a sense of common purpose externally, but the new Strategic Framework is also meant to *build* a sense of common purpose internally. FAO's role as a global knowledge organisation is diminished if it is not able to broker knowledge effectively from one culture, one country or one continent to the next.
37. Strong support continues to be provided by the FAO Investment Centre to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme process in Africa. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of coordinating the work of the Investment Centre at country level with that of FAO country offices, with missed opportunities of collaboration and exchange of views at the policy level between visiting or resident Investment Centre officers, the FAO Representatives and the country offices and/or the FIRST Policy Officers, and between FAO and the development banks working with the Investment Centre.<sup>13</sup>

**Conclusion 3: Income levels largely explain the observed differences across regions and countries in terms of demand for SO1. However, the 'nutrition transition' and rise of overweight and obesity as global public health problems are generating more requests from middle and high-income countries on nutrition education or food labelling, and therefore the role of FAO in nutrition is evolving.**

38. Significant progress has been achieved on mainstreaming nutrition in FAO's and singularly in SO1's work. The technical division dealing with nutrition has been strengthened by filling vacant nutrition officer posts. A Strategy and Vision for FAO's Work in Nutrition was released in 2014. The FAO Investment Centre has started reviewing its tools and approaches to mainstream nutrition in programme design and analytical work has taken place on the links between agriculture, food systems and nutrition. A few country offices have started supporting policy processes related to food labelling and overweight, often in collaboration with WHO and/or Pan American Health Organisation in Latin America. Supporting countries in counteracting overweight and obesity through a food system approach is emerging as a critical issue where FAO, traditionally focused on undernutrition, needs to step up its efforts.
39. A few other emerging issues were identified, related to urbanization, decentralization, migration and in some countries the resulting 'feminization of agriculture', that may deserve greater attention in the SP1 theory of change and in work at country level.

**Conclusion 4: There is a proliferation of actors, policy initiatives, approaches, coordination spaces and knowledge products in Food and Nutrition Security, sometimes leading to confusion and competition rather than building a critical mass for sustained progress. In this context, FAO could play a greater role in policy convergence, support to policy implementation, and the synthesis of multiple data streams into narratives that make sense for decision making.**

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<sup>13</sup> Already in 2013, the Evaluation of FAO's Role in Investment recommended to better link investment support through FAO Investment Centre with policy assistance and analytical work at global, regional and country levels. See: PC 113/2: Evaluation of FAO's Role in Investment for Food and Nutrition Security, Agriculture and Rural Development, FAO Office of Evaluation, January 2013.

40. FAO has contributed to the formulation and approval of policies, strategies and legal frameworks in many countries. Countries' demand is shifting to policy implementation, as rightly emphasized in the latest FAO Medium-Term Plan 2018-2021, with the addition of a new outcome dedicated to policy implementation (outcome 4). Supporting policy implementation may help FAO promote greater attention to important Food and Nutrition Security issues in a variety of national contexts. Action speaks louder than words. Experience shows that successful implementation of a programme or policy in a particular country often generates interest among its neighbours. Better implementation of existing policies could help demonstrate their value and generate greater momentum for tackling persistent food insecurity worldwide.
41. The provision of evidence for decision making is an area of strength for FAO. However, as rightly pointed out by SO1 documentation, evidence-based decision making is not primarily about data collection and publication. Rather, it is about knowledge, learning and motivation to act. In this respect, the capacity to assess policy impact emerged as a key function within the policy cycle, one for which FAO has very limited capacity. In all countries there is a need to make sense of the data collected by various partners in order to assess policy incidence and implementation gaps.

**Conclusion 5: Through the Committee on World Food Security, Member States provided FAO with legitimate policy content on Food and Nutrition Security in the form of a suite of right-based, equity-focused voluntary guidelines on the Right to Food, land tenure, or responsible investment, and calls for FAO and other agencies to support the application of this policy content at country level. FAO's support to the application of CFS products at the country level has reached some notable successes but requires conducive political environment, and ought to be approached with balance and due attention to national political priorities. While FAO has made commendable efforts to mainstream gender equity in its programmes, projects and knowledge products related to SO1, efforts to promote gender-inclusive *governance* for Food and Nutrition Security were uneven across regions, with few women's institutions and organizations participating in coordination spaces for Food and Nutrition Security.**

42. The space for advocacy in FAO is defined by its mandate to help Member States improve their levels of Food and Nutrition Security. FAO's normative work, advocacy and policy advice tend to be measured, discreet, and grounded in science and data rather than in ideology, appropriately so for a technical agency of the United Nations. FAO has supported the application of CFS products in a growing number of countries. This work requires a conducive political environment, and ought to be approached with the appropriate balance between different stakeholders and due attention to national political priorities. On the critical topic of land and natural resource tenure, encouraging results were witnessed in the application of the the Voluntary Guidelines *on* Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry at country level, with a larger share of the activity and the most promising results observed in Sub-Saharan Africa.
43. Prior to that, the Right to Food was also promoted by FAO, although the present level of support is lower than it once was. Needless to say, even when enacted in laws the Right to Food is not always actionable; actual court cases have been very few, but it remains an important aspirational goal and a good entry point for FAO to stress the importance of raising levels of Food and Nutrition Security in societies receptive to right-based arguments.
44. FAO has also made a commendable efforts to mainstream equity, gender and nutrition concerns in its Food-and-Nutrition-Security programmes and projects, through *inter alia* the production of specific policy guidance on gender and on nutrition, support on reporting process for and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of



Discrimination Against Women, the development of sex-disaggregated indicators such as the *Food Insecurity Experience Scale*, the diffusion of the ENACT curriculum, the expansion of the evidence base on what people actually eat through the development of the Global Individual Food Consumption Data Tool and the Indicator for Women's Dietary Diversity, etc. However, efforts to promote gender-inclusive governance for Food and Nutrition Security were uneven across regions, with few women's institutions and organizations participating in coordination spaces for Food and Nutrition Security. Only 10 percent of project documents reviewed by the evaluation team included equal decision-making power of men and women in their objectives.

45. Some FAO projects and documents in nutrition were found to target mothers, pregnant women and their youngest children, a frequent focus of nutrition projects in the health sector. Given its sphere of activity, FAO's could do more to meet the broader needs of women beyond their role as child bearers and care takers, and in particular help respond to their needs as farmers. According to the State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11 entitled: *Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap*, women farmers produce less food than male farmers on average, because they tend to have less access to extension services, farm inputs, mechanical equipment and credit than men.

## 4.2. Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** While the programme design was largely validated, a number of potential partners deserve better greater emphasis in the result framework and activities of SP1: municipalities and local governments (implementation capacity, rural-urban linkages); national academia and training institutes (for capacity building and policy analysis); the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) (policy analysis and evaluation); farmer organizations (for advocacy, participation in coordination spaces and policy evaluation), consumer organizations and the private sector (to work on food systems). Exploration of non-traditional donors and particularly national and regional funding opportunities, as well as links with development banks and the resource mobilization mechanisms agreed in the Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa (2015) could be better exploited.

46. Contributing to policy impact assessment would allow FAO to make sense of the available data, contribute to policy setting from a position of analytical strength, and give the poor a voice in the process through qualitative approaches. In practice however, good policy impact assessments are rare and costly; and the capacity of FAO to assess policy impact is limited and project-funded (e.g. the Monitoring and Analysing Food and Agricultural Policies programme – MAFAP) rather than supported by core resources.
47. A deeper collaboration with the CGIAR system and notably the International Food Policy Research Institute would seem useful on information and analysis on Food-and-Nutrition-Security policy, including at country level. FAO's focus ought to be on defining knowledge needs and synthesizing relevant knowledge and data streams into fact-based, coherent narratives, leaving the generation of knowledge to others such as the CGIAR, the World Bank, or national or regional universities, research institutions and 'think-tanks'.
48. The world's farmers, foresters and fishers will ultimately determine whether the sustainable development goals are realized in the areas of food and agriculture. A participation of farmer organizations in coordination spaces at all levels should be promoted to a greater extent, as a way to better root the debates into reality. Consumer organizations could also represent useful partners in addressing the links between food systems and nutrition.

49. FAO could work more closely with national technical training institutes and universities to strengthen curricula and build capacity in Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture and other fields, as already done by the Nutrition and Food Systems Division. The practice of relying on one-off, ad-hoc training events may have made sense in a previous era when national universities and training institutes in developing countries were weaker than they are today. This is no longer the case, and FAO's capacity building efforts need to reflect this evolution and seize the opportunity to leverage and support national training institutes.
50. Local governments and municipalities emerged as key stakeholders in policy implementation through territorial approaches, for instance in the recent "*100 territorios sin Hambre*" initiative by the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger. Working with municipalities holds promises in nutrition education, school meals and procurement, in building strong and diversified rural-urban food chains, and more generally in the promotion of various local development initiatives.
51. Similarly, there are opportunities to collaborate to a greater extent with the private sector at national and regional level, e.g. on investment in agriculture, food safety or food labelling with the aim to protect consumer health in terms of food safety and to promote nutritional well-being.
52. In this regard, while the current FAO guidelines to work with the private sector address the need for regulating global partnerships with large multinational quite well, they do not appear to provide adequate guidance to country offices trying to engage with food retailers, cooperatives or street food vendors at national or sub-national level. They could be usefully amended to provide practical guidance applicable to multiple forms of engagement at country level, including with small and medium-scale enterprises and the informal sector.
53. DPS guidelines are to take money from the private sector to do projects, not on how to work with them on improving the content of their products.
54. The kind of policy work supported by SO1 is not an easy domain to mobilize resources for. FAO has been fortunate to receive significant support from the EU on Food-and-Nutrition-Security governance, and the evaluation noted that GAFSP emerged as a new strategic donor. FAO should also explore regional and national funding opportunities, as done successfully in Latin America, as well as the resource mobilization mechanisms proposed to the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa (July 2015). The Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted at the conference devotes much attention to Food and Nutrition Security, recalls the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and its Framework for Action (2014), and quotes the Committee on World Food Security and its products. Among the avenues for resource mobilization identified in the Financing for Development Conference are some that hold promises for SO1-related work, such as finance from national and local governments, or the sort of public-private partnership initiated under "SDG Investing". FAO and specifically SP1 should keep abreast of these developments and could participate more actively on some of the platforms resulting from the conference.
55. Links with development banks could be further leveraged, and not only to raise funds but also to shape investment at national level. At country level the work of the FAO Investment Centre for IFAD and the World Bank would deserve to be more systematically coordinated with FAO Representatives and policy officers (e.g. FIRST Policy Officers) in country, in order to explore opportunities for mutual exchange and collaboration at policy level.

**Recommendation 2: While FAO is well positioned globally, it needs to strengthen its capacities to offer support to policy implementation and analysis at country level, through inter alia: the continuation and geographic expansion of the FIRST programme; better staff training and the publication of national State of Food Security and Nutrition (SOFI) reports in a few selected countries. The SP1 team also needs to strengthen its capacities to support and learn from FAO country offices.**

56. Informing and strengthening policy support at country level through the active dissemination of good practices and approaches requires better communication across the Organization. In particular, the SP1 team must systematize and curate a certain body of knowledge learnt from experience in the field, and must help share that body of knowledge from one country and one region to the next, not as one-size-fits-all prescriptions but as options to consider and that have worked well in well-documented circumstances. To do this effectively, it cannot rely entirely on the essentially technical backstopping functions of regional offices, and must maintain a functional link in real time with the country level. FIRST has played this role so far in 33 countries, and the facility should be extended and ideally expanded geographically as well.
57. The SP1 team should strengthen its link with decentralized offices by building upon the FIRST facility, its country profiles and its network of Policy Officers at country level informing the SP1 team in real time and receiving dedicated technical support. The number of staff and consultants working on SO1 in regional and sub-regional offices is also very low and ought to be strengthened, resources permitting, in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity and to allow for the most suitable adaptation of good practices to each particular regional or national context.
58. The development of a series of Strategic Framework/Strategic Objectives training and e-learning courses should be considered, directed at FAO staff in regional, sub-regional and country offices, and the series of sectoral policy guidelines produced in 2017 thanks to FIRST could now be disseminated via a set of webinars. FAO could also develop a general policy training course aimed at its technical staff at all levels of the organization, to sensitize them to the importance of policy matters, familiarize them with the terminology, link them to the resources available in FAO, etc.
59. Based on documented experiences, SP1 should develop and provide guidance at regional and country level in engaging simultaneously with multiple ministries. This becomes particularly significant in areas such as agriculture diversification, land tenure, nutrition, food systems, food safety and climate change where multi-stakeholder partnerships within Governments and outside are necessary for success.
60. Within FAO, simpler ways of facilitating cross-disciplinarity should be introduced than the "Service Level Agreements", whose transaction cost appears higher than their potential benefit.
61. The SP1 team could also be more present at country level, for instance through supporting and participating in key policy and strategy reviews or other strategic policy events and processes led by regional and country offices, in a demand-oriented manner.
62. The production of national SOFI reports in a few selected countries would represent an opportunity for FAO to engage with national academia and contribute to national policy discourse through science-based analytics, while feeding into the SDGs voluntary national reviews and numerous other relevant policy processes at country level. Such an undertaking would initially require the drafting of a set of guidelines for national SOFI reports, and implies

the progressive development of a capacity to backstop country offices from headquarters and regional offices on the production of high-quality documents.

**Recommendation 3: Nutrition and gender have received increased attention from FAO in recent years, but there is still much room for progress. In particular, FAO need to pay more attention to diversifying diets as a way to address overweight and obesity. FAO should raise awareness on pathways from agriculture to nutrition and try and promote agriculture and policy concerns in nutrition coordination space where the issue is still often seen only as a health problem. In gender equality, there are opportunities for FAO and SP1 to help reform national support systems for agriculture such as extension systems, veterinary networks or rural credit schemes to make them more supportive of female farmers, particularly in contexts characterised by male migration out of agriculture and resulting increased feminization of agriculture.**

63. In the context of the nutrition transition, demand from Member Countries for technical support on the emerging issues of obesity and overweight tends to increase, calling for FAO to step up its efforts in this area. Human resource permitting, Country offices should try and expand their support to diet diversification – especially in countries where the focus is perhaps too narrowly placed on a few staple crops – as a way to address nutrient deficiency, overweight and obesity and be more present in national coordination forums devoted to nutrition (e.g. under SUN/REACH) to promote the agriculture and food system determinants of good nutrition.
64. At the nexus between gender and nutrition, and given its domain of activity, FAO's concerns extend beyond the traditional health-inspired focus on maternal and child nutrition within the first 1000 days. FAO can legitimately work with women as care givers and child bearers (for instance in joint projects with UNICEF), but FAO's domain of activity demands that it also addresses women as farmers, as laborers, as business owners and as decision-makers, and that it contributes to the school meals and nutrition education of school-aged children beyond the first 1,000 days.
65. Beyond supporting vulnerable groups and communities through rural development projects, FAO and singularly SP1 can contribute at the level of the enabling environment, for instance by helping extension systems and rural credit schemes reach out to female farmers to a greater degree than at present. A fortiori, in contexts characterized by male migration out of agriculture and a resulting increased feminization of agriculture, a parallel feminization of public and private support systems to agriculture appears in order. This could mean attracting more female students in studies linked to agriculture, such as agriculture extension or veterinary science – the sort of systemic change in the enabling environment for agriculture which an organization like FAO and a programme like SP1 would be well placed to contribute to.

**Recommendation 4: Building upon the strong level of trust established with national institutions, FAO should continue to advocate for more sustainable and equitable development policies, relying on a variety of advisory and advocacy channels such as national academia, farmer organisations, south-south cooperation and mainstream national media, and grounding its advice on a strong analytical base and socio-economic argument, in complement to a right-based argument.**

66. Because of its nature as a multilateral organization, FAO maintains a strong relationship with national governments and generally supports national policies and priorities. As a result, classic advocacy groups such as the most vocal non-governmental organisations have not always been the most natural partners at country level. National universities, farmer organisations, south-south cooperation and national mainstream media can help bring policy issues to the attention of decision makers without appearing as confrontational or politically motivated. These advocacy channels have been used by FAO and could be used more in policy incidence.

67. FAO could cast its arguments for gender equity and Food and Nutrition Security in economic terms to a greater extent than done currently, e.g. around the need for women and men to produce food for themselves and the rest of society ('Cost of Hunger' approach). The nutritional wellbeing of women engaged in agriculture constitutes a right by itself, but also a necessity for them to contribute to food production, trade and utilization. Similarly, reducing the drudgery of women's farm and off-farm work could also be presented as an economic efficiency argument in contexts characterized by a 'feminization of agriculture', rather than cast only as an equity issue.
68. The idea of national SOFI reports has been mentioned in recommendation 2. If developed under the appropriate editorial board and given some visibility in country, such reports would also help ground FAO's policy messages in objective national data, demonstrate how Food and Nutrition Security is a worthwhile socio-economic goal for the country, and indicate where progress could be made.