

168th Session of the Council
Written Correspondence Procedure – inputs from Members - English version
Item 5 – The Hand-in-Hand Initiative

Member Name	Comments
<p style="text-align: center;">Australia (Wed 17/11/2021 7:03)</p>	<p>Australia welcomes the update on the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative and we respectfully provide the following comments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We appreciate the provision of information about the adoption of HIH in specific countries, including the Solomon Islands. In this regard, we consider the 10-year Agriculture Sector Growth and Investment Plan in the Solomon Islands particularly noteworthy; however, we would appreciate further information on how this is specifically “operating under the aegis of the HIH initiative” to better understand the distinction between activities under HIH and those under other programmatic initiatives. 2. We welcome the articulation of HIH not as a programme but as a series of supports to ensure access to strong science and evidence based decision making and foster national ownership. We note Management’s commitment to leverage the HIH Initiative to improve organisational efficiency and impact with a nominally flat budget. In line with this, Australia considers that HIH will be a valuable platform in the further articulation and implementation of Members’ national pathways. 3. Australia respectfully requests further information about how FAO intends to realise more efficient donor and investment match making and would welcome, in particular, additional detail on outreach activities and coordination with development and resource partners.
<p style="text-align: center;">Argentina (Wed 17/11/2021 16:21)</p>	<p>Argentina appreciates and acknowledges the information provided by FAO under this agenda item, which reports on the development of the Hand-in Hand (HIH) Initiative since its launch 18 months ago.</p> <p>The Hand-in-Hand Initiative was endorsed by LARC36 members as a mechanism for promoting effective cooperation between developed and developing countries to achieve SDGs 1, 2 and 10, particularly in countries with a high incidence of poverty and food insecurity and high agricultural potential.</p> <p>In this regard, we are pleased to note that 45 countries, including six GRULAC countries, have already joined the HIH Initiative as direct beneficiaries, and that all FAO members can participate in it as indirect beneficiaries and partners and also as members for development through multiple channels, such as South-South and Triangular Corporation. In this context, Argentina once again expresses its willingness to offer its experiences and knowledge on sustainable agrifood systems to any other countries requiring help under this initiative. Our help is offered on the premise that, there is no one so poor that they have nothing to give, nor is there anyone so rich that they do not have something to receive. We understand that this saying is in line with the spirit of HIH and the intention to promote and enhance partnerships among all parties involved.</p> <p>Our country also welcomes certain key findings arising from the implementation of HIH:</p>

	<p>FAO implements the initiative as a cooperation instrument and mechanism to support countries in the execution of national programmes aimed at strengthening and transforming, as necessary, rural economic activities to build productive, innovative and inclusive rural societies. In particular, it targets those programmes related to protecting and improving rural livelihoods, increasing agricultural productivity and expanding rural economic prospects and promoting equitable rural societies through the economic inclusion of rural women, young people and indigenous peoples.</p> <p>We welcome the fact that the initiative is not a programme in its own right, to be exported, but is seen as a tool offered to national decision makers in order to establish public policies based on scientific evidence while taking into account the particular circumstances and context of each country and region.</p> <p>This means that the initiative adds value to public policies in rural areas and is an excellent weapon in the quest for greater effectiveness and efficiency, while also generating better quality data, for example from the geospatial platform, in order to make the most of investments.</p> <p>Argentina is pleased that the HIH Initiative uses innovative tools and adopts a science-based and territorial approach, where a territorial approach is interpreted as recognizing the existence of multiple potential models, methods and practices for achieving sustainable agrifood systems, depending on national contexts, priorities and capacities. The HIH Initiative ultimately contributes to the differentiation of territories and strategies as a fundamental requirement for finding genuine solutions to achieve sustainability in the agri and bio-based industry sectors.</p> <p>Similarly, incorporating innovation and new technologies as central pillars of the HIH Initiative once again consistently demonstrates that the public and private scientific and technological system offers efficient solutions (locally adapted) to the challenges posed by sustainability and scenarios of productive vulnerability to tackle the scourge of climate change and other shocks threatening producers and stakeholders in agricultural and bioindustrial systems.</p> <p>Lastly, Argentina would like to state for the record that, although HIH could mobilize resources from mechanisms such as the GEF or GCF, all funding from such mechanisms in which FAO participates should not necessarily fall under the initiative, given the universal nature of both platforms for resource mobilization and the need for effective access to international financing by middle-income, upper-middle-income and high-income developing countries.</p>
<p>United States of America (Wed 17/11/2021 17:20)</p>	<p>The United States notes the update on the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative included in document CL 168/5.</p> <p>While we acknowledge FAO’s positive assessment of the HIH implementation (i.e. paragraph 94 of document CL 168/5 - “the commitment of senior management to dramatically improve organizational efficiency through the HIH Initiative without an increase in regular programme resources is genuine”), we would like to request further information on how the Organization is resourcing the initiative.</p> <p>We also take note of “the creation and accelerated development” of the HIH Geospatial Platform and we would like to take this opportunity to request FAO Management to provide more detailed information clarifying how FAO Management is planning to integrate this Platform with parallel work ongoing to establish a corporate Data Protection</p>

	<p>and Intellectual Property Policy, as well as data and statistical governance work considered recently by the CCLM and Programme Committees, respectively.</p> <p>Will the Platform be compliant with the Data Protection and Intellectual Property Policy? How will Management ensure alignment with this other related work?</p> <p>We would welcome this item being briefly discussed on the Council agenda or for Management to provide an information update to address these questions prior to the draft conclusions being negotiated.</p>
<p>Japan (Fri 19/11/2021 13:20)</p>	<p>Japan welcomes the evidence-based and country-led programs in the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, and evaluates its progress such as the increase in the number of countries participating in the Initiative.</p> <p>As paragraph 7 (h) of the 132 Session of Programme Committees mentioned, Japan encourages FAO to continue developing the Initiative as an accountable and transparent initiative.</p> <p>We request detailed reports on ongoing and planned projects, which cover not only the outcomes and lessons learned but also challenges and demerits which have been revealed as precisely as possible.</p> <p>Also, we continuously request FAO to update information on the progress and the results regularly.</p>
<p>Spain (Fri 19/11/2021 19:05)</p>	<p>With regard to the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, we would like to highlight the following:</p> <p>Spain fully supports the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States.</p> <p>We stress the need to ensure that the Initiative is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), joint programming within the UN development system and the 2030 Agenda.</p> <p>We call on FAO to provide Members with regular reports on the status of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, including the use of budgetary and extra-budgetary resources, results at country level and the participation of public administrations, the private sector and civil society in all countries where the Initiative is being implemented.</p> <p>We urge FAO to provide more information on the potential benefits of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative in crisis and conflict situations before we can express an opinion on this issue.</p> <p>We thank FAO for the information provided on the Initiative and request further details of tools and methods, including the Hand-in-Hand Initiative geospatial platform, information technology infrastructure and data protection aspects.</p>
<p>France (Fri 19/11/2021 20:56)</p>	<p>France aligns itself with the statement by the European Union and its 27 member states.</p> <p>France would first like to reiterate the detailed comments it made in the context of the Programme Committee. We thank Management for the responses it has already provided and would be grateful for any additional and more precise answers it could send us.</p> <p>Several important principles should guide the “Hand-in-Hand” Initiative: countries should steer the process according to government priorities; the involvement, from the initial phase of implementation, of all partners already present in the countries; alignment with the UNSDCF (<i>United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework</i>); full integration into the joint programming of the United Nations Development System and Agenda 2030; lack of impact on FAO's regular budget; transparency.</p> <p>France wishes in particular to ask the following additional questions.</p>

1/ We would like more information on how **FAO funds the Hand-in-Hand (HiHi) Initiative**. In this regard, we noted with concern the remarks made during the Programme Committee according to which certain posts would not be filled by FAO, for the time being, in order to finance the development of the "Hand-in-Hand" Initiative. France would like to thank Management in advance for its clarifications on this subject.

2/ We would like to have **more detailed information on the development of the “Hand-in-Hand” geospatial platform**, which FAO describes as “the most comprehensive and efficient platform in the world for the exchange and analysis of data and information.”

a) We have taken note of indications that this geospatial platform aims to aggregate various interoperable databases fed by data from various sources and domains. We would like to know **which databases have been integrated into the Hand-in-Hand geospatial platform** not only from FAO but also from other organizations.

b) In this regard, we would like the **data sharing agreements and memoranda signed by FAO with other organizations** to be sent to Members, in a similar fashion to the transparency achieved by FAO regarding its private sector partnerships.

c) Given the technical complexity of the subject, we would appreciate more information about the platform from the IT division.

d) We would also like to have more detailed information on how FAO currently ensures **data protection, data security, and respect for intellectual property rights**.

We would be grateful if FAO could tell us how the debates that are underway in the Organization regarding data governance, data protection, and respect for intellectual property rights are taken into account for the platform.

e) With a view to strengthening the accountability and transparency of the platform mentioned by FAO, we propose the **creation of an “intergovernmental group”** of the HiHi Geospatial Platform, to mirror the good practice established by FAO for the *International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture*.

3/ We wonder about the fact that the **FAO Data Lab** not only analyses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and agriculture but also the social networks of countries in the world to assess social unrest (“*analysis of social unrest in Covid-19 times*”), which clearly exceeds FAO's mandate. We thank FAO in advance for its guidance in this regard.

We welcome the publication of a methodology on this subject

(<https://www.fao.org/datalab/website/web/sites/default/files/2020-08/Social%20Unrest.pdf>) and thank FAO in advance for indicating to Members which keywords are used (concerning the subjects "social unrest," "COVID," "COVID & Social Unrest," etc.) to monitor this "social unrest." In addition, in this methodology, we note that the languages "*processed*" by FAO are not all the official languages of FAO but only English, Spanish and French and would like to know the reasons for this choice. Having noted the processing of "PT," that is to say—unless we are mistaken—Portuguese, which is not an official language of FAO, we would like to know the reason for this choice and the modalities for financing this processing effort.

4/ We thank the management team for their draft conclusions, however, in view of the comments and pending questions above, we consider it necessary that **the draft conclusions be substantially revised** in order to i) include more prudent language on the whole and (ii) reflect Members' comments.

Comments made by France during the Programme Committee and responses provided by FAO:

COMMENTS MADE BY FRANCE	FAO MANAGEMENT RESPONSE
<p>France wishes to recall the important principles that should guide the Hand-in-Hand Initiative: countries should steer the process according to government priorities; the involvement, from the initial phase of implementation, of all partners already present in the countries; alignment with the UNSDCF (<i>United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework</i>); full integration into the joint programming of the United Nations Development System and Agenda 2030; lack of impact on FAO's regular budget; transparency. In this regard, it notes the emphasis placed in document CL 168/5 on coordination issues on which it has the following questions and comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can the Secretariat provide Members with detailed information on the new “methods and mechanisms” developed in an “M&E system” to resolve coordination difficulties in terms of sustainability (§ 84) and ensure accountability (§ 85)? - France reiterates its request for information on the dashboard (§ 89), as well as on the typologies developed and the “stochastic analyses of the break-even point” on which they are based (§ 95). The § f in the box on page 2 is therefore premature at this stage of Member briefings. - How can the social dimensions of and public policies on food systems be integrated into strategies on the sole basis of geospatial analyses and territorial approaches (§ 98 b)? - More specifically, what are the “inherent challenges, and in particular the assumptions, structures, processes, technologies, and perceptions” incompatible with “the very high efficiency and trust requirements ... of operating at full-scale implementation” (§ 91), and how do the Geospatial platform, the five-pillar work plan (§ 98), 	<p>FAO Management concurs with France on the indicated principles that should guide development of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative. As should be clear, achieving full compliance with all of these principles, like the development of the Initiative itself, is an ambitious undertaking that cannot be completed at once. We believe, however, that the Organization has demonstrated its good faith in all dimensions, making clear to Members, through continuous reporting since the launch of the Initiative, the state of progress toward realization of each of these ideals.</p> <p>In this spirit, the current report and others before it have highlighted important lessons learned and the continuous adaptation of the programme to achieve fullest possible national ownership, transparency to participating partners on existing programmes, outreach to Members and other potential partners on a non-discriminatory basis, great care for the fiduciary responsibilities of FAO in sensitive matters such as data privacy and private sector engagement, and adherence to our commitment that the Initiative would be conducted with near zero impact on Regular Programme resources.</p> <p>We have in the course of repeated exchanges with FAO Members and Governing Bodies made clear our thinking on issues raised by Members and made adjustments to programme development in light of Members' guidance.</p> <p>The view of Management is that coordination issues arise whenever diverse actors with different and sometimes competing interests are engaged in a common pursuit. Coordination can be improved through a number of methods: by providing a clear and neutral, evidence-based analysis of a major</p>

	<p>and lead coordination by the governance unit under the direct supervision of the FAO Chief Economist (§ 99) constitute adequate answers?</p> <p>France considers that the information presented in this document and made available to Members with regard to the development of dashboards, implementation and monitoring mechanisms, the targeted system as well as production methods and management of the knowledge made available by FAO, do not yet allow Members to gauge their position on the development of the Initiative at this stage. France thus wishes to receive more information on all of these points as well as FAO's proposals with regard to the two other dimensions of the Initiative's implementation mentioned in paragraph 91. France regrets that the Initiative's mode of governance, as presented in paragraph 99 of the document, remains internal and does not include Members or traditional partners. In addition, France feels that the approach proposed by the Initiative, based on the data collection and analysis tool of the Geospatial Data Platform as proposed in paragraph 95, does not sufficiently allow it to take into account the existing policies and socio-economic issues of the countries concerned. It should also be specified that the transformation of food systems supported by the Initiative aims to improve the sustainability of these systems in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.</p>	<p>problem or problems to be addressed as a foundation for collective decision-making and action; enabling processes for communication and adjustment of plans among the partners; by tracking progress objectively against agreed milestones and objectives; by ensuring transparency and inclusion in decision-making and by actively addressing asymmetries of information. FAO will continue to provide reports and demonstrations on progress toward these objectives as the programme develops.</p>
<p>European Union (Mon 22/11/2021 20:42)</p>	<p>I am honoured to write to you on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States regarding item 5 on the agenda of the 168th Session of the FAO Council.</p> <p>The Candidate Countries Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia¹ and Turkey, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well the Republic of Moldova and the Republic of San Marino, align themselves with this written statement.</p>	

¹ The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The EU and its Member States take note of the progress report on the Hand-in-Hand Initiative. We wish to emphasise the need to ensure that the Initiative is in line with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), the joint programming of the UN development system and the 2030 Agenda. We also encourage FAO, in accordance with its mandate, to closely coordinate its work on the Initiative with other relevant agencies and developing partners, aiming at efficiency gains in line with PO 14 of UNGA Resolution 72/279, to build on the assets of the UN Country Teams, and to include this in its reporting on the Initiative.

In general, we request FAO to make available to Members regular reports on the state of play of the HiH Initiative, including on the use of budgetary and extra budgetary resources, results at country level and the engagement of public, private and civil society stakeholders in all those countries where the Initiative is being implemented. The current report is a useful step, but requires broadening and further development.

We note the Initiative's efforts to promote investment in agri-food systems and rural transformation and to select promising value chains to that effect, taking into account the three components of sustainable development. We look forward to FAO providing details of the tools and databases used in this identification process, including an explanation on the way the 'stochastic profitability frontier analysis' is used in this respect.

We would also like to remind FAO that we expect the Organization to follow-up on the request of the 165th Session of the Council (CL 165/REP, para 14.i) on the HiH Initiative, where the Council stressed the need to 'develop a cross-cutting data policy to ensure data governance, data integrity and privacy, as well as intellectual property rights'.

Furthermore, we welcome the principle that each programme is country-led and owned, where FAO supports governments to put in place a real-time performance monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. We emphasise the importance of ensuring high levels of transparency, information-sharing, and communication among partners.

We take note of the intention to develop the Programme Dashboard and would welcome a presentation on this, once a prototype is sufficiently advanced.

We also take note of the increased number of databases which are integrated within the HiH Initiative Geospatial platform and request more information on this platform, including on IT infrastructure and protocols governing the handling, governance, use and protection of data.

We are surprised to see that the Data Lab of the HiH Initiative is monitoring "social unrest" in the world. We request clarification from Management as this, in our view, exceeds the FAO mandate.

Finally, we consider that the suggestion in the report that the HiH Initiative be used in situations of crisis and conflict, as part of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, is premature. We would like to receive more information on the potential merits of the HiH Initiative in situations of crisis and conflict before expressing an opinion on this issue.

To conclude, we thank FAO for the information provided on the Initiative as an additional means of contributing to the achievement of the SDGs within FAO's mandate and request more details about tools and methods, as well as regular updates on the progress made in implementing the Initiative and the results achieved.

<p>Bahamas (Sun 28/11/2021 15:30)</p>	<p>We wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the progress made to date with respect to the Hand in Hand Initiative (HIH). The UN’s commitment to “leave no one behind”, has led to the creation of an evidence-based, country-led, country-owned programme designed to eradicate poverty and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition. The program taps into the under-supported potential of agriculture and agri-food value chains to transform lagging rural territories. Highlighting the incorporation of technological innovations as drivers of change by gathering market, agro-ecological, and farm-level information to identify agricultural areas where there are opportunities for farmers to achieve their potential income and move out of hardship.</p> <p>The Hand-in-Hand Initiative was first announced in late September 2019 by the Director-General on the sideline of the UN General Assembly. Following this announcement, at minimum five Caribbean countries committed to participating in the Initiative within the first six months. It is recognized that FAO has incurred challenges over the past 18 months of implementation, but this does not rationalize the little support to these countries for being a part of this Initiative.</p> <p>We acknowledge and congratulate Haiti with respect to the progress made with the Hand in Hand Initiative and note that the country has successfully identified national and international partners to aid with poverty maps and geospatial data collection. Haiti’s participation was the only Caribbean country highlighted in the Hand-in-Hand Report, being commendable, it does not represent the other achievements of Caribbean countries that did not receive international partners to support this participation.</p> <p>We wish to highlight the work on developing the ‘social and solidarity technical incubators’ for enhancing agribusiness growth to support agrifood systems in peri-urban territories in Belize and The Bahamas. The Bahamas will begin its geospatial mapping in January 2022, Jamaica and Belize will follow suit in the successive months.</p> <p>As these countries advance in implementing the initiative, it is requested that FAO fulfill its commitment to “leaving no one behind” by increasing communications to the Caribbean region, building the capacities of these countries to utilize and manage the HIH Geospatial Platform, and become transparent and accountable to improving multi stakeholders collaborations to foster accelerated agri-food systems transformation at national level.</p>
<p>Thailand (29/11/2021 16:19)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thailand takes note of the progress report on the HiHI and of its designation as a Programme Priority Area in FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. • Thailand supports the Organization-wide shift from ‘project’ to a more ‘programmatic’ approach which shall be facilitated by the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative. • Thailand recognizes the potential benefits offered by the Hand-in-Hand Initiative as a working platform for improved collaboration, particularly among Middle-Income Countries (MICs) • With specific regard to the investment plans developed under the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, Thailand recommends that investments plans be primarily oriented towards domestic markets, rather than be export-oriented as reported in the document. • Thailand has successfully implemented the principles and concepts contained in the “New Theory Agriculture” and the “Sufficiency Economy Philosophy”, according to which the first step to fight hunger – and in particular

rural hunger – is to promote and increase **local food production and productivity** to ensure stable, safe and sustainable **domestic food supply and consumption**. This is particularly true in our times of continued fight against Covid-19 pandemic and the related potential need to re-introduce sanitary measures that may limit international trade.

- Investments in export-oriented agriculture should be envisaged once and after sufficiency in domestic food production and equal access to food are achieved at Country level.
- Thailand **looks forward** to the next progress reports of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and its achievements.