Transformative partnerships guidance

How transformative partnerships can help FAO to better deliver its strategic objectives
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Foreword

Over the past few years, it has become increasingly apparent that to tackle the complex challenges of today, actors across the world need to join forces. The current situation is unsustainable. To deliver FAO's strategic objectives and bring transformational impact, we need to combine knowledge, resources and innovations from across the full spectrum of society.

FAO seeks collaborations that can help drive deep change. We call these transformative partnerships.

Indeed, the power of working together in transformative partnerships is at the heart of FAO's mission to build a world without hunger.

Only through effective, meaningful collaborations across society – with governments, civil society, private sector, academia and research institutions, farmers’ organizations and cooperatives, parliamentarians and more, making use of each other's knowledge and comparative advantages – can food insecurity be defeated.

Transformative partnerships allow us to get to the roots of challenges and form sustainable solutions through systemic, long-term, disruptive action. Every organization has its own strengths and resources – and bringing these together can allow us to deliver impact and value at a scale that FAO could not achieve operating alone.

Transformative partnerships can overcome barriers, and allow us to achieve fundamentally different outcomes. Delivering transformative partnerships calls for a shift in thinking.

We have already seen the results that these alliances can deliver, but we believe there is far more to come. We are committed to building even greater transformative partnerships to usher in a new era of change, and more resilient, inclusive, sustainable, and efficient agrifood systems that leave no one behind.

In the following pages, we are delighted to explain in more detail how transformative partnerships can help our agrifood systems to better deliver, and help us stay a step ahead of the next challenge – and harness the next opportunity.

Marcela Villarreal PhD
Director
Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division
Introduction and overview

This guidance document is designed to provide a common understanding of what FAO means by transformative partnerships and to showcase their importance in the context of working towards better agrifood systems. Transformative partnerships are at the heart of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031, highlighted as an essential element of FAO's reinvigorated business model.

FAO increasingly needs to build on the resources and levers that all sectors of society can bring to the table to deliver its strategic objectives, especially greater transformational impact. Focusing on the different forms of added value created by partnerships (that is, the extra benefit that arises from working with others and is unachievable alone) calls for three things: firstly, a shift in thinking and approach within FAO, including consistency in the use of partnership language. Secondly, a common understanding of the contribution made by partnerships to more resilient, inclusive, sustainable, and efficient agrifood systems that leave no one behind. And lastly, the ability to choose the form of partnership that will most effectively help us achieve transformational goals.

This document should be read together with FAO's Strategic Framework 2022–2031, which underlines “the importance of a shift in FAO's working paradigm to ensure transformational change... The improved programmatic approach will be supported by deepening and expanding partnerships, ensuring optimal leverage of FAO's normative strengths, seeking innovative financing mechanisms and sources, working under a unified vision (One FAO), embracing efficient and innovative approaches, and being prepared to operate in a world of increasing risk and uncertainty”.

FAO's reinvigorated, fit-for-purpose business model aims to ensure an inclusive and agile organization that is transparent, open, innovative, responsible, effective, and impactful – and that serves its members to achieve the four betters – better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life. Transformative partnerships are a central feature of FAO's reinvigorated business model, shown in the diagram below.

In some areas, FAO already engages in transformative partnerships. Achieving more of this type of partnership depends on FAO's operating systems, culture and skills being fully supportive of this way of working, reflected for example in job descriptions, performance incentives and measurement systems. This work is essential: it will help ensure that FAO realizes its vision of a world without hunger.

This guidance document will serve as a foundational resource, aimed at establishing a shared understanding of terms and ideas that FAO is introducing in the context of partnerships. FAO aspires to integrate the concept of transformative partnership into its existing partnership development process, as well as in the monitoring and
reporting of partnerships. It is structured in a modular format, allowing readers to begin with the section that catches their interest and explore further from there. In order to enhance partnership capabilities and foster transformative partnerships, practical tools and training materials will accompany this document.

This document was developed by FAO’s Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division (PSU) in collaboration with The Partnering Initiative (TPI), an organization dedicated to multistakeholder partnering, recognized as a pioneer of the field. The lead author of this guidance note is Dave Prescott (TPI). Additional contributors include Darian Stibbe (TPI) Tom Harrison (TPI), Sarita Sehgal (TPI), Kaori Abe (FAO) and Maribel González Barraza (FAO). The drafting also benefitted from a review process undertaken by FAO and TPI, with inputs provided by FAO colleagues in headquarters and Decentralized Offices working on partnerships.

It should also be read as a resource by FAO personnel to accompany the online guidance module on transformative partnerships that has been created by the Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division (PSU), in collaboration with the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITC-ILO), and with support from The Partnering Initiative (TPI).

**Reinvigorated Business Model**
1. Definition of transformative partnerships and their importance to FAO

Why partner?

As a major global institution with roots stretching back many decades, FAO has an important role to play in realizing a vision of a world without hunger. However, the scale and complexity of realizing this vision mean that it is more important than ever for FAO to partner with other organizations.

Partnerships are a way for an organization to achieve outcomes that it cannot achieve by itself, or through the direct purchase of goods or services.

Partnerships are also a critical means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. This is because of the systemic nature of the challenge of ensuring that everyone has enough to eat – challenges relating to income, health, education, energy, water, land ownership and more. FAO can bring its broad and deep expertise in food and agriculture, and partner with organizations that specialize in these other fields. Collectively, more can be achieved together than it is possible to achieve alone.

**Partnership:** FAO defines a partnership as: “A cooperation and collaboration between FAO units and external parties in joint or coordinated action for a common purpose. It involves a relationship where all parties make a contribution to the output and the achievement of the objectives rather than a solely financial relationship”.

A partnership becomes more than a solely financial relationship when it creates **added value** that cannot be created in any other way.

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1 Many of FAO’s formal partnerships are organized on a bilateral basis, for example with the private sector, civil society or other UN agencies. See Annexe 1 for summary of FAO’s engagement approaches for different stakeholder types.
**Transformative**: A *sustainable, systemic* change involving *long-term* action which *disrupts* the status quo and catalyzes *impact at scale*.

- **Sustainable**: Results in positive change towards resilient, efficient, and inclusive agrifood systems.
- **Systemic**: Addresses root causes of imbalances or inequalities within current systems.
- **Long-term**: Requires sustained, focused effort over a period of several years.
- **Disruptive**: Bold; requires leadership; involves doing something different from the status quo.
- **Impact at scale**: Has a clear commitment with complementary resources to create value and catalyze its effect.

**Definition: Transformative Partnership**

FAO partnerships are transformative when they deliver sustainable outcome(s) through systemic, long-term and disruptive action; when they catalyze impact at scale; and when all partners invest complementary resources (technical, financial, human, or knowledge) to create value beyond that which FAO could achieve operating alone.
2. Different types of partnerships and when to use them

FAO engages in four broadly recognizable partnership types, which can be organized into a spectrum such as the one shown below. All of these types of partnerships can potentially operate at field, regional, or global levels. There is no value judgement about what type of partnership is ‘better’ or ‘worse’. All partnership types have the potential to be transformative, in line with the overall definition above.

Clustering partnerships according to type helps with mapping existing partnerships, and see what types are underway in a particular region, on a particular theme, or with a particular stakeholder. Using common types of partnership also helps with comparing similar partnerships with each other, which in turn makes it easier to share experience, and enables collective learning.

Further examples of existing FAO partnerships across the partnership spectrum are provided in Annex 1.
FOUR TYPES OF PARTNERSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPPORTIVE</th>
<th>INTEGRATIVE</th>
<th>SYSTEMIC</th>
<th>PLATFORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAO and its partners exchange resources with each other, creating reciprocal value and supporting each other in delivering more or better. FAO provides funding to an NGO and an agriculture research centre to develop smallholder capacity to use new techniques.</td>
<td>FAO and partners combine complementary resources to directly or indirectly create value more effectively, efficiently and innovatively, or at a greater scale than would otherwise be possible. FAO and an academic partner provide joint resources for the creation and implementation of capacity development courses to enhance animal feed laboratories.</td>
<td>Multiple actors, including FAO, work collectively and by design to transform entire agrifood systems. FAO works to shift the role of family farming from the margins to the centre of agricultural policy and practice.</td>
<td>An umbrella or platform initiative involving or hosted by FAO, promoting or catalyzing multiple collaborations of the three preceding types. FAO engages across entire global commodity supply chains to raise safety standards.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Examples of each type
Summaries provided in Annex 2

- Sultan Qaboos University (Oman)
- African Conservation Tillage Network (Kenya)
- Luiss University (Italy)
- Advancing sustainable rural development in the Mediterranean (Mediterranean region)
- Climate Smart Livestock (Ecuador)
- Paradise Foods (Papua New Guinea)
- Texas A&M University System (USA)
- ASEAN RAI partnership (ASEAN)
- RUFORUM (Africa)
- University of Zambia (Zambia)
- Michigan State University (USA)
- Sustainable Rice Landscape Initiative in SE Asia (Southeast Asia)
- Mountain Partnership (Global)
- World Banana Forum (Global)
3. Creating value through partnerships

Being intentional about where and how a partnership can create additional value – i.e. deliver more than the sum of its parts – helps to deepen and expand partnership effectiveness. Partnership value-adds include:

**Synergy:** Aligning programmes, sharing resources and cooperating in order to exploit synergies, to increase the degree of impact from the input resources. Example: Combining two similar events into one joint event, which helps with regional alignment and increases visibility and diversity of stakeholder inputs, while reducing financial and human resource inputs.

**Scale:** Combining delivery capacity across geographies, thereby taking successful programmes, products and approaches to scale, to multiply their impact. Example: Coordinating multiple media outlets across a region to increase radio audience size for the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF) outreach.

**Shared learning:** Raising levels of knowledge, expertise and capacity, leading to more effective practice and greater impact. Example: In several countries that have just developed their new Country Programme Frameworks, FAO is creating a mechanism for collective learning and capability strengthening of the agricultural sector.
Innovation: Creating new, more effective solutions by blending different disciplines, ways of working, sectoral backgrounds or problem-solving approaches. Example: FAO is partnering with an SME in Papua New Guinea to improve product quality and create certification in the cocoa value chain in ways that would be impossible for any individual organization operating alone.

Complementarity: Bringing together essential complementary resources and relationships to provide a workable solution that would otherwise be impossible. Example: Uptake of the Responsible Agricultural Investment guidelines is made possible through one partner’s connections to the business community; another partner’s knowledge of legal frameworks; and FAO’s extensive experience at a policy level.

Critical mass: Combining, aligning, coordinating, enhancing or growing resources to create the critical mass needed to deliver otherwise impossible outcomes. Example: When thousands of farmers have access to key information, such as prices, a level of critical mass is reached. This enables them to avoid economic exploitation, influence markets, open new markets, and work together to develop and implement solutions to their problems.

Holism: Convening a holistic range of actors across traditional silos to enable complete, context-appropriate, cross-cutting, and implementable approaches, thereby increasing quality and breadth of impact. Example: Ensuring the voices and experiences of smallholders and Indigenous Peoples are at the centre of agricultural policymaking, for example, by working in local languages.
Transformative partnerships create multiple forms of value

The most transformative partnerships – including many of those listed above – create multiple forms of value. For example:

**Partnership between FAO and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)**

At the heart of FAO’s collaboration with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is Anticipatory Action (AA), an innovative approach that systematically links early warnings to actions designed to protect families and their assets ahead of a hazard. FAO and the IFRC have worked together across Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America, and the Caribbean, including on joint projects with coordination groups such as the Anticipatory Action Task Force, and with regional and country technical working groups on AA. Joint advocacy and learning events have been held at global, regional, and national levels to enhance both government and partner understanding of the importance of scaling up AA to save lives and livelihoods in the face of increasing hazards and alarming food insecurity trends.

FAO, IFRC, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Start Network published the joint policy brief. Key points of the brief were reflected in the G7 Foreign Ministers’ statement on strengthening anticipatory action in humanitarian assistance, which encouraged world leaders to engage with this approach in light of climate change and disasters across regions. The report provides an overview of AA work carried out in 2022 by different agencies, including FAO, IFRC, and its member National Societies.

*This partnership demonstrates innovation through the creation of a novel early warning system; synergy through joint projects and the publication of joint policy briefs; and scale through engaging global, regional, and national partners in using the early warning system.*

**The Antimicrobial Resistance Partnership Platform**

The Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Platform is an inclusive, voluntary, and international forum that aims to bring together voices from all areas, sectors, geographies, and perspectives within a holistic and system-wide ‘One Health’ approach to promote a shared vision and drive actions to curb AMR.

The platform was established by FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH). Together, they have set out an ambitious vision, to preserve antimicrobial efficacy and ensure sustainable and equitable access to antimicrobials for responsible and prudent use in human, animal, and plant health.

*This partnership demonstrates holism by bringing together organizations that do not normally work together; and critical mass by convening a wide range of voices acting in support of a new way of working.*
### 4. Recognizing partner contributions to transformation

A partnership can be seen as a way to hugely increase the number of options available for transforming agrifood systems, and the scope for creative solutions that would otherwise be impossible to achieve. This table sets out some of the various contributions that different partner types can bring to transformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner type</th>
<th>Examples of partner’s contribution to transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Government institutions | ● Legitimacy  
● Institutional uptake  
● Custodianship of public policies and regulations  
● Direct access to multiple accelerators of transformation |
| Academia and research institutions (ARI) | ● Interdisciplinary approaches to food and agriculture  
● Rigorous research and analysis  
● Trusted neutral convenor  
● Monitoring and evaluation capacity  
● Partnership learning and knowledge development  
● Evidence-based policy advice  
● Teaching; capacity building |
| Private sector  
*Includes farmers and farmers’ organizations; producer organizations and cooperatives; MSMEs; large enterprises; financial institutions; industry associations; philanthropic foundations* | ● A market-based / value creation approach  
● Brand, marketing, and communication expertise  
● Relationships across value chains  
● Technical innovation / efficiency / management  
● (Often) desire to be seen as part of the solution to societal challenges  
● Investment plans, in some cases spanning multiple decades  
● Financial and in-kind contributions |
| Civil society organizations (CSOs) | ● Outreach to farmers; representation of farmers and local communities  
● Understanding of local needs  
● Diversity of knowledge, approaches, and experience, which can (all) contribute to stronger agrifood systems  
● Commitment to fairness, equality and justice  
● Local legitimacy for social mobilization, especially for long-standing, locally-based groups |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner type</th>
<th>Examples of partner’s contribution to transformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **UN system**                   | • Strong relationships with government and policymakers  
                                  • Legitimacy, neutrality and independence  
                                  • Extensive technical support, knowledge and capacity  
                                  • Global network and access to knowledge and solutions from around the world |
| **Indigenous Peoples**          | • Globally precious and ancient place-based knowledge  
                                  • Lived experience as custodians of sustainable agrifood systems |
| **Small-scale farmers/ family farmers** | • Deep knowledge of agrifood systems  
                                  • Huge social and human capital  
                                  • Long-standing networks and relationships  
                                  • Local legitimacy |
| **Parliamentarians**            | • Democratic legitimacy and convening ability  
                                  • Influence on policy, taxation, and regulatory frameworks  
                                  • Approval of budget allocations |
| **International development partners (including IFIs)** | • Access to financial and technical instruments and expertise  
                                  • Relationships with governments and regional agencies |

Annex 2 explains how partnerships with different stakeholders are organized at FAO.
5. Partnerships and FAO as accelerators of agrifood systems transformation

Thinking systematically about the value created by a partnership can enable better access to the four accelerators of agrifood systems change identified in FAO’s Strategic Framework 2022–2031, and to the cross-cutting 'leave no one behind' agenda. For example, working in partnership can create collective momentum, advocacy, or voice towards a better future, which would otherwise not exist. Having multiple partners communicate aligned messages across diverse channels, about better nutrition, helps behavioural change happen more quickly.

Partnerships can significantly contribute to the accelerators of change by engaging the unique resources and levers that stakeholders from across societal sectors can bring to the table. In particular, they enhance FAO’s accelerators of change towards more effective, sustainable, resilient and inclusive agrifood systems. This is outlined in the examples below.

It is critical to engage stakeholders that have direct access to these accelerators in any partnership that aims to contribute to the transformation of agrifood systems, either as active partners or critical influencers of successful outcomes.

All agrifood systems comprise a complex and dynamic landscape of stakeholders. A very small number of these stakeholders will be engaged as active co-creating a joint work plan with FAO. Other stakeholders may be engaged in a range of ways, for example as champions; regulators; members / supporters; consultees; funders; data or knowledge providers; and potentially as inhibitors, i.e. those who benefit from the current status quo. As partnerships become more complex it becomes necessary to create multiple communications and engagement channels with different stakeholder groups.

[Diagram showing interconnected gears]

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Example contribution of different sector resources and levers to FAO accelerators:

**Innovation**

**Re-integrating Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge:**
Indigenous Peoples’ food systems are both intimately tied to the natural world and capable of providing food and nutritional security while restoring ecosystems and maintaining biodiversity. Centring Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge in policy supports the sustainable management of natural resources and the transformation of food systems for all.

**Access to finance:**
Affordable finance (from the private sector – banks, (including) development banks, and NGOs), allows farmers to access otherwise unaffordable equipment, or for governments to build infrastructure (e.g., roads, energy, water) in agricultural regions.

**Commercially viable and market-based approaches:**
Overwhelmingly provided by the private sector, be it a traditional company or a social enterprise, commercially viable approaches have the potential to scale, given they are economically sustainable by their very nature. Engaging small businesses in supply chains is a strong approach to bringing people out of poverty.

**Technology**

**Innovative technologies:**
Most often developed or implemented at scale by companies – such as promoting solar-powered irrigation (in line with FAO guidance) – innovative technologies can provide huge potential for transformative change.

**Data**

**Access to evidence, information, and data:**
Data from both traditional (government and academia) and non-traditional sources (e.g., market and marketing data produced by businesses, population movement tracking from mobile phone companies), forms an evidence base (often from academia) that makes the case for transformation.
**Complements (Governance, institutions, and human capital)**

**Standards:**
The creation of recognized standards (all stakeholder types), can be a driver for change in institutional practice and behaviours; it can support continuous improvement and open new opportunities to influence purchasing decisions through differentiated branding (e.g., Fairtrade). Supporting the development of new standards (and their implementation via multiple stakeholders) is one of FAO’s core contributions to transformation.

**Policy; regulation; taxation:**
Governments can implement regulations, such as requirements for food labels to display nutritional content (see FAO’s work in Chile); governments can also create new policies or change tax systems such as the introduction of a sales tax in the Pacific on sugar-sweetened beverages to help reduce obesity.

**Infrastructure development:**
The development of energy, water, and transport infrastructure (government and companies) to support agriculture value chains directly creates new opportunities for people and businesses. By reducing the cost of essential purchases, money can be used for other services – e.g., improved health care.

**New norms:**
System-level change, often driven by civil society movements relating to social, gender, and cultural norms, can really create change. The cultural shifts being created by the (global) youth climate movement represent a clear example of this.

**Advocacy and balancing power:**
Civil society, and even business, can engage and empower people to push for change, either from governments or companies, ensuring that power is used to support positive transformation of agrifood systems.

**Influence and behaviour change:**
Shifting behaviours through the power of marketing (business), a range of media (mainly media companies), and education (consumer groups, schools, NGOs) can have a major impact – from changing consumer purchase choices (towards more environmentally friendly products) to encouraging healthier lifestyles.

**Human and community capital:**
The motor of transformation is powered by healthy, well-educated, free citizens who can engage in creative self-expression. While many communities might have limited financial resources, they each/all bring transformative potential through their deep knowledge of local contexts and history, networks of relationships, and workable solutions.
6. Visualizing partnerships and systems transformation

The visuals and explanation below show the contribution of partnerships to the transformation of agrifood systems transformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition that an agrifood system is currently unsustainable</th>
<th>Transformative partnerships contribute to the transition from an unsustainable system to a sustainable system</th>
<th>Shared vision of a sustainable agrifood system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transforming agrifood systems begins with the direct lived experience of an urgent need for change among those most closely affected by the failing system. For example, if a particular agricultural landscape within a certain country has become so polluted that the soil is no longer productive, or even damaging to human and ecosystem health, people living in that landscape will feel the urge to change the system.</td>
<td>FAO’s role is to support governments and other to transform their agrifood systems. FAO alone will not have sufficient access to finance, technology, local relationships and networks, contextual knowledge, behavioral change experience, and so on. More importantly, FAO’s mandate is to achieve food security for all, ensuring people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. FAO is unlikely to have the mandate or legitimacy to transform an entire agrifood system through its own operations alone.</td>
<td>Transforming an agrifood system requires a shared vision of what a sustainable agrifood system looks like. FAO’s ‘four betters’ define the ways in which an agrifood system becomes more sustainable, resilient, inclusive, and efficient, through better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life. For example, a shared vision of a particular agricultural landscape becoming a net contributor to human and ecosystem health with continually improving soil quality, which thereby supports multiple livelihoods on an ongoing basis. The more stakeholders who share this vision, the more likely it is that transformation can occur.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
In practice: partnership contribution to transforming urban food systems

1. Recognition that an agrifood system is currently unsustainable

FAO has recognized that urban food systems are generally not well integrated (physically, economically, culturally) with their rural sources of food, leading to decreasing economic security for producers and poor health outcomes for urban consumers, particularly the urban poor.

2. Shared vision of a sustainable agrifood system

A vision for efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban food systems ensuring all people in all places are free from hunger and malnutrition, achieved through/by developing multiple strong connections between rural and urban communities, is captured in the FAO Framework for the Urban Food Agenda.

3. Transformative partnerships contribute to the transition from an unsustainable system to a sustainable system

A range of partnership types can play a role, looking not only at upstream supply chain issues but also at processing, distribution, consumer health, and nutrition. Many partnerships are pre-existing, facilitated both by FAO and by other actors. Partnerships that use an adaptive approach are most likely to be needed, given the dynamic and complex nature of the challenges involved in increasing the links between urban and rural communities.

When it comes to value creation, urban food partnerships can exploit complementarities between stakeholders, ensure a holistic approach that involves both rural and urban perspectives, and enable and facilitate shared learning between groups that may not otherwise engage with each other.

For example, FAO is currently working in partnership with RUAF (a global consortium of expert institutions and individuals working on sustainable food systems and urban agriculture). RUAF brings 20 years of experience in developing and implementing strategies to advance urban agriculture as well as in the transformation of food systems in cities around the world. FAO brings a range of technical expertise including urban planning, food systems knowledge, economics, and agronomy.
7. Transformative partnerships in practice

A diversity of partnerships is necessary to achieve positive change in agrifood systems. Knowing when to use different types of partnerships is essential. Some challenges are simpler than others and can be addressed through more supportive partnerships.

Partnerships can also evolve and grow, and all four types have the potential to be transformative. For example, a long-standing ‘supportive’ partnership between FAO and an academic institution or a civil society organization might have resulted in a strong relationship, with a high level of trust. This is reflected in regular and open exchange of knowledge, and even respectful disagreement, which in turn can result in transformative change. FAO’s relationship with the International Fertiliser Association is a good example. This partnership resulted in a new, locally adaptable code of conduct for responsible fertiliser usage, which has since been incorporated into an industry-wide code of practice.

However, because transformative change is ongoing, long-term, and systemic challenges are likely to be complex, and require systemic or platform-type partnerships, even if they start as a supportive or integrative partnership. When the desired outcome of a partnership is system change, and requires complex challenges to be addressed, it should be transformative by design and from the outset.

The table below provides a summary of the two different types of challenges, and which type of partnership is likely to be required in response. ‘Simple’ is not a synonym for ‘easy’. A challenge that is simple to explain (for example ‘there should be better food labelling to enable healthier choices’), is not necessarily easy to solve.
Characteristics of simple challenges

1. Problems are relatively easy to identify.
2. There are known solutions.
3. Problems can often be solved by an expert.
4. Change is often only required at a limited number of levels.
5. People are often receptive to solutions
6. Solutions can be deduced from generic ‘best practice’.
7. Solutions can be implemented quickly, or at least within a predictable timescale.

Characteristics of complex challenges

1. It can be difficult to identify the causes and dimensions of the problem.
2. Solutions may involve changes in beliefs, attitudes, or approaches.
3. The problem needs to be diagnosed, and solutions driven, by affected stakeholders through consultative processes.
4. Solutions require changes at multiple levels, and across organizational and thematic boundaries.
5. People are often resistant to acknowledging adaptive challenges.
6. Solutions are context-specific and cannot be derived from generic ‘best practice’.
7. Solutions require experimentation and adaptation, which take time.
8. Mindset and skillset needed for transformative partnerships

The more complex the challenge, the more important it becomes to integrate learning and experimentation into partnership activities. A partnership approach requires thoughtful, reflective, and collective work at all stages of its development and implementation, underpinned by a Theory of Change that evolves based on experience.

If the main aim of a partnership is, for example, to accelerate systemic changes by bringing policymakers closer to scientists, industry, and civil society to improve soil health, the partnership will achieve this not by employing project logic aimed at achieving pre-established results. Instead, it requires flexible, adaptive approaches that change and evolve in response to the context, while maintaining the same shared and overarching goals.

In addition to a new mindset and approach to partnering, it is critical to understand the skills and competencies that are required for transformative partnerships to flourish.

As noted above, complex challenges cannot be solved with a linear project logic. So many partnerships fail to deliver their full value because they are treated as a project rather than a long-standing partnership that evolves together with the system.

Partnering is a professional practice that requires just as much attention as technical knowledge about agrifood systems. Partnering competencies that have been proven to foster effective collaboration for systemic change include curiosity, eagerness to learn, open-mindedness, as well as the ability to build relationships with a variety of stakeholders and to communicate effectively and persuasively.

It is important for all partners to have a shared understanding of the purpose and definition of their partnership, and to invest in the development of partnering competencies as part of the process. It is equally useful to gain technical knowledge of the diverse array of partnering tools, such as stakeholder mapping, power analysis, and partnership health checks, since these provide insights and guidance on how to build effective partnerships.
Annex 1
Examples across the partnership spectrum

### SUPPORTIVE

FAO has established a partnership with Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the leading academic institution in Oman. FAO actively collaborates with SQU to mobilize knowledge and innovations, strengthen capacities, provide evidence-based solutions to policy processes, and share its own experience from the ground with the academic community. FAO Oman has engaged with SQU over the years in joint and interdisciplinary research projects, methodology sharing, joint publications, multistakeholder processes and dialogues on food security and nutrition issues, hosting students as interns, and co-organizing events on topics of mutual interest. It included, for instance, research on farmer associations. The partnership ensures the sustainability of results through the institutionalization of methodologies and knowledge produced.

The [African Conservation Tillage Network](http://www.actnet.org/) and FAO are partnering to support African farming households in creating opportunities for economic growth through conservation agriculture and sustainable agricultural mechanization. The partnership has supported farmers in transitioning from subsistence to commercial and market-oriented farming.

FAO and Luiss University are working together to develop capacities for/of food security and nutrition. This includes FAO support in developing the Luiss Master's degree programme on Food Security Law for early and mid-level food security professionals, which embeds FAO e-Learning products in its coursework. FAO regularly contributes its expertise through guest lectures on themes such as CFS-RAI, food safety, and food loss and waste.

**Advancing sustainable rural development in the Mediterranean**: FAO and the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies have collaborated on a variety of projects since 1977. In January 2009, this partnership was strengthened with a framework agreement. Both organizations agreed to enhance their collaboration in the fields of traditional foods, forest protection, irrigation modernization, and plant disease management techniques and quarantine measures, especially through sharing of knowledge and expertise, capacity development, and policy dialogue.

### INTEGRATIVE

In Ecuador, the Climate Smart Livestock programme led to the implementation of a formal partnership agreement between FAO and COFIDES and a financial contribution agreement with Ordeño and BanEcuador. This was aimed at strengthening local farmers' capacities and the productive development of small and medium livestock systems in pilot areas.

FAO partnered with a public bank, BanEcuador, under FAO Ecuador's guidance and as part of the Climate Smart Livestock project. FAO assisted in the establishment of the bank's new line of green microcredit and launched a pilot with milk producers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

FAO is partnering with [Paradise Foods and the European Union in Papua New Guinea](http://www.papuanewguinea.org/) to promote more inclusive and sustainable cocoa production value chains and create income generation opportunities for smallholder farmers, through quality improvement, better market access, and the development of product certification schemes. The improved product quality and standardized certification go beyond that which any single partner organization could deliver operating alone.

FAO and the Texas A&M University System are providing joint resources to develop and implement a capacity development course to enhance animal feed laboratories. The course focuses on key quality assurance concepts, including the chain of custody, method development, information management, laboratory accreditation, statistical process control, and international laboratory standards. The online course was established in 2013 and has trained over 100 professionals from more than 47 countries. ([See also partnership with Texas A&M as part of OneHealth](http://www.onedrive.com/)).
FAO's partnership with ASEAN aims to increase uptake of Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) principles, with an ambitious, long-term vision: "by 2030, facilitate a measurable increase in responsible and sustainable private sector investment in ASEAN's food, agriculture and forestry sectors". Such a systemic shift would alter the investment landscape with major consequences on supply chains.

FAO is an implementing partner with GrowAsia, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, and ASIADHRRA. Led by the ASEAN Secretariat, ensuring government leadership, the partnership is funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation Agency and others. ASIADHRRA works to strengthen the capacities of rural organizations and facilitate their inclusion in policy dialogues and consultation processes, such as CFS-RAI.

**FAO and RUFORUM** have a Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2017 and renewed in 2020, which recognizes the central role of family farming in agricultural innovation, and as the agent of change to eliminate hunger and ensure food security and nutrition.

In 2022, FAO partnered with the University of Zambia to host "Public Policy Cycles for Family Farming Training Programme for State and Non-State Actors in Zambia", complementing other capacity-building efforts in the country on agricultural policy formulation, for government, the private sector, and academia.

The aim is to increase the capacities of actors in Zambia, with versatile tools, instruments, and competencies to build, implement, monitor, and evaluate relevant, effective, and context-specific family-centred policies, connecting policy theory and practices that have been successfully applied around the world.

**Michigan State University (MSU)**

This partnership contributes to ecosystem restoration and its links to sustainable food systems in improving food security and livelihoods, with a particular focus on small-scale terrestrial and aquatic food production systems in Africa and Southeast Asia. FAO and MSU contribute academic resources, technical knowledge, and information; convening workshops and conferences; and utilizing networks including InFish and the International Waters Association.

**Sustainable Rice Landscape Initiative in SE Asia**

The Sustainable Rice Landscape Initiative (SRLI) supports sustainable production of rice in Southeast Asia, assisting farmers and supply chains adversely impacted by climate change.

Led by UN Environment, FAO, the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP), the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the SRLI brings together a range of organizations, including international agencies, with extensive experience in supporting sustainable production; research institutions at the forefront in the development of technical knowledge; and the private sector.

**Mountain Partnership: Organic Practices and Participatory Guarantee Systems**

As part of the Mountain Partnership Platform (MPP), a partnership with IFOAM International has supported thousands of mountain producers in eight countries by strengthening the value chain of numerous high-value mountain products, such as a stingless bee honey from the Bolivian Andes, and pink and purple rice cultivated in the Indian Himalayas. Through this initiative, mountain producers can use a voluntary certification and labelling scheme for their organic products to promote them in domestic markets. The MPP initiative has created an international network of Participatory Guarantee Systems to certify farming systems as ethical, fair, and organic.

**World Banana Forum**: This forum convenes key stakeholders in the global banana supply chain to agree on best practices for sustainable production and trade. It features retailers, importers, producers, exporters, consumer associations, governments, research institutions, trade unions, and civil society organizations.
Annex 2

How partnerships are organized at FAO

FAO has been working in partnership with different stakeholders for many years, and several strategies have been defined that govern how partnerships are created according to stakeholder type or according to FAO function. These strategies are summarized in the box below. This current document is designed to complement each of these partnership strategies. In addition, FAO engages in many multi-stakeholder partnerships and South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). In these cases, this current document can complement the programmatic approach – for example, to enable a transformational approach to FAO’s partnerships on responsible agricultural investment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder / FAO functional area</th>
<th>Summary of FAO’s strategic approach to working with this stakeholder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government institutions</td>
<td>Governments are primary partners for FAO, as an intergovernmental organization. The FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 is the primary mechanism through which FAO’s engagement with government institutions is delivered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia and Research institutions (ARI)</td>
<td>FAO partnerships with ARI are currently being evaluated and a new internal framework to guide FAO’s work with ARI is being produced, following multiple earlier iterations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>The <a href="#">FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021–2025</a> was endorsed in December 2020, following an evaluation of the previous strategy. The approach is based on a ‘connect, support, sustain’ framework. It takes a more proactive approach to strategic engagements with the private sector in support of Members achieving the SDGs, with a new, fit-for-purpose due diligence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)</td>
<td><a href="#">FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations</a> was validated, following the evaluation conducted in 2020 of the CSO strategy.</td>
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</table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UN system</strong></td>
<td>A strategic approach to collaborating with other UN agencies, including other Rome-based Agencies, is currently being reviewed in accordance with a recent joint evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indigenous Peoples</strong></td>
<td>The FAO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples works to ensure that FAO makes all due efforts to respect, include, and promote Indigenous Peoples’ issues in its work. FAO also participates in informal trust-based alliances, such as the Global-Hub on Indigenous Peoples’ Food Systems. The strategic approach is focused on transformation. Documented evolution of approach to, rationale for, and results from, alliance-building, is captured in a regularly updated narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Small-scale farmers/ family farmers</strong></td>
<td>There is no specific strategy for small-scale farmers besides the UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 as a platform to bring family farmers and family farmer organizations together. In general, farmers are recognized as a private sector under the new private sector strategy (and in some cases, some farmers’ organizations are covered by the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with CSO). Self-determination by farmer organizations is well recognized in the CSO Strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parliamentarians</strong></td>
<td>FAO has no specific strategy for partnerships with parliamentarians, although a specific work team is dedicated to engagement with parliamentarians, organizing global events such as the Second Global Parliamentary Summit against Hunger and Malnutrition in 2023, which brought together parliamentarians from 64 countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International development partners (including international financial institutions)</strong></td>
<td>FAO works extensively with multiple inter-governmental organizations beyond the UN system, including the World Bank and other multilateral development banks.</td>
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3 “FAO tends to consider small-scale producers under the scope of civil society, whereas larger foundations or commercial food organizations are usually treated as private sector. However, the division is not always clear-cut. Therefore, these organizations may be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine under which Strategy they fall more appropriately. Given FAO’s mandate, FAO will work to ensure adequate representation and participation of producers’ organizations at FAO meetings and processes to ensure their voices are considered and reflected. This will be done according to either the strategy for partnership with the private sector strategy or with civil society.”