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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AFRICA

Thirty-first Session

Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 23-27 March 2020

Outcomes of Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF) Round Table of Contributors (11 June 2019 Malabo, Equatorial Guinea)

The Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF) was established to support relevant national and regional priorities, and in alignment with FAO's revised strategic framework. The Evaluation of ASTF by the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) found it to be critically relevant for the African context as it addresses a fundamental mismatch in resources available for Africa's development. The reason is that although the continent's priorities are defined by member states, external partners drive their funding. ASTF is known to be highly cost-effective, with reduced administrative overhead costs (7 percent), thereby allowing most of the Fund to reach beneficiaries directly in countries. In addition, since duplications in operating procedures have been avoided in managing the Fund, the transaction cost is relatively low. It has been able to create synergies and leverage capacity and resources from other projects funded by development partners to achieve catalytic impacts. The ASTF enables an effective synchrony between the priority challenges currently faced by rural Africa and the development solutions deployed to address them.

The main advantage is its very rapid and effective decision making by its steering committee. Despite the achievements of ASTF, a larger number of beneficiaries are still waiting to be supported. The revitalized ASTF aims to expand the size of the Fund, and attract a critical mass of contributors from African countries, and its partners. In order to sustain the momentum and accelerate its impact there is need to transform the ASTF to attract funds from an expanded partner base by making it more appealing to an increased number of contributors from African countries and Africa's partners.

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I. Introduction

1. The ASTF portfolio has an overall positive performance, ranging from upstream policy support, to building capacity at institutional and individual levels. By 2017, the ASTF had supported 18 projects in 41 sub-Saharan African countries, covering diverse themes. Both the ASTF evaluation and a senior-level field visit, documented several spin-offs and important catalytic effects by ASTF projects, leading to the replication and upscaling of their interventions by other donors or governments. The flexibility offered by the ASTF allows for investments in critical gaps, emerging priorities and rapid interventions in addressing key challenges in the region. It also enables the development of capacity and technical expertise in new areas to help women and men in rural communities respond to emerging challenges. The ASTF supported projects that helped to upscale good practices, knowledge and technology from one African country to another. It has successfully demonstrated solidarity between African countries through funding several exchanges and sharing of short-term development solutions such as capacity, experience and knowledge among African countries.
2. ASTF has helped to strengthen partnerships with key regional development actors in Africa, such as the African Union (AU), the AU Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). ASTF has also helped to facilitate cross-sectoral work that simultaneously addresses the environmental, social and economic dimensions of today's challenges. The predictability of funding was an important success factor.

II. Achievements

3. By 2017, the ASTF had supported 18 projects implemented in 41 African countries, in diverse areas of work. These have helped in achieving effectiveness, scaling up, creating synergies, and removing barriers. The ASTF evaluation showed that it has benefited millions of rural people in Africa, and many good lessons have been learned.
4. At the regional level, the capacity of Southern African countries was strengthened in the control of threats to food safety, plant and animal pests, as well as in agricultural productivity and trade. About 4 500 experts from eight SADC countries enhanced their capacity to tackle transboundary pests and diseases through training and coordination support, which enabled the region's successful response to the Fall Armyworm invasion. In West Africa, decent rural employment opportunities were supported for young people through sustainable aquaculture and cassava value chains. The Fund also supported rapid intervention projects in West Africa during the Ebola outbreak. Central African countries received support to strengthen food security in urban areas. In East Africa, support on nutrition-sensitive agriculture helped improve nutrition and created employment opportunities for young people. In 2020, ASTF also contributed USD 1 million towards strengthening capacity for combating Desert Locust in the Horn of Africa. [<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1260420/icode/>]
5. **The key results from beneficiary countries** showed that in South Sudan, nearly 200 000 families in conflict-affected areas enhanced their nutritional intake. About 560 000 animals were protected from risk of disease outbreak thanks to a country-wide vaccination initiative, thereby protecting assets and building resilience for 19 000 households. In Malawi and Mali, 2 600 farm families and over 1 200 women and youth were empowered to effectively engage in food production and marketing activities, and to start up personal businesses, creating 400 new jobs. An additional 8 500 households in Malawi were supported to recover from flood disaster in 2015. Likewise, about 12 000 rural smallholders in Ethiopia, including women and youth, increased their income due to better access to inputs and the promotion of livelihood diversification strategies. Nearly 160 000 vulnerable households in the

Niger improved their agricultural productivity and food security thanks to quality input distribution and investments in livestock and small-scale irrigation infrastructure. In the Central Africa Republic, 16 000 households had increased access to agricultural inputs thereby increasing their rice and groundnut production. Food security assessment and analyses was also supported. More than 4 000 farm families in Ebola Virus Disease-affected communities in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone doubled their rice and vegetable productivity thanks to loan schemes and access to critical inputs and training. Household earnings in Sierra Leone increased from zero to USD 50-100 per week. Over 1 500 female and male youth in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda improved their income and access to food through decent job creation and stronger productive capacities in poultry, egg production and aquaculture value chains. Over 1 000 women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Gambia and Eswatini, including Dimitra Club members, were empowered through training in commercialization and value chain development, farming techniques, pest management, and access to credit and financial services.

III. Spin-offs from ASTF as a Catalytic Fund

6. The ASTF evaluation by OED¹, also complemented by a senior-level field visit, documented several spin-offs and important catalytic effects thanks to well-designed and implemented ASTF projects, leading to the replication and upscaling of their interventions by other donors or governments. For instance, the youth employment project in Rwanda, has motivated the government to invest the same amount in replicating the poultry model in two other locations. In Malawi, the ASTF successfully mobilized EUR 6.8 million bilateral funding from the European Union, and an additional USD 32.6 million to replicate the farmer field school model in ten districts. In Mali, the ASTF mobilized EUR 1.5 million from Luxembourg and USD 318 085 from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to support similar interventions in other regions. In Liberia, the ASTF raised USD 1.2 million from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for scaling up interventions. In the Niger, the ASTF mobilized USD 810 300 from the Government of Norway to scale up activities outside the project area. The project in the Southern African region has led to the mobilization of an additional Euro 3.5 million from the European Union, to cover all 16 SADC countries.

IV. Revamping of the ASTF

7. Despite the positive impact the ASTF has had on the lives of millions of people in rural areas, the lack of recapitalization can jeopardize the continuity of the Fund and its objectives. One of the key areas highlighted by the ASTF evaluation by OED in 2017, is the need to undertake aggressive resource mobilization aimed at replenishing the Fund. This includes investment in communication and fundraising capacity and events. Likewise, at the 30th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa, held in Khartoum, in February 2018, the Ministers for Agriculture and heads of delegation recognized the achievements of the ASTF. They have called on African countries to step up their support and contribution for the capitalization and scaling up of the ASTF, and encouraged a wide participation in ASTF's upcoming resource mobilization forum in 2019. This Information Note sets out FAO's renewed call and new modalities for expanded partnership in unearmarked funding towards ASTF.

V. The Main Components of the Renewed ASTF

8. The main thrust of the ASTF is the renewed commitment and recapitalization of the Fund in order to allow the continuation of this commendable initiative. This includes broadening the Fund to attract funding from more countries and resource partners. The new ASTF is anchored

¹ Office of Evaluation (OED) 2016. Evaluation of the Africa Solidarity Trust Fund. Evaluation Series. [<http://www.fao.org/evaluation>]

in a clear theory of change, with new transformative features as its building blocks for achieving desired outcomes. The renewed ASTF includes four key components as follows.

a. Support Actions for Accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

9. In order for African countries to achieve the SDGs by 2030, most countries need support to pursue a transformative path, develop long-term strategies and a roadmap that are quantifiable and time-bound. SDGs capacity development, cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder policy dialogue and facilitation, monitoring and data support are areas in which most countries need support. At the current pace, African countries still have major challenges in mobilizing domestic resources and investments needed to effectively plan and implement the SDGs. Focusing on the marginal expansion of normal sectoral work is insufficient to deliver the SDGs. Instead, a more coordinated support from FAO through the ASTF will enhance a transformative pathway to SDGs implementation actions, including: i) SDG Indicator monitoring and data support; ii) cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder policy dialogue and investment planning; and (iii) integrated policies, partnerships to leverage investments, resource mobilization and capacity development. Therefore, in order for FAO to effectively support African countries on the 2030 Agenda, and uphold its neutrality and multilateral roles, an increased level of unearmarked funding is needed through the ASTF. Through the ASTF, FAO will provide support to SDGs implementation actions at the country level.

b. Intra-Africa Knowledge Sharing and Exchange

10. African countries have been generating research and innovative solutions to tackle their development challenges. Such an invaluable asset can form important building blocks which, if harnessed, could enhance Africa's competitiveness. Much of the knowledge and capacity needed in Africa is available somewhere on the continent, but they need to be effectively updated, shared and scaled up. One of the objectives of ASTF is to foster intra-Africa collaboration and document good practices and African institutions of excellence in food and agriculture. The new ASTF will support platforms for generation of innovation and sharing development solutions among countries. In particular, ASTF will mobilize Africa research centres, and think tanks towards SDG solutions. This will involve two pathways:

- a. *Intra-Africa knowledge sharing and exchange.* As countries share and exchange development solutions—technology, skills, knowledge, experiences and technical know-how, they will be able to co-learn, co-innovate and co-develop and/or improve mutually relevant and sustainable innovations. Innovative knowledge generation and sharing has a crucial role to play in ensuring a dynamic flow of development solutions in the continent²;
- b. *Knowledge generation and exchange between Africa's Centres of Excellence.* The new ASTF provides a good opportunity to better tap into Centres of Excellence and their expertise, through identifying and strengthening Africa Centres of Excellence and using the South-South Cooperation (SSC) instrument to connect existing Centres of Excellence and promote knowledge sharing and exchange of development solutions. It will build on the stocktaking exercise already undertaken by FAO and the African Union Commission (AUC), through the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF). The exercise assessed existing African Centres of Excellence, identified

² South-South Cooperation (SSC) is an innovative instrument that facilitates the sharing of technological knowledge, know-how transfer and other capacity development solutions among countries in the South

capacity gaps, and examined how an African Centre of Excellence might bridge these gaps to transform agriculture and food systems agenda³.

c. Innovative Financial Modalities

11. The African countries will be able to contribute to any of the following two streams:

- a. *Supporting Africa-to-Africa Solutions.* The first value proposition to an African country contributing is that ASTF is “member-owned.” Like a club, this ownership value reinforces the “solidarity” concept of the ASTF that should encourage motivated African countries to rally and contribute because they are “Our Trust Fund”. This positions the ASTF to be an effective ‘enabler fund’ that supports African countries in achieving their priority commitments by removing implementation barriers, connecting opportunities and leveraging capacities. Pooling resources involves sharing of credits, risks and responsibilities, especially when addressing multi-faceted challenges. The central premise of the ASTF is that this pool of unearmarked funds will bring additional gains that would otherwise not have been possible with individual projects, such as its agility and responsiveness to emergency situations, capturing emerging opportunities, leveraging and removing barriers to other initiatives. This does not only reduce fragmentation, duplication and transaction costs but also creates synergies and coherence, leading to better outcomes. This ASTF is a multi-country portfolio of unearmarked funding to support countries in achieving their interconnected priority commitments.
- b. *Supporting In-country Solutions.* Sometimes the ownership value is not enough. As ASTF becomes more diverse and more countries contribute, maintaining that value, in terms of attention from the Fund is more difficult. African countries rarely see themselves as “donor countries”, so ownership may not be enough. Ownership alone does not pay the bills, so there has to be an additional incentive for countries that substantially contribute to the Fund. Instead, the principle of Africa’s solidarity should be understood as a two-way process of “Give and Take”, whereby a contributing country would also benefit proportionately from the initiatives supported by ASTF. This may include setting aside a portion of a country’s contribution from the unearmarked pooled funding to support in-country initiatives. This fund can be ring-fenced to support in-country level work and managed by the FAO Representative of that country. This can be in the form of a contributing country setting up an additional Unilateral Trust Fund (UTF) to support in-country top priorities. The fund will enable FAO to mobilize focused support from the continent or beyond, including through South-South and triangular cooperation.

d. Funding Windows for Partners of Africa

12. Motivated development partners within and outside Africa will be able to contribute to the ASTF through the following three streams:

- a. *Africa’s Development Partners.* Given the multi-faceted challenges facing Africa, and the interest of the development community to participate in its development in the era of the SDGs, the ASTF is open to contributions from stakeholders such as the bilateral and multilateral donors—referred to as “Friends of Africa”, mainly development

³ Centres of Excellence (CoEs) assessed were those put forward by governments or recognized by the AU or Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as active contributors to development research.

partners in addition to those contributions made by African countries. Although the ASTF is a single basket portfolio of unearmarked funds and an Africa-led fund, it also has a window for multi-partner participation at the country, regional or global level. This will offer the opportunity for partners operating in African countries, and global partners to contribute unearmarked funds directly to the development of Africa through the ASTF, including to replicate or scale up proven practices, initiatives, within a country or elsewhere in Africa. Contributions can be made through donations, contributions and/or co-financing agreements; these can be in-kind, financial or in the form of technical assistance. This may include South-South and triangular cooperation mechanisms.

- b. *Impact Financing Investment.* The ASTF aims to mobilize national, regional and global capital at scale to accelerate delivery of the SDGs and other Africa commitments. Impact Financing is an investment stream that supports investment by private companies with the aim to have a positive development impact at the base of the socio-economic pyramid—investment to have socio-economic impact on rural livelihoods. This type of investment is growing rapidly around the world, and it is attractive to private sector entities which are determined to make social and environmental impacts, as well as financial returns. African countries have development partners, as well as many private sector actors and financial institutions that might be willing to support them to achieve the SDGs. This will incentivize the private sector’s catalytic investment for impact financing or blended development finance, in areas where this can make a difference, especially towards achieving the SDGs and Africa’s Agenda 2063. The ASTF can serve as a conduit to connect FAO’s work. The financial institutions can play a role in using part of an investment loan to countries (public funds) to de-risk or ‘leverage’ investments for development impact by private sectors. This might offer the opportunity to “crowd in” private sector financing that would otherwise not be available to development projects. ASTF will capitalize on FAO’s normative and development work, coupled with its convening power as a neutral broker to support certification, provide policy advice and capacity development to ensure countries deliver.
- c. *Blended Finance.* The need to mobilize resources beyond development finance and to use public finance in a catalytic way is implied in the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action (AAAA), Paris Agreement and the Africa’s Agenda 2063. Africa’s emerging and frontier markets are particularly attractive to private sectors, in food systems and agriculture, climate smart agriculture, renewable energy, clean technologies, etc. There is increasing recognition that a large amount of capital that could be deployed to projects in emerging markets, especially African countries, is not flowing because its providers—private sector, require measures to mitigate risk. They also need partnerships with other capital providers along the risk-capital spectrum, policy intervention, as well as intermediation, facilitation and technical assistance to remove barriers. International Financial Institutions and development actors (resource partners), can be rallied to deploy unique financial and non-financial instruments that can help private investors overcome barriers. Blended finance solutions can provide financial support to high development impact of strategic importance, especially to achieve the SDGs and Africa’s Agenda 2063. Through the ASTF, FAO aims to facilitate blended partnership, and will seek to leverage its technical and convening power, its local presence and partnership networks, to bridge knowledge, capacity and policy gaps, to help create a pipeline of investable opportunities and an enabling environment for innovative financing. This includes helping to develop public-private partnerships that are win-win for all.

VI. Results of the ASTF Round Table

13. **The second phase of the ASTF** was launched through a Round Table of Contributors held at the International Conference Center of Sipopo in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea on 11 June 2019. The ASTF Round Table was organized by FAO and hosted by the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. It drew high-level delegates from 22 African and 14 non-African countries, including the participation of four African Heads of State and Government, several Ministers, Ambassadors, high-level officials and other delegates of countries and organizations from within and outside of Africa. The Round Table was comprised of two key parts: (i) the Opening session, and (ii) the Pledging session. The Event was moderated by Ms Coumba Sow (Coordinator of FAO's Sub-Resilience Team, based in Dakar, Senegal). The Heads of State and Government and high level delegates of the Round Table included:

1. H.E. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, *President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea (Host)*
 2. H.E. Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, *President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania*
 3. H.E. José Mário Vaz, *President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau*
 4. H.E. Ambrose Mandyulo Dlamini, *Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini, and*
 5. Ms Maria Helena Semedo, *Deputy Director-General of FAO, Rome.*
14. The total amounts pledged by countries amounted to USD 25 million detailed as follows: Angola (USD 10 million), Equatorial Guinea (USD 10 million), France (EUR 2 million), China (USD 2.6million), Eswatini (USD 100 000), and Zimbabwe (USD 100 000).

VII. Conclusions and Next Steps

- The African countries that pledged are encouraged to materialize their commitments;
- FAO should continue to encourage countries to contribute;
- FAO to follow up with countries on the signing of the contribution agreements, with those countries that are yet to sign;
- FAO to organize the Round Table of Contributors as a biennial or triennial event, in order to ensure continuous replenishment of the ASTF.