

165th Session of the Council

Progress Report on the Hand-in-Hand Initiative

In response to the request of Members of the Programme Committee (PC 128) and FAO Council (CL 164), a summary of the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative's implementation progress between June and October 2020 has been prepared (c.f. document CL 165/6).

As of 20 November 2020, 30 countries have started to engage with the Hand-in-Hand Initiative: Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guatemala, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Rwanda, Solomon Islands, Syria, Tajikistan, Tuvalu, Yemen and Zimbabwe. This number is expected to increase rapidly in the coming weeks until a first target of 50 countries has been reached.

The HIH Geospatial Platform was officially launched in July 2020. FAO engaged a number of technology companies and public data providers, as well as other UN Agencies, research institutions and space agencies to build the geospatial platform. This work is ongoing, but more than 8,000 users from 123 countries now access the platform each month. The platform's model-based analytics and territorial approach help policymakers pinpoint areas of opportunities and identify trade-offs that stymie progress. A "train the trainers" approach is being implemented to enable Members and staff to use the HIH Geospatial Platform. FAO has established a data lab within the Statistics Division to validate country data and fill data gaps.

While FAO data platforms are designed as global public goods, rules and mechanisms have been put in place to protect Member data, which FAO has been requested to keep confidential. Documentation of the protocols governing the handling, use and protection of data is being developed for review by the end of the first quarter of 2021.

HIH programme dashboards, consisting of data visualizations with the most current data inputs from implementing partners, are being developed. The dashboards will provide country-specific as well as aggregated information on the programmes designed in each country, the progress toward implementation (objectives and key results) and programme impacts measured against Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) outcomes. The dashboards support alignment and create transparency for all partners, enable improved coordination and communication, and track progress toward intermediate milestones and ultimate objectives. The dashboards will support consultation among partners to address emerging operational bottlenecks. They will ensure government control and mutual accountability among the partners. The prototypes will be available before year-end.

FAO has launched a robust partnership-building effort to engage non-state actors including research institutions, non-governmental organisations and non-profit civil society organizations, private philanthropies and private-sector entities, all within the same dashboard-supported transparency, coordination and accountability framework.

The HIH "matchmaking" presents an important innovation in FAO's approach to partnership building. Early examples include joining forces with Mars, Inc. to test and publish, as global public goods, models for predicting aflatoxin outbreaks in order to improve food safety, protect small producer incomes and livelihoods, and boost food security and nutrition. Participation of all partners is arranged based on programmatic requirements with the specific consent of the national government. The matchmaking approach will lead to sustained programmatic work that results in knowledge creation and sharing, capacity development, and accelerated joint action towards achieving the SDGs.

Key decisions about partner participation within the HIH framework rests with the national governments as well as each of the partners invited through the matchmaking process. FAO support is built from the ground up, with FAORs coordinating communications with the FAO Member Nation. Focal points at national, regional/sub-regional and headquarters levels and a representative of the FAO Investment Centre form the backbone of programme support. Overall supervision is led by the Chief Economist (DDCE) with support from the Director of the FAO Investment Centre (CFI), the Senior Officer responsible for the Global Network against Food Crises (OER), and the Senior Officer responsible for Governance and support to Hand-in-Hand (DDCG).

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