| | 联合国
粮食及
农业组织 | Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations | Organisation des Nations
Unies pour l'alimentation
et l'agriculture | Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных Наций | Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura | منظمة
الأغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة |

COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

Thirty-fourth Session
1–5 February
TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM FOR DIGITAL FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

➢ At its 164th Session, the FAO Council endorsed the proposal for FAO to host the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture ("the Platform") and requested review of its Terms of Reference (ToRs) by the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), the Committee on Forestry (COFO), the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the Programme Committee and the FAO Council.

➢ This document presents the revised ToRs for the Platform incorporating the feedback provided thereon by COAG at its 27th Session (28 September – 2 October 2020), COFO at its 25th Session (5 – 9 October 2020), the Programme Committee at its 129th Session (9-13 November 2020) and the FAO Council at its 165th Session (30 November – 4 December 2020) respectively and informs about the envisaged next steps.

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

Màximo Torero Cullen
Chief Economist
Economic and Social Development Stream
Tel. +39 06570 50869
Email: Maximo.ToreroCullen@fao.org

I.   Background

1.   On the basis of a request by the 2020 Berlin Agriculture Ministers Conference in the context of the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture ("the GFFA"), and the recommendations of the 110th Session of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (28-29 May 2020), the 128th Session of the Programme Committee (8-18 June 2020) and the Joint Meeting of the 128th Session of the Programme Committee and the 180th Session of the Finance Committee (8, 12, 16 and 17 June 2020),[1] the FAO Council, during its 164th Session (6 to 10 July 2020), endorsed the proposal for hosting by FAO of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture ("the Platform"), and requested review of the Terms of Reference ("ToRs") for the Platform by the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), the Committee on Forestry (COFO), the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the Programme Committee and the FAO Council.[2,3]

2.   In this context, documents COAG/2020/22, COFO/2020/8.1.a and PC 129/INF/6 were submitted and considered by the 27th Session of COAG (28 September - 2 October 2020), the 25th Session of COFO (5-9 October 2020) and the 129th Session of the Programme Committee (9-13 November 2020) respectively.[4]

3.   The current ToRs are based on the concept note entitled "Realizing the potential of digitalization to improve the agri-food system: Proposing a new International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture" prepared for the 2020 Berlin Agriculture Ministers Conference in the context of the GFFA by FAO and other International Organizations[5], and have been revised to take into account the feedback provided by the 27th Session of COAG (28 September – 2 October 2020), the 25th Session of COFO (5 – 9 October 2020), the 129th Session of the Programme Committee (9-13 November 2020) and the 165th Session of the FAO Council (30 November – 4 December 2020).[6]

II.   Nature

4.   The hosting of the Platform by FAO will not result in the creation of an autonomous legal entity nor a new FAO body but, rather, in a flexible, light and consensual coordination mechanism supported by FAO while complying with its regulations, rules and procedures. Participation in this mechanism will be voluntary.

5.   Establishing the Platform is in accordance with the UN Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies[7] that promotes multi-stakeholder dialogue on normative frameworks that support these technologies to build trust and confidence. It is also in line with the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation[8] for developing multi-stakeholder or

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[1] Report of the 110th Session of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (28-29 May 2020)
(http://www.fao.org/3/nc435en/nc435en.pdf), Report of the 128th Session of the Programme Committee (8-18 June 2020)
(http://www.fao.org/3/nc439en/nc439en.pdf), Report of the Joint Meeting of the 128th Session of the Programme Committee and the 180th
Session of the Finance Committee. (8, 12, 16 and 17 June 2020) (http://www.fao.org/3/nc438en/nc438en.pdf).
[2] Report of the Council of FAO. Hundred and Sixty-fourth Session, 6-10 July 2020, CL 164 REP
(http://www.fao.org/3/nd238en/nd238en.pdf).
[3] The process leading to discussions on this initiative is described in document CL 164/9 (http://www.fao.org/3/nd058en/nd058en.pdf).
[4] COAG/2020/22 (http://www.fao.org/3/nd396en/nd396en.pdf), COFO/2020/8.1.a (http://www.fao.org/3/nd713en/nd713en.pdf), PC
129/INF/6 (http://www.fao.org/3/ne027en/ne027en.pdf).
[5] FAO. 2019. Realizing the potential of digitalization to improve the agri-food system: Proposing a new International Digital Council for
Food and Agriculture. A concept note. Rome, FAO. (http://www.fao.org/3/ca7485en/ca7485en.pdf).
[6] Report of the 27th Session of the Committee on Agriculture, 28 September-2 October 2020, C2021/21
(http://www.fao.org/3/ne021en/ne021en.pdf); Report of the 25th Session of the Committee on Forestry, 5-9 October 2020, COFO/2020/REP
(http://www.fao.org/3/ne205en/ne205en.pdf); Report of the 129th Session of the Programme Committee, 9-13 November 2020, CL 165/10
(http://www.fao.org/3/ne222en/ne222en.pdf); Report of the Council of FAO, Hundred and Sixty-fifth Session, 30 November-4 December
2020, CL 165/REP (http://www.fao.org/3/ne381en/ne381en.pdf).
[7] UN Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies. (https://www.un.org/en/newtechnologies/images/pdf/SGs-Strategy-on-New-
Technologies.pdf).
[8] UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. The age of digital interdependence.
(https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/DigitalCooperation-report-for%20web.pdf).

bilateral initiatives on specific issues, and the Report of the UN Secretary-General 'Roadmap for Digital Cooperation'.[9]

III.   Mission

6.   The Platform aims at providing an inclusive multi-stakeholder forum to promote dialogue on the digitalization of the food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry sectors. Its main function is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences on best practices and policy approaches between stakeholders, including Members, agri-business and the private sector, farmers, the civil and knowledge societies, and International Organizations. Through dialogue and consensus on best practices, actions and policy approaches, it will:

a)   provide an entry point for all stakeholders, farmers, agri-business and the private sector, the civil and knowledge societies and consumers into discussions on digital technology applications on food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry, and narrow the digital divide by including in these discussions smallholder farmers, small and medium-sized enterprises, and marginalized groups to make their voices heard;

b)   increase awareness of issues related to food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry in the appropriate digital economy organizations without duplicating their activities; and,

c)   contribute to the application of safe, trustworthy, sustainable, human rights-based and inclusive digital technologies on food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and land use planning, land use change and forestry to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development.
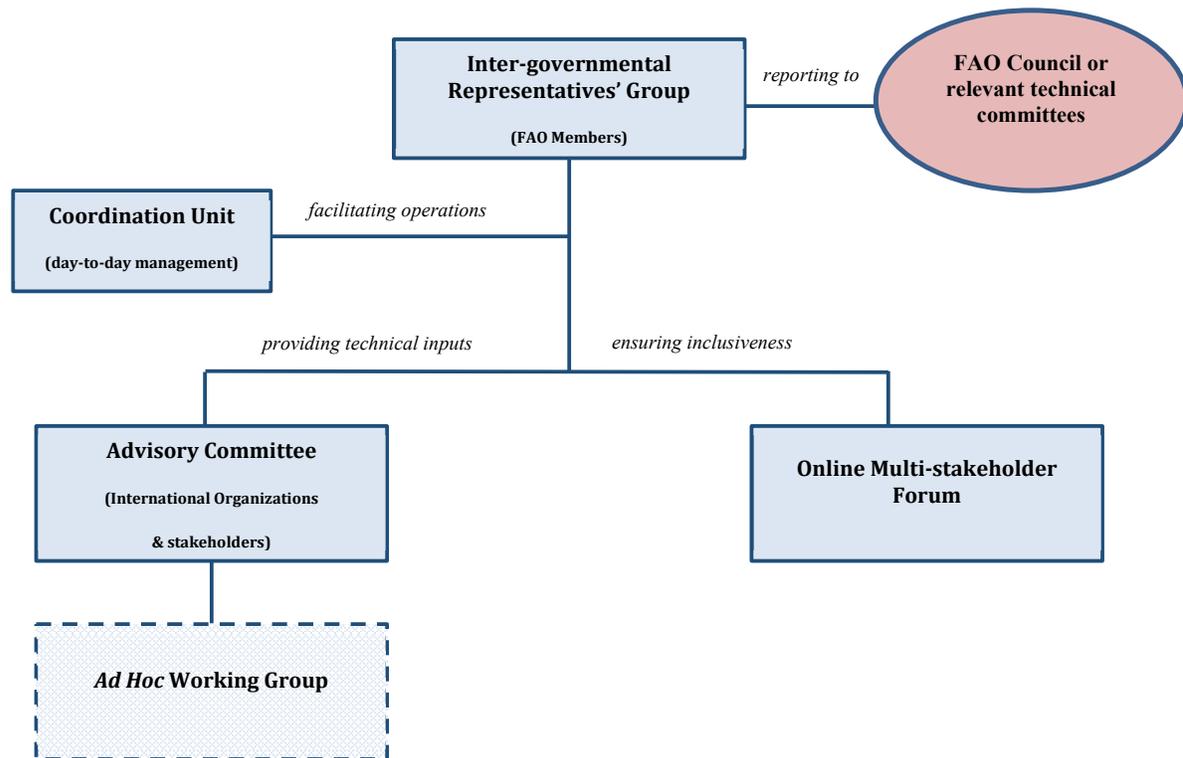
IV.   Objectives

7.   The objectives of the Platform are as follows:

a)   facilitate the exchange of knowledge on best practices, actions and policy frameworks on digitalization, and promote dialogue and consensus among all relevant stakeholders on the use and impacts of digital technologies on food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry;

b)   undertake analysis and provide scientific evidence on the benefits and potential risks of digital technology applications on food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry in accordance with national conditions and needs;

c)   create and/or strengthen linkages between international and multilateral fora mandated for the digital economy and those for food and agriculture to improve coordination and synergies and to enhance awareness on impacts of digital technologies that are specific to food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry, without duplicating or prejudging efforts; and,

d)   support policymakers to formulate actions and policy approaches by developing recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines that can address the technical, economic, environmental and social challenges food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry are facing in the context of digital technologies.

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[9] Report of the Secretary-General: Roadmap for Digital Cooperation (https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/).

Figure 1: Operating Mechanisms of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture

V.   Operating mechanisms

8.   To carry out its functions, the Platform will operate on the basis of the following mechanisms: the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group, the Advisory Committee, the Online Multi-stakeholder Forum, and the Coordination Unit (see Figure 1). The Inter-governmental Representatives' Group will be the decision-making component of the Platform, setting priorities, reviewing technical inputs and proposals, and endorsing actions. The Advisory Committee will undertake analysis, provide evidence and submit proposals for action. The Online Multi-stakeholder Forum will ensure that all stakeholders can participate in the discussions, and the Coordination Unit will provide day-to-day management of the initiative.

9.   **Inter-governmental Representatives' Group**: The Inter-governmental Representatives' Group will be composed of FAO Members' highly qualified senior public officers responsible for digital technology applications on food and agriculture, or experts accredited by the participating Members. There will be twenty-seven senior officers/experts with the following regional representation: five participants each from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean; three participants from Near East; and, two participants each from North America and Southwest Pacific. Participation in the Intergovernmental Representatives' Group is voluntary, under the authority of FAO Members and according to FAO Members' criteria. Senior officers/experts will volunteer for a term of two years and will act in their personal capacity, providing the best possible technical and policy-related knowledge available. Participating senior officers/experts shall elect a Chair and vice-Chair of the Platform for a period of two years.

10.   The Inter-governmental Representative's Group is supported by the Advisory Committee [see paragraph 11 below] to:

a)   develop a long-term strategic vision and identify issues and priorities in the context of the digitalization of food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry;

b)   approve the biennial Plan of Work[10] and the participants in the various components of the Platform, with the exception of FAO Members;

c)   review and discuss the analysis, scientific evidence and proposals provided by the Advisory Committee;

d)   deliberate on, and endorse recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines;

e)   submit voluntary guidelines to the FAO Members for consideration through the FAO Governing Body process; and,

f)   assess the overall effectiveness and performance of the Platform.

11.   **Advisory Committee**: The Advisory Committee will support the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group by providing technical inputs and analysis. The Advisory Committee will:

a)   serve as a key conduit between the Platform and international and multilateral fora mandated on digital economy and on food and agriculture, ensuring complementarity and avoiding duplication of efforts;

b)   develop and submit provisional biennial Plans of Action, budget plans and lists of participants, except of FAO Members, for the various components of the Platform for approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group;

c)   undertake technical analysis and provide scientific evidence on the effects of digital technologies on food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry and the related challenges;

d)   collect information on, and analyse actions and policy frameworks for digital food and agriculture, and develop proposals for recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines for discussion and endorsement by the Inter-governmental Representative's Group; and,

e)   support inclusive dialogue through the organization of online discussions with all stakeholders [see paragraph 15 below] and include their views in provisional biennial Plans of Action, the technical analysis and proposals for recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines.

12.   Participants in the Advisory Committee will include technical and policy experts from International Organizations and multi-stakeholder groups. There will be thirteen participants with one participant each from: the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the World Food Programme

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[10] Among other priorities, the biennial Plan of Work shall include issues related to digital technology applications and data, including management, data protection, intellectual property rights and privacy.

(WFP), the World Bank Group (WBG), the World Trade Organization (WTO), farmers' organizations, the private sector, the civil society and the knowledge society.[11]

13.   Additional technical and policy experts from International Organizations, Multilateral Development Banks and stakeholder groups can join the Advisory Committee subject to approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group. The Coordination Unit of the Platform [see paragraph 16 below] will act as the Advisory Committee's convener and chair.

14.   Subject to the approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group, the Advisory Committee may form temporary ad hoc working groups composed of experts from International Organizations and multi-stakeholder groups to strengthen technical and analytical capacity on specific focus areas for a maximum period of six months.

15.   **Online Multi-stakeholder Forum**: The Online Multi-stakeholder Forum will ensure inclusion and a bottom-up approach. It will be open to all relevant stakeholders such as farmers' organizations, the private sector, the civil society and the knowledge society, and will take the form of facilitated online discussions. Periodic face-to-face meetings of all multi-stakeholders can also be organized, subject to approval by the Inter-governmental Representative's Group. The main activities of the Multi-stakeholder Forum include:

   a)   ensuring broad multi-stakeholder dialogue, a bottom-up approach and transparency;

   b)   discussing the benefits and risks of digital technology applications on food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry; and,

   c)   exchanging knowledge on policy frameworks, best practices and measures to promote digitalization in food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry.

16.   Coordination Unit: The Coordination Unit will provide day-to-day operational and administrative support to the Platform activities, in addition to technical support. It will be placed in the office of the FAO Chief Economist and will be entirely managed by FAO under its mandate and institutional framework, and within its programme of work and budget. Accordingly, the day-to-day activities supporting the Platform shall be undertaken in line with FAO's rules and procedures.

17.   The Coordination Unit will be composed of a full-time Director (D-1 level), a Professional Staff member (P-4 level) and General Service support (G-3 level). The Director will also support the Chair of the Platform.

VI.   Reporting

18.   The Inter-governmental Representatives' Group, shall periodically report progress to the FAO Council. Voluntary guidelines endorsed by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group shall be submitted to the FAO Members for consideration through the FAO Governing Body process.

VII.   Financial implications

19.   The Platform shall be funded by voluntary contributions from Members and other partners.

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[11] The International Organizations listed collaborated in the development of the concept note entitled "Realizing the potential of digitalization to improve the agri-food system: Proposing a new International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture" prepared for the 2020 Berlin Agriculture Ministers Conference in the context of the GFFA.

VIII. Envisaged next steps

20.   In parallel to the finalization of the ToRs, the Secretariat is developing a sustainable funding plan for the initiative to be based on voluntary contributions from Members and partners.

21.   Given the importance of developing a multi-stakeholder approach for digitalization in food and agriculture, the Secretariat plans to initiate, pending finalization of the review process of the ToRs, preparatory activities with respect to the hosting of the Platform by FAO, such as consulting with international organizations and the various stakeholders. The Secretariat's plan is made upon the understanding that such activities would be those needed to prepare for the launch of the Platform and that, following review by COFI at its 34th Session (1-5 February 2021), the revised ToRs will be submitted for final review to the 130th Session of the Programme Committee (22-26 March 2021) and subsequently to the 166th Session of the FAO Council (29 March – 2 April 2021).