



# COUNCIL

## Hundred and Sixty-sixth Session

26-30 April 2021

### The Hand-in-Hand Initiative

#### Executive Summary

This brief report summarizes recent progress in implementation of the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative, with specific reference to (1) the HIH implementation process; (2) country experiences; and (3) the design of multi-partner HIH dashboards for monitoring and coordinating country-level programming. This report builds on information provided through previous reports to the Programme Committee and the Council. A consolidated HIH Programme Document is in preparation and will be made available on the [HIH website](#) before the end of March 2021, to be updated as necessary as a “living” description of the overall initiative.

As a proposed programme within the revised Strategic Framework, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative is defined by a specific thematic focus as well as specific principles, objectives, and technical supports. The report reviews emerging foci and entry points at the country level to highlight the flexibility and adaptability of the HIH Initiative, while also demonstrating adherence to this common set of core principles across all country engagements.

As an approach to country programming, the HIH Initiative is also driving a rapidly evolving, integrated, dynamic and collaborative global and regional support mechanism organized around a “One FAO” approach to delivery of programme support to the country level. The emerging business model is one in which solidarity and collaboration, core to the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and to FAO’s mission to support “separate and collective action” of its Members, serves to strengthen national ownership of the sustainable development process, while facilitating and accelerating experimentation and learning among all partners. All FAO Members benefit from this development.

Finally, the report provides additional detail on the function and design of the HIH programme dashboards. It highlights six essential functions that promote (1) partner alignment, (2) communications and (3) coordination, (4) increased transparency and mutual accountability with quarterly and annual reviews, (5) quadrennial programme impact analysis and (6) cross-programme monitoring and analytics.

### **Suggested action by the Programme Committee and the Council**

The Programme Committee is invited to take note of the progress made on the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and to provide guidance, as deemed appropriate.

In particular, the Committee may wish to:

- a) take note of the growing number of countries participating in the Initiative and the ways countries are using the Initiative to enhance existing programmes, build capabilities, and strengthen national ownership of the sustainable development process;
- b) welcome the Initiative's flexibility to bolster FAO country support to achieve other FAO Members priority objectives and, especially, for response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated impacts;
- c) take note of the six services that comprise the HIH programme dashboards and consider their role in improving transparency and mutual accountability as well as facilitating communications, coordination, and programme adjustment among the implementing partners, under the overall leadership of the host country; and
- d) consider the different ways that the Hand-in-Hand approach, platforms, tools and support mechanisms are being utilized and adapted to provide fuller access to the benefits of participation for all Members.

The Council is invited to provide guidance, as deemed appropriate.

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

Máximo Torero Cullen  
Chief Economist

Tel: +39 06570 50869

Email: [Máximo.ToreroCullen@fao.org](mailto:Máximo.ToreroCullen@fao.org)

## I. The HIH Initiative in Brief

1. The Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative is an evidence-based, country-led, country-owned programme to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2). The programme uses integrated geospatial, bio-physical and socio-economic data and analysis, and an agri-food systems lens to identify subnational territories where innovative solutions and investments in agri-food systems and rural development can have transformative impacts within a medium-term time frame. The programme's signature match-making approach to partnerships is designed to fill gaps in information, technology, capacity, coordination, market access, and technical and financial resources in countries where extreme poverty and hunger are most prevalent.
2. The Initiative works at two levels. Within each country, the initiative deploys technical analysis to identify key opportunities for accelerating agricultural and rural transformation, stakeholder consultation to identify key constraints that impede realization of that potential, partner-matchmaking to mobilize the requisite knowledge and resources to release those constraints, a territorial approach to concentrate complementary action, and a comprehensive programme investment plan (PIP) that integrates all actions with common objectives and milestones. HIH programme dashboards, similarly, work at the national level to support national ownership of the program and facilitate coordinated action among the partners.
3. Globally, the Initiative works through a networked "One FAO" approach that enables the Subregional and Country Offices to access and work seamlessly with the technical resources of the major global and regional hubs. HIH exploits economies of scale and learning that arise from creating centres of excellence, such as the HIH Geospatial Platform, the Data Lab and the Investment Centre, at headquarters (HQ) and by extending those capacities to the Regional and Country Offices. As demonstrated below, the strategic repositioning of FAO technical resources at country level that is enabled by the HIH Initiative also benefits pre-existing technical areas of work, for example rural poverty analysis, by linking national expertise with FAO core expertise and renowned global partners. Bottom-up learning from country engagements and global networking through the core are palpably accelerating learning and capacity building in a virtuous cycle.
4. HIH responds to the UN Secretary General's proposals for repositioning the UN development system (UNDS)<sup>1</sup> to redeploy and strengthen the assets of UNDS entities, especially the specialized agencies, for improved data collection and analysis, policy and technical support, facilitation of robust partnerships to provide non-financial means of implementation, and scaled-up finance and investment. In so doing, the Initiative is also strengthening FAO's work with the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) and the UN country teams (UNCTs).
5. The HIH Initiative was launched by the FAO Director-General in October 2019. Thus far, 34 countries meeting the objective UN-defined criteria for eligibility have provided formal notice to the Director-General of their desire to participate in the Initiative. These are Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Congo, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Solomon Islands, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tuvalu, Yemen and Zimbabwe.
6. Despite the enormous challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and severe economic shocks experienced in nearly all of these countries, country task teams have been formed and work has been launched, or will soon be launched, in all countries. Six to eight additional eligible countries have indicated that they are likely to formalize their participation in the first quarter of 2021.
7. In addition, many middle- and high-income developing countries have requested "full access" to the benefits of the Initiative. This report provides evidence that, within the Organization's available means, the Initiative is already making many of its key supports available to Members and that

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General: "[Repositioning the UN development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda – Ensuring a Better Future for All](#)" (Advance Unedited Edition, June 30, 2017); see also, United Nations Sustainable Development Group, [United Nations System Wide Strategic Document](#) (June 2019).

spillover effects from the Initiative are enabling powerful new ways of working that benefit all countries. We highlight three such effects: (1) development of the HIH Geospatial Platform, Data Lab, and related tools and analytics as global public goods available to all Members; (2) adoption, adaptation and innovation in the elements of the HIH approach across the Regions; and (3) unlocking the potential of all FAO technical, policy, rule-making and investment work to be materially improved by systematically integrating the normative and field programmes.

8. This report recommends additional measures that can be taken to ensure that the benefits of the Initiative are widely shared.

## II. Major Components of the HIH Engagement Framework

9. Each component of the HIH Framework represents an innovation in the way FAO engages its Members and partners at country level. In every component, data, analysis and IT systems serve as key drivers of the core service, and each component is continuously reviewed for opportunities to improve efficiency, value-addition and scalability. A common objective in each area is to reduce the human work requirement for each service and to redirect human resources to their most productive uses.

10. The Initiative implements a “**One FAO**” approach in support of country-level analysis and programme design and supports collaboration, knowledge-sharing and learning. Country support teams include focal points at country, Sub-Regional, Regional and HQ levels, as well as focal points from the Investment Centre (CFI) and, as relevant, Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER), Office of Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries (OSL), South-South and Triangular Cooperation Division (PST) and the technical divisions.

11. The Initiative uses **stochastic profitability frontier analysis** to differentiate agro-economic potential at territorial level, identify key opportunities to improve incomes and end hunger, and highlight key capacity and institutional bottlenecks to be addressed through the nationally tailored and territory-specific programme. Extending and improving this analytical framework over time by using the HIH Geospatial Platform is a key success factor for increasing the relevance and power of the HIH approach.

12. The **HIH Geospatial Platform and Data Lab** have been developed as key supports for the Initiative, seeking to overcome gaps in data and information in the HIH countries, and making new models and analytic frameworks available to the countries and their support teams.

13. The Initiative’s **donor and partner mapping** provides systematic, georeferenced information on relevant international collaboration, draws lessons learned, helps minimize duplication, and provides a foundation for joined-up stakeholder engagement and programme planning. It also strengthens national ownership of agri-food systems and rural development programming.

14. The Initiative aligns with and contributes to national government strategies, policies, programmes and plans. It facilitates stakeholder engagement by informing and presenting information and evidence throughout the full process, owned and led by the government. Country-led **Executive Roundtables** engage diverse national and international partners to identify bottlenecks and constraints impeding realization of agro-economic potential.

15. The Initiative introduces an innovative **matchmaking** approach to partnership development and management that clearly differentiates roles among partners, and enables sustained coordination and adjustment over time. Partner selection is based on territory- and programme-specific needs and active pairing or “bundling” of complementary partners orchestrated by FAO and the host government. In the context of FAO’s Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021-2025 and the Evaluation of the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations, institutional arrangements are being finalized to ensure the relevant partnerships divisions, technical divisions and HIH coordination are fully aligned with corporate due diligence and oversight processes and protocols.

16. A comprehensive **HIH Programme Investment Plan (PIP)** is typically built around the major contribution or financing from a donor or international financial institution (IFI), but reflects all partner contributions and provides a common roadmap with key objectives and milestones to guide all partners through the expected eight-year implementation.

17. Robust **HIH programme dashboards** ensure transparency and accountability among all stakeholders, track implementation and facilitate frequent reporting, promote effective communications and coordination among the partners, support efficient programme adjustment when necessary, and enable impact analysis.

### **III. Implementation of the HIH Initiative: Country experiences**

18. The HIH Initiative unfolds in three phases: inception, operations, and impact analysis. Thus far, only a subsample of all the HIH countries have completed the inception phase, and in these instances (Ethiopia and Papua New Guinea) the programmes supported by HIH were put in place through processes that long preceded the development of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative. Yet, as indicated below, there has been important value addition by the HIH Initiative in both cases.

19. The inception phase covers the start-up period, a period of intensive activity — from the initial agreement with the beneficiary country, to the development and agreement of the comprehensive PIP. The challenge in the inception phase is to develop a shared vision between the government and its partners, arriving ultimately at a common set of objectives and a roadmap to guide a programme that, for impact, will need to be sustained over months and years. Some examples of the activities developed under HIH for a subsample of those countries are provided below.

#### ***Bangladesh***

20. Spurred by an average 6.5 percent economic growth over the past decade, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by reducing poverty as well as significantly increasing life expectancy, literacy and per capita food production. Yet, despite these advances, Bangladesh is facing significant challenges, with the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbating the problems. More than 20 percent of the population remains below the national poverty line, while nearly a third of children under 5 years still suffer from stunting. The country has experienced accelerating rural depopulation, rising from 3.3 percent in 1991 and 4.5 percent in 2001, to 6.7 percent currently. Increased frequency of natural shocks, especially cyclones, and other adverse effects of climate change, have led to a significant degradation of natural resources and increased air and water pollution.

21. To address these challenges, the Government of Bangladesh has committed to moving the farming sector, in which nearly 80 percent accounts for subsistence smallholder family farms, to a more commercial, mechanized and diversified sector, with farmer-producers feeding the nation and a vibrant agro-processing and export industry creating value additions and new sources of revenue.

22. The Government and its partners have identified three key goals for the Hand-in-Hand Initiative:

- i. Support further agro-mechanization, agro-processing, post-harvest processing, cold chain and safe value chain strategies to address poverty, nutrition and agriculture productivity challenges.
- ii. Engage private sector associations, international finance partners, Government, national banks and investors to ensure transformation of the sector in line with the policy objectives of the Government.
- iii. Promote adoption of climate-smart agricultural systems in the agriculture sector to promote transitions to sustainable agriculture and continued resilience to natural and climatic shocks.

23. FAO Country Office has already drafted a concept note to guide the process. It is also constructing the typologies, thus capitalizing on the robust data made available by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and in order to focus on the six hotspots already identified by the country.

A preliminary donor mapping has already taken place and strategic partners are being identified for the matchmaking process. Executive Roundtables are expected to take place, after which the PIP will be developed, in the first half of 2021.

### *Ecuador*

24. Ecuador was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic recession, which was further aggravated by an influx of refugees that put additional pressure on strained national agri-food systems. The country came into the Hand-in-Hand Initiative under the criteria of food crisis, and the HIH programme was quickly taken over by the Government to prioritize national investments to revitalize and expand the agri-food productive sectors. Owing to this Government ownership, the Initiative is well underway in Ecuador, with an agreed roadmap and teams in place. The Government considers the HIH Initiative a key support to help implement the National Agricultural Plan 2020-2030 (PNA). The PNA is the main policy instrument focused on the implementation of agricultural policy at the national and territorial level. As the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already difficult financial situation for the country, it is expected that the Initiative, through its “country-wide approach,” will help target rural poverty and malnutrition, and promote agricultural employment. The FAO team has been meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture on a weekly basis to discuss HIH. The Ministry of Agriculture has developed a HIH proposal, which will be submitted to the central authority for approval. It sets out to incorporate new indicators at the household level. A proposal for a Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) has been submitted to FAO’s Regional Office under the umbrella of the COVID-19 response and recovery programme.

### *Ethiopia*

25. The Government’s agro-industrial strategy adopted in 2009 is a key to transforming the country’s agricultural sector and boosting the economy. Four pilots have been selected out of the country’s 17 agro-industrial parks (AIP), and a development framework and investment plans have been prepared. It is expected that this will strengthen agricultural supply chains, attract investment in food and agriculture, stimulate small and medium enterprises, and create off-farm employment, especially for women and young people. The Government has requested FAO’s assistance to accelerate these efforts and to help strengthen their impact on poverty and hunger reduction. Under the HIH Initiative, FAO is mobilizing international technical experts to review the investment plans and undertake analyses on poverty, exclusion, and food and nutrition security, so that they can be pursued in the prioritized territories. The Government will also work with FAO to strengthen the institutional environment to implement the pilot initiatives.

### *Haiti*

26. In its sixth month of the inception phase, the HIH Initiative in the country has successfully identified several national and international partners. Poverty maps and geospatial data have been combined in order to identify territories with the greatest potential for eradicating poverty, hunger and all forms of malnutrition. Roundtable meetings are taking place to address emergency needs, and here FAO emergency work and development work have an opportunity to converge, although not in the areas where the security situation (even with abundant agri-food potential) is fragile.

27. In December 2020, FAO Chief Economist presented the Initiative to the Ministers of Agriculture and the Environment, who expressed strong interest in moving forward with the implementation. The following day, the Initiative was also presented to a second forum, this time with donors, which took place in the country. It was attended by representatives of the Governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Spain and Switzerland; the European Union (EU); the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB); and by a number of donors, including the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), the French Development Agency (AFD), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO).

### *Lao People's Democratic Republic*

28. In Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Initiative aims to unlock the agricultural potential and eradicate poverty and malnutrition along the China-Lao railway corridor currently under construction. The programme emphasizes four components: inclusive and financially viable value chains, agriculture-based livelihoods, addressing malnutrition, and institutional innovation. Activities related to the Initiative have been ongoing for more than six months. They include territorial-level analysis to identify target areas, value chain analysis, the launch of a joint task force with the Government on railway development, and informal engagement of governments, private companies and other stakeholders, including France, the European Union, Charoen Pokphand (conglomerate) and others.

29. The FAO team is working to enhance the Government's capacities so that it can exercise full ownership over the Initiative. The programme vision has developed to the point of Cabinet decision, and the Government has requested FAO and World Bank to work together to finance the HIH Initiative.

### *Small Island Developing States (SIDS)*

30. The SIDS face a number of extraordinary challenges arising from their small territorial space distributed over large distances that often make regular communications difficult, the limited options to diversify food availability through land-based productive activities, and their vulnerability to climate change and extreme weather events, especially cyclones/hurricanes. The need to support HIH programmes through multi-country offices adds additional logistical challenges. Yet important progress is being made.

- i. **Kiribati.** Activities related to shaping a HIH programme have progressed, but slowly, over six months as the FAO team has contended with multiple challenges. The country has little agricultural land and local production, except fisheries, and cannot compete with cheap, imported food, which is having a major negative effect on household diets. There is no resident FAO Representative (FAOR), and reliable recent data are limited. Priority areas for programme development include: improving intra-regional trade and food safety issues, reducing poverty and increasing economic inclusion and social protection measures, preventing pandemics of zoonotic origin under One Health approach, assisting smallholders with post-COVID-19 recovery and food systems transformation. A potential data partner has recently been identified to fill the gaps and enable implementation of the HIH analytic framework. The Government will need to approve the use of third-party data.
- ii. **Papua New Guinea.** The Government requested to join the HIH Initiative in early 2020, specifically asking FAO to make use of HIH support facilities to enhance its support to the pre-existing EU-funded "Support to Rural Entrepreneurship, Investment and Trade in Papua New Guinea (STREIT PNG)" programme. As the EU's largest grant for the Pacific region (EUR 81.3 million), the programme promotes inclusive and sustainable social, economic and rural development through job creation, increased incomes and food security. Specifically, the STREIT PNG focuses on enhancing smallholder participation in the production and efficiency of the cocoa, vanilla, and fisheries value chains in the poorest regions of Papua New Guinea. Partnership with the national private sector is an established feature of the STREIT programme, ensuring its dynamism and economic sustainability. Dozens of national and international partners have been identified, and the STREIT programme serves as the reference investment plan for all the partners. FAO will enable the Government and partners to track impact of the programme over time by combining data from various sources in the HIH Geospatial Platform and in the HIH dashboards. Models associated with the HIH platform can be used to evaluate programme impact, including on the environment, and to assess and reduce vulnerability to climate change.
- iii. **Sao Tome and Principe** officially joined the Initiative in December 2020, which will be launched early in 2021.
- iv. **Solomon Islands.** The Initiative's cornerstone is the Government's Agriculture Sector Growth and Investment Plan 2021-2030 (ASGIP), implemented by the Ministry of

Agriculture and Livestock, IFAD and FAO through co-financing and technical support. The ASGIP's draft document was submitted to the Ministry in August 2020. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Ministry has been unable to provide data and survey information for analysis and to convene the stakeholder consultations necessary to conclude the adoption of ASGIP. Like many SIDS, Solomon Islands is challenged by logistics and communications across the small territory dispersed across hundreds of islands, the lack of data, a weak private sector, and limited analytical and planning capacities of line ministries.

### *Syria*

31. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic has entered its tenth year, and humanitarian needs continue to be paramount. Conflict, COVID-19, displacement, returns and the destruction of agricultural infrastructure have severely affected Syrians livelihoods and food security. While the overall security situation in Syria has considerably improved, the country faces huge food security challenges due to the effects of continuing sanctions, economic collapse, currency devaluation, inflation and lack of employment opportunities as well as damage to productive infrastructure, including the country's irrigation lifeline. Poverty and food insecurity continue to be widespread across the country. In the first half of 2020 alone, the number of food insecure people rose dramatically, from 7.9 million in January to 9.3 million in June, and an additional 1.9 million people are at risk of becoming food insecure.

32. The agriculture sector is fundamental for employment in rural areas and for national food availability. The country's recovery, with sustainable agricultural development and enhancing livelihoods in rural areas as key drivers, depends on the careful management of water and other natural resources in a country with low annual rainfall. The Government is committed to the recovery of the agriculture sector, and the Hand-in-Hand framework is being used to help identify and address some of the main priorities. These include a focus on promoting sustainable use of natural resources, especially water, in areas of high agro-economic potential. Damage to water infrastructure has resulted in low agricultural performance since the crisis began, making revitalization of the water sector an urgent necessity for recovery. A second critical need is a focus shift in international collaboration, from emergency response to development.

33. Next steps include developing an investment plan that will target rebuilding of infrastructure for improved irrigation and to build capacity within the country. A small TCP, combined with "One FAO" provision of technical support, is already in place and expected to jumpstart the reconstruction and transformation process.

### *Zimbabwe*

34. The HIH Initiative was officially launched in Zimbabwe on 27 November 2020 under the auspices of the Minister for Agriculture, Lands, Water and Rural Resettlement, The Honourable Anxious Jongwe Masuka, and was endorsed by the UN Country Representative and the Chief Economist of FAO. The Zimbabwe HIH programme builds on the pre-existing "AgrInvest" programme, which is an FAO undertaking to support the Zimbabwe National Agriculture Investment plan.

35. With HIH, the AgrInvest programme is strengthened by the stochastic frontier mapping to identify territorial hotspots to accelerate programme implementation and impact, and by complementary work to reduce food losses and improve sustainable management of water resources, as well as creation effort focusing on responsible investment promotion in agriculture and food systems, with an emphasis on developing data systems to enhance agricultural policy decision-making and implementation.

36. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Water and Rural Resettlement is in the process of aligning some of the strategies of AgrInvest with those of HIH. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has delayed stakeholder consultations. The pandemic has also shifted the Government's attention from HIH inception activities to crisis management. At the end of 2020, the Government of United Arab Emirates offered a grant of USD 350,000 to accelerate implementation of the HIH Initiative in Zimbabwe.

#### IV. HIH programme dashboards

37. The HIH dashboards are essential to the effective delivery, management, governance and impact of the Initiative. HIH country programmes are designed to fill critical information and coordination gaps, and the HIH dashboards are the principal means of fulfilling this function. They rely on distributed, user-friendly, reliably controlled IT-enabled systems to minimize the human resources devoted to information collection, aggregation and analysis and are designed to ensure country ownership and mutual accountability of the partners.

38. The HIH dashboards provide the following six services:

- i. **A simple checklist system for reporting progress in the inception phase** against key programmatic milestones for developing a tailored programme investment plan (PIP) that contains the major programme objectives and milestones, an initial work programme, and key programme results and impacts.
- ii. **A knowledge management system or searchable repository for all shareable programme work-related products.** This includes donor and partner mappings, welfare maps and maps to indicate where food insecurity and malnutrition are prevalent, baseline georeferenced data for the country programme impact analysis, stochastic profitability frontier analysis heat maps, records of executive roundtables and related consultations, commitments of partners, the programme investment plan, and additional studies and mappings produced during the life of the programme.
- iii. **Cumulative reporting of progress against primary programme operational objectives** (with capacity to indicate intentional status changes) and milestones (key results or completed actions to achieve the operational objectives), as well as SDG objectives (impacts or outcomes), all with convenient, succinct visualizations. The high-level visualization provides a holistic visual guide and touchstone for the government, permissioned partners, and the public at large, with links opening to more detailed pages covering different component elements of the programme. This service is the main mechanism for ensuring transparency throughout the life of the project. It includes warnings when a programme is operationally off-track, or signals where important programme adjustments have been made by the government and the partners. It also includes a green-yellow-red traffic light system to indicate whether the country and the programme are off-track (directionally) or off-target (temporally) to achieve the national SDG 1 and SDG 2 targets, as noted in (v).
- iv. **A monitoring platform to support secure, distributed quarterly reporting by partners against programme milestones.** It enables information-sharing and coordination among partners in connection with quarterly and annual progress reviews, supports plan revision as required and in accordance with government guidance, and provides selective public access to this information according to rules agreed by the host country and partners.
- v. **Reporting of impact on a rolling basis** (traffic light system), with detailed quadrennial reporting prior to FAO Conference, against programme objectives. An important innovation of the HIH Initiative is to link FAO-supported activities more closely to national SDG-level targets and indicators. To enable this linkage, FAO will collect baseline information through FAOSTAT, the HIH Geospatial Platform, the Data Lab, and relevant geo-referenced data and information. An important aspect of the inception phase, accordingly, is to enter into early agreement with the beneficiary government on the national SDG targets relevant to the HIH programme evaluation. While it is expected that baseline data will be collected at a maximum of four-year intervals, it will be useful to estimate impacts at shorter intervals.
- vi. **A system for aggregating and analysing progress and results** across HIH programme country experiences. There is need to provide a system for aggregating and comparing actions and results across all or some subset of HIH countries and regions. This service should extract information collected from other services and allow programme-wide

tracking against overall expected progress, highlight recurring challenges for further analysis, and enable faster learning.

39. In Hand-in-Hand, all data is georeferenced, linking action to locations. The roll-out of the dashboards is expected to ease the process of fulfilling information requests for decentralized FAO offices, as different user groups will have different levels of access, enabling them to consume the latest information autonomously. Similarly, information from the dashboards can be used to prepare or update country briefs, management requests, common country reporting under the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and ad hoc requests from donors and other partners. An initial dashboard for the tracking progress in the inception phase was created using off-the-shelf software. A capital expenditure proposal for the intensive design and implementation of the full dashboards has been prepared with the expectation that initial implementation can be completed within six months of funding, with refinements, adjustments and integration with other FAO and UN reporting services continuing for an additional six months.

## V. Conclusion: Hand-in-Hand for all FAO Members

40. The HIH Initiative was developed to provide a programmatic focus to address the specific needs of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), including LDCs that are landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS) and countries facing Food Crises. This [LDC category](#) is defined by the [UN Committee on Development Policy](#) as follows: “Least developed countries (LDCs) are low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. They are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets.” The criteria for countries facing food crises are defined by the [Global Network against Food Crises](#) in its [Global Report on Food Crises](#) countries with significant shares of their population (at least 20 percent or 1 million people) in acute food insecurity due to the *force majeure* of conflict and insecurity, climate shocks or economic turbulence.

41. At its core, the HIH Initiative is an expression of solidarity and a call for all FAO Members to collaborate in mobilizing support to end poverty and hunger where they are most prevalent and where capacities for effective self-help are most constrained. And yet, as this report shows, the Initiative is bringing in train many fundamental innovations in the way that FAO conducts its work. It takes little effort to demonstrate that the Initiative is thereby bringing new and additional benefits for all Members. Through instruments like the HIH Geospatial Platform and the Data Lab, new analytical methods, systems and dashboards being developed to support more ambitious partnering, the Initiative is unlocking enormous potential for FAO to bring to its Members all the elements required to solve the increasingly complex problems of sustainable development. These instruments are being replicated in FAO regional offices, where they will soon be supporting a globally diverse network of researchers and policy analysts with data, models and tools to support regional, national and subnational programming.

42. The One FAO approach is erasing the distance between technical officers at HQ and in the field, promoting intensive collaboration around real-world, geospatially determinate problems, and enabling faster learning, innovation and diffusion of experiences and research findings. Consider FAO’s well-regarded analytical work on rural poverty alleviation. The paucity of up-to-date proxy of poverty or welfare maps – a key bottleneck in implementing the HIH stochastic profitability frontier analysis in many HIH countries – sparked a search for real-time means of estimating the geospatial distribution of rural poverty. This led to a new partnership with Stanford University that uses readily available satellite data to fill gaps. Meanwhile, a request from the Government of Ethiopia to evaluate the performance of its Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA), particularly in relation to poverty reduction among small producers, led to new tools and a refinement of FAO’s own methods of programme evaluation – and new learning and insights into what works in accelerating inclusive agricultural transformation. The learnings from this one supporting element of the Ethiopia HIH programme highlight the two-way flow of learning that arises from the new form of country engagement implemented under HIH.

43. Finally, the methods of HIH are readily adopted, adapted, and innovated to suit the needs of countries outside of the LDC or food crises categories. In Nicaragua, for example, the FAOR sought the assistance of the Agrifood Economics Division (ESA) to respond to a request from the Government to assess the potential contribution of the agri-food sector to restart the economy following a period of social unrest. The analysis demonstrated that livestock, a largely smallholder activity in the country, had the highest growth prospects, and that coffee production needed significant investment in post-harvest processing. This was then supplemented with the HIH stochastic profitability frontier analysis to determine where in the country the investments would have the highest return. This new information led to a commitment to fund the first year of more than USD 1 billion in public investment over the next decade. The same combination of analyses is now being conducted in Mexico, Paraguay, and Uganda, with the Ministries of Finance and Agriculture joining hands in all three countries.