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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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Real time Evaluation of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme - Phase 1

Management Observations

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1. Management welcomes the Phase 1 real-time evaluation and positive assessment of the efforts of the Organization in response to and for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including good practices and lessons learned outlined in the document.
2. Management is pleased that the evaluation looked at four areas of focus as priority for initial evaluation of the work that has been carried out in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Management welcomes with appreciation that the findings highlight strengths of the Organization in terms of producing global public goods, data and analytical work, advance programme design and clear strategic planning, humanitarian response with a strong link for medium-long term impact on the ground, etc.
3. It is furthermore commended that the interim report (Phase 1) also highlights the effective leveraging of FAO's network of Decentralized Offices to ensure a more country-driven approach and to provide direct support to the countries and the population in need, and a strong commitment to working in partnership at all levels.
4. Management appreciates the good practices selected across the four areas of focus, lessons learned, as well as suggestions for improvement. Management looks forward to continuing to build on these aspects as part of the implementation of the Strategic Framework 2022-31.

Management Observations

5. Management presents here below a number of observations on selected lessons learned reflected in the interim evaluation report. The more comprehensive Management Response will be provided upon issuance of the final evaluation report.

Lesson learned 1.c: *Investing in a systematic and digitized data sharing mechanism is needed to leverage pre-existing data and information (e.g. on the geographic areas and the peoples) as a basis to assess future crisis; and to further add on new data and information.*

6. **Management Observation:** FAO has been investing in a systematic and digitalized data sharing mechanism. The Geospatial Platform and the Data Lab are proof of this investment and of the active positioning of the Organization in this space. Both the Geospatial Platform and the Data Lab are constantly used for immediate response and targeted intervention to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lesson learned 1.d: *To enhance the reliability and ownership of the analytics, it is important to openly acknowledge and address the weaknesses in the analytics; and enable the data addition and correction from multiple sources.*

7. **Management Observation:** All data gathered and provided is public data and publicly available which allows for direct and timely feedback in case of error and any issues identified by countries and partners. In addition, the information is provided by FAO Members or in consultation with countries, thus strengthening countries' ownership of national data and information.

Lesson learned 2.a: *When asked about the impact of COVID-19, a number of vulnerable people tend to make little distinction between the impact of COVID-19 with other shocks as they were simultaneously being affected by many issues.*

8. **Management Observation:** FAO focused on the effect and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and, using the food insecurity experience scale (FIES) methodology, facilitated the differentiation between the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and that of other shocks faced by many vulnerable groups and communities.

9. One of the most severe effects of the pandemic was indeed the recession and lack of income, which FAO could closely track, monitor and respond to. *The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) 2021* addresses specifically this topic, and provides evidence and guidance on actions that can help actors in agri-food systems manage their vulnerability to shocks and stresses, as well as strengthen agri-food systems' capacity to support livelihoods and sustainably provide continuous access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to all in the face of disruptions.

Lesson learned 3.a: The headquarters' coordinated review and clearance mechanism for COVID-19 related knowledge products proved effective to prioritize key messages and disseminate reliable information but did not always respond to the need for timeliness and facilitate process monitoring from the decentralized offices.

10. **Management Observation:** A peer review system was established at the Office of the Chief Economist for timely response and quick coordination, through which the inputs were classified under three categories as: (1) *excellent*, (2) *good*, and (3) *low quality*. The first two categories were fast-tracked and the review process was accelerated to allow for timely response, while the third category was further reviewed and, in some cases, excluded from the process.

Lesson learned 5.d: The lack of a comprehensive narrative that demonstrates the links of "data for action" to "data that demonstrates resilience outcomes".

11. **Management Observation:** All data and analytical work are produced to guide and advise for action. *SOFA 2021* is very focused on data demonstrating resilience outcomes and five indicators that capture the resilience capacity of agri-food systems at the country level. FAO has developed a suite of resilience indicators designed to measure the robustness of primary production, the extent of food availability, and the degree of people's physical and economic access to food in countries worldwide. These indicators can help assess the capacity of national agri-food systems to absorb the impact of any shock, which is a key aspect of resilience.

Lesson learned 7.a: The lack of guidelines for mainstreaming gender and leave no one behind approach in the development of KPDS¹ was mitigated by the authors' own exposure to and uptake of these principles but has limited the application of consistent, comprehensive, and systematic criteria across FAO's key messages.

12. **Management Observation:** FAO has developed a series of policy briefs and analyses with a strong focus on mainstreaming gender and leaving no one behind in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, to assist in guiding this process at all levels across the Organization. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women as a primary vulnerable group strongly affected by the pandemic was not only raised and communicated worldwide, but policy and advice were provided to governments on how to tackle this issue.

¹ Knowledge products and data services (KPDS)