



COUNCIL

Hundred and Seventieth Session

13-17 June 2022

Update on Rome-based Agencies collaboration

Executive summary

This document provides an update on Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) collaboration, with focus on two specific items:

- Executive Summary of the Joint Evaluation of the collaboration among RBAs and its Coordinated Response; and
- Update on the status of the feasibility study for the RBAs on the integration of administrative services.

Suggested action by the Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees and the Council

The Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees and the Council are invited to take note of the Update and provide guidance, as deemed appropriate.

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

Marcela Villarreal
Director, Partnerships and UN Coordination
Tel: +39 06570 52346
Email: Marcela.Villarreal@fao.org



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



I. Executive Summary of the Joint Evaluation of the collaboration among RBAs and its Coordinated Response

A. Executive Summary of the Joint Evaluation of the collaboration among RBAs

1. The Evaluation Offices of the United Nations Rome-based agencies (RBAs) have conducted an evaluation of RBA collaboration (RBAC) since 2016. It assesses the relevance and results of all forms of collaboration; the factors affecting those results; and the value added by RBAC.
2. RBAC takes many forms, from joint advocacy, policy and technical work to joint projects. Since 2018, and especially at the country level, the drivers of RBAC in support of the 2030 Agenda have been significantly reshaped by the Reform of the United Nations Development System (UNDS), and by reforms aimed at enhancing operational efficiency.
3. RBAC is relevant to the strategic direction of the UNDS. In practice, it has had mixed results in strengthening coordination. There is a strongly collaborative spirit in some countries; pragmatic collaboration and recognition of complementarity in many countries when RBAC is seen to make sense; and, in some, little or no strengthened collaboration. Gender and nutrition are examples of areas in which RBAC has enhanced the sharing of knowledge, lessons and good practice at all levels. Emergency response contexts provide a conducive framework for RBAC within United Nations response structures. But RBAC is more challenging in formal development project settings. In development work, the RBAs have made limited progress in reducing overlap, competition and duplication. Achievement of their shared objectives is still impaired by misunderstandings about the mandates of FAO and WFP. The success of RBAC in enhancing joint administrative efficiency has been limited.
4. Government attitudes range from strong support for collaboration to indifference or dismay about perceived duplication and competition. The official global structure and processes of RBAC do not significantly strengthen coordination. Donor support for RBAC is not as strong or coherent in practice as donor advocacy of it implies. RBA leadership expresses a spectrum of support and skepticism about collaboration. Some Member States urge stronger collaboration, but overall, RBAC is not a high priority for the Governing Bodies or RBA management.
5. There is limited quantitative evidence on the added value of RBAC. It can enhance effectiveness and achieve administrative cost savings, but there are multiple administrative difficulties in achieving constructive interfaces between the structures and cultures of the RBAs. Outside formally structured project settings, these difficulties can be overcome through the often-displayed ability of technical colleagues to work together where they perceive clear mutual interest. This kind of mutual technical respect and support is a daily reality (often in wider United Nations frameworks), but across the RBAs there is widespread ambivalence about RBAC.
6. The evaluation recommends that the RBAs update their Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to reflect realistically the context, constraints and opportunities around RBAC; restructure the coordination of RBAC; engage proactively with the new joint programming mechanisms at the country level; focus administrative collaboration efforts on further embracing the United Nations efficiency agenda; and be alert to the likely higher transaction costs that joint projects impose. Again urging realism, it recommends that the Member States of the RBA Governing Bodies reappraise and adequately resource their position on RBAC.

*B. Coordinated Response to the Joint Evaluation of collaboration
among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies*

7. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), hereinafter referred to as the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs), welcome the Joint Evaluation of collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies. The evaluation confirms the importance of RBA collaboration for the furthering of the three agencies' common objectives for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The RBAs appreciate that the evaluation was conducted during an exceptionally challenging period. However, despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation was carried out with full engagement of RBA staff, including through 12 remote field missions at the country level, focus group discussions and a global survey. The evaluation team, the Evaluation Management Group and RBA staff worked together to ensure that all three agencies were substantively involved in providing strategic feedback throughout the process.

8. The evaluation assesses RBA collaboration using five criteria, namely: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The evaluation confirms that RBA collaboration has been, and continues to be, largely relevant to the principles and vision that guide the strategic direction of the United Nations development system (UNDS). It also recognizes that the current operating context for the RBAs is dynamic and that RBA collaboration is one of several ways to contribute to the agencies' shared objectives. The evaluation is timely, given the significant changes to RBA collaboration due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the repositioning of the UNDS.

9. The UNDS repositioning has seen a strengthening of modalities for collaboration and whole-of-system approaches, such as more in-depth and analytical Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and more strategic, SDGs-focused and system-wide United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs). The UNDS repositioning provides an excellent opportunity for the RBAs to further strengthen their collaboration as a "subset" within the wider UN system coordination mechanisms dedicated to fulfilling the 2030 Agenda. Relevant elements and recommendations that have been pointed out in this evaluation – such as the RBAs' support to the achievement of the SDGs under closer collaboration in joint analysis, advocacy, programming and planning – are encompassed in the recalibrated development system, including joint contributions to advancing SDGs (SDG 1, 2, 10 and 17, in particular) in partnership with the respective governments of Members. Overall, strong RBA collaboration, building on years of experience, can be seen as an important subset, as well as a logical result of a coordinated UN system.

10. In this regard, the three RBAs welcome the evaluation's recognition of their strong commitment to engage in the implementation of the UNDS reform and ensure that RBA collaboration takes place within this evolving context. The active participation in the development of the UNSDCF guidance, the measures being taken to align the RBAs' country planning and programming instruments to the UNSDCF, and the fact that the RBAs are signatories to at least 60 UNSDCFs currently under implementation, all reaffirm the importance that the RBAs place on the UNDS repositioning.

11. While SDG 2 is at the heart of the mandates of the three RBAs and the agencies share a common commitment to support progress towards it, the evaluation clearly states that it is not the only SDG to which each RBA contributes. FAO has identified SDGs 1, 2 and 10 as guiding SDGs in its Strategic Framework 2022-31, and is the custodian of 21 SDG indicators across six SDGs, including SDG 2. WFP focuses on SDGs 2 and 17, IFAD focuses on SDGs 1 and 2, and all the three organizations recognize that they make contributions to many other SDGs. Moreover, the report highlights that it is important to affirm that there are many partnerships that exist beyond the RBAs that are critical to advancing the 2030 Agenda and that all agencies must work across and beyond the UN system to ensure that partnerships are advanced based on complementarities, comparative advantages and respective strengths.

12. The evaluation acknowledges that the RBAs believe strongly in working together where it is useful and where transaction costs are not excessive. The evaluation concludes that from global to country levels, RBA staff recognize what they have in common, and that they can identify ways of increasing their effectiveness by working together in transforming food systems, advocacy,

communication, sharing expertise, tackling emergencies, developing technical approaches, building knowledge and engaging in inclusive and sustainable rural transformation. RBA Management supports this conclusion and believes that their collaboration is essential to the achievement of the relevant SDGs. To this end, RBA Management supports the conclusion that RBA collaboration should take place where effective and where value and impact outweigh costs, and that collaboration for the sake of collaboration should be avoided.

13. While the evaluation mentions that the RBAs have made limited progress in reducing overlap, competition and duplication of work, the RBAs believe that their collaboration is built on synergies and complementarities which are key in addressing any competition, overlap and duplication. While there is always room for improvement, RBA Management believes that the various RBA collaboration mechanisms, such as the Senior Consultative Group, informal debriefings with Member States and the annual informal joint meetings of the RBA Governing Bodies have improved communication and understanding not only among the agencies themselves, but also with the Membership. Nonetheless, strengthening RBA collaboration, in particular at country level, within the UNDS repositioning and the CCAs and UNSDCF processes will certainly aid in building on complementarities and maximizing efficiencies.

14. The evaluation concludes that collaboration among the RBAs is a daily reality. RBA staff routinely see and act on the advantages of collaboration where they see an opportunity for enhanced success of shared objectives. However, the evaluation points out that colleagues at various levels may have a different understanding of what RBA collaboration is and how it works. The RBAs recognize that there is no “one size fits all” approach or model for RBA collaboration. It varies depending on the country and regional contexts, the relationships and trust formed among colleagues at country level and the capacity of country-level staff to dedicate time and resources to collectively understand how one another’s comparative advantage and expertise can advance common objectives. There may not be a formal definition of what RBA collaboration is or should be; however, RBA Management supports the recommendation to clarify and explain the relationships between the agencies’ mandates through an update of their joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and pursuit of the new elements introduced.

15. RBA Management supports the evaluation’s finding that insufficient resources are provided for RBA collaboration. The evaluation recognizes that at global level, donor funding does not match donor calls for collaboration to be strengthened, and the funding that they provide for it is not proportional to the emphasis being placed on it. RBA Management is aware that at country level, RBA managers/staff lack funding for planning or coordinating collaborative actions, and that this can constrain RBA collaborative activities.

16. None of the agencies has a specific budget for supporting country-level RBA collaboration. In this regard, RBA Management welcomes the evaluation’s recommendation that the RBAs should retain and strengthen capacity for coordinating collaboration. RBA Management further welcomes the recommendation that Members should contribute with additional financial support to the RBAs’ work towards this goal.

17. RBA Management also welcomes the evaluation’s recommendation that Members of the RBA Governing Bodies should reappraise and adequately resource their position on RBA collaboration. Equally, RBA Management welcomes the recognition that this collaboration is an important objective in some circumstances, but not all. In particular, RBA Management welcomes the recommendation that collaboration in joint corporate services should largely comprise proactive commitment to the overall United Nations efficiency agenda, rather than administrative harmonization and efficiency initiatives focused on the RBAs alone. There are many proven RBA collaboration initiatives in place that are successful and that have tangible results, but cannot be scaled up due to lack of funding. The three RBAs therefore call upon Members to increase funding for activities that can maximize impact on the ground within the overall framework of the UN reform.

18. RBA Management would like to reaffirm its unwavering commitment and support to the RBA collaboration agenda. With just nine years left to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the RBAs recognize the urgent need to advance innovative and concrete solutions together.

19. RBA Management welcomes the recommendations outlined in the evaluation report. Detailed responses to the specific recommendations are provided in the matrix.

Coordinated Response to the Joint Evaluation of Collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies					Date
Evaluation recommendation	Management Response	Management Plan			
	Accepted, Partially Accepted or Rejected	Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection	Responsible unit	Time frame	Further funding required (Y or N)
<p>Recommendation 1. Update the MOU between the RBAs. Although the current five-year MOU was only signed three years ago, significant changes since then make an update necessary. The updated MOU should include the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strategies set out by FAO in its Strategic Framework 2022-2031 and Medium-Term Plan, 2022-2025; in the IFAD12 Results Management Framework 2022-2024; and by WFP in its Strategic Plan, 2022-2026. Through updating the MOU, the RBAs should reset their strategy for collaboration in a proactive manner – based on the reflections that this evaluation may stimulate – and to move beyond simple reaction to calls for stronger collaboration. Emphasize the potential benefits of RBAC, including through strong performance in various areas of thematic collaboration, and joint promotion of the food systems approach – including follow-up to the Food Systems Summit. The MOU should also emphasize that RBAC is not a universally applicable principle: collaboration will only be pursued where it makes clear practical sense to do so, and may often include work with other United Nations entities. While the ‘Rome’ label might be retained for reasons of familiarity, the emphasis should be on the three agencies’ shared commitment to common food security objectives. A revised statement on ‘mutual engagement’ to explain how RBAC complements and is structured by the United Nations development system reform process and, specifically, the UNSDCF at country level, under the leadership of the United Nations Resident Co-ordinator. United Nations reforms at regional level, building on the Regional Collaborative Platforms and the implications for regional RBA collaboration, and recognizing the potential contribution of the RBAs to the emerging regional knowledge management hubs. In the light of administrative elements of the United Nations reform, the updated MOU should remove its commitments to collaboration on joint corporate services that are covered by the United Nations Business Operations Strategy and other Business Innovation Group initiatives at country level. The MOU should acknowledge that these commitments are largely subsumed by the system-wide enhancements to business operations – to which it should commit the RBAs’ support. Emphasizing the RBAs’ commitments across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, the updated MOU should clearly state FAO’s commitment and roles in humanitarian response, as well as those of WFP in sustainable development. It should commit all RBAs to work at all levels to clarify and explain the relationships 	Accepted	<p>The RBAs agree to participate in the update of the MOU between the three agencies, as proposed by the evaluation. In light of their new strategic frameworks/plans, the MOU will build on the comparative advantage of each agency in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Each agency’s Senior Management and relevant departments will be engaged in providing input on the content and form of the update to the MOU. As needed, the RBAs will rely on internal consultations with regional and country offices, inter-agency working groups, and external advisory services. Once the MOU is finalized, the RBA Principals will send the MOU and a joint communication to all offices worldwide, explaining the MOU and the relationships’ mandates.</p>	<p>FAO: Lead Office - Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division (PSU)</p> <p>IFAD: Lead Office - Global Engagement, Partnership and Resource Mobilization Division (GPR)</p> <p>WFP: Lead Office - Partnerships and Advocacy Department (PA) (Strategic Partnerships Division [STR]) with support from Humanitarian and Development Division (PRO)</p>	October 2022	

<p>between their mandates; ensure that they do not conflict over roles or compete over resources; and convert competition into collaboration.</p>					
<p>Recommendation 2. Restructure and reinforce the coordination architecture for RBA collaboration within the framework of UNDS reform to ensure that at all levels, the coordination and evaluation of RBAC includes more proactive efforts to develop and disseminate lessons and knowledge about how to optimize collaboration among and beyond the RBAs, about the costs and benefits of RBAC, and about technical experience that can be usefully shared.</p> <p>a) The RBAs should retain and strengthen capacity for coordinating RBAC at their headquarters, with financial support from Member States. The coordination function should in future focus on optimizing the RBAs' engagement in and contribution to the UNDS reform process.</p> <p>b) In each country where it has adequate capacity, each RBA should appoint a focal point whose primary task should be support for and facilitation of RBAs' engagement in the UNSDCF.</p> <p>c) RBA regional offices and hubs should play a stronger role in supporting country offices' redefined collaborative engagement in UNSDCFs through capacity strengthening.</p> <p>d) The RBAs should not continue with a global action plan for their collaboration. Instead, they should jointly monitor and report on their contributions to the overall efforts of the United Nations to achieve SDG 2 through the reformed United Nations development system, through the UN INFO portal.</p> <p>e) The RBAs should monitor the finalization and implementation of their three pilot joint country strategies, assess their value in the context of the UNSDCF, and formally review whether the preparation of more such strategies is warranted.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>The RBAs agree to restructure and reinforce the coordination architecture for RBA collaboration, with the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RBAs will retain and strengthen capacity for coordinating RBA collaboration at their headquarters, as feasible within existing resources, so that in future they can optimize the RBAs' engagement in and contribution to the United Nations reform process. • The RBAs will encourage the appointment of focal points by country and regional offices at country and regional levels where possible and facilitate adequate capacity-building to enable engagement in dialogue and discussions on RBA collaboration and, where appropriate, jointly engage in UNDS processes. This is particularly important for engagement in UNSDCFs. • The identified RBA focal points will be encouraged to proactively develop and disseminate lessons and knowledge about how to optimize collaboration among and beyond the RBAs. • The RBAs will prepare a document with an analysis of the three pilot joint country strategies, lessons learned and recommendations on whether more such strategies should be prepared. 	<p>FAO: Lead Office - PSU; regional offices; and Office of Strategy, Programme and Budget (OSP)</p> <p>IFAD: Lead Office - GPR, with support from Programme Management Department (PMD) front office; regional divisions; and Strategy and Knowledge Department</p> <p>WFP: Lead Office - PA (STR), with support from Public Partnerships and Resourcing Division (PPR); Programme and Policy Development Department (PD), (PRO); regional bureau; and Resource Management Department (RM)</p>	<p>(a)-(d) June 2022; (e) June 2023</p>	

<p>Recommendation 3. Further embrace the new joint programming mechanisms at the country level and ensure constructive, collaborative RBA engagement with these mechanisms.</p> <p>a) The RBAs should develop and deliver consistent guidance to their country offices on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. jointly preparing to engage in UNSDCF planning processes; ii. jointly contributing to Common Country Analyses and UNSDCF preparation; iii. harmonizing their respective country multiannual plans with each other and with the UNSDCF; iv. jointly participating in UNSDCF implementation under the leadership of the UNRC. <p>b) Where appropriate and feasible, RBAs should harmonize their resource mobilization efforts with those of the UNRC for the UNSDCF.</p> <p>c) Particularly in countries where they do not all have offices, the RBAs should be more proactive in supporting the UNRC to reinforce collaboration within the United Nations Country Team, and in collaborating with each other to promote effective action to strengthen food systems and achieve SDG 2.</p> <p>d) The RBAs should engage wherever appropriate and feasible in joint strategic advocacy to country governments about issues related to SDG 2 with the UNRC and other members of the United Nations Country Team.</p> <p>e) The RBAs should encourage more of their senior staff to apply for UNRC positions.</p>	Accepted	<p>RBA Management agrees and will continue to embrace the new joint programming mechanisms at the country level and ensure constructive, collaborative RBA engagement with these mechanisms. This will be accomplished through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RBAs will ensure, where possible and appropriate, that agency-specific guidance materials are prepared within the mutually agreed timeline to reflect recommendation 3, and in line with the MOU. • Each RBA will explore ways in which more senior staff can be encouraged to apply for Resident Coordinator posts through evolving career development programmes. 	<p>FAO: OSP; Resource Mobilization and Private Sector Partnerships Division; Human Resources Division; regional offices</p> <p>IFAD: GPR, with support from PMD front office; Operational Policy and Results Division (OPR); regional divisions; Human Resources Division</p> <p>WFP: PD (PRO), with support from STR; PPR; Human Resources Division</p>	December 2022	
<p>Recommendation 4. Focus administrative collaboration efforts on further embracing the United Nations efficiency agenda.</p> <p>a) Except for those limited areas of administrative collaboration between their three headquarters in Rome that clearly have practical value and cut costs for all the agencies, the RBAs should integrate their efforts at administrative collaboration with the overall United Nations efficiency agenda, specifically the work streams of the Business Innovation Group, to which they should make a joint, proactive commitment at global, regional and country levels.</p>	Accepted	<p>RBA Management agrees to continue to focus administrative collaboration efforts within the UN efficiency agenda at country level, except for those limited areas of possible administrative collaboration between their three headquarters in Rome. Through UN Country Teams and Operations Management Teams (OMTs), the RBAs will continue to identify areas for enhanced collaboration through the Business Operations Strategy (BOS) process and the consolidation of selected services as defined in the Common Back Office (CBO), Common Premises and Shared Service Centres.</p>	<p>FAO: Logistics Services Division (CSL); regional offices</p> <p>IFAD: Corporate Services Department (CSD) Field Support Unit (FSU), with support from PMD</p> <p>WFP: RM and Management Services Division, with support from PA (STR)</p>	December 2022	
<p>Recommendation 5. In considering the development of joint projects and programmes, assess the costs and benefits of the proposed collaboration and only proceed if the benefits outweigh the costs.</p> <p>a) The RBAs should jointly prepare simple guidance for assessing the benefits and costs of proposed joint projects and programmes that captures the likely higher</p>	Accepted	<p>RBA Management agrees that, in line with the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United</p>	<p>FAO: Project Support Division; Finance Division; CSL; regional offices</p>	December 2022	

<p>transaction costs and potential reputational risks of this type of collaboration, alongside the benefits of joint RBA action.</p> <p>b) The RBAs should streamline inter-agency administrative arrangements and charges, as well as procedures for the delegation of authority to country level where feasible and appropriate, in order to reduce some of the transaction costs of joint projects and programmes.</p>		<p>Nations System (QCPR) resolution 75/233 paragraph 52, while encouraging joint programming – also requests the UN system to be mindful of potentially increasing transaction costs, fragmentation, unproductive competition and overlap among entities. This will be accomplished through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RBAs’ focal points will support country offices as needed to decide when and how to design joint projects that are based on synergies, complementarities and the assurance that the impact/benefits largely outweigh the costs, and the most appropriate modality to engage. • Where feasible and appropriate, the RBAs will explore streamlining inter-agency administrative arrangements and charges, as well as procedures for the delegation of authority to country level. 	<p>IFAD: CSD FSU and GPR in collaboration with OPR; Financial Controller’s Division; and Office of Strategic Budgeting</p> <p>WFP: PA (STR) with support from RM and PD</p>		
<p>Recommendation 6. The Member States of the RBA Governing Bodies should reappraise and adequately resource their position on RBA collaboration.</p> <p>Through their various representative RBA governance structures, the Member States should confirm to the RBAs that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize that RBA collaboration is an important objective in some circumstances but not all; • recognize that RBA collaboration should be pursued within the framework of reformed United Nations coordination at country level; • recognize that RBA collaboration on joint corporate services should largely comprise proactive commitment to the overall United Nations efficiency agenda, rather than administrative harmonization and efficiency initiatives focused on the RBAs only; • will give priority to resourcing collaborative RBA action on the principles set out above, to be reflected in the updated MOU that they should endorse. 		<p>Member States may provide their responses during the Governing Body meetings.</p>	<p>Responsibility: Member States</p>	<p>End of 2021 in response to this report.</p>	

II. Update on the status of a feasibility study for the integration of administrative services among the RBAs

20. At the 163rd Session of the Council held in December 2019, Members requested “FAO, together with WFP and IFAD, to provide a first assessment regarding the feasibility of integrating administrative functions, and greater collaboration in some oversight functions”.

21. This request followed the discussions held during the Informal Joint Meeting of the FAO Council, IFAD Executive Board and WFP Executive Board held in September 2019, on the results of a study jointly conducted in 2019 by FAO, IFAD and WFP on *Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementation and review of potential compatibilities within RBAs*. The study, which expanded on the recommendations and findings presented in the 2015 UN System Interoperability Study, concluded that ERP Interoperability in and of itself is not a goal but could be beneficial if business processes were standardized and harmonized across agencies. Business operations harmonization is precisely the scope of the UN Efficiency Agenda to which the RBAs are committed to and which the Joint Evaluation of RBA collaboration advises to adhere to.

22. In 2020, the RBAs hired an external consultant to carry out a first assessment of the feasibility of integrating administrative functions among the three Agencies. This exercise involved two main steps: i) a mapping of on-going and potential areas of collaboration at headquarters and country level; ii) a detailed analysis focused on two administrative areas for potential integration. The results of the mapping exercise were included in the Progress Report on RBA collaboration presented to the 165th Session of FAO Council, as well as to the WFP and IFAD Executive Board sessions, held in fall 2020 (ref. document CL 165/13 Rev.1 with a detailed list of activities and status of collaboration provided under *Annex B – Headquarters details*: <https://www.fao.org/3/ne051en/ne051en.pdf>). This mapping showed that existing RBA collaboration in corporate services at headquarters level is significant, and that a growing amount of collaborative activities at country level were being implemented as part of the broader UN Efficiency Agenda. The Progress Report further recognized the need for the RBAs to pursue more systematic collaboration within the overall framework of the UN Efficiency Agenda.

23. In early 2021, the external consultant made progress on the second part of the assignment, focusing on the detailed analysis of two administrative areas of potential increased collaboration and efficiency gains, namely: Fleet Management and the Humanitarian Booking Hub. When FAO Senior Management briefed Members about this analysis at the Joint Meeting of the 130th Session of the Programme Committee and 185th Session of the Finance Committee, held in March 2021, Members requested a more comprehensive approach to the feasibility study, encouraging RBAs to assess the integration or synergies across a greater range of administrative functions.

24. Furthermore, in response to Members’ queries regarding the possibility of integrating investigative functions related to allegations of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse (SH/SEA), discussions were held at the Informal Joint Meeting of RBA Governing Bodies held in October 2020. Subsequently, the RBAs issued a joint paper in May 2021 entitled *Joint Paper on RBA Common Specialized Expertise on Investigative Functions related to SH/SEA* which was also posted on the RBAs respective Member Platforms after the April 2021 RBA Senior Consultative Group meeting (https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/en/XXX-0521-19/Joint%20Position%20RBA%20SH%20SEA%20FINAL%20.pdf). The paper concluded that there is a significant amount of ongoing collaboration amongst FAO, IFAD and WFP in the context of oversight. Each organization already uses the others’ services whenever assistance or additional capacity on specific cases is needed.

25. It is noteworthy to highlight that collaboration among the RBA investigations community is strong, particularly in areas such as sharing services, common training, and knowledge sharing. However, the analysis concluded that the full integration “of expertise at headquarters in these specific fields would

not be an effective use of resources, and would increase inefficiencies as well as drive up costs by duplicating expertise that is already present and operating”.

26. In June 2020, the first independent Joint Evaluation of RBA collaboration was launched as a strategic evaluation intended to generate evidence for the RBA’s global collaboration strategy while focusing particularly on improving results at country level. It covered the period November 2016 – May 2021. A workshop with preliminary findings was held in July 2021 with a final report issued in September 2021. The feasibility study was paused during the evaluation process in order to ensure its alignment with the outcomes of the Joint Evaluation. It included evaluation of RBA collaboration in corporate services and its recommendations were to focus future integrative efforts in administration within the context of the overall UN Efficiency Agenda.

27. At FAO Council and IFAD and WFP Executive Board sessions held between November and December 2021, Members enquired about their original request made in 2019, asking for an update on RBA collaboration in the administrative and financial areas at headquarters.

28. With the results of the Joint Evaluation before the RBAs and Members, a new phase of the feasibility study commenced in early 2022. The three Agencies initiated the procurement actions necessary for the identification of a consultancy firm to carry out an independent assessment to explore the feasibility and the potential for integration of administrative functions. A competitive selection process is underway, from which the contracted service provider will be chosen.

29. It is anticipated that the assessment will align with the RBAs commitments to the repositioning of the UN development system and, specifically, the focus on common services and joint business operations promoted through the UN’s Business Operations Strategy 2.0 (BOS) with the purpose of eliminating duplication, leveraging the common bargaining power of the UN, and maximizing economies of scale. It is foreseen that the assessment will consider a headquarter-level mapping and assessment of possible RBA integration/further collaboration along the **six common service lines** as defined in the BOS: Administration; Finance; Human Resources; Information Communication Technology (ICT); Logistics; and Procurement. There are limited pooled resources available from the three Agencies for the assessment which will, in turn, determine the depth to which these various areas can be considered.

30. The study will be conducted over a period of six months, during which the service provider will carry out a desk review, engage in interviews with key business and policy owners in the three Agencies, collect data, and produce a final report by the end of 2022.