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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Hundred and Thirty-seventh Session

Rome, 6-10 November 2023

FAO innovation and technology accelerators: a fit-for-purpose business model to ensure inclusive, efficient, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems transformation.

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

Mr Vincent Martin
Director, Office of Innovation
Tel: +39 06570 52562
Email: Vincent.Martin@fao.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Innovation and technology are central to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Strategic Framework 2022-31 and its efforts to end hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. Accelerators have been created under the Strategic Framework to accelerate the mainstreaming of science, technology, and innovation in FAO's field programs through a closer integration between Program Priority Areas, Regional Initiatives, Areas of Emphasis, and Country Programming Frameworks.
- The FAO Science and Innovation Strategy supports the implementation of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. It calls for FAO to strengthen science and evidence-based decision making, support innovation and technology at the regional and country level and reinforce FAO's capacities to better serve Members in accessing knowledge, science, technologies, and innovations.
- The Office of Innovation is spearheading FAO's efforts to develop a Global Innovation Model (GIM) that enables the Organization's drive for accelerating progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the transformation of agrifood systems. Acceleration Zones will be a core asset of the GIM architecture and will support FAO's programmes and operations and accelerate their impact on the ground and thus better serve FAO Members. Acceleration Zones will complement Innovation Hubs and Incubators in delivering the core services and enhance FAO's capacity to leverage innovation and technology.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

Draft Advice

The Committee:

- **noted with appreciation the progress made in advancement of innovation and technology accelerators and their integration into FAO's programmes;**
- **welcomed the efforts in development of a Global Innovation Model and its three key assets and services – acceleration zones, innovation hubs and incubators; and**
- **supported systematic integration of innovation and technologies into FAO programmes for closing the science, technology and innovation gap at all levels in support of Members' achieving much needed transformation of agrifood systems.**

A. The Role of Innovation and Technology in the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31

1. The FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 considers innovation and technology as central driving forces for achieving a world free from hunger and malnutrition. Innovation and technology have enormous transformative potential, while recognizing that they also present substantial risks, such as reinforcing inequality and market concentration, and contributing to the degradation of natural resources. Helping farmers take full advantage of new technologies such as digital agriculture, biotechnologies, precision agriculture, innovations in agroecology, 5G, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to increase food production, while respecting the environment, is of paramount importance to achieve *better production, better nutrition,* a *better environment and* a *better life*.

2. To accelerate progress and maximize efforts in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to achieve the *four betters*, FAO applies four cross-cutting/cross-sectional "accelerators": technology, innovation, data, and complements (governance, human capital, and institutions) in all its programmatic interventions, to accelerate the impact while minimizing trade-offs. FAO employs a systemic approach that seeks to overcome siloed thinking by considering all four accelerators in relation to each other, while also ensuring that they address the cross-cutting themes: gender, youth, and inclusion. The Office of Innovation (OIN) is leading the efforts to systematically integrate innovation and technologies into Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), regional and country programmes.

3. The programmatic approach is central to FAO's innovation and scaling-up agendas. It ensures that the Organization fully leverages its comparative strengths to promote working at scale for greater sustainability and longer-term impact. Such an approach involves aligning the various levels and layers of the Organization around a common vision of objectives to be achieved, and means of action to achieve those objectives. FAO Initiatives, the PPAs, and the Regional Priorities are the core building blocks of a programmatic approach that aims to strengthen the integration of FAO's technical expertise and knowledge into its field program, in response to Members' needs and with the support of the four accelerators.

B. The FAO Science and Innovation Strategy

4. The FAO Science and Innovation Strategy (the Strategy) is a tool to support the delivery of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. The Strategy's overarching goal is that Members can harness science and innovation to realize context-specific and systemic innovations for more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems.

5. The Strategy is driven by three interdependent pillars: (i) strengthening science and evidence-based decision-making; (ii) supporting innovation and technology at the regional and country level; and (iii) serving Members better by reinforcing FAO's capacities. Its guiding principles mandate implementation approaches that are: (i) rights-based and people-centered; (ii) gender-equal; (iii) evidence-based; (iv) needs-driven; (v) sustainability-designed; (vi) risk-informed; and (vii) ethics-based. The Strategy aims to deliver nine outcomes including, among others:

   a) enhanced access to, and use of, inclusive, affordable and context-specific innovations and technologies aiming at achieving sustainable agrifood systems by small-scale producers, family farmers and other agrifood systems actors;
   b) strengthened capacities of national agrifood innovation systems to prioritize, co-create, and scale appropriate innovations and technologies aiming at achieving sustainable agrifood systems; and
   c) enhanced FAO capacities to enable science and innovation.

6. FAO will develop effective and transformative partnerships for harnessing science and innovation, based on an understanding of the differentiated roles, responsibilities, and knowledge of partners. Partnerships with local, national, and regional organizations are particularly important for delivering impact on the ground. Private sector partnerships will be enhanced – with special attention

to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and entrepreneurs, start-ups, and incubators (particularly women and youth). In line with the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021-2025, FAO will explore mechanisms to partner with the private sector to make appropriate new technologies and innovations accessible in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), for example through open innovation initiatives, challenges, dedicated grants, prizes, etc.

7. Innovative funding and financing (for example through public-private partnerships) is needed to ensure that LMICs do not fall behind on harnessing science and innovation, further exacerbating existing divides. FAO will support, facilitate, de-risk and leverage investments at scale and ensure that the quality of funding and financing responds to investment needs, including being inclusive and providing long-term benefits for the poor.

8. Particular attention is given to the needs of LMICs, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS), focusing on small-scale producers, family farmers, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and other under-represented agrifood systems actors, including MSMEs, to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. The knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and small-scale producers is recognized as an important source of innovation for agrifood systems transformation and is considered within the scope of the Strategy.

9. Pillar 2 of the Strategy, to support innovation and technology at regional and country levels, reflects the importance given to innovation and technology as accelerators of the Strategic Framework. FAO's comparative advantage rests on its convening capacity and in mobilizing technical expertise and resources for scaling-up pilot initiatives and in ensuring that the uptake of innovation and technology is adapted to local needs and contexts. More specifically, the Strategy aims to support innovation and technology at regional and country levels by: (i) supporting the establishment and strengthening of national and regional innovation platforms and hubs for knowledge sharing and capacity development; (ii) promoting co-creation and co-innovation approaches in national agrifood innovation systems; (iii) assisting countries in increasing the capacity of agrifood innovation systems for the co-creation, local adaptation and uptake of innovations through a rigorous approach to the prioritization of innovations and technologies; and (iv) delivering updated information about the full range of technological, social, policy, financial and institutional innovations, including evidence of their effectiveness in given contexts.

C. Accelerating impact through FAO's Global Innovation Model

10. FAO's evolving innovation business model is strongly associated with solving problems by identifying global challenges and leveraging the potential of innovations to achieve impact at scale in the shortest time frame, while considering potential associated risks. In line with the experience of other UN agencies, FAO's Global Innovation Model (GIM) is expected to entail social or other processes which may be facilitated through the application of specific tools and methods. It will promote co-creation of solutions by engaging multiple actors throughout agrifood systems while considering their differentiated roles and responsibilities, in each context. GIM will also be based on scientific and/or informal knowledge and involve incremental change or radical/disruptive change, which also involves uncertain outcomes, trade-offs, and potential synergies.

11. Several challenges affect the attainment of the Strategic Framework's vision of accelerating innovation across FAO programmes at all levels. First, while there is a significant amount of innovation being generated by FAO's field programmes and the PPAs, there is space for making this effort more systematic and better coordinated, thus delivering the best returns. Second, innovations tend to remain under-scaled relative to their potential and at the same time innovations imported from other contexts can face barriers when adapted locally. Third, integration of FAO's knowledge and experiences on innovation, as embodied in the PPAs, with field programmes could be enhanced.

12. Better leveraging the role of the accelerators envisioned by the Strategic Framework can play an important role in addressing the above challenges. First, by adopting specific and well-tested methodologies for managing portfolios of innovations, PPAs and Regional and Country Offices can identify opportunities for prioritizing innovations that target strategic development areas with the greatest impact potential. Second, accelerators can support PPAs, regional and country teams in using

foresight thinking to integrate scaling-up strategies at the design stage of innovative activities. Thirdly, the accelerators could support PPAs and Regional Initiative teams in scanning systematically for South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) opportunities. Enhancing the role of accelerators requires the creation of spaces for co-creation that involve FAO teams as well as key stakeholders, and the development of facilitation tools and methods.

13. OIN is structured around four focus areas: (i) Anticipate change and planning ahead, to better leverage horizon scanning and foresight methods for strategic policy making; (ii) Source, test and scale innovation with a specific focus on acceleration; (iii) Connecting and empowering, to facilitate innovation and co-creation at country level; and (iv) Fostering innovation culture, to cultivate change. Among others, OIN is responsible for the innovations and technology accelerators.

14. To address the above challenges and support the implementation of the Strategic Framework in line with the guidance provided by the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy, OIN is developing the architecture of FAO's forthcoming GIM in an effort to provide more systematic support to current innovation efforts at FAO, based on the existing accelerators. In its current state of conceptualization, the GIM would evolve around an innovation architecture consisting of three main assets and related services.

15. Acceleration Zones will be created at FAO headquarters and at regional level with the objective of enhancing the role of the accelerators in integrating the PPAs in FAO's regional and country programmes. The Acceleration Zones will provide a physical and virtual space for different combinations of PPAs, regional and country project teams, and relevant stakeholders to convene and strategize including through a lab-modality approach, around FAO's portfolio of activities, establish priorities, and identify strategic gaps at country level and scaling-up opportunities. The Acceleration Zones will also be a space for FAO teams at different levels to come together and identify new ways of working to achieve an organization that is more agile and whose innovation culture is enhanced.

16. The Acceleration Zones will complement the FAO Incubator, currently operated in FAO headquarters with the support of the Innovation Fund. The Incubator will be strengthened to allow the incubation of ideas and ventures driven by FAO teams in Country Offices and project ideas driven by priority programmes as identified through the support of the Acceleration Zones, in line with FAO Country Programming Frameworks and identified national priority areas.

17. Innovation Hubs will be established to facilitate multi-stakeholder platforms where different type of actors would come together to share knowledge, co-create new initiatives, and identify opportunities for piloting and scaling-up new initiatives, including in partnership with FAO's field programmes. Innovation Hubs would provide services on innovation processes and policies. They would also support capacity development in collaboration with other UN agencies, regional or international innovation Hubs.

18. To support and coordinate the above innovation architecture, OIN will explore innovative funding approaches, in line with what is envisioned in the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy, with the objective of mobilizing financial resources. Additional functions, such as monitoring, evaluation, learning, and financial management would be required to complement the funding function to ensure transparency and accountability of GIM.