

## EVALUATION SERVICE

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## Evaluation of FAO's cross-organizational strategy on broadening partnerships and alliances

### The importance of partnerships and alliances for FAO

All major UN Conferences and Summits have affirmed that partnerships are essential for progress in overcoming hunger and poverty, promoting economic and social development, and conserving the environment. Promoting public–private partnerships is at the heart of the UN Secretary-General's reforms, and “Building a global partnership for development” is the eighth Millennium Development Goal (MDG). The crucial roles of civil society and the private sector are now recognized and the participation of these new actors in global governance and their responsibilities and accountability need to be addressed. In addition, member countries are requesting FAO to strengthen its work in areas of comparative advantage with increasingly reduced resources. FAO has responded by seeking increased collaboration both with UN agencies and with less traditional actors, and “Broadening partnerships and alliances” was included as one of the six strategies to address cross-organizational issues in FAO's Strategic Framework: 2000–2015. The strategy refers to three categories of partners: i) UN organizations, international financial institutions and other intergovernmental organizations; ii) civil society and non-governmental organizations (CSOs/NGOs); and iii) the private sector.

### Findings

Partnerships and alliances were defined as *cooperation and collaboration between FAO units and external parties in joint or coordinated action for a common purpose*. FAO works extensively in collaboration with other organizations, and partnerships have been particularly fruitful when related to programmes of special relevance to member countries, when embedded in FAO's core programme of work, and when the division of labour among partners is clear and based on differences in their respective mandates. There has, however, been a tendency for FAO to overshadow partners when taking the lead, especially when hosting the secretariat of the partnership.

Collaboration with other organizations in the **UN system** is often institutionalized and encompasses a wide range of relationships. At headquarters level, FAO has proved to be an active and positive player in the various interagency coordination mechanisms, and has established successful bilateral partnerships with various agencies, although not all UN organizations perceived FAO as being open to partnerships.

At the **country level**, FAO appeared to have greater difficulties in partnering than at headquarters level. Despite a generally positive assessment of FAO's increased participation in UN system-wide mechanisms, FAO Country Offices' limited financial and human resources have prevented them from playing a fuller role. The progress noted at the headquarters level in collaborative activities among

the Rome-based agencies (FAO, WFP, IFAD) has also not yet been carried down to the field level.

Overall, FAO's partnerships with **CSOs/NGOs** were found to be constructive, especially in the framework of international policy fora, where these organizations have demonstrated professionalism and technical competence. In implementing programmes jointly with CSOs/NGOs, the Organization benefited from their broad outreach and their capacity for advocacy by repackaging FAO's normative work for non-specialized audiences.

The number of **private sector partnerships** was low, and was mostly found in expert consultation and data exchange activities and, to a lesser extent, in policy dialogue and regulatory framework processes. The mobilization of resources from the private sector for FAO's work has also been very limited. The private sector policy formulated in 2000 has not been well disseminated, and corporate efforts to implement it have not been substantive.

Overall, FAO's main partners are **research and academic institutions**. Relationships with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and its 15 International Agricultural Research Centres are especially intense, and the assessment is positive overall. However, problems have arisen from the lack of adequate mutual understanding and risk of overlap in roles, as well as from the limited permeation through FAO of experiences and lessons learned by the various units. The Organization's multiple relationships with other research institutions have concerned discrete activities and projects, often not conceived as part of programmes.

There appeared to be **general satisfaction with FAO as a partner**. It was found that FAO staff lacked a common understanding of partnerships, and that the Organization did not have a consolidated source of information on partnering initiatives. Partners often considered FAO's main contributions to partnerships to be its role as an honest broker and ability to work with multiple constituencies, the worldwide information resource it provides and its outreach. Only some partners (particularly research institutions) looked to FAO for technical expertise. The lack of flexibility in the availability and use of resources has sometimes undermined the effectiveness of partnerships and conveyed the impression that the Organization is insufficiently prepared for active management of and contribution to partnerships.

Some important lessons were learned regarding **factors which exert a positive influence on partnerships** and which should drive prioritization and decision-making in partnering. These factors include:

- a high level of political commitment;
- an appropriate institutional home;
- consideration of different organizational cultures and values;
- a balance in power and resources among partners and careful attention to potential inequalities in the design of the partnership including the consensual distribution of resources among partners;
- investment of substantial regular core programme resources by the FAO unit involved;
- a well-defined domain of intervention and clear boundaries to the intended outputs and outcomes;
- robust formal and informal communication systems and decision-making mechanisms at operational and policy levels;
- controversial, complex or innovative issues at the heart of the partnership and generation of an innovative product;
- a manageable number of partners;
- avoiding overlaps and competition with other partnerships;
- involvement of partnership facilitators with mediation, negotiation and communication skills.

## Recommendations

■ **Country level partnerships.** These should be increased and, in particular, the Rome-based agencies should strengthen collaboration by reaching a three-way consensus recognizing synergies and establishing a clear division of labour. **FAO country representatives' capacity to partner** needs to be strengthened. Increased flexibility in the use of resources would enable FAO country offices to better determine human and financial investments to dedicate to partnerships.

■ **Partnerships with CSOs/NGOs.** These are evolving and include a very broad range of organizations, representing diverse groups and views in society. FAO must pay careful attention to the genuine ability of individual CSOs/NGOs to represent specific constituencies. When entering into partnership with CSOs/NGOs, FAO needs to be more open and inclusive. This is all the more important in that FAO is particularly appreciated by this category in its role as an honest broker.

■ **Partnerships with the private sector.** The strategy for partnering with the private sector should be revised to differentiate among private sector partners and indicate what can realistically be gained from working with each of them. It should review experiences of the UN system, especially within the framework of the UN Global Compact with the private sector. FAO must recognize the role of the private sector in enhancing growth and development, while carefully addressing the reputation risks associated with these partnerships. Effective implementation will require staff training and capacity development.

Partnerships with non-state actors whose interests may diverge from those of FAO pose **risks to the Organization's credibility**. The risk is particularly high when partnering with the private sector and with NGOs concerned with specific issues. FAO should avoid being associated with actors that have a negative public image and must enhance the transparency, objectivity and neutrality of the process for selecting partners. A set of criteria should be established, weighing risk against opportunity and adjusting the screening process to the significance of the initiative. At the same time, **if FAO is to keep its role as an honest broker**, it must adjust the balance between the constituencies with which it collaborates. Among other considerations, this requires FAO to be more inclusive in the selection of partners, in particular non-state actors. Efforts to increase partnerships with small and medium enterprises, national CSOs and research institutions will increase the breadth of constituencies represented and enhance FAO's legitimacy and credibility.

■ **Partnerships with research and academic institutions.** These should be periodically reviewed, and efforts to establish a corporate policy for designating FAO Reference Centres should continue, in order to avoid incoherent and fragmented approaches. With CGIAR institutes, better joint mechanisms should be developed for exchanging information and assessing these relationships.

■ **Management structure.** The current management structure for FAO's partnerships is not optimal. There is a restricted concept of what the Organization should look for in partnerships, too often focused primarily on obtaining external funding. In addition, sharing of responsibilities with other UN organizations does not adequately reflect the evolution of system-wide high level coordinating mechanisms, resulting in overlapping functions among different FAO units. The management structure should be reformed, in order to allow more central access to information, strategic planning and corporate policy on partnerships at senior management level, while the substantive aspect of partnerships should be guaranteed by embedding work in the core activities of FAO technical departments.

Overall, it is clear that **external and internal trends converge towards the necessity for partnering**, in particular at country level, in the context of UN reform and for optimal implementation of the MDGs. In addressing this challenge, FAO will have to be more strategic in the way it engages in partnerships. FAO's corporate strategy, its approach to partnering with external actors, and the related policies and guidelines all need to be further developed in order to ensure that the Organization's priorities come to bear in partnerships and that fragmented efforts are avoided.

### Management and FAO Governing Bodies' responses

This evaluation was completed in September 2005 and will be considered by the Governing Bodies in 2006.

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### References

**Evaluation of FAO's Cross-Organizational Strategy for Broadening Partnerships and Alliances.**

Available at: [http://www.fao.org/pbe/pbee/common/ecg/181/en/Report\\_of\\_the\\_Evaluation\\_of\\_FAO\\_s\\_Cross\\_Organizational\\_Strategy\\_Broadening\\_Partnerships\\_and\\_Alliances.doc](http://www.fao.org/pbe/pbee/common/ecg/181/en/Report_of_the_Evaluation_of_FAO_s_Cross_Organizational_Strategy_Broadening_Partnerships_and_Alliances.doc)