

U.S. Statement on Agenda Item 13.1: Terms of Reference of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture

- The United States supports increased innovation, including digitalization in agriculture to increase sustainable production.
- Thus, the United States also supports the platform's proposed role in sharing knowledge of best practices and raising awareness.
- We note the recommendations from the Joint meeting of the Program and Finance Committees explicitly noted that the new platform should not have a policy-setting function in its mandate; the recommendations of the Council are that any proposed voluntary guidelines from the Platform are submitted to FAO Members for consideration through the FAO Governing Body process.
- It is imperative the new platform coordinate with other efforts to take advantage of opportunities for collaboration and synergy, as well as to avoid duplicating established work programs and activities of other international bodies with comparative advantage in policy areas involving information communication technologies, use of digital technologies and data, and digital economy, as well as overlapping with other multi-stakeholder forums providing recommendations and guidelines for supporting governments as they create new policy frameworks.
- The United States requests that this new platform be coordinated with the Digital Agriculture Knowledge Hub (DAK-Hub), a newly established global think tank, and evidence and data broker, set up to enhance digital solutions for agricultural transformation.
- The United States requests that any terms of reference for this digital platform focus more on knowledge-sharing, to fully remain within FAO's mandate, and avoid duplicating the authorities or mandates of other relevant international organizations.
- In alignment with the previous views of the United States, which we shared in FAO governing body meetings and the decisions reflected in reports of these bodies, the United States is submitting written comments on the Terms of Reference.
- With regards to the proposed provisions on policy guidance, the FAO should not duplicate policy guidance areas or ongoing work within the International Telecommunication Union, through its Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) and World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), and the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) or its forums, created by UN General Assembly.

January 2021

COFI/2020/Inf.3.3

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农 业 组 织Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United NationsOrganisation des Nations
Unies pour l'alimentation
et l'agricultureПродовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных НацийOrganización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agriculturaمنظمة
الاغذية والزراعة
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COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

Thirty-fourth Session

1–5 February

**TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM
FOR DIGITAL FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- At its 164th Session, the FAO Council endorsed the proposal for FAO to host the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture (“the Platform”) and requested review of its Terms of Reference (ToRs) by the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), the Committee on Forestry (COFO), the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the Programme Committee and the FAO Council.
- This document presents the revised ToRs for the Platform incorporating the feedback provided thereon by COAG at its 27th Session (28 September – 2 October 2020), COFO at its 25th Session (5 – 9 October 2020), the Programme Committee at its 129th Session (9-13 November 2020) and the FAO Council at its 165th Session (30 November – 4 December 2020) respectively and informs about the envisaged next steps.

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I. Background

1. On the basis of a request by the 2020 Berlin Agriculture Ministers Conference in the context of the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (“the GFFA”), and the recommendations of the 110th Session of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (28-29 May 2020), the 128th Session of the Programme Committee (8-18 June 2020) and the Joint Meeting of the 128th Session of the Programme Committee and the 180th Session of the Finance Committee (8, 12, 16 and 17 June 2020),¹ the FAO Council, during its 164th Session (6 to 10 July 2020), endorsed the proposal for hosting by FAO of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture (“the Platform”), and requested review of the Terms of Reference (“ToRs”) for the Platform by the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), the Committee on Forestry (COFO), the Committee on Fisheries (COFI), the Programme Committee and the FAO Council.^{2,3}

2. In this context, documents COAG/2020/22, COFO/2020/8.1.a and PC 129/INF/6 were submitted and considered by the 27th Session of COAG (28 September - 2 October 2020), the 25th Session of COFO (5-9 October 2020) and the 129th Session of the Programme Committee (9-13 November 2020) respectively.⁴

3. The current ToRs are based on the concept note entitled “Realizing the potential of digitalization to improve the agri-food system: Proposing a new International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture” prepared for the 2020 Berlin Agriculture Ministers Conference in the context of the GFFA by FAO and other International Organizations⁵, and have been revised to take into account the feedback provided by the 27th Session of COAG (28 September – 2 October 2020), the 25th Session of COFO (5 – 9 October 2020), the 129th Session of the Programme Committee (9-13 November 2020) and the 165th Session of the FAO Council (30 November – 4 December 2020).⁶

II. Nature

4. The hosting of the Platform by FAO will not result in the creation of an autonomous legal entity nor a new FAO body but, rather, in a flexible, light and consensual coordination mechanism supported by FAO while complying with its regulations, rules and procedures. Participation in this mechanism will be voluntary.

5. Establishing the Platform is in accordance with the UN Secretary-General’s Strategy on New Technologies⁷ that promotes multi-stakeholder dialogue on normative frameworks that support these technologies to build trust and confidence. It is also in line with the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation⁸ for developing multi-stakeholder or

¹ Report of the 110th Session of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (28-29 May 2020) (<http://www.fao.org/3/nc435en/nc435en.pdf>), Report of the 128th Session of the Programme Committee (8-18 June 2020) (<http://www.fao.org/3/nc439en/nc439en.pdf>), Report of the Joint Meeting of the 128th Session of the Programme Committee and the 180th Session of the Finance Committee. (8, 12, 16 and 17 June 2020) (<http://www.fao.org/3/nc438en/nc438en.pdf>).

² Report of the Council of FAO, Hundred and Sixty-fourth Session, 6-10 July 2020, CL 164 REP (<http://www.fao.org/3/nd238en/nd238en.pdf>).

³ The process leading to discussions on this initiative is described in document CL 164/9 (<http://www.fao.org/3/nd058en/nd058en.pdf>).

⁴ COAG/2020/22 (<http://www.fao.org/3/nd396en/nd396en.pdf>), COFO/2020/8.1.a (<http://www.fao.org/3/nd713en/nd713en.pdf>), PC 129/INF/6 (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne027en/ne027en.pdf>).

⁵ FAO. 2019. Realizing the potential of digitalization to improve the agri-food system: Proposing a new International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture. A concept note. Rome, FAO. (<http://www.fao.org/3/ca7485en/ca7485en.pdf>).

⁶ Report of the 27th Session of the Committee on Agriculture, 28 September-2 October 2020, C2021/21 (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne021en/ne021en.pdf>); Report of the 25th Session of the Committee on Forestry, 5-9 October 2020, COFO/2020/REP (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne205en/ne205en.pdf>); Report of the 129th Session of the Programme Committee, 9-13 November 2020, CL 165/10 (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne222en/ne222en.pdf>); Report of the Council of FAO, Hundred and Sixty-fifth Session, 30 November-4 December 2020, CL 165/REP (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne381en/ne381en.pdf>).

⁷ UN Secretary-General’s Strategy on New Technologies. (<https://www.un.org/en/newtechnologies/images/pdf/SGs-Strategy-on-New-Technologies.pdf>).

⁸ UN Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. The age of digital interdependence. (<https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/DigitalCooperation-report-for%20web.pdf>).

bilateral initiatives on specific issues, and the Report of the UN Secretary-General 'Roadmap for Digital Cooperation'.⁹

III. Mission

6. The Platform aims at providing an inclusive multi-stakeholder forum to promote dialogue on the digitalization of the food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry sectors. Its main function is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences on best practices, objectives and policy approaches frameworks between stakeholders, including Members, agri-business and the private sector, farmers, the civil and knowledge societies, and International Organizations. Through dialogue and consensus on best practices, actions and policy approaches by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, it will:

- a) provide an entry point for all stakeholders, farmers, agri-business and the private sector, the civil and knowledge societies and consumers into discussions on digital technology applications on food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry, and narrow the digital divide by including in these discussions smallholder farmers, small and medium-sized enterprises, and marginalized groups to make their voices heard;
- b) increase awareness of issues related to food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry in the appropriate digital economy organizations without duplicating their activities; and,
- c) contribute to the application of safe, trustworthy, sustainable, human rights-based and inclusive digital technologies on food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and land use planning, land use change and forestry to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development.

Commented [USA1]: To align with USA inputs under written procedure for COFI, as well as COAG and COFO.

Second, these changes also align with 7(a).

IV. Objectives

7. The objectives of the Platform are as follows:

- a) facilitate the exchange of knowledge on best practices, actions and policy frameworks on digitalization, and promote dialogue and consensus among all relevant stakeholders on the use and impacts of digital technologies on food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry;
- b) undertake analysis and provide scientific evidence scientific-based assessments of the benefits and potential risks of digital technology applications on food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry in accordance with national conditions and needs;
- c) share information from the Platform with relevant create and/or strengthen linkages between international and multilateral fora mandated for the digital economy and those for food and agriculture to improve coordination and synergies and to enhance awareness on impacts of digital technologies that are specific to food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry, without duplicating or prejudging efforts; and,
- d) support-share information from the Platform to benefit policymakers to-in formulating actions and policy approaches by developing recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines that can frameworks to address the technical, economic, environmental and social challenges food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry are facing in the context of digital technologies.

⁹ Report of the Secretary-General: Roadmap for Digital Cooperation (<https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/>).

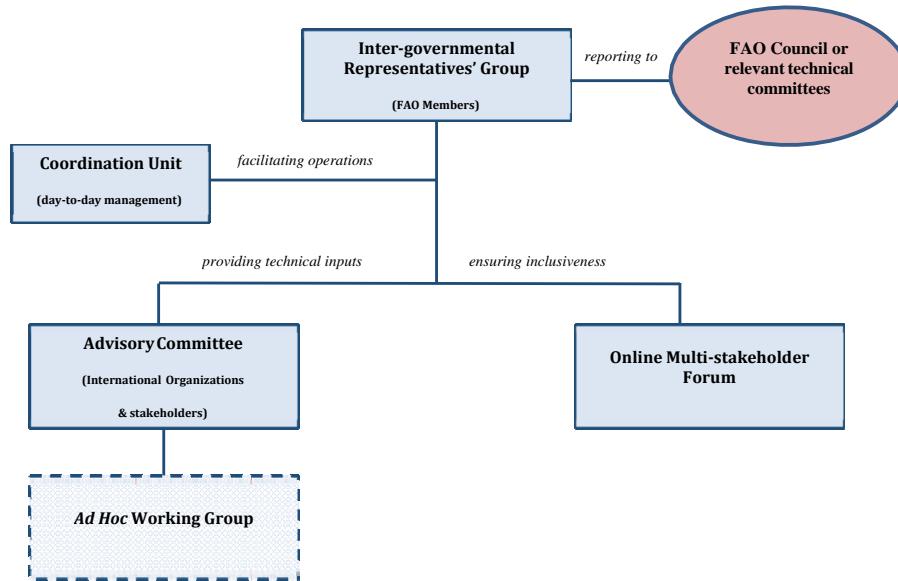


Figure 1: Operating Mechanisms of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture

V. Operating mechanisms

8. To carry out its functions, the Platform will operate on the basis of the following mechanisms: the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group, the Advisory Committee, the Online Multi-stakeholder Forum, and the Coordination Unit (see Figure 1). The Inter-governmental Representatives' Group will be the decision-making component of the Platform, setting priorities, reviewing technical inputs and proposals, and endorsing actions. The Advisory Committee will undertake analysis, provide evidence and submit proposals for action. The Online Multi-stakeholder Forum will ensure that all stakeholders can participate in the discussions, and the Coordination Unit will provide day-to-day management of the initiative.

9. **Inter-governmental Representatives' Group:** The Inter-governmental Representatives' Group will be composed of FAO Members' highly qualified senior public officers responsible for digital technology applications on food and agriculture, or technical experts accredited by the participating Members. There will be twenty-seven senior officers/experts with the following regional representation: five participants each from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean; three participants from Near East; and, two participants each from North America and Southwest Pacific. Participation in the Intergovernmental Representatives' Group is voluntary, under the authority of FAO Members and according to FAO Members' criteria. Senior officers/experts will volunteer for a term of two years and will act in their personal capacity, providing the best possible technical and policy-related knowledge available. Participating senior officers/experts shall elect a Chair and vice-Chair of the Platform for a period of two years.

Commented [USA2]: This is not well balanced in geographic representation. Could distribution be more geographically balanced?

Region/Number of Countries
 Asia 25
 NERC 21
 ARC 49
 LARC 33
 ERC 48
 NA 2
 SWP 16

Commented [USA3]: Need to resolve the implied conflict.

Senior public officers, under the authority of FAO Members, serving in their personal capacity?

This may not be possible for members where there are rules or requirements for these officials to always act under authority of the government. May not always be separable their government authority versus individual capacity.

10. The Inter-governmental Representative's Group is supported by the Advisory Committee [see paragraph 11 below] to:

- a) develop a long-term strategic vision and identify issues and priorities in the context of the digitalization of food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry;
- b) approve the biennial Plan of Work¹⁰ and the participants in the various components of the Platform, with the exception of FAO Members;
- c) review and discuss the analysis, scientific evidence and proposals provided by the Advisory Committee;
- d) ~~share best practices and deliberate on, and endorse recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines and provide summary reporting on policy frameworks;~~
- e) ~~submit voluntary guidelines to the FAO Members for consideration through the FAO Governing Body process; and~~
- f(e) assess the overall effectiveness and performance of the Platform.

11. **Advisory Committee:** The Advisory Committee will support the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group by providing technical inputs and analysis. The Advisory Committee will:

- a) serve as a key conduit between the Platform and international and multilateral fora mandated on digital economy and on food and agriculture, ensuring complementarity and avoiding duplication of efforts;
- b) develop and submit provisional biennial Plans of Action, budget plans and lists of participants, except of FAO Members, for the various components of the Platform for approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group;
- c) undertake technical analysis and provide scientific evidence on the effects of digital technologies on food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry and the related challenges;
- d) ~~collect information on, and analyse actions and policy frameworks for digital food and agriculture, and develop consensus best practices and proposals for policy frameworks recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines for discussion and endorsement by the Inter-governmental Representative's Group; and,~~
- e) ~~support inclusive dialogue through the organization of online discussions with all stakeholders [see paragraph 15 below] and include their views in provisional biennial Plans of Action, the technical analysis and proposals for recommendations, policy frameworks and best practices and voluntary guidelines.~~

12. Participants in the Advisory Committee will include technical and policy experts from International Organizations and multi-stakeholder groups. There will be thirteen participants with one participant each from: the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the World Food Programme

Commented [USA4]: The Group focus should be on sharing knowledge, deliberating, and providing summary reporting on policy frameworks.

Endorsement of policy recommendations should be an outcome from members reaching consensus in the FAO Governing Body process. In FAO technical committee and Council, Members have agreed on this point in Council and technical Committee reports.

In the Platform's reporting to FAO Governing Bodies, paragraph 18, there would be an ongoing opportunity for the Platform to highlight analysis, provide evidence and offer stakeholder consensus views on policy frameworks. This aligns with other coordination mechanisms, such as the Soil Partnership.

Commented [USA5]: Align with U.S. comments on Mission and Objectives (sections above).

Commented [USA6]: What about other regional IFI/DBs? *Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB)*

¹⁰ Among other priorities, the biennial Plan of Work shall include issues related to digital technology applications and data, including management, data protection, intellectual property rights and privacy.

(WFP), the World Bank Group (WBG), the World Trade Organization (WTO), farmers' organizations, the private sector, the civil society and the knowledge society.¹¹

13. Additional technical and policy experts from International Organizations, Multilateral Development Banks and stakeholder groups can join the Advisory Committee subject to approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group. The Coordination Unit of the Platform [see paragraph 16 below] will act as the Advisory Committee's convener and chair.

14. Subject to the approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group, the Advisory Committee may form temporary ad hoc working groups composed of experts from International Organizations and multi-stakeholder groups to strengthen technical and analytical capacity on specific focus areas for a maximum period of six months.

15. **Online Multi-stakeholder Forum:** The Online Multi-stakeholder Forum will ensure inclusion and a bottom-up approach. It will be open to all relevant stakeholders such as farmers' organizations, the private sector, the civil society and the knowledge society, and will take the form of facilitated online discussions. Periodic face-to-face meetings of all multi-stakeholders can also be organized, subject to approval by the Inter-governmental Representative's Group. The main activities of the Multi-stakeholder Forum include:

- a) ensuring broad multi-stakeholder dialogue, a bottom-up approach and transparency;
- b) discussing the benefits and risks of digital technology applications on food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry; and,
- c) exchanging knowledge on policy frameworks, best practices and measures-approaches to promote digitalization in food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, and land use planning, land use change and forestry.

16. Coordination Unit: The Coordination Unit will provide day-to-day operational and administrative support to the Platform activities, in addition to technical support. It will be placed in the office of the FAO Chief Economist and will be entirely managed by FAO under its mandate and institutional framework, and within its programme of work and budget. Accordingly, the day-to-day activities supporting the Platform shall be undertaken in line with FAO's rules and procedures.

17. The Coordination Unit will be composed of a full-time Director (D-1 level), a Professional Staff member (P-4 level) and General Service support (G-3 level). The Director will also support the Chair of the Platform.

VI. Reporting

18. The Inter-governmental Representatives' Group, shall periodically report progress to the one or more FAO technical committees? FAO Council. Voluntary guidelines endorsed by the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group shall be submitted to the FAO Members for consideration through the FAO Governing Body process.

VII. Financial implications

19. The Platform structure, the Coordination Unit, and its activities shall be funded by voluntary contributions from Members and other partners.

Commented [USA7]: This could be contentiously competitive for each individual seat. Should there be a rotation requirement every 2 years or re-chartering of membership?

How is "knowledge society" defined and what organizations?

Commented [USA8]: Given the technical and cross-cutting nature of the Platform's scope the reporting should be first to one or more technical committees -- CCP/COAG/COFI, and the reports of these committees to the Council can include any outcomes of member discussion.

Commented [USA9]: The financial resources for the Platform should be FAO Core Budget neutral – entirely supported by voluntary funding.

¹¹ The International Organizations listed collaborated in the development of the concept note entitled "Realizing the potential of digitalization to improve the agri-food system: Proposing a new International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture" prepared for the 2020 Berlin Agriculture Ministers Conference in the context of the GFFA.

VIII. Envisaged next steps

20. In parallel to the finalization of the ToRs, the Secretariat is developing a sustainable funding plan for the initiative to be based on voluntary contributions from Members and partners.

21. Given the importance of developing a multi-stakeholder approach for digitalization in food and agriculture, the Secretariat plans to initiate, pending finalization of the review process of the ToRs, preparatory activities with respect to the hosting of the Platform by FAO, such as consulting with international organizations and the various stakeholders. The Secretariat's plan is made upon the understanding that such activities would be those needed to prepare for the launch of the Platform and that, following review by COFI at its 34th Session (1-5 February 2021), the revised ToRs will be submitted for final review to the 130th Session of the Programme Committee (22-26 March 2021) and subsequently to the 166th Session of the FAO Council (29 March – 2 April 2021).