联合国　Food and Agriculture　Organisation des Nations　Продовольственная и　Organización de las　منظمة
粮食及　Organization of the　Unies pour l'alimentation　сельскохозяйственная организация　Naciones Unidas para la　الأغذية والزراعة
农业组织　United Nations　et l'agriculture　Объединенных Наций　Alimentación y la Agricultura　للأمم المتحدة

COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION
5 - 9 October 2020
INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM FOR DIGITAL FOOD AND AGRICULTURE – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Executive Summary

The Global Forum for Food and Agriculture's (GFFA) Communiqué of 18 January 2020 called upon FAO's governing bodies "to support a process" for "the establishment of an International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture."

At its 164th Session, the FAO Council endorsed the reports presenting the proposal for FAO to host an International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture and requested the review of its terms of reference by the Committee on Forestry as well as by the other Technical Committees and the Programme Committee.

Accordingly, this document presents the proposed terms of reference for the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture.

Suggested action by the Committee on Forestry

The Committee may wish to review the terms of reference for the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture.

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

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I.   BACKGROUND

1.   Global food systems are in direct need for innovative solutions to address interlinked challenges such as ensuring food security and nutrition for all, contributing to inclusive growth, and

managing natural resources sustainably. Digitalization can play an increasingly important role in addressing these challenges by boosting connectivity and reducing inefficiencies and information costs. Digital technologies can have a tremendous impact, making agriculture more productive, sustainable, and efficient. The opportunities offered by digital technologies are vast and profoundly transformative. Digital technologies affect all sectors of the economy, and society as a whole, however their impacts on agriculture can be specific and can give rise to economic, social and ethical challenges and risks that should be addressed by policymakers.

2.   On the basis of a request by the 2020 Berlin Agriculture Ministers Conference in the context of the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture, 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, and requested review of the Terms of Reference for the Platform by the COAG, COFI, COFO, the Programme Committee and the FAO Council.[2],[3]

3.   The present Terms of Reference 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 Global Forum for Food and Agriculture by FAO and other International Organizations.[4]

II.   NATURE

4.   The hosting of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture 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 International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture is in accordance with the UN Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies[5] that promotes multi-stakeholder dialogue on normative frameworks that support these technologies to build trust and confidence. It is also in line with the recommendation of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation[6]

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[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] 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).
[5] UN Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies. (https://www.un.org/en/newtechnologies/images/pdf/SGs-Strategy-on-New-Technologies.pdf).
[6] 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).

for developing multi-stakeholder or bilateral initiatives on specific issues, and the Report of the UN Secretary-General 'Roadmap for Digital Cooperation'.[7]

III.   MISSION

6.   The International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture aims at providing an inclusive multi-stakeholder forum for identifying and discussing the potential benefits and risks of digitalization of the food and agricultural sectors. Through dialogue, it will:

a) promote coordination and bridge the gap between international and multilateral *fora* for the digital economy and those for food and agriculture and enhance awareness on issues specific to the digitalization of the food and agriculture sectors; and,

b) provide policy recommendations to governments, such as voluntary guidelines or other non-legally binding instruments, aimed at supporting decision-making at higher levels.
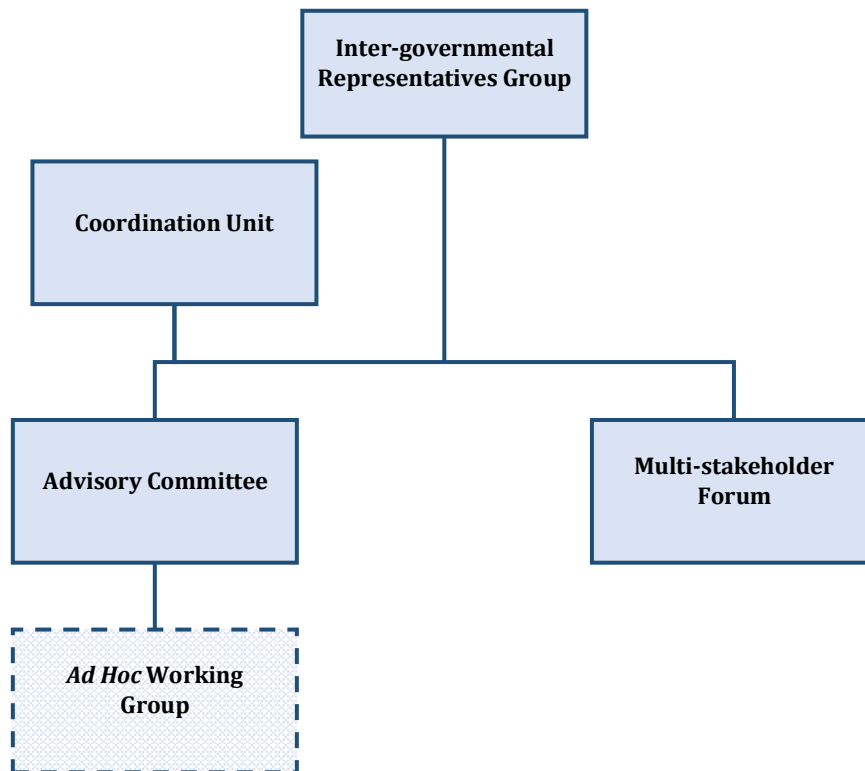
IV.   OBJECTIVES

7.   The objectives of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture are as follows:

a) promote discussion among stakeholders on impacts of digital technologies on food and agriculture and facilitate the exchange of knowledge on policy frameworks and best practices that promote digitalization;

b) undertake analysis and provide scientific evidence on the benefits and potential risks of digital technologies on food and agriculture in accordance with national conditions and needs to support multi-stakeholder dialogue and consensus;

c) create and strengthen linkages between international and multilateral *fora* mandated for the digital economy and those for food and agriculture to improve coordination and synergies without duplicating or prejudging efforts and work, and enhance awareness on impacts of digital technologies that are specific to agriculture; and,

d) support policymakers to formulate policies by developing recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines that can address the technical, economic, social, and ethical challenges food and agriculture is facing in the context of digital technologies.

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[7] 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 International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture will operate on the basis of the following mechanisms:

a) **Inter-governmental Representative**s **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 experts accredited by the participating Members. There will be fourteen senior officers/experts with two participants each from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, Near East, North America and Southwest Pacific, ensuring that all FAO regions are represented. 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 International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture for a period of two years. The Inter-governmental Representatives Group is supported by the Advisory Committee [see V.b) below] to:

(i) identify issues and priorities in the context of the digitalization of food and agricultural sectors;

(ii) approve the biennial Plan of Work and the participants in the various components of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture;

(iii) review and discuss the analysis and scientific evidence provided by the Advisory Committee;

(iv) deliberate on, and endorse policy recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines; and,

(v) assess the overall effectiveness and performance of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture.

b) **Advisory Committee**: The Advisory Committee will support the Inter-governmental Representatives Group by providing technical inputs. The Advisory Committee will:

(i) serve as a key conduit between the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture and international and multilateral fora mandated on the digital economy and on food and agriculture, ensuring complementarity and avoiding duplication of efforts;

(ii) develop and submit provisional biennial Plans of Action, agendas and lists of participants for the various components of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture for approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives Group;

(iii) undertake technical analysis and provide scientific evidence on the effects of digital technologies on food and agriculture and the related challenges;

(iv) support inclusive dialogue through the organization of online discussions with all stakeholders [see V.c) below] and include their recommendations in the analysis; and,

(v) collect information on, and analyse policy frameworks and best practices, and develop policy recommendations and voluntary guidelines for discussion and endorsement by the Inter-governmental Representatives Group.

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

Additional technical and policy experts from other International Organizations can join the Advisory Committee subject to approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives Group. The Coordination Unit of the Platform [see V.d) below] will act as the convener and chair of the Advisory Committee.

Subject to the approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives Group, the Advisory Committee may form temporary *ad hoc* **working groups** composed by 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.

c) **Online Multi-stakeholder Forum**: The Online Multi-stakeholder Forum will ensure inclusion and a bottom-up approach. It will be open to stakeholders such as farmers' organizations, the private sector, the civil society and the knowledge society, and will take the form of facilitated online discussions. Participants will be identified and invited by the Coordination Unit [see V.d) below] subject to approval by the Inter-governmental Representatives Group. The main activities of the Multi-stakeholder Forum include:

(i) ensuring broad multi-stakeholder dialogue and transparency;

(ii) discussing benefits and risks of digital technology applications on food and agriculture; and,

(iii) discussing and exchanging knowledge on policy frameworks, best practices and measures to promote digitalization in food and agriculture.

d) **Coordination Unit**: The Coordination Unit will provide day-to-day operational and administrative support to the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture 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, procedures and policies.

The Coordination Unit will be composed by 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 International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture.

VI.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.   The International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture shall be funded by extra-budgetary contributions.