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Update on the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy - Information Note 1 –
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I. Background

1. This Information Note provides an update since the publication of the outline and roadmap document (CL 168/22) submitted to the Programme Committee and the Council, given that some of the elements contained in it have since evolved. Regional consultations on science and innovation have been held in all regions and a brief description is included below. The updated roadmap is presented in *Figure 1*.

II. Guidance from the 168th Session of the Council

2. The 168th Session of the Council supported the outline of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy with the overall aim of strengthening FAO's capacities to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Strategic Framework 2022-31, and requested FAO to implement the proposed roadmap.¹ It commended the broad scope of the Strategy as responding to the complexity of agrifood systems, covering all relevant scientific disciplines and types of innovations, including those stemming from indigenous and local knowledge, as well as community-based innovation. It highlighted the need for addressing accountability, affordability and access, while also recognising the benefits of science, technology and innovation, especially for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, people in vulnerable situations, people with disabilities, youth and women.

¹ The report of the 168th Session of the Council includes the full set of guidance and is available at this link <https://www.fao.org/3/nh512eng/nh512eng.pdf>

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

3. The Council further highlighted that science and innovation should be adaptable to local, national and regional development contexts, addressing national priorities and capacities, as appropriate, and the importance of assessing potential benefits and risks from using new technologies and innovations on the three pillars of sustainable development. It prioritized supporting the strengthening of national and local institutions upon request of Members, including national agricultural research institutions. The Council stressed the need for the dissemination and scaling up of good practices and for the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy to include innovative communication and dissemination of science and available innovations, technologies, knowledge and good practices.

III. Update on the content of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy

4. Since the Outline and Roadmap of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy (CL 168/22) was prepared, the Vision and Goal of the Strategy have been developed, and the Scope and Pillars have been streamlined. The updated description of these elements is included below.

Vision

5. A world free from hunger and malnutrition, where science and innovation contribute to overcoming complex social, economic and environmental challenges of agrifood systems in an equitable way while maximising synergies and minimising trade-offs and risks.

Goal

6. FAO provides global leadership and supports its Members in harnessing science and innovation to realise context-specific, sustainable and systemic solutions for MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind.

Scope

7. The FAO Science and Innovation Strategy has a broad scope that includes all sectors and areas of agrifood systems, including crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture – from production to consumption. It gives particular attention to the needs of low- and middle-income countries as well as small-scale producers, women, youth and Indigenous Peoples in order to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs, while also strengthening FAO's capacities, with the ultimate aim of benefiting the countries and people that the Organization serves. The Strategy addresses the full range of relevant scientific disciplines (e.g. the biological, social and economic sciences) and recognises the importance of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity for addressing systemic challenges in a holistic manner. It recognises the need for a diversity of innovations (technological (including digital), social, policy, financial and institutional) and promotes indigenous and local knowledge systems as an important driver of innovation for inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems.

Pillars

8. The Strategy will include pillars that define its priority areas and provide the framework for the Action Plan. Three priority areas are proposed. The first focuses on strengthening science- and evidence-based decision-making; the second on supporting innovation and technology at the country level; and the third on reinforcing FAO's capacities to better serve countries.

IV. Regional consultations

9. The FAO Regional Offices hosted regional consultations on science and innovation between October and December 2021, in order to provide inputs for the development of the thematic priorities of the Science and Innovation Strategy, including identifying science and innovation needs and gaps at regional and country levels and discussing science and innovation priorities. Regions raised similar concerns, although regional specificities were also present.

10. Overall, the importance of considering the complexity of agrifood system challenges and the need to adopt systemic approaches was underlined, as well as access and affordability of innovations. Both the benefits and challenges of digitalisation were widely recognised. FAO’s normative role was considered a comparative advantage, but the challenge of bringing the normative work to the country level was underlined, as was the need to integrate FAO’s policy guidance in national plans and budgets to ensure impact. All regions highlighted the centrality of strengthening research and extension at country level as well as the need to enhance partnerships, particularly with research institutions and the private sector.

11. The importance of bringing together small-scale producers, researchers and extension agents in an integrated, participatory process through approaches such as the Farmer Field Schools was stressed, together with the importance of sharing existing knowledge, including through rural communication services. All regions acknowledged the importance of promoting the role of young people in agrifood systems, and highlighted the need for multi-stakeholder innovation platforms. Finally, investing in FAO staff knowledge development and the need for innovation in FAO’s internal and administrative processes were highlighted as being key.

Figure 1. Updated roadmap (this roadmap is an update and replaces the Annex of the Outline and Roadmap of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy (CL 168/22)

