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Synthesis of evaluations conducted in the Africa region 2019-2021¹

Executive Summary

This report is a synthesis of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Office of Evaluation (OED) evaluations completed from 2019-2021 on FAO's work in the Africa region. It documents FAO's contribution to results, identifies gaps and emerging issues, and lessons learned. The synthesis is organized around the themes of Sustainable production and value chain development, Food security and nutrition, Climate change and natural resources, Resilience to threats and crises, and Gender equality and empowerment of women. The synthesis used the Programme Priority Areas of the Strategic Framework 2022-2031 to analyse FAO's contribution to results.

The synthesis found many positive examples of FAO's contribution to results in the Africa region. However, the sustainability of results is a challenge for the region, due to several factors including capacity constraints of government partners, and limitations of FAO project designs. Gaps and emerging issues include the need for guidance on 'accelerators' of results, addressing youth as a key priority, and new approaches to partnerships with civil society and the private sector. Lessons learned include the importance of good project design, suitably capacitated decentralized offices, effective knowledge management, and strategic and inclusive partnerships to achieve results.

Suggested action by Regional Conference

The Regional Conference may wish to:

- i. Take note of the contents of the report; and
- ii. Encourage FAO's Regional Office for Africa (RAF) to pursue actions to address the constraints and gaps identified in the report.

¹ Synthesis of evaluations of FAO's contributions in the Africa Region (2020-2021). Full Report: <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/regional-synthesis>

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

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Introduction

1. The FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) conducted a synthesis of evaluations of FAO projects and programmes implemented in the Africa region. The purpose of the synthesis is to contribute to the Organization's learning and improvement. The objective of the synthesis is to identify lessons that can contribute to an informed discussion of FAO's strategic positioning and contribution to results in the Africa region and to provide guidance for future work planning at the regional level.
2. This is the second synthesis of evaluations. The first synthesis was conducted in 2019-2020. The present synthesis covers evaluations completed between 2020 and 2021, as well as evaluations from 2019 that were not included in the first regional synthesis. The synthesis aims to answer questions about the results achieved through FAO's support, emerging issues and gaps that require attention and lessons that can be used to inform future programming.
3. A sample of 42 evaluation reports (project, thematic and country programme evaluations) was analysed under the following themes:
 - Sustainable production and value chain development;
 - Food security and nutrition;
 - Climate change and natural resources;
 - Resilience to threats and crises; and
 - Gender equality and empowerment of women.
4. The synthesis used Nvivo software to analyse the reports. The results of the analyses were also mapped according to the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) of the Strategic Framework 2022–31.

Contribution to results

5. The synthesis found several examples of FAO's contribution to **sustainable production**: supporting countries to improve production through innovation and technology and strengthening national capacities for sustainable use and management of natural resources. FAO's support contributed to strengthened capacities of small-scale producers as well as the capacities of governments to reform policies and make evidence-based decisions on investments. There were, however, several examples where positive results were not scaled up due to a lack of financial resources, among other things.
6. In the area of **food security and nutrition**, FAO raised awareness of the Right to Food across countries in the region. FAO's support contributed to the development and implementation of agriculture and food-related policies and programmes that integrated nutrition as well as direct support to the most vulnerable countries to improve their nutrition strategies. The synthesis located only one evaluation covering FAO's contribution to reducing food loss and waste.
7. FAO strengthened the capacities of Ministries, civil society organizations and agro-pastoralists in **climate change adaptation**. FAO also helped to improve the knowledge of governments and local communities on biodiversity including ecosystems. The synthesis found examples of FAO's contribution to improved management and disposal of persistent organic pollutants and obsolete pesticides. There were, however, limitations to scaling up the results of FAO's work in managing the environment and natural resources. The evaluations identified a lack of finance as a constraint to scaling up and sustainability of results.
8. FAO made significant contributions to **building resilience to threats and crises** in the Africa region. The Organization helped to strengthen preparedness and response to emergencies, contributed to peace and conflict prevention and enhanced resilience. FAO also advocated for, and raised awareness on, addressing future health risks. The Organization supported improved national capacities and provided substantial policy support on zoonotic diseases and

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). There are still gaps in embedding resilience building in FAO's emergency response and in accounting for conflict in its programming. Regarding One Health, FAO has not yet been able to scale up initiatives to adequately control health risks in endemic countries or to ensure the sustainability of its interventions.

9. The synthesis found several examples of **gender equality mainstreaming** in the design of projects and programmes. There is room for strengthening FAO's work in gender equality and empowerment of women in the region, including addressing the structural and cultural barriers to gender equality and reporting on results.

Enablers and constraints

10. Key enablers of the results include the quality of FAO's partnerships with governments; its leadership and expertise in coordinating multiple stakeholders across national boundaries; the Organization's collaboration with other United Nations entities; and FAO's approach to capacity development. The main constraints are similar to those identified in the 2019-20 regional synthesis, namely, limited financial resources in governments, shortcomings in project design and human resources capacity constraints.

Gaps and emerging issues

11. The synthesis identified several gaps and emerging issues.
12. The "accelerators" of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, namely, innovation, technology, data and complements are present in FAO's programmes to varying degrees and are interconnected. However, these programmes need to be more visible and deliberate going forward to achieve significant transformation of agriculture and food systems in the Africa region. There is also a need for more detailed guidance on how these four "accelerators" operate in practice.
13. The issue of youth is not receiving the required attention in FAO projects and programmes. The Strategic Framework 2022-31 identifies youth as a cross-cutting theme. In the African context, the youth sector needs to be addressed as a key priority.
14. Engagement and partnerships with civil society have tended to be transactional rather than strategic. The private sector as partners did not feature in most of the projects and programmes evaluated. There is a need to shift the nature of FAO's partnerships with civil society organizations towards a more strategic one. There is also a need to forge partnerships with the private sector, taking full consideration of the recently adopted FAO Strategy for partnerships with the private sector.
15. There is a gap in monitoring and evaluation at country level and in the region. Moreover, insufficient attention is paid to knowledge management.
16. The sustainability of results is fragile in several of the projects and programmes reviewed in the synthesis. With the constrained public finance in most African countries, FAO will need to find alternative ways to ensure both sustainability and scaling up of initiatives.

Conclusions

17. **Conclusion 1.** FAO contributed to results in the 14 Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), reflected in the overarching themes of the regional synthesis. The results to which FAO contributed are wide-ranging at the regional, national and subnational levels. These have benefited stakeholders in governments, local communities, small-scale producers and civil society organizations. FAO's most significant contribution is its capacity to strengthen governments' policy development, policy reforms and planning. Here, FAO has empowered governments through research to generate evidence, analytical and planning tools as well as sharing FAO's knowledge and technical expertise in the various sectors that fall within the Organization's mandate.

18. Although the synthesis found many positive results, there is a recurring theme of the fragile sustainability of interventions since activities often do not continue once the project and funding end. A lack of funding was frequently cited as the reason for this. However, the issue of sustainability is also a reflection of FAO's default modality of execution through projects rather than adopting a more programmatic approach. The fragility of sustainability also reflects weaknesses in project design which has not adequately planned for the project's future "after FAO". Another limitation is that positive results, such as the successful promotion of innovation and technology, are not scaled up in many instances as insufficient attention is paid to how to scale up interventions when they are designed. The absence of adequate strategies for scaling up is especially problematic in the case of zoonotic diseases and AMR as these pose a risk to the impact of other FAO interventions.
19. **Conclusion 2.** FAO's contribution to results in the region has been enabled by its strategic positioning as a trusted partner of governments in the region and by its technical expertise that supports counterpart ministries. It has leveraged its position as the lead technical organization of the United Nations in food and agriculture to convene multistakeholder platforms and policy dialogues. The participatory approaches that FAO has used in capacity development are important enablers as they increase ownership by governments and stakeholders. They also ensure that interventions are relevant to the country and the local context and needs. There are, however, several constraints that impact FAO's contribution to results negatively. In addition to financial and human resource constraints experienced by many governments on the continent, there is a need for technical expertise in FAO Country Offices that cannot always be filled by overstretched regional technical experts. Administrative delays were also identified as constraints in the evaluations.
20. **Conclusion 3.** The regional synthesis identified gaps and emerging issues that may be taken into consideration in improving FAO's performance in the region. The synthesis attempted to use the "accelerators" of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 to understand how they contribute to results. There is a need for guidance on how these "accelerators" function in practice. The issue of youth needs to be prioritised, and young people should be treated as distinct stakeholders with agency. There are gaps in partnerships with non-state actors, as well as persistent gaps in monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management at country level, which limits organizational learning.

Lessons learned

21. **Lesson 1. It is imperative to have a good project design with a clear focus on sustainability as well as a FAO strategy for exit and scale-up. Projects need to be informed by and nested in medium-to-longer term programmes for greater impact.** The evaluations reviewed in the synthesis identified weaknesses in the design of projects, and this issue emerged in the previous synthesis. Characteristics of good project design include: i) participation of partners in the design process; ii) relevance of the design to the country or local context and needs of beneficiaries; iii) theory of change with explicit assumptions and risks; iv) coordination mechanisms identified at the design stage; v) appropriate indicators and mechanisms for tracking progress; vi) realistic targets and timeframes; and vii) sufficient budget to implement all the planned activities. Projects should also have an explicit exit strategy and an indication of how results will be sustained. If appropriate, a plan should be developed for how and by whom the intervention will be scaled up. A portfolio of well-designed stand-alone projects that are not clearly linked to a programme is less likely to have impact and sustainability than projects that form part of a soundly designed programme.
22. **Lesson 2. FAO Country Offices are at the front line and must be equipped for this critical role.** The evaluations reviewed highlighted the importance of FAO's technical expertise and leadership at the country level in achieving results. These are essential for FAO to positively influence the policy agenda and advocacy on normative issues. FAO's technical expertise and leadership are also essential for the Organization to contribute to, and lead in, discussions related to food and agriculture in the United Nations Strategic Development Cooperation Framework

(UNSDCF). Country Offices need to have ready access to technical expertise when it is needed and should have the skills to design and implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems. The offices should also be effective in managing knowledge. The transition to the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 may press Country Offices to conceptualise and implement projects and programmes that are more integrated and potentially more complex. Given the COVID-19 pandemic experience, projects design should take potential risks into account.

23. **Lesson 3. Knowledge generated by FAO projects is important for the Organization's advocacy, resource mobilization and internal learning. It is also a public good that should be systematised and made widely accessible.** Projects that demonstrated positive results contained an element of managing and sharing knowledge with stakeholders. However, knowledge management was not an integral part of many projects. Knowledge management is seldom done if it is not planned and budgeted for in the project. There are many good reasons for FAO to document and systematise the knowledge and lessons generated through projects, including use in advocacy for mainstreaming interventions and approaches. They could also be used as persuasive evidence for governments to scale up initiatives and innovation and to make public finance available for this purpose. Good knowledge management also provides evidence to support FAO's resource mobilisation. Effective knowledge management can improve the quality of FAO's portfolio in the region. Additionally, it is an essential part of organizational learning since it contributes to strengthening capacities of civil society organizations, farmer and producer organizations, pastoralist associations and individual farmers.
24. **Lesson 4. Coordination is effective when it is built into project design and is relevant to the context.** The evaluations in the synthesis identified coordination as a critical factor in the success of interventions. Coordination mechanisms were identified in the design phase of all projects; they were not an afterthought. Importantly, these mechanisms were relevant to the context of the project. The projects that were evaluated as effective in coordination made use of resources dedicated to this purpose. Coordination among FAO headquarters, Regional, Subregional and Country Offices can be improved.
25. **Lesson 5. Strategic and inclusive partnerships are essential for achieving results.** The evaluations reviewed in this synthesis reaffirmed FAO's strong partnership with counterpart ministries. While this is positive, FAO's partnerships need to be more inclusive of other stakeholders, particularly other ministries, civil society and the private sector. Inclusive partnerships are not built through ad hoc activities; rather, they require a strategy based on a deep understanding of potential partners in government, the private sector, civil society and other development partners. There should be a clear articulation of the mutual benefits of the partnership for FAO and the potential partners. Building and maintaining strategic and inclusive partnerships are not add-on activities nor the responsibility of a partnership specialist alone, and such partnerships should be treated as integral to the functions of all FAO staff.