

February 2013



منظمة الأغذية
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Food and
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Продовольственная и
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Объединенных
Наций

Organización
de las
Naciones Unidas
para la
Alimentación y la
Agricultura

COUNCIL

Hundred and Forty-sixth session

Rome, 22 - 26 April 2013

FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations

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Executive Summary

1. This document is submitted for review by the Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees, and for approval by the 146th session of the Council. This is in line with the request of the 145th session of the Council, which considered a version of the Strategy for partnership with civil society¹ incorporating recommended revisions from the November 2012 Joint Meeting.
2. Following the guidance of the 145th session of the Council for a complete and updated version of the Strategy to be submitted for its approval in April 2013, a series of informal consultations have been held with representatives of Member States and regional groups. The outcomes of such consultations are embedded in the present, finalized version of the Strategy.
3. FAO has been working for many years with hundreds of civil society organizations (NGOs, community-based organizations, professional associations, networks, etc.) in technical work, emergency field operations, training and capacity building, and advocacy of best agricultural practices. Over the past years, civil society organizations (CSOs) have evolved in terms of coordination, structure, outreach, mobilization and advocacy capacity. In this period FAO has also undergone changes in management, revised its Strategic Framework and given a new impetus to decentralization. Therefore, a review of the existing 1999 FAO Policy and Strategy for Cooperation with Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations was needed.
4. This Strategy considers civil society as those non-state actors that work in the areas related to FAO's mandate. It does not address partnerships with academia, research institutions or philanthropic foundations, as they will be treated in other FAO documents.
5. Food producer organizations, given their specific nature and relevance in relation to FAO's mandate, will be considered separately. In principle, as they usually are for-profit, they will fall under the private sector strategy, unless these organizations state otherwise and comply with the criteria for civil society organizations. These cases will be addressed individually.
6. The strategy identifies six areas of collaboration and two levels of interaction with different rationales and modus operandi: global-headquarters and decentralized (regional, national, local). The main focus of this Strategy is in working with civil society at decentralized level.
7. In its reviewed Strategic Framework, FAO has defined five Strategic Objectives to eradicate poverty and food insecurity. To achieve this, the Organization is seeking to expand its collaboration with civil society organizations committed to these objectives.
8. This Strategy has been elaborated under the understanding that: (i) given the intrinsic nature of its membership and governance, the main interlocutors for FAO are its member governments; and (ii) the basic texts, rules, procedures or composition of FAO's governing bodies will not be affected by this Strategy.
9. Within the priority framework defined by Member States for FAO's work at country level reflected in the Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs), FAO can assist countries in identifying key local CSOs that, under governmental leadership, can contribute to these priorities.
10. At the country level, FAO can play a catalytic role in facilitating and supporting Member States to increase dialogue with CSOs, by providing expertise in technically-related discussions or a neutral space for debate. When requested by Member States, FAO can assist in creating an environment conducive for dialogue.
11. This Strategy promotes that the views of small farmers, fishers, women, youth and others are brought to the policy, normative and technical discussions convened by FAO. In this regard, where provided for by a decision of the Member States, relevant civil society networks may be invited as observers by FAO to meetings of the Technical Committees (e.g. COFI, COFO, COAG) or governing bodies - in coordination with the Chairpersons and secretariat of said bodies.

¹ CL 145/LIM/9

12. While partnering with civil society organizations to reduce poverty and food insecurity, FAO has established mechanisms to ensure the impartiality of the Organization, while also maintaining two of FAO's fundamental characteristics: (i) the capacity to provide a neutral forum for discussions; and (ii) its evidence-based knowledge work.

13. To ensure that partnerships will not compromise FAO's neutrality and impartiality, this Strategy foresees a risk assessment process and a monitoring and evaluation system to measure outcome and impact of collaborations.

14. To be more effective in the reduction of poverty and food insecurity, the Strategy proposes the following arrangements for its implementation, in close coordination with governments:

- a) establishment of a regional network of dedicated FAO partnership focal points, who will discuss with FAORs and others to develop regional work plans for enhancing collaboration at decentralized level;
- b) a set of tools (e.g. a handbook with criteria, guidelines to ensure balanced representation) to assist FAO staff in establishing partnerships;
- c) capacity building material, targeted for FAO staff at decentralized and headquarters level, will be developed by the Office of Communications, Advocacy and Partnerships (OCP) in collaboration with key units in FAO;
- d) a risk management system already established to identify potential partnerships that may pose even a minimal risk to the neutrality and independence of FAO. This includes: (i) a due diligence process for all new formal partnerships between FAO and civil society organizations; and (ii) robust internal governance in the form of a Partnerships Committee, and an operational Subcommittee benefitting *inter alia* from legal advice;
- e) impact indicators will be developed as part of a monitoring and evaluation system to measure performance and ensure transparency and accountability;
- f) OCP, as the responsible unit for this Strategy, will prepare a yearly report on key partnerships detailing funds allocated, organizations chosen, outcomes and impact; and
- g) OCP will inform the appropriate governing bodies on a regular basis about the progress on implementation of this Strategy and key lessons learnt.

15. This finalized version of the Strategy is the result of extensive consultation with FAO staff, civil society organizations and Member States, and builds upon the foundations established by other FAO main corporate work carried out in recent years (IEE, IPA, Organization-wide Strategy on partnerships, the reviewed Strategic Framework).

16. The Strategy provides a framework which, together with the rest of the complementary tools, will provide a direction for FAO staff to guide their work with civil society organizations in their pursuit of the eradication of hunger based on the fulfilment of FAO's five Strategic Objectives.

Suggested action by the Programme and Finance Committees

The Programme and Finance Committees are invited to review the complete and updated Strategy for Partnership with Civil Society Organizations, and recommend it for approval by the Council.

Suggested action by the Council

The Council is invited to review the complete and updated Strategy for partnership with civil society organizations, taking into account the recommendations of the Programme and Finance Committees, and approve the Strategy.

I. Introduction

1. Despite important progress obtained over the years by Member States, organizations and institutions, today's world continues to face serious problems of poverty, hunger and malnutrition. These problems have increasingly become more complex and interconnected, as evidenced by the many food-related crises of recent years. The solution cannot simply be to intervene on isolated symptoms of a larger, more complex and multifaceted problem, nor can these issues be tackled solely by one organization or institution. FAO acknowledges that eradicating hunger, malnutrition and poverty is a fight that can only be won by joining forces with different stakeholders. FAO recognizes civil society organizations as one of these key stakeholders.
2. Civil society organizations² (CSOs) play a crucial role in food security and poverty reduction. They have increasingly shown their capacities and potential in programme and project design, execution and implementation at regional, national and local³ levels. In recent years, CSOs have succeeded in opening up areas for dialogue with Member States and other actors at regional and global levels, contributing their capacities and expertise to higher quality policy and normative discussions.
3. FAO has been working for many years with hundreds of CSOs (among them non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), professional associations, networks) in technical work, emergency field operations, training and capacity building, and advocacy of best agricultural practices. In recent years, CSOs have evolved in terms of coordination, structure, outreach, mobilization and advocacy capacity. Likewise FAO has also undergone changes in management, and given a new impetus to decentralization. Moreover, it has revised its Strategic Framework which includes among its core functions to facilitate partnerships for food security and nutrition, agriculture and rural development between Member States, development partners, CSOs and the private sector. Consequently, review of the existing 1999 FAO Policy and Strategy for Cooperation with Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations was needed.
4. While partnering with CSOs to reduce poverty and food insecurity, FAO has established mechanisms to ensure the impartiality of the Organization while also maintaining two of FAO's fundamental characteristics: (i) the capacity to provide a neutral forum for discussions; and (ii) its knowledge-based work capable of improving livelihoods.
5. Academia, research institutions, foundations, federations, and cooperatives are not included in this Strategy. Food producer organizations,⁴ given their specific nature and the relevance of their work to FAO's mandate, are considered separately. In principle, food producer organizations will fall under the private sector strategy, unless they state otherwise and comply with the criteria for CSOs.
6. As a corporate document, this Strategy⁵ provides overall guidance for FAO staff to better collaborate with CSOs. It identifies six areas of collaboration and two levels of engagement with different rationales and modus operandi: global-headquarters; and decentralized (regional, national, local). Its main focus is establishing partnerships at the decentralized level.

² In this Strategy civil society organizations will be used as an overarching term to include civil society associations, networks, platforms, community based organizations, associations, informal village groups, etc.

³ Local is used in this document to refer to the various levels of administration that different States have. For example: State, provincial, regional, municipal or district level.

⁴ FAO tends to consider small-scale producers under the scope of civil society, whereas larger foundations or commercial food organizations are usually treated as private sector. However, the division is not always clear-cut. Therefore, these organizations may be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine under which Strategy they fall more appropriately. Given FAO's mandate, FAO will work to ensure adequate representation and participation of producers' organizations at FAO meetings and processes to ensure their voices are considered and reflected. This will be done according to either the strategy for partnership with the private sector strategy or with civil society.

⁵ A set of tools will also be developed to complement the Strategy.

II. Background

7. In the 1990s, the role of CSOs in global debates on agricultural development became increasingly prominent. Recognizing CSOs' importance, FAO bolstered its collaboration and dialogue with CSOs (including social movements, NGOs, and CBOs) which led to broad CSO engagement at the 1996 World Food Summit, held in Rome.

8. In 1999, FAO adopted the Policy and Strategy for Cooperation with Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations,⁶ acknowledging the changing roles of Member States, CSOs and the Organization, in an effort to increase both its legitimacy and efficiency in decision-making. In 2002, the World Food Summit: *five years later* gave a strong impetus to FAO's decentralized relations with CSOs through its extensive involvement in the Summit process. As a result, FAO's regional offices designated focal points for civil society in order to strengthen relations with CSOs at the regional level.

9. The Independent External Evaluation and Immediate Plan of Action (2007-2008) supported the need to expand partnerships with different stakeholders and made a general recommendation to increase the level of collaboration and agreements with CSOs that share FAO's mandate.

10. In 2012 the Director-General launched a Strategic Thinking Process to determine the future direction of the Organization. As part of this process, the Director General reaffirmed the importance of establishing partnerships to carry out the Organization's mandate, reasserting CSOs as one of FAO's key allies in its fight against hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

11. This Strategy, rooted in the recommendations received and lessons learnt over the past years, updates the 1999 FAO Policy and Strategy for Cooperation with Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations. It has undergone a global consultation process involving FAO senior management and key staff at headquarters and the decentralized offices, as well as a wide range of CSOs and Member States.⁷

12. Aligned with the 2011 Corporate Strategy on Capacity Development,⁸ it adheres to the key principles established in the 2010 FAO Organization-wide Strategy on Partnerships, and supports the five Strategic Objectives in the Strategic Framework to eradicate poverty and food insecurity.

13. Lastly, the communality between the strategies for partnerships with civil society and the private sector are that both are based on the same guiding principles, follow the same risk management system, and in some cases concern organizations which could be treated by either strategy.

III. Objectives and principles

A. Objectives

14. The Strategy establishes a framework for FAO-CSO collaboration, providing FAO staff with practical guidance on how to establish effective partnerships with civil society organizations.

15. It has been elaborated with the understanding that: (i) given the intrinsic nature of its membership and governance, the main interlocutors of FAO are its members governments; and (ii) the basic texts, rules, procedures or composition of FAO's governing bodies⁹ are wholly unaffected by the Strategy.

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x2214e/x2214e00.htm>

⁷ A total of 50 organizations sent their comments to IPC. The comments were summarized and submitted to FAO for inclusion in the draft strategy.

⁸ PC 106/2

⁹ In this document, whenever the FAO governing bodies are mentioned, it is under the overarching principle that: this Strategy does not alter the present decision-making capacity of Member States, and does not change the rules and procedures of the governing bodies. Participation of civil society organizations in meetings of FAO governing bodies is subject to decision by Member States.

16. Its specific objectives, at the two different levels of engagement are:
- At the decentralized level:
 - a) to assist in undertaking mapping exercises and identifying key local CSOs, which work in the areas of food security and nutrition, that can contribute to the priorities defined by Member States in the Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs);
 - b) to foster collaborations and partnerships between FAO, Member States and CSOs during different stages of programme and project development, particularly at field and operational level;
 - c) to capitalize on the outreach capacities of CSOs, as well as their detailed knowledge of grassroots realities and regional contexts, which can complement FAO's stock of knowledge and technical expertise;
 - d) to support national and regional consultative and multistakeholder mechanisms with wide representation of different civil society constituencies for policy discussion, implementation and monitoring of programmes; and
 - e) to support Member States in achieving the five Strategic Objectives as 'development outcomes' established in FAO's reviewed Strategic Framework, particularly those outcomes under Strategic Objective 1 on hunger eradication and Strategic Objective 3 on poverty reduction.
 - At the global level:
 - a) to engage a broad and equitable range of CSOs in partnership with FAO, ensuring balanced geographic representation;
 - b) to ensure that the views of the poor and marginalized are brought to FAO policy discussions through their civil society organizations;
 - c) to encourage inclusive processes for policy dialogue, technical management and sharing of expertise and knowledge; and
 - d) to improve FAO's knowledge and capacity to work in partnership with CSOs, in line with the guiding principles of this strategy;
17. FAO will collaborate with CSOs to ensure two main outcomes:
- a) *Process-driven outcomes*: focus on the participation and inclusion of a wide a range of relevant CSOs, ensuring balanced representation among geographic areas, types of organizations and the various constituencies, in order to better inform and influence policy discussions and debates;
 - b) *Output-driven outcomes*: on technical work at field level, in which FAO, Member States and partner organizations work towards common outputs. These outputs improve the lives of the poor by bringing together FAO's technical expertise with CSOs' outreach and local knowledge.

B. Underlying principles of FAO-CSO engagement

18. This Strategy has been elaborated under the understanding that: (i) given the intrinsic nature of its membership and governance, the main interlocutors for FAO are its member governments; and (ii) the basic texts, rules, procedures or composition of FAO's governing bodies will not be affected by this Strategy.

19. Successful partnerships result from different organizations working towards shared goals. However, working together does not mean that parties must share the same positions, visions, or outlooks. Instead partnerships with CSOs should be based on mutually accepted principles.

Mutual Principles

- a) A partnership is a voluntary association of actors sharing a common interest; based on mutual respect and acknowledgement of each organization's capacities; built upon the comparative advantage and knowledge of each organization, and not compromising the position, opinions and nature of any of the partners.
- b) Respect for UN principles, human rights and dignity, gender equality and, in particular, the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.

FAO's acknowledgement of relevant principles for civil society organizations

- a) Autonomy and self-organization: once granted access to a forum, civil society organizations can autonomously organize, deciding how best to occupy the different spaces of dialogue and express their positions.
- b) Internal consultations: civil society organizations will carry out internal consultations among their constituencies to establish their positions and identify their representatives.
- c) Sufficient time: civil society organizations need time to cascade relevant information to their main offices and members prior to consolidating and presenting a joint position.

Civil society acknowledgement of relevant principles for FAO

- a) FAO Membership and Governance: FAO is an Organization accountable to its Member States. The nature of the Organization entails agreements and adoption of standards of other UN and intergovernmental bodies.
- b) Neutral forum: FAO can provide a neutral forum for dialogue and debate.
- c) Knowledge organization: FAO is a knowledge organization, not a funding institution. In those cases when the Organization funds a CSO, FAO's rules and regulations apply.

IV. Definition and types of civil society organizations

A. Civil society: A definition

20. In 1998 the UN defined civil society as: "the sphere in which social movements organize themselves around objectives, constituencies, and thematic interests."¹⁰ Civil society is a broad category which encompasses a wide variety of organizations, which although different, often share certain common goals, resources and/or approaches to maximize their decision-making capacity, advocacy and knowledge.

B. Types of civil society organizations (CSOs)

21. This strategy considers civil society organizations as those non-state actors that fit within three main categories (i.e. member-based organizations (MBOs); non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and social movements (SMs) as described below) that work in areas related to FAO's mandate. Due to their varied nature, categorizing CSOs into distinct groups is a challenge and overlap is likely to exist.

22. For organizations that do not have a legal status, a decision will have to be made on a case-by-case basis. Formal agreements require a legal structure. Those civil society platforms or community-based organizations with no legal status will have to seek the assistance of a CSO with juridical standing if a formal agreement with FAO is to be signed. When collaborations are informal, particularly at the field level with community-based organizations, one of the main contributions from FAO can be to assist them in formalizing their organization.

¹⁰ UNGA A/53/170 "Arrangements and practices for the interaction of non-governmental organizations in all activities of the United Nations System"
<http://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N98/202/59/pdf/N9820259.pdf?OpenElement>

Member-based organizations (MBOs)

23. Member-based organizations are locally-based organizations made up of stakeholders (e.g. small farmers, fishers or forest dwellers) who want to work towards a variety of common goals, such as managing common resources, lobbying their Member States on certain issues, or helping to satisfy local needs by providing goods or services. Their primary objective as an organization is to improve their livelihoods and those of their members. MBOs work to be self-sustainable, requiring members to contribute in some way, e.g. through paying an annual fee or providing services.

24. MBOs are democratic in structure, and are subject to local laws and regulations. This provides internal accountability to their members and enhances the legitimacy of these organizations. MBO leaders are elected democratically by their Members and often come from the most vulnerable communities.

25. MBO activities are aimed at impacting policies or providing public (not private) goods or service where there may be a gap in services provided by the State or the private sector. These can range from training their members to advocacy and lobbying.

26. An example of MBOs is the local agricultural research committees (CIALS) in the Honduran Hillside, sponsored by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

27. NGOs are formally constituted, legally registered, free from commercial interests, non-profit organizations that provide services, information and expertise, sensitize public opinion, and conduct advocacy activities. For years, FAO has been working with NGOs on policy discussions, normative work and field initiatives (e.g. collaborating in assessments, exchanging technical support and knowledge on food security and nutrition, etc.). FAO has also capitalized on their capacities when implementing its field programme. NGOs can also play a vital role in facilitating the quick delivery of emergency response interventions to affected populations.

28. An example of an FAO-NGO collaboration is the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), which is cooperating with FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Department in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries for the benefit of small-scale fisheries and fish workers.

Social movements (SMs) working in food security¹¹

29. This category includes platforms, committees, mechanisms, federations and networks of advocacy-based and policy-oriented organizations related to FAO's mandate on food security and nutrition, which promote claims or rights of specific constituencies (e.g. land-holding farmers, fishers and fish workers, pastoralists and herders, forest dwellers, rural landless workers, urban poor, indigenous peoples).

30. Social movements working in food security emerge from historical circumstances. They share similar goals, promote awareness and attempt to influence policy-makers in development, social and/or political issues, some of which coincide with FAO's mandate. While their legal status¹² and characteristics may vary, their common trait is to work to strengthen the capacities of the organizations under their coordination-umbrella to advocate for the common interests, concerns, views and goals of their constituencies.¹³

¹¹ Member-based organizations are different from social movements in that they respond directly to their members. Social movements coordinate different organizations, which may include MBOs as well as NGOs.

¹² FAO works on food security related matters with a number of social movements and platforms that may not have legal standing as a movement, but whose membership includes numerous legally-registered organizations. In those cases where a formal agreement is required between FAO and the movement, a legally-registered organization from within the movement will be delegated responsibility for the work being carried out and sign any formal agreements with FAO on behalf of the whole social movement.

¹³ FAO is developing indicators to be able to identify and monitor the governance structures and levels of accountability and representation of social movements to ensure that these movements are in fact working with and representing the people and organizations they claim to be.

31. FAO has collaborated with various social movements working in food security including: the Civil Society Mechanism and the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty.

Indigenous peoples and other ethnic minorities

The needs of Indigenous Peoples and ethnic minority groups are recognized in the 2010 FAO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.¹⁴ This policy takes into consideration the fact that among the most vulnerable, indigenous peoples and ethnic minority groups deserve particular attention. It is estimated that although indigenous peoples represent 5 percent of the world's population, they comprise about 15 percent of the total poor. FAO considers indigenous and tribal peoples, with their wealth of ancestral knowledge, to be key strategic partners in the fight against hunger. The increasing participation of indigenous peoples and other ethnic minorities in public policy debates and fora is an important step towards strengthening their rights and improving their situation.

V. Mutual benefits and areas of collaboration

A. Mutual benefits

32. By expanding its collaboration with CSOs, FAO aims to capitalize on the capacities, knowledge and skills of CSOs. FAO ensures that any assistance it provides to vulnerable people is delivered in a coordinated and accountable way. These mutual benefits provide the basis for FAO to engage in partnership with CSOs.¹⁵

33. FAO acknowledges the following comparative advantages of CSOs: their outreach capacity to the poor and vulnerable; their mobilization and advocacy capacity; the representation of their broader networks; their key role in community-based management of natural resources; and their knowledge of local contexts.

34. The following table summarizes some of these mutual benefits:

<u>Benefits for FAO</u>	<u>Benefits for CSOs</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion in discussions of isolated and vulnerable groups. - Better representation in debates and discussions. - Increased advocacy and mobilization capacity. - Complementary outreach and capacity for field activities, including improved emergency response. - Enhanced ownership of endorsed policies/ strategies. - Access to resources (human, physical, knowledge). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FAO provides access to a neutral forum for discussions <i>vis-à-vis</i> private sector, Member States and other stakeholders. - Access to information, capacity building, technical knowledge and expertise on key food security areas. - Possibility of suggesting items for discussion in the agendas of FAO meetings. - FAO can facilitate discussion and the exchange of views between CSOs and member states at all levels.

¹⁴ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1857e/i1857e00.htm>

¹⁵ When partnering with CSOs, a number of considerations should be made (e.g. limitations for some CSOs to fully engage at all levels of policy dialogue; dependency of some CSOs on external funding, which could influence their views and raise issues of sustainability; and the possibility of creating a divide between local governments and local civil society).

B. Areas of collaboration

35. Six areas of collaboration have been identified:¹⁶

1) Field programme: to strengthen local capacities and project outreach in a more cost-effective manner, FAO, in coordination with Member States, will promote dialogue and partnerships at field level with civil society to design, implement and monitor quality and sustainable local initiatives, programmes, projects and emergency responses. FAO acknowledges that the chain of accountability to affected populations travels from the funding source to the end recipient, requiring FAO and other agencies to discuss and negotiate with their partners (e.g. the food security cluster and its humanitarian partners; forestry national fire surveillance systems with local NGOs; seed multiplication in Haiti with local NGOs).

2) Knowledge sharing and capacity development: FAO is in a unique position to promote and facilitate the flow of global knowledge on agriculture and nutrition issues and make it accessible to all sectors of society. However, FAO will also capitalize on the detailed knowledge CSOs have from the grassroots level and regional contexts, which will greatly complement the stock of knowledge and technical expertise that FAO promotes. This exchange will allow FAO to better respond to local contexts and needs (e.g. the Gambia Forestry Department worked with FAO and local civil society institutions, such as the National Consultancy on Forestry Extension Services and Training, to institutionalize a step-by-step participatory enterprise development tool that supports the sustainability of transfer of forest resources to the communities).

3) Joint use of resources in emergency situations: large international and national NGOs, foundations, and academic institutions have considerable stocks of human and financial capital, supplies, assets and capacity development strengths. Some of these entities are specifically mandated and funded to provide support to UN agencies with a range of services. In turn, grassroots CSOs will have numerous contacts, not only at grassroots level, but also with large formal and informal social networks and platforms. FAO will increase cooperation with some organizations to jointly mobilize and use the wide human, physical and financial resources available, increase the scale and focus of FAO's technical support, improve the coordination capacity of all stakeholders and ensure improved accountability to affected populations¹⁷ (e.g. humanitarian organizations have stand-by partner agreements with FAO through which staff, equipment and supplies can be made available for FAO's deployment missions when responding to crises). The Emergencies and Rehabilitation Division (TCE) will collaborate together with OCP in these interventions.

4) Policy dialogue: FAO may establish fora for policy dialogue or, when requested, support Member States in creating policy dialogue fora on issues related to food security and nutrition. These fora could be multistakeholder discussions including CSOs in the dialogue together with Member States and decision-makers, thus increasing ownership, accountability and sustainability of policy adoption and implementation (e.g. providing inputs to FAO Regional Conferences,¹⁸ post Rio+20).

5) Normative activities: FAO supports the involvement of CSOs along with Member States, research institutions and other interested stakeholders in the implementation of codes of conduct, global conventions and regulatory frameworks in areas related to FAO's mandate (e.g. Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries;¹⁹ International Treaty on Plant Genetic

¹⁶ The set of tools intended to complement the strategy outline a plan of implementation and guidelines for ensuring a balanced representation of CSO participation.

¹⁷ In 2011, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, FAO committed to promote accountability to affected populations with its partners and to incorporate these commitments into partnership agreements. A guidance note on accountability to affected populations is being prepared.

¹⁸ For example, the 2012 Regional Conference in Africa demonstrated the importance of implementing inclusive multistakeholder fora, in order to catalyze coherent actions for eradication of hunger and food insecurity.

¹⁹ The participation of different stakeholders, as appropriate, in the Technical Committees, will be on the basis of decisions taken by the Members.

Resources for Food and Agriculture; Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests).²⁰

6) Advocacy and communication: FAO and civil society partners will jointly raise public awareness and build strong support and political will in the fight against poverty and food insecurity. They will benefit from each other's extensive experience, networks and outreach. Together they can reach grassroots audiences, raise issues to key decision-makers, inform public opinion (any joint advocacy initiative will abide by UN principles).

VI. Strategy implementation

A. Institutional arrangements

36. Under the general guidance of the Director-General, the Partnerships and Advocacy Branch (OCP) in the Office for Communication, Partnerships and Advocacy (OCP) is the responsible unit for implementation of this Strategy.

37. OCP will be responsible for the following in support of the implementation of this strategy:

- a) assist each of the five FAO regional offices in recruiting one focal point for partnerships. These regional focal points will provide guidance and support in the roll-out of Country Programming Frameworks and in implementing partnerships with CSOs at regional, national and subnational levels;
- b) provide support and work in close collaboration with FAO staff in technical units and decentralized offices;
- c) support FAO staff at all levels in developing and maintaining regular dialogue with CSOs to foster relationships built on mutual trust and to encourage joint activities and collaboration;
- d) collaborate with key units in FAO to develop capacity building material for FAO staff at decentralized and headquarters levels. The capacity development material will provide guidance to staff at all levels on how to liaise with CSOs;
- e) carry out a stock-taking exercise to identify existing collaborations with CSOs in various FAO departments; and
- f) develop a set of tools including a handbook, containing selection criteria for potential partners, and guidelines on ensuring balanced representation of CSOs, based on geography, gender, constituency and type of organization.

B. Decentralization

38. The implementation of this strategy will be focused on the decentralized level. FAO has drawn three important lessons from past FAO-CSO collaboration at decentralized level, which have informed this strategy:

- a) discussions and agreements between industry and farmer organizations are necessary in order to achieve an efficient management of the food chain;
- a) rural policies and social protection schemes are more efficient when community based and local civil society organizations are involved; and
- b) CSOs have important outreach capacity in rural areas, isolated zones and within vulnerable populations, thereby having access to important information about local food systems that complement FAO's technical expertise.

²⁰ These normative frameworks and guidelines have resulted from negotiations and discussions at FAO's Technical Committees, such as the Committees on Forestry (COFO), Fisheries (COFI) and Agriculture (COAG).

39. The Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs)²¹ will be the main instrument for implementing this Strategy, for liaising with FAO country representatives and FAO regional offices, and for assisting Member States in identifying potential local CSO partners.

40. When requested by Member States,²² FAO can assist in identifying potential local CSO partners. In addition, FAO can play a catalytic role in facilitating and supporting increased dialogue with CSOs by providing a neutral space for dialogue and expertise in technically-related discussions.

C. Selection of CSO partners

41. The selection of CSO partners will depend on whether the collaboration is taking place at the global-headquarters or at the decentralized level (i.e. regional, national, provincial, municipal, district).

42. At the global level it is important to involve networks and organizations with the broadest possible representation *vis-à-vis* their constituency and region. Moreover, FAO promotes that the views of small farmers, fishers, women, youth and others are brought to policy, normative and technical discussions convened by the FAO, and subject to a decision by Member States, to technical Committees (i.e. COFI, COFO, COAG) or FAO's governing bodies. In the latter case, FAO in coordination with the Chairs and Secretariats, invites relevant civil society networks as observers.

43. At the national level, FAO will work through the framework of the CPF set by the Member State. Based on its experience, FAO can assist the government in identifying key local CSOs that can contribute to the priorities set out in the CPF. The following considerations will be made when selecting CSOs to work with: their previous level of collaboration with other institutions and actors in the country; their technical expertise; and their outreach capacity in rural areas.

D. Tools for collaboration

44. FAO has developed a number of administrative tools and procedures²³ to collaborate with CSOs. The main ones are:

1) Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)

45. MoUs can be developed by FAO in order to establish a framework for collaboration of significant importance with civil society organizations.²⁴

2) Exchange of letters

46. If collaboration is limited to a reduced period of time, or if its scope is more limited, and does not entail any financial commitments, a more informal exchange of letters may be an appropriate tool. An exchange of letters can be used, for example, to carry out a joint assessment or to coordinate actions while implementing field activities. The approval process is similar to that of MoUs.

3) Letters of Agreement (LoAs)

47. Letters of Agreement (LoAs) may constitute a useful administrative tool for contracting services from civil society organizations. The scope of LoAs is generally limited to contracting services from non-commercial entities (e.g. organizing a meeting in regional, subregional or national offices; implementing a transboundary animal disease surveillance programme with local NGOs, etc.). LoAs entail a transfer of resources from FAO to a registered non-profit organization in exchange for pre-defined services and are governed by Section 507 of FAO Administrative Manual under the overall responsibility of the Procurement Service (CSAP) and technical units.

²¹ CPFs set Member States priorities for FAO's support.

²² Some Member States have developed a national strategy for partnerships with different stakeholders in food security. This national strategy will inform the CPF process, and if requested by the Member State, FAO could contribute to its implementation.

²³ Civil society organizations especially social movements that lack proper legal status have requested that FAO reviews and upgrades some of its administrative tools. FAO is analyzing these requests internally.

²⁴ DG bulletin 9/99 makes reference to the Memorandums of Understanding and the Exchanges of Letters.

4) Formal relations

48. Some CSOs with international status and governance mechanisms have formal relations with FAO and may be invited to attend FAO's meetings as observers. The relevant regime is defined in FAO's Basic Texts which foresee that formal relations with an international non-governmental organization may take one of three forms according to the importance of its field of activity in relation to the activities of FAO, whatever the degree of cooperation envisaged in the common field of activity. These are: consultative status, specialized consultative status or liaison status. Based on the FAO Basic Texts, the formal status granted by FAO will be reviewed and maintained as appropriate. The list with Organizations having formal status with FAO will be regularly updated and made available on the FAO Web page.

5) Partnership Committee for review of financial and other agreements

49. In 2010, the Director General established the Partnership Committee²⁵ for the review of financial and other agreements which examines partnerships with non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations. Review by the Committee is aimed primarily at ensuring compliance with a number of principles and guidelines, and specifying measures, conditions and contractual clauses as appropriate to avoid potential problems related to conflict of interest, image, governance and codes of conduct.

6) Multidonor Trust Funds to support civil society participation

50. FAO will develop Multidonor Trust Funds to support partnership and collaboration between FAO and civil society organizations. For example in 2011, a Multidonor Trust Fund was established for donors to allocate resources for the participation of civil society in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). FAO will look at the possibility of establishing Multidonor Trust Funds for civil society as a tool for their capacity building and wider participation in FAO's broad areas of work.

E. Risk assessment

51. To ensure that partnerships will not compromise FAO's neutrality and impartiality, the Strategy includes a risk assessment process and a monitoring and evaluation system that will measure performance. Based on monitoring results, the risk assessment process may be further improved as more experience is gained in this area. These will identify and manage any potential risks which may result from increased partnerships (e.g. conflicts of interest; undue influence on standard setting; unfair advantages to certain organizations). Any identification of potential partners at national level will be within the framework of the CPF and involve government endorsement from the initial stage.

52. Over recent years, the demand for partnerships with CSOs has been increasing both at headquarters and decentralized level. In order to be able to respond to such requests, a thorough risk assessment process has been developed to assess proposed partnerships with CSOs. This process will be further improved as the Organization gains more experience in this area. FAO's current risk assessment consists of three distinct steps:

1) Preliminary screening - OCP

53. OCP screens the partner against UN Global Compact Principles (human and labour rights, environmental and governance practices) and conducts an initial assessment of the partnership against FAO risk factors (conflict of interest, threat to neutrality/scientific credibility, unfair advantage, and financial risk). A colour code is used to provide an instant analysis of the outcome of the screening assessment, depending upon the level of compliance with international principles and standards.²⁶ The information gathered also includes: (a) identification of the proposed partners' activities and geographical operations; (b) the composition of its directive and executive structure; and (c) linkages of the organization with other organizations or institutions.

²⁵ The Partnerships Committee is chaired by the Director-General and composed by senior management (cf. Director-General Bulletin 2010/22).

²⁶ The initial screening is informed by the Principles and Guidelines for FAO Cooperation with Civil Society as outlined in the 1999 Policy and Strategy.

2) Review - Sub-Committee for Review of Financial and other Agreements (SubCom-RFA)

54. The Sub-Committee RFA, composed of FAO management and senior technical officers (including a representative from both the Regional Offices and the Legal Office), elaborates on the initial screening carried out by OCP, and reviews and examines the proposal for formal partnership with FAO in its specific operational context. The SubCom-RFA then summarizes its findings and makes a recommendation to the Partnerships Committee to: (i) accept the formal proposal for collaboration; (ii) accept it with amendments; or (iii) reject it.

3) Decision - Partnerships Committee (PC)

55. The Partnerships Committee, convened at the highest level of the Organization and chaired by the Director-General, is responsible for the final decision on those partnership proposals forwarded by the Sub-Committee RFA, deciding on whether to endorse the proposal from the Sub-Committee or reject it.

F. Monitoring and evaluation of partnerships

56. OCP together with other FAO units will continue to develop and enhance the monitoring and evaluation system. The M&E system will provide FAO with a set of indicators against which to measure performance that can be evaluated and reported on as to its effectiveness, providing information both on impact and outcomes. This system will assist the Organization in improving the quality of its partnerships and in introducing changes in the implementation of the strategy based on the information generated.

57. With a more results-oriented approach, FAO will be able to enable effective monitoring and subsequent evaluation of new partnerships. The monitoring system will be linked to FAO's corporate information and project management tools and will not imply complex, ad hoc reporting from the technical units and field offices. Evaluation of the impact of partnerships between FAO and CSOs will be based upon the data provided by the monitoring system.

58. Based on the information from the monitoring and evaluation system, OCP will inform future revisions of the Strategy, should they be needed.

59. OCP will issue an annual report detailing the main collaborations between FAO and CSOs at the global level. The report will provide details on funding, types of organizations and key achievements.

60. The OCP Web site will provide the selection criteria used to collaborate with CSOs and an up-to-date list of approved partnerships to ensure transparency.

61. In addition, OCP will inform the appropriate governing bodies on a regular basis about the progress of the implementation of this Strategy and key lessons learnt.