

CL 163/6 - Information Note 1 – November 2019

The Hand-in-Hand Initiative

This Information Note is presented at the request of the Joint Meeting of the 127th Session of the Programme Committee and the 178th Session of the Finance Committee, held on 4 November 2019 (CL 163/6, paragraph 14):

*“The Joint Meeting welcomed in principle the Hand-in-Hand Initiative [...] [and]:
[...]*

- g) looked forward to receiving a document setting out details of the initiative, its intended scope and outreach before the 163rd session of the Council.”*

This Note in the form of answers to frequently-asked questions on the topic, responds to the request of the Joint Meeting. It is intended as a living document, to be updated as required.



CL 163

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger being open, inclusive, transparent, flexible and tangible. Our goal is to achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. With over 194 Member States, FAO works in over 154 countries worldwide. We believe that everyone can play a part in ending hunger.

Our new vision is to work for better production, environment, nutrition and life working together to build a dynamic one FAO for a greater World. We start with the hand in hand initiative prioritizing the left behind countries and we will then include middle income, all our country members, and all the challenges we face in rural areas.

Hand-in-Hand and the UN:

The Big Picture

Q. What is the Hand-in-Hand Initiative?

Hand-in-Hand is an evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG2). In doing so, it contributes to the attainment of all the other Sustainable Development Goals.

The Initiative prioritizes countries where national capacities and international support are most limited or where operational challenges, including natural- or man-made crises, are greatest. This is in keeping with the UN's priority commitment to "leave no one behind."

The Initiative uses the most sophisticated tools available, including advanced geo-spatial modeling and analytics, to identify the biggest opportunities to raise the incomes and reduce the inequities and vulnerabilities of the rural populations, who constitute the vast majority of the world's poor. It also uses these tools to improve targeting and tailoring of policy interventions, innovation, finance and investment, and institutional reform. At the same time, the Initiative adopts a market-oriented food systems approach to increase the quantity, quality, diversity and accessibility of nutritious foods available in local, regional and national food markets and to improve food system capacities to deliver nutrition and healthy diets for everyone.

The initiative focuses on the well-recognized, but under-supported potential of agriculture and agri-food value chains to lift large numbers of the rural poor out of poverty. And it ensures that UN norms and standards are fully reflected in policies that advance all three pillars — economic, social and environmental pillars — of sustainable development. To this end, the Initiative promotes the sustainable use of biodiversity, natural resources and ecosystem services, and supports climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience. It provides data and analysis to evaluate interactions and tradeoffs among objectives and actions, helping to pinpoint key bottlenecks and focus policy dialogue.

With a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, the initiative aims to deliver a first set of benchmark results by 2023.

Q. How does Hand-in-Hand relate to UN reform, especially the Secretary-General's call for integrated UN efforts?

The fundamental objective of the UN development system (UNDS) reform led by the Secretary-General is to make the entire UNDS more "fit for purpose" in supporting the highest ambitions of the 2030 Agenda. One can distinguish between short-term and longer-term objectives of the UN reform. A priority of the reform so far has been to make the UN system more responsive, aligned, coherent, transparent, nimble and accountable to Member States and their international partners. However, there

is also a commitment to repositioning and, over time, strengthening the assets and capabilities of the UN system to respond to the higher ambitions of the 2030 Agenda. This is not merely to improve the UN as a deliverer of direct services, but to reposition it as an infrastructure for improved collective action to achieve transformational change.

The Hand-in-Hand Initiative is fully supportive of both the letter and spirit of these short-term and longer-term objectives of the UN reform. It recognizes that promoting agricultural and food systems transformations in rural-urban context is not just an economic process. Rather, it also requires public investments in rural populations' health and education to build the social foundations of growth. It requires research and development to achieve environmental and climatic sustainability — it means promoting innovations in practices, technologies and institutions, so that agri-food systems transformation protects and promotes sustainable use of biodiversity, natural resources and ecosystem services, and improves climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience. In this sense, **the Hand-in-Hand Initiative is a trigger to the full set of actions that a fully engaged UN systems approach can deliver and sustain.**

Specifically, Hand-in-Hand contributes to the integrated approaches of UN reform by achieving greater cooperation and deepening partnership among Rome-based agencies, as well as with actors across the UN system. It provides a technical foundation by bringing in a full spectrum of tools for the UN to achieve what needs to be done.

Achieving more integrated approaches to UN programming is certainly one of the most important and challenging elements that the UN Secretariat and Member States have agreed upon. It is essential in making the UN more effective and coherent. However, it is important to note that more integrated programming will not, by itself, deliver a UNDS reform that is appropriately supportive of the complex ambitions of the 2030 Agenda. There are other elements as well. The Secretary-General has spelled out these elements in his various reports to the United Nations Member States, starting in June 2017 and encapsulated it in the draft System-Wide Strategic Document tabled in July 2019.

The System-Wide Strategic Document describes the purpose of the UN reform as repositioning the UN system to be able to deliver a “UN offer” to Member States that is “demand-driven” (or country-led and -owned), “open” (based on many partnerships and focused on enabling actions by others), and “transformative.” The last criterion is especially important. The System-Wide Strategic Document states clearly that in order to be transformative, the UN offer has to:

1. Focus on either promoting or adapting “structural transformations” through policies that support the achievement of the SDGs.
2. Identify and address the risks to ensure that no one is left behind.
3. Spell out the UN’s contribution to establishing a robust enabling environment to strengthen and sustain national efforts and international collaboration to achieve transformative change over time.

The Hand-in-Hand Initiative is one of the first UN-sponsored initiatives to realize UN reform’s core vision of how the UN can reposition itself to support transformative change. As such, **it is a ready-made framework for a bold FAO contribution to Common Country Analysis (CCA) to promote structural and economic transformation to deliver the SDGs.**

Q. How is Hand-in-Hand related to FAO’s emerging focus on food systems?

The Rome-based agencies are preparing for the Food Systems Summit, a major global conference, in late 2021. While many details are being finalized, the fundamental objectives are clear. FAO wants to

recognize and strengthen the many independent initiatives that have emerged to transform different aspects of food systems. Many of these initiatives are aware of the interactions, dependencies and possible tradeoffs around interlinked issues, but they lack a common framing, a shared vision, and a strong science-policy interface.

The preparatory process for the summit — which will be highly inclusive, consultative and participatory — is designed to achieve the following three objectives:

1. To agree to a common definition of “food systems.” Despite the obvious need, there is no widely agreed definition of food systems. As FAO made it possible for the UN to define “food security” during the 1996 World Food Summit, the 2021 summit will define the term for everyone.
2. To create a common vision — evolving around four broad objectives — across the SDGs: eradication of poverty; elimination of hunger and all forms of malnutrition, including obesity; protection and sustainable use of biodiversity, land, water, soil, marine, fishery, forestry, and ecosystem services; climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience. These four objectives touch upon all the SDGs and are essential for understanding the relationship between food systems and the 2030 Agenda. The challenge is to analytically understand the interactions between these objectives, including the interdependencies and tradeoffs between them.
3. To build a sophisticated, open data-sharing platform for modeling and analysis to construct scenarios — all with a view to enabling better-targeted policies, innovations, investment and governance.

The Hand-in-Hand Initiative will contribute to all of these three objectives.

Q. Under the UN reform and Common Country Analysis, what is the role of the Resident Coordinator when it comes to Hand-in-Hand’s GIS data platform?

The answer is simple. The platform is one more input that the Resident Coordinator will have. We hope that the platform will be useful in creating the CCAs and also in creating the Country Partnership Strategies (CPS). Our aim is to bring more information, and the resident coordinator will have ownership of the platform. We have been coordinating with the UN on this.

The Approach

Q. Does Hand-in-Hand have a territorial approach?

Yes. Within countries, we work on territories where we can obtain maximum agricultural potential profits. It is important that we are discussing “profits,” that is, net market earnings of the poor from a variety of activities. The initiative focuses not only on increasing producer “productivity,” but more importantly, on improving realized incomes in the short-run along with sustainability for the longer-term. It takes the rural poor as we find them, with most households and even most individuals engaged in a wide range of activities — and we ask a fundamental question: **What can be done, among a wide range of possible actions with different pathways and different trade-offs among social values, to improve the net earnings of individuals and also generate the revenues to support public investment in the social, environmental and climatic foundations of sustainability?**

By focusing on optimizing “net market earnings,” we are looking closely into supply and demand for goods and services. So the Initiative is not only about making farmers produce more, but also about them having better access to markets and improving the share of income that producers receive for their products or labor. The rural poor, even those engaged in farming in some way, typically earn their living from a variety of activities that are often part-time, piecework or seasonal. All these activities can be compared on a common metric of individual, social or external profits against alternative uses of labor and resources. Even the poor are what economists call “profit maximizers” — they want to receive the highest remuneration for their services. The pursuit of income as compensation for unpaid labor is profit maximization in this sense.

Q. What does the Initiative cover?

Hand-in-Hand works to create many different types of opportunities in the food and agriculture sectors. It works on areas of food and nutritional security, trade, food systems and value chains, as well as areas of protracted crises.

The Initiative is focused on countries, but also captures regional aspects. So for example, we are working with the World Trade Organization (WTO) to provide technical assistance to support Africa on sub-regional trade agreements. This is important because our job is to accelerate progress on SDG 1 and 2. We are not focused on self-sufficiency in terms of food. Rather, we focus on access and income, so that countries can purchase food from other countries or produce it themselves and export it, if it makes sense for them to do so.

Regional components are tremendously important. For example, in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region, there are countries that can produce certain types of commodities in a profitable way. For example, Nigeria has the capacity to develop and deploy fertilizers for all of Africa. But 80 percent of the production, developed with investments from International Finance Corporation (IFC) and other private companies, is sent to Latin American countries, like Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, because it is easier to ship commodities to Latin America than across the African continent. This is because of trade agreements, specifically non-tariff barriers. To resolve that, we need to work together with WTO, the World Bank and others. Regional aspects are part of Hand-in-Hand, even though the interventions are at the country level. We aggregate information at the regional level to see relationships among countries.

This is also important for the Central America Dry Corridor (CADC). For example, in northern El Salvador, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) built the Northern Transnational Highway, improving access to market. Yet, this hasn't improved agricultural sales or income in the area because it still suffers from past conflict and has an aging population. If the agricultural potential of the area can be tapped, it could supply food to Guatemala and Honduras in the CADC region.

We also hope that this Initiative will help attract transportation, communications and public utilities in the countries when we identify investment gaps.

This Initiative is based on multilateralism. That's why we are bringing in all the partners. We are trying to be inclusive with donors, with countries and with all the actors. Our aim is to accelerate progress to achieve SDG 1 and SDG 2. While FAO will only work in areas under its mandate, it is committed to creating a process of partnership and complementarities.

Q. Does Hand-in-Hand only focus on large farms? Or does it also focus on smallholder farmers or subsistence farmers?

This Initiative focuses on geographical areas where there is significant agricultural potential and high-levels of poverty. These are typically areas that have significant numbers of smallholder farmers but that is not necessarily the case across all countries. Our intention is to reduce poverty through agriculture, fishery, forestry and other activities. If this implies that the way to reduce inefficiency is to create aggregation through farmers association, horizontal coordination or contract farming

arrangements, then that's the way we will move forward. The idea is to reduce inefficiencies, so that households and farmers, farm laborers, rural entrepreneurs, service providers and many others can achieve or benefit from realization of potential that exists today, and that would allow them to move out of poverty in a sustainable way.

Q. Why is Hand-in-Hand looking at potential that exists today?

This is a really important question. What we are trying to achieve is the current level of potential called the "frontier." We are interested in profits because we want to aggregate all the different activities of farmers. Normally, smallholders grow different products or work on different activities, and that's why profit is the way to bring everything together. So we are going to assess the level of profits today given today's soil, agro-ecological conditions, technology, levels of education, and all the other characteristics the farmers have today and see if the frontier is big enough. If the frontier is US\$1.90 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) a day per capita, that means we cannot move people out of poverty today. And clearly agriculture is not a solution today. We would need to use something else — cash transfers, human capital, education and all the other mechanisms to link the rural poor to the alternative value chains to create labor opportunities.

If the frontier is bigger than US\$1.95 PPP, especially if it's bigger than US\$2.00 PPP a day per capita or even more, then those are areas where agriculture has potential to lift people out of poverty. This means that if farmers in the areas could be put on the frontier, they could move out of poverty in a sustainable way. In fact, we need to have a frontier of around US\$7.00 PPP a day to do this. But even with just over US\$2.00 PPP, we can move people out of poverty. Those are the areas where all the knowledge and science of FAO on agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry can be used to reduce inefficiencies.

This is why it is important to talk about today's frontier. We must achieve our first targets by 2023 and our second targets by 2030. In the meantime, we can work to expand the frontiers. The frontier, which is US\$1.90 PPP, could become US\$2.00 PPP or US\$3.00 PPP through activities like land recovery, huge irrigation projects and so on. But it will take time. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative focuses on accelerating progress with existing frontiers to move people out of poverty.

FAO will continue with all the activities to achieve the frontiers when it makes sense to achieve them. But things have to be done with comprehensive cost-benefit analyses which includes not only physical costs, but also costs like water quality, sustainability of agriculture, emissions and so on. And this is why Hand-in-Hand links perfectly with the Food Systems Summit of 2021 — it has the concept of food systems behind its approach. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative will provide critical inputs for the Food Systems Summit.

Q. Does Hand-in-Hand have a top-bottom strategy? Who owns it?

Hand-in-Hand's approach is not at all top-bottom. Buy-ins from countries and partners are critical to the Initiative. That's why it is called "Hand-in-Hand." The only thing we are doing from the FAO side is bringing together all the information as a seed to start a process. It will then evolve into a system, in which we work together with countries and donors, so that everyone has access to the information and has ownership of it.

The ownership by recipient countries is especially critical because, even though FAO will initially host all the data and information, eventually, it makes sense for the countries to take over and host them. It is not only the current information that we are going to supply to countries; it is also the information they have, which they can use privately or share with others. It is a voluntary approach. We believe that this is the way to create ownership. Experience tells us that sharing information and working with countries can help them identify public investment in their political process. That is why it should be a country-owned process.

Q. What is the role of data in the Initiative?

FAO is using a Geographic Information System (GIS) to collect and analyze all available data from within the organization and other agencies. For example, FAO has detailed high-resolution data on soil maps. It also has data on water, forestry, road network, crop areas and crop calendar. Essentially, FAO is bringing all these data together in one common place to break down silos that used to exist within FAO.

The Initiative will create two labs: a data lab and a GIS lab. The data lab will use modern technologies, including artificial intelligence, to collect data in areas like small islands where little data are available. It will also collect data to validate official data FAO has been using, creating a mechanism for data quality control. In doing so, the Initiative supports governments to improve the quality of their work. For example, we are working on the 50 x 2030 Initiative together with the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). We got immediate feedback from Wageningen University on some of our soil data, as soon as we released them. We improve our data by making them public — like the Food Insecurity Experience Scale or the Poverty and Undernourishment Indicator — and receive feedback.

The data lab will also have a text-mining system to assess what solutions have been tested on different commodities in different locations and in different countries. FAO has already done this to assess food loss and waste, and the results were published in *The State of Food and Agriculture 2019*. FAO has been expanding on this to have data on extensions, productivity interventions, distortions and government subsidies, so that it can build on the lessons learned.

There are important data, even though they are not directly linked to FAO. For example, let's say that we identified an area as having high agricultural potential through GIS, and we want to implement the Hand-in-Hand Initiative there. We also identified a possible solution to improve the farmers' efficiency in the area, which is giving them access to digital technologies to produce crops. FAO would then need to get information from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to see if the area already has a digital network installed. If there is no digital network, then we cannot use this type of solution to support farmers achieve higher profits. This is why linking all the data from FAO and from partners is necessary.

To date, FAO has signed formal agreements with the World Bank, International Labor Organization (ILO), ITU, WTO, World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme (WFP), IFAD and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). We are making arrangements and building partnerships to set up a data-sharing system in place.

A major benefit of the Initiative comes from the GIS data platform. We have defined five levels of information.

- Level 1 is the database that brings together all the data we have at FAO. All the FAO Member States benefit from them.
- At level 2, we will use the FAO data to create GIS linkages. All the FAO Member States benefit from them.
- Level 3 is the GIS-linked FAO data from level 2, plus data from other sources. This will be beneficial to countries that will work on accelerating progress toward SDG 1 and 2 under the prioritized list of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative.
- At level 4, we add to level 3 the analyses of typologies to identify investment gaps and areas of potential and no potential. This information is useful for priority countries under the Initiative.

- Level 5 identifies specific investment gaps as well as potential projects that can be implemented to fill those gaps and remove inefficiencies. This level of information is useful for priority countries under the Initiative.

If donors or countries that are not on the priority list of the Initiative want to invest in data collection and analysis at level 3, 4 and 5, FAO will support them to do so.

Q. Does this Initiative replace any existing initiative?

No. This Initiative complements existing initiatives. Hand-in-Hand brings together all the initiatives that already exist. For example, within FAO, the Initiative is linked to the work on resilience through the Global Network against Food Crises. It is also fully linked to the Common Country Analysis and the UN reform because it will support country representatives in building up information. It will also coordinate with and help strengthen existing coordination mechanisms in countries.

Q. How does the Initiative identify bottlenecks?

Once high potential areas are identified, FAO will conduct technical missions to identify bottlenecks and investment gaps for prioritization. The Initiative's labs will assess which interventions have been effective and which have not been effective. We will also work with partners to integrate complementarity when coordinating and prioritizing interventions.

Q. Is this Initiative linked to the 2030 Agenda?

Yes. The Initiative targets SDG 1 and 2 and their interlinkages with all the other SDGs. In everything we do, we consider all the dimensions of the food systems. For example, when we aim at reducing hunger and all forms of malnutrition, we also consider generating quality employment, especially for youth, ensuring environmentally sustainable investments, and coping with climate change through resilience mechanisms.

The Operationalization

Q. What are the Initiative's operational modes?

Hand-in-Hand is based on two types of operational modes. Most countries already have many international donor partners — more than 10 or even 20 — and existing mechanisms for donor coordination. In those countries, we are going to work together with the government and existing donors. Everyone will have access to Hand-in-Hand's GIS data platform, giving them more information to help make decisions on investment targets. This approach is for countries like Burkina Faso or Ethiopia. This is **the first operational mode**. The goal is to complement the existing information and to work with existing coordination mechanisms, the UN system, the humanitarian system, and all the different agencies.

The second operational mode applies to countries like Eritrea or Small Island Developing States (SIDS) that have few donor partners. We are going to work together with them to attract more donors and give them access to the GIS data platform.

Q. What are the types of “matching” or “matchmaking” the Initiative will carry out?

The Initiative's "matchmaking" will depend on variety of operational contexts. **The first type of matchmaking is simply to bring in more donors.** If any new donors want to join forces, then they are welcome, even if a recipient country already has many donors. This type of "matchmaking" will be more important in the second operational mode mentioned earlier.

In the second type, Hand-in-Hand provides the GIS data platform to countries and donors to help them identify investment gaps, helping farmers achieve a level of potential that will allow them to move out of poverty. Right now, because of certain inefficiency or market failure, farmers and the rural poor are not able to reach their potential. Identifying investment gaps could help existing donors prioritize their interventions or target their interventions differently.

The third type of matchmaking is for agencies that make investments in countries, such as multilateral development banks, including the World Bank Group, IDB, AfDB and ADB, and players like the MCC. We are helping them identify investment gaps by meeting their information needs. For example, FAO has agreed with the World Bank to have three pilot countries to roll out Hand-in-Hand. With IDB, we have identified countries in the Caribbean to launch the Initiative.

By identifying investment gaps for donors and multilateral organizations, the Initiative coordinates and complement efforts. For instance, if a donor makes an investment in an organic coffee value chain in Ethiopia, there is a need to build infrastructure, such as road or energy network, to do it properly. Then investment banks could be willing to make the investment to do this, and Hand-in-Hand partners could complement those activities by developing the whole value chain, instead of just focusing on productivity that do not take into account other important infrastructure issues.

Finally, **the fourth type of matchmaking aims to attract the private sector.** Hand-in-Hand identifies investment gaps in areas where it is profitable for the private sector to operate and finds ways to reduce risk or mix interventions. This type of matchmaking concerns areas where the potential is very high — as much as US\$7 or US\$8 PPP per capita per household, or even more — which would be attractive to private companies because of significant potential returns. These are areas where, if the farmers can reach their potential frontier, they would be able to move out of poverty. Hand-in-Hand will also identify investment gaps in those locations.

FAO is coordinating with IFC, as it is already doing this type of work. The World Bank Group's International Development Association (IDA) helps the world's poorest countries. And IFC and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) are lowering risks and using blended finance to attract private companies in the countries IDA works in. For organizations like IFC and IDB Invest, an independent affiliate of IDB, having access to Hand-in-Hand's GIS data platform helps bring in the private sector for high potential returns. And it helps Hand-in-Hand partners work with smallholders to reduce poverty, since Hand-in-Hand's priority areas are those with high levels of poverty.

FAO is also works with Rabobank, a Dutch multinational banking company, on food loss and waste.

Q. What are the timeframes?

We are working on the initiative and informally communicating it to Member States and FAO staff. We are meeting with all the departments, the regional offices and country representatives, so that everyone understands what the Initiative aims to achieve.

We already had a meeting with FAO's the Joint Finance and Program Committee, and the Program Committee. We have a council meeting scheduled in December. The aim is to have the GIS data platform ready for some pilot countries before the yearend, so that next year, we can start working in the countries. We have a 4-year benchmark defined for 2023 for evaluation.

Q. How will Hand-in-Hand get the donors to share their information?

To date, there is no comprehensive database of all the different donors. There are only three initiatives that have tried to do this: one from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

(OECD), another from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), and the third from the European Union (EU) Aid Explorer from the European Commission (EC). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has a similar initiative for their Feed the Future project. FAO is trying to get information on what donors and multilateral organizations are doing and in which locations. We have already met with the EC and USAID to bring the information together.

The goal is to create a common framework, so that anyone who accesses the GIS data platform will know which donors are working on what in which locations. This will take time. This can't be done immediately, but it's important to start to set it up because it would help avoid duplication and increase complementarity. By the end of this initiative, we will have set this up together with all the agencies.

Q. What happens if governments don't want to do this or don't want to use the GIS data platform?

This has to happen on a voluntary basis. We also know that we have to create proper incentives. When we work with countries and make them own this effort, they will know that gaining access to data and being able to prioritize needs can help them coordinate better with donors. For example, when a donor knocks on the door to give a loan to build a road, they will be able to say, "Look, I need a road in this location because I want to develop a cocoa value chain and I don't have access to markets. And I already have an energy project with the MCC that can help me develop cold value chains." So these are the kind of things we are aiming for. We believe countries would be happy to do this. It also helps countries in their political processes, because narrowing down investment priorities from 20,000 to 1,000 through clear identification helps resolve problems.

Q. Talk about the Initiative's monitoring and evaluation system.

FAO is the custodian of 21 SDG indicators. These indicators are the core monitoring tools that will be used to assess progress. The monitoring framework will have its first benchmark in 2023, four years after the start of the project. We will track everything using FAO's SDG indicators as well as those collected by other UN agencies.

We are **not** going to overlap with other initiatives, including the comprehensive CAADP framework, which uses a monitoring and evaluation framework developed by ReSAKSS. We are coordinating with the African Union, as their indicators are directly linked to the SDGs. This will allow us to track our progress in the priority countries in Africa. If something similar exists in other regions of the world, we will also include it. Our goal is to complement, not to substitute. We also want other agencies to evaluate Hand-in-Hand's progress.

Country Selections

Q. How are the countries selected? There are some concerns as middle-income countries don't seem to be part of the Initiative.

The Initiative prioritizes those countries in situations that put large numbers of people at risk of being left behind. The intention is to provide a special level of support to help overcome limited capacities or natural- or man-made crises in order to accelerate progress toward SDG 1 and 2. These countries can largely coincide with those that we have classified as off-path, off-target or both. Off-path means they are seeing hunger on the rise, instead of going down. Instead of reducing extreme poverty, they are seeing that it is increasing. They are off-target because they would not be able to achieve the SDGs indicators by 2030.

There are clear criteria and clear specifications as to why a country should be included in the Initiative. We have prioritized some of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Least Developed Countries (LLDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), food crisis countries, and less developed and largely populated countries where we would be working at the sub-national level. For example, in Bangladesh and Nigeria, we won't work on the whole country like we would in the LLDCs. Rather, we would work at the sub-national level, because it is at this level that they face challenges of assisting a significant number of extremely poor and undernourished populations.

Q. What is the letter that the FAO Director General sent to countries for?

FAO has a list of prioritized countries for the Initiative, and the goal of the letters sent to donors was to seek expressions of interest from donor countries as to which countries they would like to support. The letters to recipient countries asked which countries they would like to have as donors. Many donor countries are already working in 20 countries or more. The letter asked donors to identify five countries they are already working in where they think Hand-in-Hand could accelerate their existing efforts toward SDG 1 and 2. This could help them prioritize their interventions.

For countries the donors have not worked in, we are asking for support. It can be support in prioritizing existing interventions, new investment or technical assistance. This would result in North-South, South-South or triangular learning.

Q. How can countries join the Initiative?

Countries can also request to be a recipient country. The initial list had 43 countries, but FAO is now reviewing additional countries on a case-by-case basis in response to requests from them. These countries are being considered because they have significant levels of undernourishment, hunger, other forms of malnutrition, and extreme poverty, even though they may not be obvious at the national level. This is the case in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador in Central America, for example. At the national level, these countries have higher average levels of income, but still face high levels of undernourishment. So we are including them on a case-by-case basis after careful assessment. This is all done on a voluntary basis. Countries could also fall into food crises. As a result, our list of priority countries has expanded and will keep evolving over time.

Countries can also raise funding to support data collection and analysis, as part of building levels 3, 4 and 5 of the GIS data platform. They can also volunteer to provide technical assistance to recipient countries as part of South-South learning. If countries are interested in joining the Initiative, FAO will work with them to find extra-budgetary resources to make it happen.

FAO will continue to provide policy and technical support to all its Member States, regardless of whether or not they are part of the Initiative. In the Hand-in-Hand priority countries, FAO is focused on accelerating SDG 1 and SDG 2 progress. All the Member States will benefit from this effort.

Q. Most of the Latin America and the Caribbean countries are not included in the initiative. Haiti seems to be the only country included.

In the initial list of 43 countries, only Haiti was from the Latin America and the Caribbean region. But the list has been expanded to include more countries. Some countries have requested to be included in the initiative, and we have assessed them. Some countries have already selected countries they want to give technical assistance to, so they are playing both roles — the role of being a recipient and a donor. In addition, if any country wants to participate in the Initiative they can work with us to raise funding to build the GIS data platform.

Q. Which FAO division will coordinate this Initiative?

This is a corporate initiative, bringing all the departments together. It's an initiative that tries to break down silos by bringing together all the available and relevant information collected by divisions and offices across the organization. FAO is also developing a portfolio of all FAO projects in the priority countries. We have the description of projects, what we have learned, what interventions are happening. The information will allow us to act in a more efficient, effective way.

The Economic and Social Development Department (ES) is the host of the initiative, as it is responsible for the technical design. ES has been working with different departments and coordinating with them. The data lab and the GIS lab that are being set up will become corporate labs, rather than ES labs.

Q. What are the financial implications for FAO?

FAO has been able to get extra-budgetary resources to set up the labs. At the moment, the Initiative is cost-neutral. In the future, FAO has to assess how to institutionalize this initiative within the limits of the existing budgetary resources.

Q. What can we expect in the next few months?

So far, FAO has approached countries through informal meetings led by the Director General. We have had several bilateral meetings with ambassadors. We also met with several regional members groups. We presented the initiative at the Joint Finance and Program Committee, as well as at the Program Committee. We will inform and consult the Member States on a regular basis.

We have agreed in the Program Committee that we would develop a technical document, which will summarize the Initiative in a simple language, expanding on the brochure. The document is a work-in-progress and will incorporate all comments received. We will be very clear in stating that this is a country-led, partner-led initiative, that we will be coordinating with all the donors and recipient countries, that this has no cost implications for the time being, that we will have many oversight mechanisms, that this is not a top-down initiative, but rather it's a bottom-up initiative, and that we are simply creating a system of information with a methodology to provide to countries. We will be clear on the types of "matchmaking" we propose. We will also be clear on the levels of data we are collecting and analyzing.

Q. How will Hand-in-Hand follow up on youth employment and all the work the Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division (ESP) does in this area?

By identifying the investment gaps and working on value chains, our hope is to reduce bottlenecks and inefficiencies that will bring employment, and attract youth and laborers to decent jobs.

The initiative also brings together other elements related to sustainability: climate change, adaptation, mitigation, water use, land use, forestry and all the different practices to reduce problems. For example, we found several cases where the soil packages provided by governments and private companies in Africa were harmful to the land. This is why it's essential to have soil maps, as they can help identify the right types of soil.

Q. Are there any political risks? What are they?

Our idea is to map a country-owned approach to minimize political risks. We will work with the Global Network against Food Crises and collaborate with all the Rome-based UN agencies. But we

cannot restrict ourselves to them. We have to work with all the relevant actors, the multilateral development banks and the UN agencies. That's why the UN reform plays a crucial role.

There are questions about data quality. It is true that sometimes the quality of the official data FAO uses is less than ideal. FAO's strategy is to make public all the data it uses, while complying with the data protection requirements — we follow all the ethical and legal requirements. We will use Hand-in-Hand's data and GIS labs for this purpose as well. We will collect data using AI and text-mining mechanisms, allowing us to find alternative sources of data to validate the ones we already have. If we find any discrepancies, we will work with countries to resolve them. In short, we will have a data quality control mechanism in place.

Q. What are some of the other initiatives or issues that will be taken into account?

Working together with FAO's climate change group, we will take into account the Green New Deal Initiative and the Climate and Biodiversity Initiative. The UN Biodiversity Conference next year will inform Hand-in-Hand. We will also work with the World Conservation Congress, as we prepare for the Food Systems Summit in 2021. We will work with the Global Network against Food Crises. The Initiative is also linked to all the Strategic Programs at FAO.

Next year, we have the Global Nutrition for Growth summit in Japan. We are going to link to that because that's part of the initiative. And we are going to learn from it. We have the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and are already working with the modelers, so that Hand-in-Hand and the Food Systems Summit are in line with what they are doing. We will try to be consistent with all the big initiatives, so that we don't reinvent the wheel. We want to build on what is already there and gain efficiency.

In the last *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*, we argued that the food systems are failing in very important ways, but that it can and must be improved. We can fix it. Our priority, again, is to target the countries that are left behind.

Q. How is Hand-in-Hand related to the Global Network against Food Crises?

The Global Network against Food Crises, a joint initiative between FAO, WFP, the EU and other resource partners and UN agencies, works to bring sustainable solutions to food crises. It aims to develop data-informed and evidence-based approaches, build capacities and provide knowledge to prevent and respond to food crises, and contribute to longer-term resilience building and development efforts. In most of the countries experiencing food crisis situations, there are areas with high agriculture profit potential that could help address the root causes of food insecurity.

Advancing sustainable solutions to food crises requires acting along the Humanitarian-Development nexus in a resilience perspective as evidence has shown that humanitarian assistance alone is essential but not sufficient. In most of the countries experiencing food crisis-situations, there are areas with high agriculture profit potential in agriculture, which in a resilience perspective could contribute to address the root causes of food insecurity.

Against this background, the **Hand in Hand initiative** should be seen as a potential major FAO contribution to the **Global Network Against Food Crises** whilst also benefiting from it.

Taking into account that in food crisis contexts, 60 to 80 % of the population is rural and depends on agriculture, the Hand in Hand initiative can ensure, where possible, that working on optimizing the potential of high-profit potential in some agricultural areas, contributes to build resilient food systems. Investing in high potential areas can also contribute to minimise the risks of instability in those areas. It will also help in harnessing those key elements of FAO knowledge and capacities (e.g. data analysis, support to sustainable food systems) to address the specific needs of countries affected by food crises.

The Global Network, which focuses on contexts affected by food crises (as identified by the Global Report on Food Crises), can contribute to the Hand in Hand initiative by bringing to the fore its already established partnerships and coordination mechanisms under the framework of the Global Network that includes both UN agencies and donors.

In addition, it can contribute to the analytical efforts of the Hand in Hand initiative through the provision of analyses on acute food insecurity and availing related data to feed the FAO Data Platform.

It can help in mapping existing food security and agriculture related investments at sub-national level therefore helping in designing relevant agriculture investments for more detailed sub-national level programming in fragile contexts.

Ultimately, it can facilitate stakeholders' coordination mechanisms such as UNSCDFs or other relevant national development frameworks and initiatives around the achievement of food security and nutrition collective outcomes

Q. Why are food safety issues relevant to Hand-in-Hand?

Food safety is important because it's part of solving the problem of a country's access to food. We need to give countries access to not only food, but quality food that complies with *Codex Alimentarius*, a collection of international food safety standards, which FAO hosts. We need to build capacity in the countries to achieve this.

One of the reasons for high level of inefficiency in countries is the lack of standards, lack of mechanisms to access dynamic markets and value chains, even within the country's border. For example, let's say that FAO tells a maize producer that one way of reducing food loss is to get rid of aflatoxins, fungus, in the maize, which is caused by humidity. FAO tells the farmer to dry the maize at 7-11 percent of humidity level and store it in sealed plastic bags. The farmer invests the little resources he has to do this. But when he takes his aflatoxin-free maize to the market, the market doesn't recognize the price-premium of the aflatoxin-free maize. It buys the farmer's aflatoxin-free maize at the same price as other maize. Suffice it to say, the farmer will not welcome FAO's advice again. This is why food safety issues and building standards are important, and we are working with WTO on this.