



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

Office of the  
Inspector General

# Audit of the FAO Accountability Framework



AUD0624

27 June 2024

This document is comprised exclusively of the executive summary of the audit report.

Permanent Representatives accredited to FAO and institutional resource partners of FAO may be granted access to the full report upon written request to the Inspector General, in accordance with paragraphs 59-61 of the [Charter of the Office of the Inspector General](#).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## WHAT WAS AUDITED?

In accordance with its 2022–2023 biennial audit plan, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) carried out an audit of FAO's accountability framework. The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the accountability framework in establishing a culture of conscientiousness, responsibility, and rewards and sanctions at FAO. In assessing the status of FAO's accountability framework, OIG used the 24 benchmarks proposed by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in its recent review of the accountability frameworks in United Nations system organizations. OIG tailored the benchmarks to fit FAO's organizational context, where necessary. This audit was not an assessment of the effectiveness of each individual accountability mechanism but a high-level review of the key components of the overall framework.

## WHY IT MATTERS?

An effective corporate accountability framework is essential to enable FAO to achieve its organizational mission and earn the trust of its various stakeholders.

## WHAT WERE THE KEY OBSERVATIONS?

A summary of FAO's performance against the adapted JIU benchmarks is presented in the table below (see [Annex A](#) for definitions of the benchmark ratings).

Components	Benchmarks	Rating
<b>1. Accountability Definition</b>	1. Existence of an accountability framework	▲
<b>2. Accountability Pillars</b>	2. Accountability pillars	▲
<b>3. Accountability Compact</b>	3. Accountability compact objectives	▲
	4. Accountability compact stakeholders	▲
<b>4. Accountability System</b>	5. Culture	▲
	6. Guidance, training and advice	▲
	7. Data, assets and tools	▲
	8. Roles, responsibilities, delegations of authority	▲
	9. Other preventive controls	◆
	10. Self-assessment	▲
	11. Management oversight	●
	12. Feedback from stakeholders	▲
	13. Independent oversight	■
	14. Impact mitigation	◆
	15. System improvements	▲
	16. Organizational accountability	N/A
	17. Individual accountability	▲
	18. Internal communication	▲
	19. External communication	◆
	20. Knowledge and learning	▲
	21. Role of legislative organs and/or governing	◆
<b>5. Accountability Indicators</b>	22. Effectiveness indicators	●
	23. Efficiency indicators	●
	24. Maturity model	●

Considering the wide scope of this audit and the impracticality of reviewing every benchmark in detail, the assessment of several benchmarks relied on the results of recent thematic audits conducted by OIG or other independent oversight bodies or consisted of a high-level review. This report highlights only those risks that have not been reported to FAO Management through previous assurance or advisory engagements.

OIG identified 11 risks associated with six different accountability-related areas. Several of these risks, specified below and discussed in detail in the body of the report, represent cross-cutting issues that impact several benchmarks.

Overall, the audit determined that FAO Management has established an overarching *de facto* accountability framework that includes as its key components FAO's Accountability Policy, Internal Control Framework and the Policy on Risk Management, as well as most of the basic underlying elements and mechanisms recommended by the JIU accountability model. FAO Management has been using this accountability framework to ensure that the planned results, as derived from FAO's organizational mandate, are achieved. However, the audit identified gaps in the design and application of the framework that reduce assurance it will achieve its intended objectives.

OIG believes FAO Management should focus its attention on the following high-priority issues:

- Lack of clear and complete identification of the components comprising the accountability framework and underlying accountability mechanisms (most notably, the Accountability Policy lacks any reference to FAO's framework for accountability to affected populations).
- Unclear ownership of some of the underlying policies supporting the accountability framework.
- Unclear definition of the Office of Strategy, Programme and Budget's role as manager of the Accountability Policy.
- Lack of structured, regular assessments of the effectiveness of several key underlying accountability mechanisms, such as staff performance appraisals and disciplinary procedures.
- Need for complete identification of the oversight activities performed by FAO Management in relation to the accountability mechanisms and their coordination with the activities performed by the independent oversight bodies.

## CONCLUSION

Identified weaknesses in the existing structures, policies and procedures negatively impact the effective mitigation of key risks. The audit identified 11 risks, ten of which were assessed as high and one as moderate. If not addressed, they will hinder the achievement of some important governance, risk management or internal control objectives.

Management has developed a suitable action plan to address eight of the eleven issues raised, and OIG will follow up on their timely implementation. The development of Management Action Plans to address two of the issues is dependent on clarifying the ownership of the Accountability Policy. For the remaining issue related to risk management and internal control reporting, which OIG assessed as presenting a moderate level risk exposure to the Organization, no Management Action Plan was developed at this point; however, OIG has raised an informal recommendation for management's consideration to implement.







Mika Tapio  
Inspector General  
27 June 2024

# ANNEX A:

## BENCHMARK RATINGS

An audit rating system (defined below) has been used to rank each benchmark.

RATING LEVEL		RATING LEVEL DEFINITION
Generally Consistent		Key accountability mechanisms are in place, their effectiveness is regularly assessed, and no major shortcomings have been identified.
Mostly Consistent		Most of the key mechanisms are in place but no measures are in place to measure the effectiveness of some key mechanisms and some shortcomings have been identified.
Partially Consistent		Some key accountability mechanisms are not in place, or their effectiveness has not been assessed or significant weaknesses were identified in their performance.
Not Consistent		Several key accountability mechanisms are not in place, or their effectiveness has not been assessed or critical weaknesses were identified in their performance.