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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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**Real-time evaluation of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery
Programme – Final Report**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- At the request of the Programme Committee, this report assesses the contributions of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme (Phase 2 of the evaluation) to a more relevant and timely response at country level. It also reviews the extent to which the COVID-19 Programme promoted collaboration and normative values and supported business continuity. Furthermore, it identifies good practices and lessons learned.
- Based on country case studies and self-assessments of contributions prepared by regional offices and priority area leads implementing projects as part of the COVID-19 Programme, the evaluation encompasses the Programme's seven priority areas (PA). Through this work, the evaluation seeks to answer questions about timeliness, relevance, collaboration, normative values, business continuity and contributions of the COVID-19 Programme.
- FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme was designed in a period of great uncertainty and when the world needed guidance and solutions to prevent the health crisis unleashed by COVID-19 from becoming a food security crisis. The COVID-19 Programme consists of seven PA and has a target funding level of USD 1.32 billion, of which 33 percent has been raised to date. The bulk of the funding has been mobilized for the priority areas targeted in the early response (Priority Area 1 - Global Humanitarian Response Plan; and Priority Area 3 - Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty) and for two regions with food insecure populations potentially affected by the health crisis (Africa and the Near East).
- The evaluation finds that FAO efforts under the COVID-19 Programme have made significant contributions to mitigating the effects of the pandemic and promoting recovery efforts by, for example, providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups, supporting FAO Members through the use of data for decision-making, and boosting smallholder resilience. The analysis suggests that FAO's response under the COVID-19 Programme was relevant, mostly timely and adaptive in addressing national priorities emerging from the pandemic. FAO's ability to leverage internal collaborations and external partnerships proved critical in providing timely advice to government stakeholders and external partners. In addition, the case studies highlight that FAO was proactive in mainstreaming United Nations (UN) normative values and principles in activities under the COVID-19 Programme.
- Despite these efforts, progress has not been uniform across all PAs; fundraising for long-term recovery was less successful than for the early response. In addition, some activities were affected by cost-increases associated to COVID-19 safety measures and by difficulties in acquiring goods and services, which delayed project implementation. Country offices were generally caught unprepared by the COVID-19 pandemic and although business continuity plans existed, none contemplated the magnitude of an event on the scale of the pandemic.
- The evaluation makes three recommendations aimed at avoiding uneven distribution of resources required in future similar programmes (Recommendation 1), improving the timeliness of the acquisition of goods and services in future crisis responses (Recommendation 2), and strengthening the implementation of business continuity plans at country level (Recommendation 3).

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of the document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

I. Background

1. At its 129th Session, the Programme Committee of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) requested that the Office of Evaluation (OED) conduct a real-time evaluation of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme (the Programme). The Programme is a pioneer initiative, as it is the first time that FAO develops a single programme to implement both development and emergency projects. The evaluation was carried out in two phases (see Appendix for more information). This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations from the second phase.
2. The first phase was a real-time evaluation of FAO's humanitarian response and knowledge products and data services. This phase started at the end of January 2021 and resulted in a report submitted to the Programme Committee during its 132nd session (November 2021). The evaluation identified several good practices and lessons learned to be considered by Management, technical teams and relevant offices in preparing for future responses to crisis situations. These included i) promptly defining strategic objectives and putting in place processes to address emerging issues, which was key to responding to the COVID-19 crisis; ii) leveraging in-house expertise, networks and partnerships to enhance FAO outreach efforts; iii) applying lessons from previous crises, such as from the Ebola virus outbreak, to anticipate and address continuity of the food supply chain; iv) ensuring a timely response to increase uptake of knowledge products by decision-makers and the value of using data for humanitarian assistance to have sustainable results; v) obtaining a systematic and nuanced understanding of the circumstances and needs of beneficiaries, in particular vulnerable groups, to adjust interventions; and vi) fostering collaboration to improve coordination, planning and alignment of efforts within FAO.
3. The current report presents findings from the second phase, which covered FAO's COVID-19 responses under the Programme from the onset of the pandemic to date. This phase responds to a request from the Programme Committee to identify contributions stemming from the Programme, particularly at the country level, as well as any lessons learned and good practices for the future. The evaluation therefore assesses initial contributions made through the Programme and provides feedback to foster organization-wide learning, inform decision-making and promote accountability. The primary intended users of the information provided in this report are FAO Members, Senior Management, and personnel working on the COVID-19 response at global, regional and country levels.

II. Methodology

4. Phase 2 of the evaluation addresses the following questions:
 - To what extent has the Programme provided a timely and relevant response to stakeholders' needs and priorities?
 - To what extent were the coordination and synergies with external partners useful?
 - To what extent have FAO country offices mainstreamed United Nations (UN) normative values?
 - To what extent were FAO country offices able to maintain business continuity?
 - What have been the contributions under the Programme?
 - What are the main good practices and lessons learned for the future?
5. The evaluation is based on ten country case studies across regions. The number of countries considered for inclusion in each region was proportional to the regional representation in the total Programme budget, with a minimum of one and maximum of four country slots assigned per region. Once the number of "slots" per region were determined, ten countries were selected based on:
 - Coverage of priority areas (PAs): Number of PAs addressed in a country
 - Programme-funded projects: Number of projects in a country's portfolio tagged as part of the Programme

- Budget: Total amount disbursed
 - Country profile: Diversity in terms of crisis status based on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and, when possible, geographic representation
6. Applying these resulted in a total of 92 countries. Consultations with priority area leads and regional offices, who reviewed the list of countries, resulted in the following countries selected for this phase of the evaluation: Cabo Verde, Chad, Kenya and Malawi in Africa; Egypt and Iraq in the Near East and North Africa; Bangladesh and Cambodia in Asia and the Pacific; Honduras in Latin America and the Caribbean; and Tajikistan in Europe and Central Asia. Annex 1 provides a list of FAO projects included for each country and identifies, for each project, the associated priority areas and geographic coverage.
 7. As seen in the selection of case study countries, the evaluation adopted a consultative approach, engaging groups of key internal stakeholders to serve as a sounding board, validate findings and provide evidence of progress through “self-assessed” contributions. These self-assessments were designed to increase the coverage of priority areas and countries included in this evaluation and elevate the voices of regional offices and priority area leads implementing projects as part of the Programme. Regional offices and priority area leads were invited to submit examples of contributions made by their projects to the Programme. OED developed and provided a template to assist them in this exercise. A total of 32 submissions were received, covering 91 countries, 4 subregions/regions, and 4 global. Although the self-assessments have not been validated by OED, they provide support for the evaluation findings and enable FAO Members and FAO leadership to hear directly from personnel implementing projects. Extracts from selected submissions appear in text boxes in section IV of this report. All submissions can be found in Annex 2.
 8. Lastly, the evaluation faced a number of limitations. COVID-19 and natural disasters negatively affected the ability of some team members and country offices to carry out and support evaluation activities. This resulted in delays in data collection and revisions to the evaluation work plan. For example, data collection for two case studies (Egypt and Iraq) had to be conducted remotely by OED personnel with support from the country offices, while the Chad case study could not be concluded. Also, limitations on the availability of data affected the timeline, as more time was required to obtain evidence of progress. This was more acute in priority areas receiving less funding (see Table 1) and in cases where projects were being implemented and outcomes not yet reasonably expected to occur.

III. FAO’s COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme

A. Programme overview

9. FAO’s response to the COVID-19 crisis is characterized by two stages: the “immediate response stage” (March–June 2020) and the “transition and recovery stage” (July 2020 onwards) marked by the launch of FAO’s COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme.
10. Two efforts stand out in FAO’s immediate response stage, both of which were mainstreamed into the Programme. The first was FAO’s knowledge products and data services work advocating for increased attention to the effects of COVID-19 in food security. The large and varied range of materials produced supported a more evidence-based response aimed at preventing the health crisis from becoming a food crisis. The second effort was FAO’s humanitarian response. The Organization contributed to the United Nations (UN) system’s humanitarian response (Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, GHRP), which became Priority Area 1.
11. The Programme was developed to enhance coordination of FAO’s response to the crisis by fostering synergies to improve delivery and mobilize resources efficiently and effectively, by overcoming organizational silos, streamlining processes and improving communication. Conceived as an “umbrella programme,” it is designed to include all projects/trust funds related to the various components of the Programme operating under a simplified governance structure. The specific goals of the Programme are to mitigate the immediate impacts of the pandemic and

strengthen the long-term resilience of food systems and livelihoods by implementing projects and activities in seven priority areas:

1. **PA1 - Global Humanitarian Response Plan.** Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and safeguarding livelihoods in food crisis contexts.
2. **PA2 - Data for Decision-Making.** Ensuring quality data and analysis for effective policy support to food systems and Zero Hunger.
3. **PA3 - Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty.** Pro-poor COVID-19 responses for an inclusive post-pandemic economic recovery.
4. **PA4 – Trade and Food Safety Standards.** Facilitating and accelerating food and agricultural trade during COVID-19 and beyond.
5. **PA5 - Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery.** Protecting the most vulnerable, promoting economic recovery and enhancing risk management capacities.
6. **PA6 - Preventing the Next Zoonotic Pandemic.** Strengthening and extending the One Health approach to avert animal-origin pandemics.
7. **PA7 - Food Systems Transformation.** “Building to transform” during response and recovery.

B. Programme portfolio

12. The Programme was officially launched on 14 July 2020 with an appeal for USD 1.32 billion. Based on an analysis of data provided by the Resource Mobilization and Private Sector Partnerships Division (PSR), as of early July 2022, the Programme’s portfolio consisted of 308 approved projects with a total budget of about USD 435.8 million (33 percent of the appeal). A total of 94 percent of the budget (USD 409.3 million) originates from voluntary contributions, with the remaining 6 percent covered by FAO’s Technical Cooperation Programme (over USD 26 million).
13. The tables below show the target and actual funding per priority area (Table 1) and the regional distribution of funding raised (Table 2). The humanitarian (PA1), economic inclusion and social protection (PA3), and resilience (PA5) priority areas make up 91 percent of the Programme’s budget. The global humanitarian response plan is the closest to reaching its target funding (PA1: 66 percent), followed by economic inclusion and social protection to reduce poverty (PA3: 33 percent). The Africa and the Near East and North Africa regions account for 72 percent of the Programme’s budget.

Table 1. Distribution of target and raised funding per priority area (in USD)¹

Priority Areas	Target funding	% of target raised	Budget raised	% of total budget raised
PA1 - Global Humanitarian Response Plan	428 000 000	66%	283 811 895	65%
PA2 - Data for Decision-Making	24 000 000	9%	2 146 016	<1%
PA3 - Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty	170 000 000	33%	55 920 200	13%
PA4 - Trade and Food Safety Standards	50 000 000	11%	5 614 104	1%
PA5 - Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery	500 000 000	12%	57 891 237	13%
PA6 - Preventing the Next Zoonotic Pandemic	100 000 000	8%	7 826 315	2%
PA7 - Food Systems Transformation	50 000 000	30%	15 202 928	3%
All	-	-	1 200 000	<1%
Not specified	-	-	6 196 221	1%
Total	1 322 000 000	33%	435 808 916	100%

¹ Some discrepancies in fund assignment between priority areas may occur due to system and funding source tracking issues. Also, the table does not include USD 1.85 million of MDF funding for PA2 since it cannot be materially linked to the COVID-

Table 2. Regional distribution of projects in the Programme portfolio (by percentage of total budget raised)

Region	# of projects	Budget raised (USD)	% of total budget raised
Africa	129	183 997 006	42%
Near East and North Africa	39	129 719 162	30%
Asia and the Pacific	59	46 370 686	11%
Latin America and the Caribbean	55	46 890 590	11%
Global	12	15 613 512	4%
Europe and Central Asia	14	13 217 960	3%
Total	308	435 808 916	100%

IV. Findings

14. This phase of the evaluation assessed the Programme’s contribution to a more relevant and timely response at country level. It also reviewed the extent to which the Programme promoted collaboration and normative values and supported business continuity. Furthermore, it identified good practices and lessons learned. The findings reported below are based on an analysis of the country case studies.

A. Programmatic approach

Relevance and timeliness

15. Finding 1. **The country case studies suggest that the response provided by the Programme was relevant by addressing stakeholders’ needs and priorities, in particular to vulnerable groups at country level. Overall, the response was timely, although some actions were delayed due to factors both internal and external to FAO.**
16. The evaluation case studies are consistent in their assessments of FAO’s response under the Programme as relevant, mostly timely, and adaptive in addressing national priorities emerging from the pandemic. Without exception, the cases point out that FAO’s efforts as part of the Programme were in direct response to assessed needs and requests for support to mitigate and recover from the pandemic, in particular addressing vulnerable groups² at country level. The respective governments and stakeholders consulted judged FAO’s contributions as positive.
17. FAO’s close working relationships with key stakeholders (see section on collaboration below) facilitated close alignment of the Programme with pressing needs. For instance, in Tajikistan, FAO helped the Ministry of Agriculture draw an emergency response plan early on (April 2020) outlining urgent needs, and later develop a comprehensive “Action Plan for Mitigation Measures against COVID-19” (November 2020). FAO’s response was in full alignment with this plan. Similarly, in Cambodia, responding to a government request for policy advice and technical assistance, FAO launched a variety of projects based on a 2020 rapid assessment of COVID-19 impacts on agriculture and food security conducted with the government. Government counterparts and beneficiaries judged as appropriate and satisfactory the interventions designed based on data from that assessment such as the project strengthening livelihood recovery in Seam Reap and Banteay Meanchey. As was true in Tajikistan, FAO’s COVID-19 response in Cambodia was in line with the country’s Economic Response Plan (2021) and was viewed as relevant and

¹⁹ Programme in the Field Programme Management Information System (FPMIS) system. In order to appropriately reflect such funding as part of the Programme, it was decided to mention the figure as a separate component when presenting Programme updates.

² For additional findings related to vulnerable groups/leave no one behind see the section on normative values below.

suitable to address needs by interviewed government officials since it led, in their estimation, to the prevention of further deterioration of the food crisis, particularly among the most vulnerable.

18. A number of country case studies identified a series of factors that affected the timeliness of some activities. Delays were often linked with the time required to acquire goods, which in some cases were exacerbated by supply chain issues impacting the availability of required inputs locally (e.g. poultry feed, soap). Likewise, lockdown regulations affected both implementation (e.g. procurement of goods was hampered due to limited availability and/or price fluctuations) and monitoring of activities despite alternate work modalities deployed. In one country, implementation was delayed by the project's classification as a "development" project instead of an "emergency" project. The implication with such classification was that the type of procedures (procurement, administrative, financial and clearance requirements) applied were more onerous. Externally, national political contexts (such as elections) and natural disasters also affected timeliness.

Collaboration

19. **Finding 2. The analysis of case studies suggests that FAO built on existing relationships to coordinate and develop synergies with partners that proved critical in providing timely advice to government stakeholders and external partners. Internal collaboration was a key factor for providing appropriate and timely advice to government stakeholders and external partners.**
20. FAO's track record and network of partners are common elements identified in the case studies as conducive to promoting collaboration and synergies between stakeholders. The cases highlight that prior to the pandemic, FAO had established long-lasting partnerships and had experience in coordinating work with key national authorities, donor/development partners, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, among others. These relationships proved critical to helping mitigate and respond to the pandemic in a timely manner.
21. Examples of how previous engagements helped in providing a more effective response include the following: In Iraq and in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), FAO undertook a joint "Study on the Impact of Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) on the food security & food supply chain in Iraq" to monitor the evolution of a series of relevant indicators. This collaboration resulted in regular updates on food security issues provided through biweekly and quarterly reports. In Honduras, the design and focus of FAO's response was based on its participation in the preparation of the Emergency Humanitarian Plan (EHP) by the government in collaboration with agencies from the United Nations, donors and civil society. FAO was an active participant in several working groups. The needs, gaps and objectives identified as part of this work served as the basis for FAO's programme of work.
22. The role that internal FAO collaboration and support played in addressing stakeholder needs was another important element mentioned in case studies. Phase 1 of the evaluation³ identified a number of good practices and lessons learned that were conducive to increasing coherence of the response. Good Practice 1 highlighted that "adopting measures that fostered 'horizontal' (multidisciplinary collaborations across divisions and offices) and 'vertical' (across geographic locations) cooperation resulted in improved coordination, planning and alignment of efforts within the Organization." This is in line with Good Practice 1 of this report (see Annex 3) that states: "The adaptability and responsiveness of FAO personnel to address emerging needs through contingency planning, reallocation of resources and reprogramming of activities proved essential in ensuring a timely and relevant response."
23. The case studies show the value of coordination meetings, and provision of knowledge products and technical support. In **Honduras**, internal coordination meetings between the subregional

³ FAO. 2021. *Real time Evaluation of FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme – Phase 1*. <https://www.fao.org/3/ng781e/ng781e.pdf>

office and the country office were very valuable and the support received from personnel allowed for mid-course corrections on project reprogramming and budget revisions to support these adjustments (securing and allocation of non-core funds from FAO). The availability of guidance from FAO headquarters regarding various data, policy papers and webinars was very useful, for example to tailor FAO **Malawi**'s national Response and Recovery Plan to the government's needs.

Normative values

24. Finding 3. **The country case studies highlight that FAO was proactive in mainstreaming UN normative values and principles in activities under the Programme.**
25. In several case studies, FAO's efforts in incorporating "leave no one behind" (LNOB) criteria, such as attention to gender and Indigenous Peoples, into its response, emerge as valuable contributions in line with the respective UN principles. The UN Resident Coordinator's Office in **Cabo Verde** considers FAO to be a "super inclusive agency", giving a key place to the implementation of the LNOB principle and with special attention devoted to issues of gender equality and the most vulnerable families. In **Tajikistan**, where some beneficiary communities embrace traditional gender roles, FAO hired a female community mobilization specialist for more frequent consultations with women in need of project support. The presence of the female community mobilization specialist proved worthwhile, as suggested by the share of women among beneficiaries trained and receiving advice (more than 30 percent), and receiving high-quality potato seeds (15 percent were women-led smallholder farming units). Similarly, FAO projects in **Honduras** included support and assistance to Lenca Indigenous Peoples, particularly in the form of agricultural supplies for production (for example family gardens) and nutritional education. As part of its work, FAO ensured that the approach and methodologies for working with the Lenca considered their worldviews and cultural practices.

Business continuity

26. Finding 4. **The country case studies suggest that FAO country offices were able to adapt quickly and implement business continuity measures to mitigate the risks that arose during the pandemic. Despite these efforts, delays in implementation and cost increases were reported.**
27. The case studies note that country offices were generally caught unprepared by the COVID-19 pandemic and although business continuity plans existed, none contemplated the magnitude of an event on the scale of the pandemic. However, offices were very quick to adopt business continuity measures to suit evolving conditions, always prioritizing personnel and stakeholder safety. These included revised work practices, such as online meetings and remote monitoring of projects. During the early stage of the pandemic, in coordination with resource partners and national authorities, country offices were able to repurpose some existing funding to address emerging issues (e.g. need for data), with personnel demonstrating adaptability in adjusting ongoing projects beyond their original scope.
28. In **Tajikistan**, the UN Country Team developed a business continuity plan that was duly implemented by the country office in addition to FAO specific guidance received from headquarters. In line with such measures, the office quickly shifted to teleworking providing internet connection for personnel that did not have such means at home. Project implementation was maintained through online meeting platforms and telephone communications, though this personnel mentioned that it could not completely replace in-person interactions. In **Malawi**, when all travel by personnel was suspended and no implementation or monitoring of activities in the beneficiary catchment areas could be provided, FAO officers backstopped the work through phone calls to the field frontline personnel.
29. Nonetheless, a number of case studies reported serious delays in projects starting and/or in their implementation, with personnel identifying travel restrictions as the source of the problem. This

meant limited contacts with direct beneficiaries in the field and decreased distribution of inputs due to frequent disruptions as a result of limited access to the grassroots level. Examples were also mentioned of the additional financial burden stemming from increased expenditures related to transportation costs (for example, more vehicles and trips were needed to comply with social distancing guidelines) and more personnel time required in the field to reach out to beneficiaries in small-size gatherings.

B. Evidence of Programme contributions

30. The country case studies have identified several examples of FAO contributions, with most cases addressing a couple of different priority areas. The case studies are consistent in their assessments of FAO's response, finding it to have contributed to mitigating the immediate impacts of the pandemic and making inroads in strengthening the long-term resilience of agrifood systems and livelihoods. The self-assessed contributions also illustrate results attained (extracts of selected submissions appear in text boxes).
31. Nonetheless, progress has not been uniform across all priority areas, unsurprisingly given variation in funding raised (see Table 1). As portfolio data foreshadowed (see Table 2), most cases/examples cover the Africa region. Likewise, the evidence highlights the diversity of FAO contributions such as on normative/policy aspects (PA7), livelihoods (PA3, PA5) and analytical support (PA2). Examples of contributions under the seven priority areas include:

Priority Area 1 – Global Humanitarian Response Plan. Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and safeguarding livelihoods in food crisis contexts.

32. Finding 5. **The case studies suggest that beneficiaries of FAO humanitarian assistance were able to mitigate (to different extents) the effects of the pandemic during a critical period of time. Self-assessed contributions also provide examples of FAO's efforts in assisting the most vulnerable groups, particularly through the provision of cash transfers, food baskets, COVID-19 protective equipment and safety training.**
33. In **Cabo Verde**, FAO accompanied the government in responding to the serious food insecurity that arose from the pandemic. A total of 2 645 people (of which 78 percent included women heads of households) from vulnerable families from agricultural areas received basic food baskets, COVID-19 protective equipment, and capacity building in gender-based violence (GBV) prevention. The availability of basic food baskets allowed families to mitigate the immediate effects of the pandemic. Beneficiaries interviewed reported that as a result of the new knowledge gained, behavioural changes have been observed (e.g. social distancing). Furthermore, FAO contributed to the introduction of fresh food (vegetables and fish) through school meals for more than 43 000 students.
34. In **Kenya**, unconditional cash transfers (UCT) were used in the arid and semi-arid lands areas to support vulnerable beneficiary households whose livelihoods were susceptible to the effects of COVID-19, by transferring KES 5 000 (ca. USD 45) to 3 723 households (a second transfer was made later as well). Beneficiaries indicated that cash was used

Self-assessed case:

Adapting targeted support to Kuchi pastoralists in Afghanistan for COVID-19 (PA1)

Project beneficiaries made use of unconditional cash transfers provided through the project. 90.4 percent of 2000 households reported that the cash received improved their access to food. One out of four households reported that the cash received reduced their debts and 18.1 percent of households reported that the cash received helped them restart their livelihood (buying agricultural or livestock inputs). Other benefits derived from the cash received included the prevention of an impending debt, paying for medical treatments and buying tools for home gardening.

primarily for food purchases. This aligns with a survey from FAO Kenya indicating that 507 beneficiary Isiolo households' main use of the first of two disbursements of the UCT was for: food items (80 percent), agricultural inputs (8 percent), non-food households (7 percent), loan/credits repayment (3 percent) and school fees/education-related costs (3 percent).

Priority Area 2 – Data for Decision-Making. *Ensuring quality data and analysis for effective policy support to food systems and Zero Hunger.*

35. Finding 6. **The case studies suggest that stakeholders have been using data generated through the assistance provided by FAO to inform decision-making, project development, and monitoring of food security. Self-assessed contributions provide examples of FAO's support in terms of data provision and analysis on a wide array of topics related to food supply, demand, access and consumption.**
36. The studies suggest that the data generated has been used as an input by some countries in their decision-making processes. Specifically, countries have used data in considering how to strategically invest scarce public resources to i) ensure that agriculture contributes to the short-term recovery, and ii) promote consistency with medium to long-term economic and social gains.
37. In **Iraq**, to address the need for data on the effects of the pandemic and inform decision-making, the collaboration between FAO, WFP, IFAD and the World Bank (see section on collaboration) produced regular reports on topics such as food supply, the status of local production and consumption patterns along with analysis and recommendations. Results of the studies were presented every month by the Resident Coordinator's Office, FAO, WFP, IFAD and the World Bank. The reports were used as inputs in identifying and promoting the government's response to COVID-19. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture urged poultry producers not to raise the prices; the Ministry also supported strategic crops, horticultural crops and vegetables to maintain price stability. The data from the reports was also used internally by the stakeholders; for example, it was used by both WFP and the World Bank to develop several projects.
38. In **Malawi**, to monitor the effects of the pandemic, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, with technical and financial support from FAO and the European Union, set up a national emergency agriculture and food security surveillance system. The data⁴ on food prices informed government interventions related to food price adjustments and food aid distribution.

Self-assessed contribution:

Nicaraguan National Rural Investment Support Programme (PA2)

The growth of the Nicaraguan economy has been affected by various shocks since 2018, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the Eta and Iota hurricanes in November 2020, which according to official data, totalled USD 742 million in loss and damage, equivalent to 6 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). In this context, at the request of the Government of Nicaragua, FAO produced analytical reports and technical studies to generate evidence for the development of rural investments in the country's agricultural sector. The data produced informed government decisions on which sectors and in what territories to promote investments. The beef and dairy cattle, coffee, beans and cocoa agrifood chains were prioritized, given that the studies showed that an increase of half a percentage point of GDP in public investments in the agricultural sector would favour an increase in GDP of 2.2 percent, 5.9 percent in agrifood GDP and in the reduction of urban and rural poverty in 0.5 and 1.6 percentage points, respectively, between 2022–2031.

Priority Area 3 – Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty. *Pro-poor COVID-19 responses for an inclusive post-pandemic economic recovery.*

⁴ By December 2021, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture – with financial support from the European Union - had produced more than 40 bulletins of the Emergency Agriculture and Food Security Surveillance System (EmA-FSS).

39. Finding 7. **The case studies suggest that beneficiaries of FAO assistance (such as youth and migrant populations) were able to mitigate some of the negative effects arising from the pandemic through a combination of direct capacity building and technology transfer as well as expanded coverage of national social protection programmes. Self-assessed contributions provide examples of FAO's efforts in promoting economic inclusion and expanded social protection measures.**
40. In **Kenya**, through its Integrated Country Approach, FAO supported six value chains in different parts of the country and promoted youth-inclusive climate-smart agricultural technologies and green jobs for environmental sustainability by supporting capacity building and providing inputs. A beneficiary youth group reported having an intensive production of fingerlings and supplying farmers offering advisory services to them. The group also reported that their income increased using online marketing, which enabled them to reach out to more customers despite the periods of restricted movement during the pandemic. In **Cambodia**, FAO has been working to restore livelihoods and enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations, with a focus on fostering more nutrition-sensitive, climate-resilient and food-safe agriculture. FAO supported: 1 087 households (32 percent headed by women) with agricultural inputs, tools and materials to start vegetable production; 2 229 participants (40 percent women) with training sessions and regular technical advice; among other services. Beneficiaries reported that the support provided has contributed to their ability to grow vegetables using drip irrigation, allowing them to use available land around their houses for production and provide employment to returned migrants. They also mentioned that vegetable growing technologies introduced by the project have improved yield and incomes by at least 20 percent.

Self-assessed contribution:

Building Resilience of Syrians under Temporary Protection and Host Communities in Türkiye through Supporting Socio-Economic Integration and Creating Livelihood Opportunities (PA3)

Currently, Türkiye is hosting more than 3.7 million Syrians under temporary protection. The majority of them only have access to employment in the informal sector and generally receive wages lower than locals employed in similar jobs, and therefore tends to rely on temporary and seasonal job opportunities. Work in the agricultural sector – despite being subject to the risk of low wages, exploitation, and insecurity – is often their sole opportunity to have a livelihood. The project aims to improve self-reliance of livelihoods for 6 200 vulnerable households of Syrians under temporary protection, among others, living in the targeted provinces where their population is high, and the agrifood sector is an important economic factor. FAO anticipated that, as a result of the project, at least 1 400 unemployed beneficiary agricultural workers would find formal jobs or more secure seasonal employment under decent working conditions. One axis of support was vocational training, with 125 vocational training groups having completed their activities since the beginning of the project. The total number of graduate trainees is 2 947, with 40 percent of those having found employment by the end of April 2022.

Priority Area 4 – Trade and Food Safety Standards. Facilitating and accelerating food and agricultural trade during COVID-19 and beyond.

41. Finding 8. **The case study for Cambodia⁵ indicates that efforts by FAO helped strengthen trade and food safety standards in the country while promoting COVID-19 prevention measures among farmers, street vendors and consumers. Self-assessed contributions (found in text boxes) provide examples of FAO's policy and advocacy efforts to avoid food supply disruptions and help lessen economic and trade consequences of the pandemic.**

⁵ Cambodia was the only country included in the case studies where PA4 activities were implemented.

42. In **Cambodia**, interviewed stakeholders from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries stated that FAO provided valuable technical assistance and capacity building on the country's food law framework in partnership with IFAD. The food law has provisions for food hygiene relating to the prevention of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. The partnership assisted in the preparation of guidelines, as well as pilot inspections and certification processes. The partnership also included training to promote awareness and understanding of the pesticide labelling guidelines and a model for pesticide label information. FAO also supported the establishment of Cambodia's Good Agricultural Practices (CamGAP), Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), and Certified Organic Products throughout the country for a variety of agricultural products. Three vegetable demonstration farms were established, and farmer field days organized with 150 farmers (29 percent women) to share their experiences with CamGAP agriculture practices. The General Directorate of Agriculture uses the certification system to certify a number of safe agricultural products. Some cooperatives have earned CamGAP and PGS certificates, certifying their produce as safe and receiving additional market benefits, and reported additional incomes of at least 20 percent over conventional production.

Self-assessed contribution:

Regional Policy Dialogues – Latin America and the Caribbean (PA4)

In order to help lessen economic and trade consequences of the pandemic, strengthen the multilateral support and generate regional agreements at the Members level, the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (RLC), together with other agencies and stakeholders, supported a series of high-level policy dialogues with all governments of the region, which allowed countries to discuss and reach understandings for individual and joint actions on the main issues of interest: major disruptions to food supply chains, trade, and availability of and accessibility to food. FAO's intervention contributed to strengthening governance and multilateral cooperation as the crisis showed the need to have Members-driven non-bureaucratic mechanisms for regular and agile communication and dialogue with ministers, focused on practical and concrete needs and agendas. Some results derived from the dialogues include: in **Mexico**, the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development (SADER) developed a strategy for ensuring food production and supply in the short-term and to contribute to strengthening the agricultural and rural sector; in **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**, a Food Security and Impact Mitigation Plan was developed, enhancing marketing strategies to ensure market access and improve development of sustainable livelihoods for family farmers and agro-processors.

Priority Area 5 – Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery. Protecting the most vulnerable, promoting economic recovery and enhancing risk management capacities.

43. Finding 9. **The case studies suggest that FAO boosted smallholders' food security and promoted economic recovery. Self-assessed contributions (included in text boxes) provide examples of FAO's efforts in strengthening resilience in smallholder groups.**

44. In **Bangladesh**, FAO supported 600 beneficiaries through training on value chain-based crop production technology, post-harvest loss management and value addition; integrated farming systems for smallholder farms for better productivity, nutrition and income; and also provided diverse inputs. Beneficiary farm-households consisted of landless, marginal and small farm categories, with women-headed farm-households and those with disabled/vulnerable people prioritized. The project contributed to increased agricultural production (e.g. pulses, vegetables), improved livelihoods, and a significant increase in the income levels of beneficiary households. Beneficiaries and government officials reported that post-harvest losses of crops were greatly reduced and that in the project areas, it contributed to enhanced health and well-being in beneficiary households, with focus group participants reporting a significant increase in the consumption of nutrition-dense food items such as pulses, fruits and vegetables. Project endline survey data reports that the average number of improved agricultural production techniques used during the 2020 agricultural season increased significantly from 3.9 practices to 6.39 practices. There was also a substantial increase in the total cropped area reported (from 6.9 percent to 12.4 percent).

Self-assessed contribution:

Strengthening resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and contributing to poverty reduction in peri-urban Kinshasa through agricultural livelihoods support (PA5)

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, households adopted negative coping strategies, based among other things, on reducing the frequency and quantity of meals consumed per day, and consumed less nutritious food. The main objective of FAO Democratic Republic of the Congo's contribution was to strengthen the socioeconomic conditions and nutritional situation of 2 550 affected households in Kinshasa, while reducing their risk to COVID-19 transmission. To promote economic recovery, FAO distributed, for example, fishing inputs and provided training on fishing activities for responsible fishing and conservation. Six-hundred fishers were able to increase their catch rate to an average of USD 80 per catch, after having no income due to the movement restrictions imposed as part of the measures to control the spread of COVID-19. These changes were possible not only due to the training but also by linking producer households directly with markets, reducing the number of intermediaries.

45. In 2020, FAO supported the Ministry of Agriculture of **Tajikistan** in the development of various action plans to ensure smooth implementation of the 2020 and 2021 agricultural seasons and comprised a set of mitigation measures to address challenges linked to COVID-19 including potato seed production, multiplication and yield improvements. These measures were designed to contribute towards ensuring food security and availability of food stuff and protecting incomes and livelihoods of stranded migrants and their families. FAO's immediate COVID-19 response actions were launched through repurposing some existing interventions prior to the roll-out of projects under the Programme. FAO's contributions included the distribution of 110 metric tonnes of elite potato seeds to more than 75 smallholder farming units in various districts. Beneficiary potato-producing farming units and households consulted reported increasing their yields by at least tenfold compared to when they used inferior quality seed. They also mentioned having learned that higher yields can be maintained by adopting improved agricultural practices, such as advanced irrigation techniques, integrated pest management, using fertilizers and small agriculture practices. Beneficiaries interviewed also stated that with other project emergency support packages (seeds, fertilizers, agricultural machinery, cash transfers and matching grants, etc.), there have been positive changes for the vulnerable households (including women headed households and those with labour migrants stranded in the country) by improving their livelihoods, food security situation (staple food supply) and generating income (e.g. potato production).

Priority Area 6 – Preventing the Next Zoonotic Pandemic. Strengthening and extending the One Health approach to avert animal-origin pandemics.

46. Finding 10. **The case study for Tajikistan⁶ indicates that efforts by FAO helped in dispelling unfounded claims that animals and livestock were a source of infection, assisted veterinarians and food sector workers to return to work, and updated regulatory norms and procedures. Self-assessed contributions provide examples of FAO’s efforts in One Health risk mitigation measures (included in text boxes).**
47. At the request of the **Tajikistan** Committee for Food Security, FAO and the Tajikistan Veterinary Association (TVA) launched the “*Preparedness for prevention of COVID-19 and other zoonosis*” project. The interventions of the project were informed by the findings of a joint mission assessment conducted in July 2021 that revealed that individuals and facilities lacked basic standard means of protection and basic professional knowledge about compliance with sanitary-epidemiological and veterinary norms, regulations, and methods of control of infectious diseases in animals. In addition to providing personal protective equipment, related materials, tools and reagents to target facilities across regions of Tajikistan, the project also delivered specialized trainings to raise awareness and provided up-to-date information and advice to stakeholders. It also supported the development of five policy documents (amendments and additions to existing regulatory norms and procedures) approved by the Committee for Food Security. Initial positive changes reported by stakeholders included, for example, that awareness-raising efforts helped eliminate panic resulting from unfounded claims that animals and livestock were a source of infection. Veterinarians and food sector workers were able to return to their normal business routines and maintain their incomes and livelihoods (e.g. veterinary clinics, marketplaces for sale of animals, etc.). As a result, veterinarians interviewed mentioned that they feel better prepared for future incidents and other potential emergencies in the animal health sector.

Self-assessed contribution:

Global guidance on risk assessment and One Health risk mitigation measures (PA6)

FAO, through its multidisciplinary experts in animal health and communication, and with a wide network of international laboratories, took the lead in developing several global guiding materials and tools aimed at helping countries design, plan and implement their country specific One Health interventions. FAO’s contributions have resulted in positive changes in terms of the establishment of One Health epidemiological investigation and risk mitigation mechanisms in some countries. For example, in **Canada**, the technical One Health working group consisting of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative and Provinces modified their epidemiological investigation forms to comply with FAO recommendations and have used them in developing national guidance that in turn modified the form used in epidemiological investigation of SARS-CoV-2 transmission to farmed mink in British Columbia in 2021. A Texas A&M University research team used FAO’s One Health investigation guidelines in identifying the data needed for investigating SARS-CoV-2 transmission to pets in contact with COVID-19 patients. **Indonesian** authorities already started field implementation of the One Health epidemiological investigation plan by investigating a case of potential human-to-tiger infection in a zoo.

Priority Area 7 – Food Systems Transformation. “*Building to transform*” during response and recovery.

48. Finding 11. **The case studies suggest that efforts by FAO contributed to the adoption of technical and institutional innovations enhancing local agrifood systems while promoting safe COVID-19 practices. The self-assessed contribution provides an example of FAO’s efforts in promoting agribusinesses.**

⁶ Tajikistan was the only country included in the case studies where PA6 activities were implemented.

49. At the request of the Government of **Egypt**, FAO assisted the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation through a series of activities to increase adoption of technical and institutional innovations along the supply chain as well as strengthening capacities to enhance food safety and nutrition quality across agrifood systems. One of the interventions leveraged the results of a previous project – the AI Mufeed (Beneficial) mobile application to disseminate food and agriculture-related information using digital technologies – and used the app to disseminate COVID-19 related information. FAO then conducted several training sessions with community representatives and training of trainers on digital tools for 25 government extension agents. These efforts were complemented with a social media campaign that was estimated by sources interviewed to have been viewed approximately 1.62 million times. The AI Mufeed application has been downloaded by 6 641 users from ten governorates. According to farmers who were interviewed, the AI Mufeed application is a useful tool in raising awareness, increasing knowledge and adopting new practices such as in the use of pesticides and management of pesticide residues. Farmers reported they are now aware of the damage that pesticides can cause if not properly used. Another area of reported improvement was in the harvesting, packing and transportation processes with farmers now packing and transporting fruits and vegetables in a more careful and hygienic manner to avoid losses.

Self-assessed contribution:

Improving the abilities of youth in East Africa to start and manage successful agribusinesses during COVID-19 (PA7)

Agriculture and agribusiness have the potential to transform the agriculture-based economies in Africa and meet Africa's outsized employment and food security challenges. The sectors can provide youth with jobs through entrepreneurship although there is a gap in providing relevant business skills for young women and men in the area of agribusiness and value chain development. Access to technical and entrepreneurial skills are the biggest obstacles for youth agripreneurs in Africa. It underlines their access to finance and markets which both require viable business planning. In partnership with the African Union Commission, using East Africa as a pilot, FAO developed and tested an online course that focuses on developing the agripreneurship skills of youth and enhancing their skills in the space of agricultural value chain development. The course was piloted in partnership with the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) targeting a sample size of 247 youth agripreneurs in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda. The results (pre-post) show positive trends for the training group regarding the measures of entrepreneurial self-efficacy, action, planning and business practices as well as an overall high satisfaction with the training, the content of which was, on average, found to be very useful for the trainees.

50. In **Malawi**, FAO contributed to improving the agricultural capacity building policy environment and supporting the implementation of practical measures to address the immediate impacts of the pandemic while also supporting the transition to more sustainable agrifood systems. Following the suspension of residential farmer field schools (FFS) courses due to the pandemic, FAO assisted in the updating of various FFS standard operating procedures and manuals. These included the FFS curriculum, the community-based facilitator's guidelines as well as a set of protocols to guide extension workers and facilitators on how to safely implement FFS and other outreach activities during the pandemic. Stakeholders reported that these are being used at ongoing residential courses, community-based facilitator trainings and FFS community outreach events. The adoption of the guidelines permitted the resumption of residential farmer field schools with extension workers interviewed reporting that they felt much safer because of the tight COVID-19 precautionary measures that were adopted.

V. Good practices and lessons learned

51. A number of good practices and lessons learned emerging from the case studies may be useful in fostering learning and improving the design and implementation of future similar initiatives. The complete list of the practices and lessons can be found in Annex 3. This section highlights those most relevant for future FAO efforts.

52. **Reliance on FAO practices and experience** promoted relevance and timeliness of actions under the Programme. These included:
- **Adaptability and responsiveness** of FAO personnel in addressing emerging needs through contingency planning, reallocation of resources and reprogramming of activities.
 - **Reliance on past experiences** and interventions such as the Ebola virus outbreak in anticipating information needs and in planning of actions.
 - **Use of real-time data collection and adapting existing data systems and tools** to the COVID-19 context was critical for informing timely decision-making and guiding corrective actions.
53. **Leveraging existing partnerships and fostering new ones** also emerged as important factors that enhanced the relevance and timeliness of the Programme. Specifically:
- **Engaging** partner organizations, local experts and communities in the planning, design and implementation of the response was essential for ensuring appropriate alignment with emerging needs while minimizing the duplication of efforts.
 - **Collaborating** with local media, civil society organizations and community members enabled outreach to the communities and raising awareness about the pandemic.
54. **Involving gender specialists** ensured gender mainstreaming remained a priority for FAO projects.
55. This evaluation prompted OED to reflect on the conduct of its work under the pandemic and draw some lessons as well. As was true of Programme implementation, the **pandemic exacerbated** the challenges faced by evaluators. Three lessons stand out as holding potential to improve OED's work in the future. These are:
- **Early planning is critical.** Assessing the availability of country office personnel to actively engage in an evaluation, and coordinating evaluation with project/programme implementation activities, is critical to facilitate success in both activities.
 - **Resilient data collections will enhance OED's work.** Reflecting on and assessing its data collection experiences will enable OED to develop more resilient approaches – that is, approaches that are designed early, reduce reliance on field personnel, leverage local or UN partners, and/or contribute to building office monitoring data systems in ways that can be leveraged for evaluation.
 - **Evaluations should focus on questions that can be answered in a rigorous and timely manner.** Limiting the scope of evaluations to answering questions for which robust data are available and rigorous analyses can be conducted will facilitate the generation of credible, and therefore useful evidence to guide decisions in support of FAO's goals.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

56. Initial results identified by the evaluation suggest that FAO's overall response has contributed to mitigating the immediate impacts of the pandemic and helped strengthen the long-term resilience of agrifood systems and livelihoods. In particular, stakeholders considered FAO to be effective in coordinating actions and developing synergies with internal collaborators and external partners, building on existing relationships to address the challenges caused by the pandemic. However, progress has not been uniform across all areas, likely due to variation in funding raised and complexity of needs for assistance. Therefore, and despite the achievements reported and documented in this report covering about 90 countries across all regions, there is still much more to do in supporting countries and communities in reversing the negative effects of COVID-19 in the food and agricultural sector and in building a more sustainable agrifood system for all.
57. **Conclusion 1.** FAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme was designed in a period of great uncertainty and when the world needed guidance and solutions to prevent the health crisis unleashed by COVID-19 from becoming a food security crisis. The Programme had a target funding level of USD 1.32 billion, of which only 33 percent has been raised to date. Also, the bulk

of the funding has been mobilized for two of the seven priority areas, that is, the two areas that were tasked with the early response (PA1 and PA3) and focused on two geographic regions (Africa and the Near East).

58. **Recommendation 1.** Members and Management should consider how to best address funding shortfalls to avoid uneven distribution of resources required in future or similar programmes.
59. **Conclusion 2.** Findings from the country case studies and the self-assessed contributions suggest that the Programme was relevant, as it addressed national priorities and stakeholders' needs. Although the Programme response was generally timely, some actions were delayed due to internal and external factors. Among the internal factors, the time required to acquire goods was singled out in several instances. A related external factor was the disruption of supply chains and the limited availability of inputs locally, which impacted timely procurement. Complying with the safety measures put in place also delayed implementation and increased operational costs.
60. **Recommendation 2.** Management should consider the application of fast-track procurement procedures for future similar situations and further improve timeliness in procurement processes through the support provided to country offices by International Procurement Officers.
61. **Conclusion 3.** FAO headquarters and offices had business continuity plans in place at the onset of the pandemic. However, none of these plans contemplated an event of the magnitude of the pandemic and, therefore, were not able to provide a roadmap for adapting quickly to evolving work circumstances. According to the Logistics Services Division (CSL), FAO has reviewed the operational risk management system in place and plans to adjust the procedures to better prepare and respond to similar future crises.
62. **Recommendation 3.** Management should ensure that business continuity plans are updated and owned by country offices, and that sufficient human and financial resources for their implementation are available.

Appendix. Evaluation focus and status

Table 1 shows the focus and status for each component of the evaluation. The areas of focus were selected because of their importance in FAO's initial response and the ensuing Programme and to address the information needs of key stakeholders. The evaluation was conducted in two phases: Phase 1 covered points 1-3, Phase 2 addresses point 4.

Table 1. Evaluation focus

COMPONENT	FOCUS	EVALUATION STATUS
1. Programme design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconstruct the Programme's theory of change 	Completed in June 2021
2. Humanitarian response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lessons learned and good practices on providing humanitarian support in food crisis countries in the context of COVID-19 	Presented to the PC in November 2021
3. Knowledge products and data services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lessons learned and good practices on development, dissemination and uptake of COVID-19 related knowledge products and services 	Presented to the PC in November 2021
4. Programme contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of contributions of FAO's Response and Recovery Programme (country studies and self-assessed submissions) 	Presented to the PC in November 2022

Phase 2 focused on assessing Programme contributions and identifying good practices and lessons learned from FAO's response to the pandemic that can inform future work, covering actions from March 2020 to date.

List of Annexes

Annex 1. Projects, priority areas and geographic coverage of the country case studies

Annex 2. Self-assessed contributions

Annex 3. Case studies' good practices and lessons learned

Annexes to the report are available on the FAO Office of Evaluation website at:
www.fao.org/evaluation

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