



World Food Programme
Programme Alimentaire Mondial
Programa Mundial de Alimentos
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

Executive Board
Second regular session
Rome, 15–18 November 2021

Distribution: General

Agenda item 6

Date: 20 October 2021

WFP/EB.2/2021/6-B/Add.1

Original: English

Evaluation reports

For consideration

Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<https://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

Coordinated response to the recommendations in the summary report on the joint evaluation of United Nations Rome-based agency collaboration

Focal points:

Mr S. Samkange
Senior Director
Strategic Partnerships Division
tel.: 066513-2262

Mr N. Pronesti
Strategic Partnerships Officer
Strategic Partnerships Division
tel.: 066513-2259



Coordinated Response to the Joint Evaluation of Collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP), hereinafter referred to as the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs), welcome the Joint Evaluation of Collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies. The evaluation confirms the importance of RBA collaboration for the furthering of the three agencies' common objectives for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The RBAs appreciate that the evaluation was conducted during an exceptionally challenging period. However, despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation was carried out with full engagement of RBA staff, including through 12 remote field missions at the country level, focus group discussions and a global survey. The evaluation team, the Evaluation Management Group and RBA staff worked together to ensure that all three agencies were substantively involved in providing strategic feedback throughout the process.

The evaluation assesses RBA collaboration using five criteria, namely: **relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency** and **sustainability**. The evaluation confirms that RBA collaboration has been, and continues to be, largely relevant to the principles and vision that guide the strategic direction of the United Nations development system (UNDS). It also recognizes that the current operating context for the RBAs is dynamic and that RBA collaboration is one of several ways to contribute to the agencies' shared objectives. The evaluation is timely, given the significant changes to RBA collaboration due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the repositioning of the UNDS.

The UNDS repositioning has seen a strengthening of modalities for collaboration and whole-of-system approaches, such as more in-depth and analytical Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and more strategic, SDGs-focused and system-wide United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs). The UNDS repositioning provides an excellent opportunity for the RBAs to further strengthen their collaboration as a "subset" within the wider UN system coordination mechanisms dedicated to fulfilling the 2030 Agenda. Relevant elements and recommendations that have been pointed out in this evaluation – such as the RBAs' support to the achievement of the SDGs under closer collaboration in joint analysis, advocacy, programming and planning – are encompassed in the recalibrated development system, including joint contributions to advancing SDGs (SDG 1, 2, 10 and 17, in particular) in partnership with the respective governments of Members. Overall, strong RBA collaboration, building on years of experience, can be seen as an important subset, as well as a logical result of a coordinated UN system.

In this regard, the three RBAs welcome the evaluation's recognition of their strong commitment to engage in the implementation of the UNDS reform and ensure that RBA collaboration takes place within this evolving context. The active participation in the development of the UNSDCF guidance, the measures being taken to align the RBAs' country planning and programming instruments to the UNSDCF, and the fact that the RBAs are signatories to at least 60 UNSDCFs currently under implementation, all reaffirm the importance that the RBAs place on the UNDS repositioning.

While SDG 2 is at the heart of the mandates of the three RBAs and the agencies share a common commitment to support progress towards it, the evaluation clearly states that it is not the only SDG to which each RBA contributes. FAO has identified SDGs 1, 2 and 10 as guiding SDGs in its Strategic Framework 2022-31, and is the custodian of 21 SDG indicators across six SDGs, including SDG 2. WFP focuses on SDGs 2 and 17, IFAD focuses on SDGs 1 and 2, and all the three organizations recognize that they make contributions to many other SDGs. Moreover, the report highlights that it is important to affirm that there are many partnerships that exist beyond the RBAs that are critical to advancing the 2030 Agenda and that all agencies must work across and beyond the UN system to ensure that partnerships are advanced based on complementarities, comparative advantages and respective strengths.

The evaluation acknowledges that the RBAs believe strongly in working together where it is useful and where transaction costs are not excessive. The evaluation concludes that from global to country levels, RBA staff recognize what they have in common, and that they can identify ways of increasing their effectiveness by working together in transforming food systems, advocacy, communication, sharing expertise, tackling emergencies, developing technical approaches, building knowledge and engaging in inclusive and sustainable rural transformation. RBA Management supports this conclusion and believes that their collaboration is essential to the achievement of the relevant SDGs. To this end, RBA Management supports the conclusion that RBA collaboration should take place where effective and where value and impact outweigh costs, and that collaboration for the sake of collaboration should be avoided.

While the evaluation mentions that the RBAs have made limited progress in reducing overlap, competition and duplication of work, the RBAs believe that their collaboration is built on synergies and complementarities which are key in addressing any competition, overlap and duplication. While there is always room for improvement, RBA Management believes that the various RBA collaboration mechanisms, such as the Senior Consultative Group, informal debriefings with Member States and the annual informal joint meetings of the RBA Governing Bodies have improved communication and understanding not only among the agencies themselves, but also with the Membership. Nonetheless, strengthening RBA collaboration, in particular at country level, within the UNDS repositioning and the CCAs and UNSDCF processes will certainly aid in building on complementarities and maximizing efficiencies.

The evaluation concludes that collaboration among the RBAs is a daily reality. RBA staff routinely see and act on the advantages of collaboration where they see an opportunity for enhanced success of shared objectives. However, the evaluation points out that colleagues at various levels may have a different understanding of what RBA collaboration is and how it works. The RBAs recognize that there is no “one size fits all” approach or model for RBA collaboration. It varies depending on the country and regional contexts, the relationships and trust formed among colleagues at country level and the capacity of country-level staff to dedicate time and resources to collectively understand how one another’s comparative advantage and expertise can advance common objectives. There may not be a formal definition of what RBA collaboration is or should be; however, RBA Management supports the recommendation to clarify and explain the relationships between the agencies’ mandates through an update of their joint Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and pursuit of the new elements introduced.

RBA Management supports the evaluation’s finding that insufficient resources are provided for RBA collaboration. The evaluation recognizes that at global level, donor funding does not match donor calls for collaboration to be strengthened, and the funding that they provide for it is not proportional to the emphasis being placed on it. RBA Management is aware that at country level, RBA managers/staff lack funding for planning or coordinating collaborative actions, and that this can constrain RBA collaborative activities.

None of the agencies has a specific budget for supporting country-level RBA collaboration. In this regard, RBA Management welcomes the evaluation's recommendation that the RBAs should retain and strengthen capacity for coordinating collaboration. RBA Management further welcomes the recommendation that Members should contribute with additional financial support to the RBAs' work towards this goal.

RBA Management also welcomes the evaluation's recommendation that Members of the RBA Governing Bodies should reappraise and adequately resource their position on RBA collaboration. Equally, RBA Management welcomes the recognition that this collaboration is an important objective in some circumstances, but not all. In particular, RBA Management welcomes the recommendation that collaboration in joint corporate services should largely comprise proactive commitment to the overall United Nations efficiency agenda, rather than administrative harmonization and efficiency initiatives focused on the RBAs alone. There are many proven RBA collaboration initiatives in place that are successful and that have tangible results, but cannot be scaled up due to lack of funding. The three RBAs therefore call upon Members to increase funding for activities that can maximize impact on the ground within the overall framework of the UN reform.

RBA Management would like to reaffirm its unwavering commitment and support to the RBA collaboration agenda. With just nine years left to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the RBAs recognize the urgent need to advance innovative and concrete solutions together.

RBA Management welcomes the recommendations outlined in the evaluation report. Detailed responses to the specific recommendations are provided in the matrix.

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Evaluation recommendation	Management Response Accepted, Partially Accepted or Rejected	Management Plan			
		Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection	Responsible unit	Time frame	Further funding required (Y or N)
<p>Recommendation 1. Update the MOU between the RBAs. Although the current five-year MOU was only signed three years ago, significant changes since then make an update necessary. The updated MOU should include the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strategies set out by FAO in its Strategic Framework 2022-2031 and Medium-Term Plan, 2022-2025; in the IFAD12 Results Management Framework 2022-2024; and by WFP in its Strategic Plan, 2022-2026. Through updating the MOU, the RBAs should reset their strategy for collaboration in a proactive manner – based on the reflections that this evaluation may stimulate – and to move beyond simple reaction to calls for stronger collaboration. Emphasize the potential benefits of RBAC, including through strong performance in various areas of thematic collaboration, and joint promotion of the food systems approach – including follow-up to the Food Systems Summit. The MOU should also emphasize that RBAC is not a universally applicable principle: collaboration will only be pursued where it makes clear practical sense to do so, and may often include work with other United Nations entities. While the ‘Rome’ label might be retained for reasons of familiarity, the emphasis should be on the three agencies’ shared commitment to common food security objectives. A revised statement on ‘mutual engagement’ to explain how RBAC complements and is structured by the United Nations development system reform process and, specifically, the UNSDCF at country level, under the leadership of the United Nations Resident Co-ordinator. United Nations reforms at regional level, building on the Regional Collaborative Platforms and the implications for regional RBA collaboration, and recognizing the potential contribution of the RBAs to the emerging regional knowledge management hubs. 	Accepted	<p>The RBAs agree to participate in the update of the MOU between the three agencies, as proposed by the evaluation. In light of their new strategic frameworks/plans, the MOU will build on the comparative advantage of each agency in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Each agency’s Senior Management and relevant departments will be engaged in providing input on the content and form of the update to the MOU. As needed, the RBAs will rely on internal consultations with regional and country offices, inter-agency working groups, and external advisory services. Once the MOU is finalized, the RBA Principals will send the MOU and a joint communication to all offices worldwide, explaining the MOU and the relationships between their agencies’ mandates.</p>	<p>FAO: Lead Office - Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division (PSU)</p> <p>IFAD: Lead Office - Global Engagement, Partnership and Resource Mobilization Division (GPR)</p> <p>WFP: Lead Office - Partnerships and Advocacy Department (PA) (Strategic Partnerships Division [STR]) with support from Humanitarian and Development Division (PRO)</p>	October 2022	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the light of administrative elements of the United Nations reform, the updated MOU should remove its commitments to collaboration on joint corporate services that are covered by the United Nations Business Operations Strategy and other Business Innovation Group initiatives at country level. The MOU should acknowledge that these commitments are largely subsumed by the system-wide enhancements to business operations – to which it should commit the RBAs' support. Emphasizing the RBAs' commitments across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, the updated MOU should clearly state FAO's commitment and roles in humanitarian response, as well as those of WFP in sustainable development. It should commit all RBAs to work at all levels to clarify and explain the relationships between their mandates; ensure that they do not conflict over roles or compete over resources; and convert competition into collaboration. 					
<p>Recommendation 2. Restructure and reinforce the coordination architecture for RBA collaboration within the framework of UNDS reform to ensure that at all levels, the coordination and evaluation of RBAC includes more proactive efforts to develop and disseminate lessons and knowledge about how to optimize collaboration among and beyond the RBAs, about the costs and benefits of RBAC, and about technical experience that can be usefully shared.</p> <p>a) The RBAs should retain and strengthen capacity for coordinating RBAC at their headquarters, with financial support from Member States. The coordination function should in future focus on optimizing the RBAs' engagement in and contribution to the UNDS reform process.</p> <p>b) In each country where it has adequate capacity, each RBA should appoint a focal point whose primary task should be support for and facilitation of RBAs' engagement in the UNSDCF.</p> <p>c) RBA regional offices and hubs should play a stronger role in supporting country offices' redefined collaborative engagement in UNSDCFs through capacity strengthening.</p>	Accepted	<p>The RBAs agree to restructure and reinforce the coordination architecture for RBA collaboration, with the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RBAs will retain and strengthen capacity for coordinating RBA collaboration at their headquarters, as feasible within existing resources, so that in future they can optimize the RBAs' engagement in and contribution to the United Nations reform process. 	<p>FAO: Lead Office - PSU; regional offices; and Office of Strategy, Programme and Budget (OSP)</p> <p>IFAD: Lead Office - GPR, with support from Programme Management Department (PMD) front office; regional divisions; and Strategy and Knowledge Department</p>	(a)-(d) June 2022; (e) June 2023	

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<p>d) The RBAs should not continue with a global action plan for their collaboration. Instead, they should jointly monitor and report on their contributions to the overall efforts of the United Nations to achieve SDG 2 through the reformed United Nations development system, through the UN INFO portal.</p> <p>e) The RBAs should monitor the finalization and implementation of their three pilot joint country strategies, assess their value in the context of the UNSDCF, and formally review whether the preparation of more such strategies is warranted.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RBAs will encourage the appointment of focal points by country and regional offices at country and regional levels where possible and facilitate adequate capacity-building to enable engagement in dialogue and discussions on RBA collaboration and, where appropriate, jointly engage in UNDS processes. This is particularly important for engagement in UNSDCFs. The identified RBA focal points will be encouraged to proactively develop and disseminate lessons and knowledge about how to optimize collaboration among and beyond the RBAs. The RBAs will prepare a document with an analysis of the three pilot joint country strategies, lessons learned and recommendations on whether more such strategies should be prepared. 	<p>WFP: Lead Office - PA (STR), with support from Public Partnerships and Resourcing Division (PPR); Programme and Policy Development Department (PD), (PRO); regional bureau; and Resource Management Department (RM)</p>		

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<p>Recommendation 3. Further embrace the new joint programming mechanisms at the country level and ensure constructive, collaborative RBA engagement with these mechanisms.</p> <p>a) The RBAs should develop and deliver consistent guidance to their country offices on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. jointly preparing to engage in UNSDCF planning processes; ii. jointly contributing to Common Country Analyses and UNSDCF preparation; iii. harmonizing their respective country multiannual plans with each other and with the UNSDCF; iv. jointly participating in UNSDCF implementation under the leadership of the UNRC. <p>b) Where appropriate and feasible, RBAs should harmonize their resource mobilization efforts with those of the UNRC for the UNSDCF.</p> <p>c) Particularly in countries where they do not all have offices, the RBAs should be more proactive in supporting the UNRC to reinforce collaboration within the United Nations Country Team, and in collaborating with each other to promote effective action to strengthen food systems and achieve SDG 2.</p> <p>d) The RBAs should engage wherever appropriate and feasible in joint strategic advocacy to country governments about issues related to SDG 2 with the UNRC and other members of the United Nations Country Team.</p> <p>e) The RBAs should encourage more of their senior staff to apply for UNRC positions.</p>	Accepted	<p>RBA Management agrees and will continue to embrace the new joint programming mechanisms at the country level and ensure constructive, collaborative RBA engagement with these mechanisms. This will be accomplished through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RBAs will ensure, where possible and appropriate, that agency-specific guidance materials are prepared within the mutually agreed timeline to reflect recommendation 3, and in line with the MOU. • Each RBA will explore ways in which more senior staff can be encouraged to apply for Resident Coordinator posts through evolving career development programmes. 	<p>FAO: OSP; Resource Mobilization and Private Sector Partnerships Division; Human Resources Division; regional offices</p> <p>IFAD: GPR, with support from PMD front office; Operational Policy and Results Division (OPR); regional divisions; Human Resources Division</p> <p>WFP: PD (PRO), with support from STR; PPR; Human Resources Division</p>	December 2022	

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<p>Recommendation 4. Focus administrative collaboration efforts on further embracing the United Nations efficiency agenda.</p> <p>a) Except for those limited areas of administrative collaboration between their three headquarters in Rome that clearly have practical value and cut costs for all the agencies, the RBAs should integrate their efforts at administrative collaboration with the overall United Nations efficiency agenda, specifically the workstreams of the Business Innovation Group, to which they should make a joint, proactive commitment at global, regional and country levels.</p>	Accepted	RBA Management agrees to continue to focus administrative collaboration efforts within the UN efficiency agenda at country level, except for those limited areas of possible administrative collaboration between their three headquarters in Rome. Through UN Country Teams and Operations Management Teams (OMTs), the RBAs will continue to identify areas for enhanced collaboration through the Business Operations Strategy (BOS) process and the consolidation of selected services as defined in the Common Back Office (CBO), Common Premises and Shared Service Centres.	<p>FAO: Logistics Services Division (CSL); regional offices</p> <p>IFAD: Corporate Services Department (CSD) Field Support Unit (FSU), with support from PMD</p> <p>WFP: RM and Management Services Division, with support from PA (STR)</p>	December 2022	
<p>Recommendation 5. In considering the development of joint projects and programmes, assess the costs and benefits of the proposed collaboration and only proceed if the benefits outweigh the costs.</p> <p>a) The RBAs should jointly prepare simple guidance for assessing the benefits and costs of proposed joint projects and programmes that captures the likely higher transaction costs and potential reputational risks of this type of collaboration, alongside the benefits of joint RBA action.</p>	Accepted	RBA Management agrees that, in line with the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System (QCPR) resolution 75/233 paragraph 52, while encouraging joint programming – also requests the UN system to be mindful of potentially increasing	<p>FAO: Project Support Division; Finance Division; CSL; regional offices</p> <p>IFAD: CSD FSU and GPR in collaboration with OPR; Financial</p>	December 2022	

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b) The RBAs should streamline inter-agency administrative arrangements and charges, as well as procedures for the delegation of authority to country level where feasible and appropriate, in order to reduce some of the transaction costs of joint projects and programmes.		<p>transaction costs, fragmentation, unproductive competition and overlap among entities. This will be accomplished through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The RBAs' focal points will support country offices as needed to decide when and how to design joint projects that are based on synergies, complementarities and the assurance that the impact/benefits largely outweigh the costs, and the most appropriate modality to engage. • Where feasible and appropriate, the RBAs will explore streamlining inter-agency administrative arrangements and charges, as well as procedures for the delegation of authority to country level. 	<p>Controller's Division; and Office of Strategic Budgeting</p> <p>WFP: PA (STR) with support from RM and PD</p>		

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<p>Recommendation 6. The Member States of the RBA Governing Bodies should reappraise and adequately resource their position on RBA collaboration.</p> <p>Through their various representative RBA governance structures, the Member States should confirm to the RBAs that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognize that RBA collaboration is an important objective in some circumstances but not all; • recognize that RBA collaboration should be pursued within the framework of reformed United Nations coordination at country level; • recognize that RBA collaboration on joint corporate services should largely comprise proactive commitment to the overall United Nations efficiency agenda, rather than administrative harmonization and efficiency initiatives focused on the RBAs only; • will give priority to resourcing collaborative RBA action on the principles set out above, to be reflected in the updated MOU that they should endorse. 		Member States may provide their responses during the Governing Body meetings.	Responsibility: Member States	End of 2021 in response to this report.	