



Sixth Informal Joint Meeting of FAO Council, IFAD Executive Board and WFP Executive Board 30 November and 1 December 2022

High-level Summary

Background

The Sixth Informal Joint Meeting of the FAO Council, IFAD Executive Board and WFP Executive Board (the governing bodies of the Rome-based agencies [RBAs]) took place on 30 November and 1 December 2022. The meeting lasted over one and a half days, giving Board and Council members and the management of the three organizations the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue on a range of different issues. The meeting was held virtually via Zoom and interpretation was provided in all six official languages. In accordance with the practice of rotating the chair among the agencies, WFP acted as host this year.

His Excellency Md. Shameem Ahsan, President of the WFP Executive Board, was the overall chair of the meeting. Specific segments were chaired by the Independent Chair of the FAO Council, the Chairperson of the IFAD Executive Board and IFAD President and were introduced by the Chief Economist of FAO; the Director of the WFP Gender Equality Office; the Director of Global Engagement, Partnerships and Resources Mobilization of IFAD; the Associate Vice President, Programme Management Department of IFAD; and the Director of the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub and FAO Director of the Office of Sustainable Development Goals. The key themes covered by the meeting had been agreed through consensus using consultative process with Members and the Chairs of the three RBA governing bodies; accordingly, the meeting focused on the global food crisis and gender, with updates also provided on the 2021 joint evaluation on RBA collaboration and the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub.

Opening remarks

The President of the Executive Board of WFP opened the meeting, welcoming participants and giving an overview of the event. The Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, His Excellency Hans Hoogeveen, and the Chairperson of the IFAD Executive Board and President of IFAD, Mr Alvaro Lario, then delivered their opening statements. These were followed by statements by the Director-General of FAO, Mr Qu Dongyu and by the Executive Director of WFP, Mr David Beasley.

Describing the drivers of the global food security crisis, the President of IFAD noted that the far-reaching impact of challenges including conflict, COVID-19 and climate change revealed fundamental flaws in world food systems. A two-pronged approach was required to address immediate hunger and build robust food systems for the future. In this context, RBA

collaboration was more important than ever, with the agencies called upon to offer expertise in emergency response and long-term development.

In his remarks, the Director-General of FAO also underscored the increasing importance of RBA collaboration in the face of the global food crisis. He highlighted the successful cooperation behind joint programming in the Sahel, on gender equality and women's empowerment and on information sharing and advocacy, adding that collaboration within the United Nations system as a whole was key to addressing the unprecedented challenges and shifting the focus from emergency response to long-term development.

The Executive Director of WFP urged the international community to prioritize meeting the emergency needs of 350 million food-insecure people around the world in order to avert widespread social unrest and destabilization. He said it was vital to be very strategic with assistance, given the limited funding available and growing humanitarian needs, and noted the potential for donors to facilitate collaborative approaches through their funding decisions.

Agenda Item 1 – Global food security, fuel and fertilizer crisis and related challenges

The Chief Economist of FAO described the humanitarian, macroeconomic and food and agriculture impacts of the global food crisis. Despite a fall in fuel prices, the global food import bill was forecast to reach a record high of almost USD 2 trillion; the 62 most vulnerable countries would see their import costs rise by USD 25 billion. High costs of imported energy and fertilizers were the main drivers of the increase; the unaffordability of fertilizer for many farmers pointed to reduced yields in 2023, especially in the most vulnerable countries. FAO modelling indicated that Africa would be particularly hard hit by fertilizer shortages in areas already flagged as hunger hotspots. It was vital to improve food access immediately and support vulnerable countries in procuring the agricultural inputs needed to prevent an even deeper food crisis in 2023.

Members commended the RBAs for working together to tackle the challenges linked to the global food security crisis. They noted the importance of evidence-based discussions and decision-making and praised the Agricultural Market Information System and the regular release of data and analysis by FAO in this regard.

Several Members described the challenges linked to the global food crisis in their countries and regions and the disproportionate impact of climate change on the most vulnerable populations. They highlighted the importance of ending conflicts and addressing structural weaknesses such as import dependency, suboptimal food production and distribution systems and indebtedness while providing immediate relief to those most impacted by the crisis. They saw a key role for the RBAs in supporting national efforts to build resilience, adopt a strategic approach to agriculture and elaborate policies that would deliver sustainable development. Joint analysis, RBA complementarity, cross-country learning, and transparency and accountability were all cited as priorities, together with increased attention to joint engagement with international financial institutions (IFIs).

Members called for:

- renewed collaboration between the RBAs to address the impacts of the global food crisis, particularly at the country level, and greater interaction between the RBAs and the New York-based funds and programmes;

- increased efforts by the international community to lower the price of agricultural inputs;
- clarification of the roles of the RBAs in the face of increasing demands from governments and IFIs;
- the systematic transformation of food systems to ensure food security for all and the prioritization of vulnerable groups; and
- medium and long term planning to tackle the fertilizer crisis.

In response to questions from the Membership, RBA Management explained how they were adjusting their medium-term plans in light of the global food crisis to optimize the focus, timing and nature of their operations. They also provided additional insight into RBA plans to respond to the fertilizer crisis.

Agenda Item 2 – Update on joint work on Gender

The Director of the WFP Gender Equality Office presented the update, describing the comprehensive collaboration between the three RBAs in the area of gender equality and women’s empowerment. She highlighted recent developments in the joint programme on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security and Nutrition, the joint Programme on the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women and the Coalition for Action: Making Food Systems Work for Women and Girls, which emerged from the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit and was being supported by the RBAs.

Members welcomed RBA collaboration on gender equality and the update on the two joint programmes, which were described as valuable platforms for knowledge transfer. They highlighted the importance of ongoing negotiations on the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition, led by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Turning to the coalition, Members praised RBA leadership and support for the analysis of national pathways and “champion” countries. They also recognized progress made in incorporating gender equality considerations in RBA recruitment and retention policies and encouraged further work in this area.

Members highlighted the central role of women in food production, particularly in rural communities, and their disproportionate vulnerability to poverty and food insecurity. They described women as powerful agents of change and gender equality as a prerequisite for achieving Agenda 2023. They noted that efforts to foster gender equality should be context-specific and non-politicized and there should be opportunity to develop a shared understanding of what constitutes a gender-transformative approach.

Members called for:

- greater joint efforts to capture disaggregated data for all programming, and more evidence generation on gender-transformative approaches and their impact on food security and nutrition;
- further implementation of operational cooperation between the RBAs, stronger collaboration on gender equality within regular activities and more joint country-level strategies and initiatives on gender;

- renewed efforts to integrate gender into all RBA operations and promote gender equality in food security discourse;
- particular focus on women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women and girls with disabilities; and
- continued work on increasing the knowledge and skills of rural women, particularly on climate-resilient agriculture and business development.

In response to questions, RBA management gave further insight into recent work carried out by the Making Food Systems Work for Women and Girls Coalition, the monitoring and evaluation of the joint programmes, the development of context-specific approaches and the internal impact of the focus on gender equality within the RBAs. They also gave examples of the contribution of individual RBAs to the joint programmes, collaboration taking place outside the framework of the joint programmes and peer learning mechanisms in the area of gender.

Agenda Item 3 – Update on the 2021 Joint Evaluation on the Collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies

Introducing the update on behalf of the RBAs, the Director of Global Engagement, Partnerships and Resources Mobilization of IFAD summarized progress made in implementing each of the six recommendations of the joint evaluation of the RBAs.

Members appreciated RBA efforts to enhance collaboration and welcomed the reinforced joint coordination structure aimed at improving country-level coordination. They highlighted the importance of reducing overlap, competition and duplication between the RBAs, particularly in development work; the need to harmonize terminology; and the value of each RBA devising country-level plans and strategies.

Members noted that collaboration should be based on each agency’s mandate and follow the “One United Nations” approach. They welcomed increased analysis including of the multiplier effects of RBA operations and encouraged the RBAs to identify complementarities and explore where working together would increase efficiency or impact.

Members called for:

- timely finalization of the new Memorandum of Understanding between the RBAs;
- effective in-country coordination in all countries of operation;
- demonstration of how and what the RBAs were delivering at the humanitarian-development–peace nexus;
- a shared strategic focus on addressing the root causes of food insecurity; and
- innovation, creativity and a bold approach in the face of current global crises.

In their responses, RBA Management described their respective structures for RBA coordination and discussed food systems approaches, the development of the Memorandum of Understanding and ongoing work with IFIs. They also highlighted opportunities presented by United Nations reforms and the scope for Members to contribute to reduced duplication and overlap through their funding decisions. They confirmed that the draft Memorandum of Understanding and joint programming guidance would be completed shortly.

Update on RBA collaboration in the Sahel

The Associate Vice President of the Programme Management Department of IFAD presented an update on the Joint Sahel programme in response to the challenges of COVID-19, conflicts and climate change (SD3C), summarizing progress made during the first year of implementation. He noted challenges encountered and set out the next steps for the programme, which was not only a flagship for RBA collaboration but also a pilot regional lending operation with attention to cross-border issues, adding value for the individual countries and the region as a whole.

Members underscored the importance of RBA work in the Sahel in strengthening the resilience of vulnerable populations and reinforcing local structures. They congratulated the RBAs on their work with national and international partners and encouraged their collaboration with the Sahel Alliance as part of efforts to take an integrated multisector approach in the region. Interest was expressed in the potential for approaches similar to the SD3C to be applied in other regions.

In response to questions, RBA Management discussed coordination with other United Nations agencies in the Sahel, funding and reporting challenges, the complementarities of the RBAs and efforts to improve coordination, from the country level to the regional levels. They agreed that lessons learned from the SD3C could be applied to other regions and described efforts to achieve synergies with the Great Green Wall Initiative in the Sahel and other countries participating in the scheme; social cohesion, land rehabilitation, cash for work and school feeding were also key components of RBA work in the Sahel.

Agenda Item 4 – Update on the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub

The Director of the United Nations Food Systems Hub and FAO Director of the Office of Sustainable Development Goals gave an overview of recent and planned activities for the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub including country needs assessments, the development of the programme of work, the food systems solution dialogues, the coalition mapping exercise and preparations for the “stocktaking moment” planned for 2023. He also explained how the hub promoted RBA collaboration including through co-development of the work plan, country-level operational collaboration and shared accountability, resulting in better cost efficiency and effectiveness, stronger RBA leadership within United Nations reform efforts and enhanced RBA convening power.

Members expressed appreciation for the work of the RBAs in establishing and running the hub, noting that lessons learned from the initiative could be valuable in other spheres. They looked forward to the stocktaking moment in 2023. They also welcomed the work done by the School Meals Coalition, describing it as a model for global advocacy and a catalyst for national commitments, particularly in its engagement with local actors to achieve tangible progress.

Support was voiced for innovative financing models and for work under way between IFAD and the World Bank to operationalize a new food financing architecture. Members also noted the role of country and regional United Nations system capabilities in supporting national efforts to transform food systems. They recalled that the RBAs should harness existing structures for work related to the United Nations Food Systems Summit,

particularly the CFS High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, and underscored the importance of practical government involvement in hub meetings beyond the presence of national coordinating bodies in order to ensure that real transformation was envisaged and implemented.

Members encouraged the RBAs to:

- support countries in designing and implementing national pathways for food systems transformation;
- contribute to better uptake of CFS products;
- strengthen the role of the hub in supporting the implementation of Agenda 2030; and
- hold inclusive consultations with Members to identify opportunities for transforming food systems.

In response to questions, RBA management shared preliminary insight into the expected form and output of the 2023 stocktaking exercise. They explained how the hub and the coalitions facilitated country-level collaboration, particularly on the mobilization of resources, and clarified the purpose of the next round of touchpoints, which were due to take place in December.

Other topics covered included the mobilization of existing resources to support the work of the hub; the food systems financing agenda co-led by IFAD and the World Bank and collaboration between the RBAs and IFIs; and questions about the World Bank's Food Systems 2030 Trust Fund and if and how it related to the Food Systems Summit follow up. Management also emphasized that at the country level hub activities were coordinated directly with governments via the designated food systems national convenors or other designated officials, noting that governments had also been invited to appoint additional focal points, if necessary, to facilitate this interaction.