

Renewing and scaling up Rome-based agency collaboration in fragile settings: strengthening and defining pathways for increased collaboration for impact

1. Introduction

1. At a time when humanitarian resources have been dramatically reduced, acute food insecurity and chronic undernourishment are reaching record levels. According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025 report, between 638 and 720 million people are experiencing hunger, an increase from pre-pandemic levels. Of these people, according to the 2025 Global Report on Food Crises, nearly 295 million faced acute food insecurity across 53 countries. In 35 of these countries, food crises have recurred every year since 2016.
2. Under the UN80 New Humanitarian Compact, the United Nations recognizes the importance of the Rome-based agencies' robust alignment to maximizing their collective impact on food security in fragile settings, especially at the humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) nexus, building on strong existing collaboration while identifying opportunities to further enhance effectiveness and efficiency. In this paper, FAO, IFAD and WFP outline efforts to reinforce and align actions in fragile settings to combat hunger and reduce humanitarian needs. Through this process, the agencies will identify concrete steps to take globally and at the country level to realize operational efficiencies and strengthen strategic collaboration.
3. Through these efforts, FAO, IFAD and WFP aim to strengthen data sharing and joint analysis anchored within existing data systems, the United Nations development system process and the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks (UNSDCFs) and to achieve meaningful efficiencies and cost savings, and to advance the Humanitarian Reset and locally led, context-specific approaches.

2. Current status and lessons

4. Rome-based agency (RBA) collaboration takes place at the global and country levels, across a range of thematic and operational areas to help transform agrifood systems and achieve zero hunger. FAO, IFAD and WFP have developed flexible and context-specific ways of working to achieve shared results and greater impact. These ways of working include joint analyses, joint and coordinated programmes, and collaborative policy engagement. In the field, the 2021 joint Independent evaluation of RBA collaboration confirmed that collective work is a daily reality and a regular feature of the RBAs' global engagement, grounded in long-standing complementarities and a shared commitment to advancing food security, rural transformation and sustainable development.

5. The RBA partnership is guided by the 2023 RBA memorandum of understanding, which was informed by the 2021 joint evaluation. RBA collaboration in fragile settings is also guided by a range of specific frameworks and strategies, including the 2015 Resilience Collaboration Framework, the FAO/WFP Joint Anticipatory Action Strategy (September 2023), and the 2024–2027 IFAD–WFP Action Plan. FAO and WFP co-lead the global food security cluster, which guarantees evidence-based prioritization of needs in crises and coordination of emergency efforts. In addition, FAO and WFP work together intensively to lead the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification System (IPC) and through the Global Network Against Food Crises they publish reports such as the Global Report on Food Crises .

**Lessons learned: RBA resilience initiative in
the Niger, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia**

Between 2017 and 2023, the RBAs jointly implemented a programme, funded by the Government of Canada, to strengthen resilience in order to improve food security and nutrition. In the Niger, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, the programme leveraged the comparative advantages, tools and experience of each agency to deliver integrated and context-specific assistance, with a strong focus on gender equality and nutrition.

Despite exceptional challenges posed by the coronavirus 2019 pandemic, a coordinated push in 2021 enabled the initiative to achieve nearly all planned activities. Each organization's mandate was reflected: WFP addressed immediate food needs and supported asset creation and livelihoods; FAO strengthened climate-resilient agricultural production, livelihoods and community empowerment; and IFAD's investments reinforced producer organizations, market access and natural resource governance. This clear division of labour, underpinned by government coordination and joint planning, enabled the RBAs to maximize complementarities while avoiding duplication. The following elements contributed to the success:

- **Strong joint design and performance frameworks:** shared theories of change and performance measurement frameworks clarified roles and responsibilities.
- **Operational complementarity recognized by communities:** Communities cited the combination of cash, food assistance for assets, and school meals as critical to the success.
- **Adaptive collaboration in fragile settings:** the RBAs jointly adjusted implementation modalities in response to insecurity and the pandemic, streamlining activities to ensure continuity and completion of planned outputs.
- **Evidence-based coordination and learning:** the joint analysis, combined with inter-agency monitoring and learning, enabled the agencies to track results, adapt underperforming activities and strengthen coordination.

3. Accelerating reform and efficiencies at the global and country levels in fragile situations and during emergency responses

6. Despite successful RBA collaboration and the outcomes achieved together, it is imperative to improve and meet the new challenges ahead. The 2021 joint evaluation highlights challenges, including overlap or duplication of roles, and competition over resources. With tightening budgets and the pressure to deliver more with less, these overlaps risk generating pressure at the country level, particularly as WFP, FAO and other agencies with similar resource mobilization models draw from the same funding streams. In response, the RBAs have each undertaken efforts to clarify, within their own strategic frameworks, each agency's strategic focus.

7. The WFP strategic plan for 2026–2029 refocuses WFP on emergency preparedness and response, with an emphasis on anticipatory action, disaster risk finance and resilience building. WFP is redoubling its focus on reducing humanitarian needs and building self-reliance and resilience in places facing the most frequent cases of acute food insecurity and malnutrition, while strengthening national systems. The WFP strategic plan explicitly deemphasizes direct implementation of activities in relation to livestock, food production (seeds, fertilizers), fisheries and other non-core areas, where WFP will rely on partners including FAO and IFAD.
8. The FAO strategic framework 2022–2031 focuses on transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind. In line with this, FAO's Emergency and Resilience Global Appeal 2026, and the related emergency and resilience country plans, outline areas of intervention aligned with the organization's agricultural mandate and Members' expectations. In crisis settings where the majority of people rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, FAO works to protect and restore food production systems through timely, operational interventions grounded in its technical expertise. By providing locally adapted inputs and support, including seeds, livestock assistance and cash+ modalities, FAO enables communities to anticipate shocks, sustain production and strengthen resilience.
9. As an international financial institution (IFI), IFAD engages with governments to design and finance investment operations that can contribute to building food system resilience. For IFAD, engagement in fragile settings is among the three priority areas for the 13th replenishment of IFAD's resources (IFAD13) for the period of 2025–2027, supported by an updated operational approach around four work domains: fragility and risk diagnostics, fragility-sensitive programming approaches, strong operational guidance and support, and strategic partnerships. It is important to note that IFAD is not a humanitarian organization and is not equipped to respond to humanitarian needs. However, IFAD is structurally designed to operate at the intersection of long-term development and rapid crisis response, focusing on recovery and rebuilding. An advantage of IFAD's IFI model is that its financial instruments at the country level have the flexibility to adjust allocations. This combines predictability with the ability for projects to be adapted when shocks occur in order to address emerging priorities. During IFAD14, IFAD envisions engaging in fragile settings through the resilience pillar, channelling dedicated resources, strengthening analytical and operational capacity, partnering with FAO and WFP, as well as others, at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, and investing in inclusive rural livelihoods in ways that address drivers and dimensions of fragility relevant to IFAD's mandate.
10. These important steps provide the foundation for this blueprint, which includes three linked processes:
 - a) **Global efficiencies and impact framework.** RBA review of areas to strengthen collaboration and identification of operational efficiencies that improve shared impact. Existing complementarities will be built upon, with opportunities for joint action and enhanced efficiency identified (March–June 2026).
 - b) **Country-level execution framework.** Applying the global framework, the RBAs will implement an agile, country-based and country-led process to implement these agreements and identify additional opportunities to improve efficiency and impact. This framework will be executed to align future programmes and operations, generating additional impact and cost savings.

- c) **Senior leadership oversight of implementation.** Core leaders from the organizations will undertake periodic reviews to ensure that ambitions are being met and country-level collaboration is advancing in line with shared objectives.

4. Strengthening existing collaboration to improve collective impact (March-June 2026)

- 11. Under the UN80's New Humanitarian Compact (Workstream 3, Work Package 2), the RBAs are working to align agency responsibilities for food security, aiming to achieve greater efficiency, predictability and results at scale. Building on the collaboration developed and implemented through the global food security cluster and the Global Network Against Food Crisis, the RBAs will strengthen their collective engagement in fragile and conflict-affected settings by clearly articulating each agency's comparative focus, reinforcing operational synergies and setting targeted joint priorities.

Areas of focus

- 12. Each agency contributes distinct yet complementary capacities to address food insecurity in fragile settings.
- 13. FAO's core role in fragile settings is to protect and restore agrifood systems and agriculture-based livelihoods, enabling households to maintain or regain food production and income generation through targeted support for crops, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture, forestry, agroforestry and natural resource management. Drawing on its long-standing field presence and trusted local partnerships, FAO delivers timely, life-saving and resilience-building agricultural interventions before, during and after crises. This includes rapid support for local food production and agriculture-specific early warning, risk analysis and anticipatory action to protect food production systems from shocks. WFP provides large-scale emergency food, cash and nutrition assistance, including unconditional and conditional (e.g. food and cash-for-assets) assistance, supported by strong preparedness and anticipatory action to respond quickly to shocks. WFP's extensive supply chain and logistics capacities enable operations in high-risk environments. At the same time, WFP helps to reduce recurring needs by strengthening resilience through nationally owned, community-based and integrated programmes that support livelihoods, build and rehabilitate productive assets and expand access to services such as weather information, inclusive financing and nutrition, while supporting national social protection programmes, including school meals.
- 14. IFAD is the only United Nations specialized agency and IFI focused exclusively on reducing rural poverty and food insecurity through agriculture and rural development. Working with governments, development partners and the private sector, it supports national policies and programmes centred on smallholder farmers and other rural people. IFAD provides loans and grants aligned with national strategies, using innovative financing tools to strengthen rural markets, expand access to finance and develop inclusive value chains.

A collaboration built on long-standing coordination mechanisms

- 15. At the country level, RBA collaboration builds on established humanitarian and development coordination systems to align priorities, avoid duplication and ensure coherent support for crisis-affected populations. These mechanisms provide shared spaces for analysis, planning and decision-making, allowing the RBAs to work from a common understanding of needs and to design complementary interventions. Through these platforms, the RBAs jointly conduct needs

assessments, analyse responses and coordinate programming. This includes, for example, conducting joint food security assessments during sudden onset crises, developing combined livelihood and food assistance plans within humanitarian response plans and agreeing on sequenced interventions in resilience-focused plans.

16. The RBAs also collaborate with national partners and local organizations to strengthen coordination in hard-to-reach areas. At a more strategic level, the RBAs support shared evidence generation, risk monitoring and coordinated advocacy on the drivers of food insecurity. Examples include jointly contributing to national or regional early warning bulletins, aligning triggers for anticipatory action and presenting common messages to governments and donors during major food crises. By harmonizing multi-year plans and converging in priority geographic areas, the RBAs help to link emergency assistance with longer-term resilience and peacebuilding efforts, ensuring actions are mutually reinforcing and responsive to evolving needs.

Prioritized areas for joint action

17. To maximize impact and strengthen collective positioning, the RBAs will pursue a set of strategic priorities where collaboration offers clear benefit:
 - Advocate for complementary financing opportunities, including joint resource mobilization by FAO and WFP, unified pitches around major crises and shared financing opportunities for programmes aligned with the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.
 - Coordinated advocacy to elevate food crisis issues, promote the protection of agrifood systems in conflicts and influence policy processes at the national, regional and global levels.
 - Shared data and integrated analysis, including early warning, risk monitoring and joint contributions to key analytical products under the Global Network Against Food Crises.
 - Anticipatory action, building on shared triggers, joined-up programming and complementary delivery capacities to mitigate the impacts of shocks.
 - Promotion of an agrifood-systems lens, ensuring that emergency, recovery and resilience actions are aligned with long-term transformation objectives and address systemic drivers of fragility.

5. Country-level execution framework: accelerating alignment and collaboration to generate shared impact

18. In response to the accelerating levels of food crises in fragile settings, FAO, IFAD and WFP will use the global framework outlined above to pursue a more structured approach in selected priority countries and to achieve the UN80 goal of aligning agency responsibilities in order to achieve to greater efficiency, predictability and results at scale. The RBAs will build on existing bilateral or trilateral collaboration, such as the IFAD–WFP action plan in fragile settings, the FAO/WFP Joint Anticipatory Action Strategy, the global food security cluster, the Global Network Against Food Crises, and the RBA Resilience Framework. The RBAs will implement an agile and practical process that promotes coherent action and country leadership, reinforces efficiency and impact, and ensures that collaboration is guided foremost by evidence and clear added value. Through this process, the RBAs will work to achieve improved operational efficiencies and greater country-level alignment, as outlined in the respective country-level strategic and programming frameworks.

19. RBA collaboration will be grounded in each organization's distinct mandate and operational models, including a network of national partners. IFAD's investments and government-led implementation model, FAO's mandate to provide specialized agricultural assistance in emergency and development settings, as well as normative and policy guidance, bolstered by its strong field presence, and WFP's dual food-assistance mandate and field-level capacities shape what each agency will deliver.

Step 1: Country selection

20. Building from a longlist of countries – in particular, hunger hotspots – with high potential for the RBAs to generate significant shared impact and, in the case of IFAD, alignment with country demand with respect to RBA collaboration, the RBAs will shortlist 5 to 10 countries in 2026 based on clear criteria (see box 1) and will discuss with regional and country teams to ensure full ownership and leadership of the prioritization process, leveraging ongoing initiatives. The RBAs will then work in each selected country to execute a strong collaborative alignment process that will strengthen joint or aligned programming based on each agency's complementary strengths.

Box 1: Country selection	
Country selection criteria	Longlist of countries (hunger hotspots)
• Countries in protracted crises and areas of recurrent and acute food insecurity and high burden of acute malnutrition with large humanitarian needs and opportunity to transition from emergency assistance to longer term resilience building. • Countries in the Global Report on Food Crises and joint FAO–WFP Hunger Hotspots reports. • Strong alignment with government policy frameworks, and country ownership and full agreement. • A significant presence of the RBAs at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, enabling meaningful complementarity in roles and capacities. • Timing of agency programme and strategy planning cycles conducive to longer term structural alignment. • For IFAD: alignment with government demand for RBA collaboration in the context of the country programme. • Relevant UN80 working groups' priority/focus countries.	Highest concern (populations face or are at risk of Catastrophic Hunger/Famine — IPC/CH Phase 5): Haiti, Mali, State of Palestine (Gaza Strip and West Bank), South Sudan, the Sudan, Yemen Very high concern: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, Syrian Arab Republic Hotspot (escalating risk): Bangladesh (Rohingya), Burkina Faso, Chad, Kenya

Step 2: Country alignment for shared results using a systemic approach

21. All three agencies operate under established strategic planning processes and frameworks, including FAO's country programming frameworks and its emergency and resilience country plans, WFP's Board-approved country strategic plans, and IFAD's country strategic opportunities programmes or, more frequently in fragile settings, country strategy notes. Building on joint analyses and consultations with governments and partners, the RBAs will better align these processes to identify how each agency can contribute to joint strategic actions that support UNSDCF's and generate greater impact.

22. The RBAs will use this process to align their strategies in order to ensure that their long-term plans in each country are built around and updated with a shared vision for generating greater impact together. The RBAs will work with the country teams, consistent with **long-standing coordination mechanisms** and with consideration of specific requirements in each country. Leveraging this improved alignment, the RBAs will continue to pursue a common analysis of the dynamics of hunger and malnutrition and their drivers, develop joint strategic priorities or results frameworks, and align implementation where it matters the most.

Box 2: Guiding principles for collaboration in fragile and crisis settings

- Country-level RBA collaboration is anchored in government priorities and country leadership, and aligned with the United Nations development system process and UNSDCF strategies, priorities and needs in the areas of food security and nutrition.
 - Depending on the specific mandate, RBA collaboration will strive to support transition from humanitarian relief to inclusive development in crisis situations by applying a continuous, long-term resilience-building approach.
 - The RBAs will work within the scope of their complementary mandates and mutually reinforcing strengths.
- In all cases, roles are applied based on comparative advantage and the specific circumstances in each country, ensuring flexibility in implementation across different settings.
- The RBAs will support strategies and programmes connected to shared goals and accelerate effective collaboration through more systematic joint programmes.
 - Local and national leadership and ownership will be ensured in alignment with each RBA's mandate, and all investments will reinforce the capacity of local stakeholders, notably governments, other local institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector and communities.
 - The RBAs will identify and promote cost efficiency throughout their collaboration.

Step 3: Joint or aligned programming, complementary financing opportunities, and implementation

23. A concrete outcome of step 2 will be a road map for updating relevant country plans where appropriate, as well as the identification of specific joint initiatives and proposals that the RBAs will pursue together. The RBAs will develop transition plans as needed in order to ensure that the most efficient operational models are used, with due consideration of the different models of each RBA. Looking ahead, joint or aligned programming will continue but remain targeted, focused on settings and areas of work where it offers clear advantages – and successful models identified in recent evaluations will continue to be applied.

Step 4: Strategic support

24. Where most needed and jointly prioritized, a team of senior RBA staff will facilitate a joint alignment task force. These teams will work with country team leadership, in collaboration with governments and partners, to map how each agency can align its programmes and planning to generate greater collective impact and to identify overlapping geographic priorities and programmatic complementarity.

Box 3: Leveraging agrifood systems analysis to multiply impact in emergencies

Together with national governments and other partners, the RBAs will use joint agrifood systems analyses to understand the dynamics of acute food insecurity in geographic areas combining recurring food insecurity, protracted crises, recurrent shocks and stressors, and systemic weaknesses, as well as to map the leverage points for addressing the underlying and proximate drivers of acute food insecurity. By ensuring that the analyses go beyond immediate symptoms to identify the structural, interconnected drivers of food insecurity, the RBAs will create a stronger foundation for identifying how to sequence and layer each agency's actions and generate joint actions where effective in order to reinforce complementarity at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, particularly in protracted crises with high and rising levels of acute food insecurity and in settings transitioning from humanitarian assistance to recovery.

25. As an IFI, IFAD engages with governments to design and finance investment operations that can contribute to building food systems resilience, as well as, depending on the setting, to addressing humanitarian-development-peace nexus challenges. Collaboration with FAO and WFP in this context is typically indirect and government-led: national authorities may choose to involve one or both agencies as technical partners in IFAD-funded investments or, where appropriate, as third-party implementers. These arrangements follow IFAD's investment model, systems and procedures and are driven by government demand. As part of the project design processes and to support alignment, IFAD will continue to consult with FAO and WFP counterparts.

Step 5: Mutual accountability and follow-up

26. Based on the results of the joint alignment process documented in the country collaboration blueprint, each agency's leadership at the country, regional and global levels will prioritize specific follow-up actions and deconflict any potential challenges. Light but regular six-monthly check-ins will be held with RBA leadership (Director-level or equivalent, depending on structure of each organization) to ensure continued support for efforts to accelerate aligned actions and enable adaptive management. Finally, the RBAs will continue to pursue joint learning exercises and share evidence systematically to improve adaptive management.

6. Next steps and timeline

Next steps	Timeline
1. Review and select priority countries	March to April
2. Develop alignment framework and terms of reference, including a deep dive on current planning cycles, operational challenges and areas of overlap	March to June
3. Implement alignment exercise in 5 to 7 countries	June to December