

Ninth Informal Joint Meeting of FAO Council, IFAD Executive Board and WFP Executive Board

27 April 2026

High-level summary

Background

1. The Ninth Informal Joint Meeting of the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Executive Board of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Executive Board of the World Food Programme (WFP) took place on 27 April 2026. The meeting lasted five hours, giving Board and Council members and the senior management of the three organizations the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue on collaboration between the Rome-based agencies (RBAs). The meeting was held in person and online, 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.
2. Her Excellency Ms Carla Barroso Carneiro, President of the WFP Executive Board, was the overall chair of the meeting. Two panel discussions were moderated by Mr Mina Rizk, Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, and Mr Alvaro Lario, Chairperson of the IFAD Executive Board and IFAD President. The panellists in the first discussion, on renewing and scaling up collaboration among the RBAs in the context of the UN80 initiative, were Ms Beth Crawford, Assistant Director-General and Director, FAO Office of Strategy, Programme and Budget; Ms Gérardine Mukeshimana, IFAD Vice-President; Mr Carl Skau, WFP Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer; and His Excellency Mr Andreas von Brandt, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to the United Nations Organizations in Rome.
3. The panellists in the second discussion, on RBA collaboration on school meals, were Mr Máximo Torero, FAO Chief Economist; Ms Pieterneel M. Boogaard, Managing Director of the IFAD Office of Technical Delivery; Ms Rania Dagash-Kamara, WFP Assistant Executive Director for Partnerships and Innovation; and His Excellency Mr. Fredrick Lusambili Matwang'a, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kenya to the RBAs. The meeting aimed to identify concrete, actionable steps to enhance joint RBA impact at the country level, strengthen synergies and enhance coherence with the ongoing UN80 reform process, while supporting more efficient, effective and aligned RBA collaboration in response to rising global needs and growing food insecurity.

Opening remarks

4. The President of the WFP Executive Board opened the meeting, welcoming participants and giving an overview of the meeting. The Chairperson of the IFAD Executive Board and President of IFAD and the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council then delivered their opening remarks. These were followed by statements by the Director-General of FAO, Dr Qu Dongyu, and by the Executive Director of WFP, Ms Cindy McCain.
5. In their remarks, the leaders noted that the meeting was taking place at a time of profound global uncertainty; food systems were further strained, and macroeconomic stability and social cohesion were under threat. Collaboration among the RBAs was increasingly viewed as a test case for the UN80 reforms to see whether the system could deliver as one. When the differentiated but complementary mandates of the RBAs were translated into coordinated action, the three organizations created a continuum of action and impact, from emergency response to resilience.
6. The profound changes in the multilateral system reflected the expectation of the international community that it delivers more coherent and efficient responses to increasingly complex challenges. While each RBA had a distinct mandate, together they represented a unique ecosystem of expertise spanning emergency response, long-term agricultural transformation and rural development. It was necessary, however, to examine where coordination was working well and where it could be improved, with efforts to address overlaps, gaps and inefficiencies. The success of RBA collaboration was ultimately assessed at the country level.
7. The *2026 Global Report on Food Crises* highlighted that nearly 300 million people faced acute food insecurity. In many countries, the crises were no longer temporary shocks; they were recurring, intensified and increasingly difficult to reverse. The problems were structural and would require the RBAs to adapt, increase and strengthen their collaboration, especially at the country level. There was a need to build on existing RBA collaboration, including joint analysis and coordinated responses to the situation in the Strait of Hormuz.
8. Collaboration among the RBAs was continuously evolving and expanding, and, owing to the global funding circumstances and UN80 reform, the RBAs had increased efforts to align their roles even more effectively, efficiently and coherently, reducing fragmentation and focusing on their comparative strengths. In its strategic plan for 2026–2029, for example, WFP had chosen to disengage from livestock and food production support, areas in which partners had higher added value and expertise.

Agenda Item 1 – The Rome-based agencies in the UN80 reform process: Renewing and scaling-up collaboration

9. The Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council asked Ms Crawford, Ms Mukeshimana and Mr Skau about their agencies' contributions to the UN80 reform process and the development of the RBA "blueprint" entitled *Renewing and scaling up Rome-based agency collaboration in fragile settings: strengthening and defining pathways for increased collaboration for impact*, as well as what they considered to be the most important takeaways. The speakers highlighted the need to focus on delivery and impact at the country level; complementarity and coherence; integrated action across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus; and evidence, data-sharing and accountability for results. Efficiency should be seen as a means of strengthening delivery, not an end in itself. It was important to ensure localization in delivery and physical proximity to operations, and to mobilize additional resources, including through the involvement of the private sector. Reform was described as a state of mind rather than simply a process, and agencies needed to have the courage

to champion a new approach. The time was ripe for the reforms given the increasing needs and dwindling resources, but together, the RBAs held a unique toolbox to end hunger. Collaboration with partners outside the RBAs were also essential.

10. Ambassador von Brandt was asked to give some concrete ways in which Member States could help ensure that the RBAs stayed on track and delivered on the UN80 reforms. Recalling that Germany and India were co-chairs of the Group of Friends of the RBAs, which had produced a non-paper entitled *RBA collaboration for UN80 impact*, he noted that Member States could use the decision-making powers of their governing bodies to enhance collaboration and make reciprocal information-sharing mandatory. The RBAs were encouraged to explore the submission of joint proposals to donors, and donors were encouraged to provide flexible or core funds, and pooled funds where appropriate, and to coordinate funding to country teams. There were opportunities to better delineate the division of labour among the RBAs; a gap analysis of the capacities of the respective agencies could be useful in that regard. The Ambassador also proposed organizing a second informal joint meeting of the RBAs later in the year.
11. During the open discussion on this topic, Member States shared their views, underscoring that reform was essential, given the protracted nature of present food crises and the scarcity of resources. It was vital to reduce fragmentation and work according to the comparative advantage of each agency, recognizing that collaboration with other United Nations entities was also necessary. Member States thanked the Group of Friends for their work, and they welcomed the RBA blueprint, which was described as a good starting point. A number of speakers considered that the document would benefit from more detail and required adjustment in its operationalization in order to reflect the right scale of ambition.
12. Member States highlighted the following:
 - There should be a shift from the current ad hoc collaboration to more institutionalized collaboration led by the top leadership of the RBAs; to truly achieve scale, RBA collaboration could not rely on a few committed individuals in certain countries; it required strong leadership commitment, including at the highest level, alongside systemic incentives;
 - Collaboration had to mean clear choices, not just coordination; there were strong calls for an explicit delineation of roles and responsibilities, including in relation to who would lead, who would support, and who would step back;
 - RBA governing bodies should be prepared to provide guidance on strategic choices, including prioritization when needed, in order to maximize collective impact;
 - Continued transparency was required from the RBAs in their engagement with Member States, including on how priorities were set, resources were used and results were measured;
 - Collaboration should span joint analysis, joint planning and, where relevant, joint programming, complemented by strengthened data sharing and interoperable systems, as well as expanded use of shared services (offices, supply chains and procurement);
 - More transparency was requested on the collaborative initiatives already under way and their impact on optimization of the use of resources, including, potentially, digital updates on joint planning and implementation;

- Further insight was sought into what the RBAs were doing to eliminate or reduce competition for resources at the national level while donors increased their efforts to coordinate the allocation of funds in a proportionate and timely manner;
 - A second informal meeting was proposed to enable Member States to stay abreast of the progress made and to maintain momentum;
 - An expansion of the pilot countries beyond the number indicated in the blueprint was suggested, noting that too few pilot countries could undermine the relevance of the initiative;
 - The operationalization of the blueprint should be rapid and ambitious, including details of each agency's roles and responsibilities; a specific plan to create efficiencies and eliminate duplication; quantification of the potential cost savings and impact; and subsequently, the timely delivery of tangible results;
 - The operationalization of the blueprint should be accompanied by a stronger joint monitoring framework, with the creation of SMART indicators to measure progress over time;
 - RBA collaboration should be aligned with the wider UN80 reform process, anchored in existing United Nations country-level mechanisms, including the common country analysis and United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks;
 - There should be more information on and better understanding of the role of the United Nations resident coordinators in ensuring collaboration at the country level;
 - Evidence-based decision-making should be supported through harmonized data systems and analysis;
 - There should be greater focus on localization and promotion of the role of national governments and regional institutions, and alignment of interventions with demand-driven national priorities
 - Support for and investment in small-scale farmers should be increased in order to build resilience and promote food security;
 - There should be greater South–South and triangular cooperation; and
 - Efforts should be made to demonstrate RBA collaboration in response to current crises, such as supply chain disruptions, including for fertilizers, in the Middle East.
13. The panellists thanked Member States for their comments and responded to the points raised. The next step for the blueprint was the selection of the pilot countries and the clarification of the role of each RBA based on their distinct yet complementary mandates, responding to specific country contexts and enabling a more systematic approach to joint analysis, planning and delivery, in line with broader United Nations system processes; more detail would follow in due course. The blueprint focused on fragile settings because those were the most promising contexts in which to align the RBAs' mandates and achieve collective impact. The historical establishment of each RBA, endorsed by Member States, and their continuing distinct mandates, with IFAD leading on financing and investment, were also recalled. There were many excellent examples of the collaboration already under way in the field. That said, success was often due to the individuals involved, and the RBAs needed to move towards institutionalizing such collaboration. Ambassador von Brandt said that the Group of Friends would take note of the points related to the demand-driven priorities of national governments and localization in their further deliberations, as well as the calls for increased focus on monitoring and assessment.

Agenda Item 2 – Rome-based agency collaboration on school meals

14. In his introduction, the Chairperson of the IFAD Executive Board and IFAD President noted that school meals, which were at the intersection of a number of sectors, such as education, nutrition, social protection and food system transformation, were increasingly seen as an integral part of national policies, frameworks and strategies as opposed to stand-alone interventions.
15. The panellists described about their agencies' contributions to the achievement of integrated, cost-effective and sustainable country-level outcomes through school meal programmes. FAO had developed a framework for working with governments to improve children's diets, support education outcomes and strengthen local economies, including by connecting small-scale farmers with school meal programmes, and had produced guidance that supported countries in designing holistic school meal standards adapted to local realities. FAO also supported the development of policies and legislation and knowledge exchange. IFAD's approach was fourfold, focusing on the availability of, access to and awareness of nutritious food, as well as its affordability. IFAD focused mostly on the supply side of school meals, strengthening farmer organizations and systems, which also led to human capital development and rural transformation. Meanwhile, WFP provided support for the development of policy and regulatory frameworks; improvement of financial and institutional capacities; programme design and implementation; home-grown school feeding; and the strengthening of local food systems. The School Meals Coalition, co-chaired by Brazil, France and Finland, was hosted by WFP, which acted as its secretariat.
16. Asked about the areas in which the RBAs could most effectively support the long-term sustainability of a national school meal programme, Ambassador Matwang'a said that governments required support in developing national policy and ensuring institutional ownership; embedding smallholder applications in national systems; unlocking innovative and predictable financing and convincing the ministries of finance of the programme's return on investment; strengthening monitoring, data and accountability frameworks; and transitioning from pilot projects to sustainable national programmes.
17. Member States reiterated the value of school meal programmes, not only in providing nutritious food to pupils, but also in contributing to social protection, developing human capital, empowering women and young people, boosting food systems, strengthening local markets, and ensuring rural development. It was acknowledged that the development of a robust national school meal programme took time. It was thus necessary to adopt a long-term approach to engagement with national governments, setting realistic timelines and designing potential exit strategies. School meal programmes should become nationally owned on a permanent basis, able to withstand fiscal cycles, emergencies and future shocks.
18. Member States called for:
 - The scale-up of school meal programmes, focusing where possible on home-grown school feeding and involving the entire value chain, including local smallholder farmers, supporting them in particular in accessing markets and storage;
 - Strengthened nutrition standards and meal diversity so that school meals addressed child health;
 - School meal provision to be combined with educational measures on nutrition, including for teachers, and with interventions to ensure adequate physical infrastructure in schools;

- Promotion of a whole-of-government approach to school feeding and of the link between school feeding and access to clean water and sanitation, including collaboration with UN-Water;
 - Increased monitoring, better use of data to promote sustainability, and consideration of other metrics to measure the success of programmes, such as the annual number of days in which a school meal is provided;
 - Strong engagement of the RBA leadership in promoting school meals during contact with national political leaders;
 - Attention to the scale-up of sustainable school meal systems, which required long-term planning, clearer sequencing, and complementary roles across the RBAs;
 - The positioning of home-grown school feeding as the default approach, framed as a strategic investment, not just a social programme;
 - Focus on the building of national ownership and sustainability through budget integration, community participation and capacity-building for governments and local institutions;
 - Closer collaboration with international financial institutions and multilateral development banks to expand the fiscal space, improve access to concessional financing and ensure sustainable and predictable funding;
 - All schools in a given area to benefit from school meals to avoid competition and the imbalances in enrolment that could result from children being incentivized to move from non-assisted to assisted schools;
 - Collaboration with all appropriate partners, such as the United Nations Children's Fund; and
 - The harnessing of the opportunities afforded by the African Day of School Feeding.
19. Responding to the comments made, the panellists underscored the need to collect best practices on food safety and standards, innovate on financing and improve metrics. They agreed that high-level support within the RBAs was crucial, as was the learning of lessons from existing programmes to inform future activities and interventions. The private sector had a critical role to play, and it was vital to ensure that the school meals were home grown wherever possible. Ambassador Matwang'a agreed that the institutionalization of a school meal programme took time and expressed interest in reviewing the metrics of success.

Next steps and closing remarks

20. Closing the informal meeting, the President of the WFP Executive Board thanked the participants for their contributions, stating that she had taken note of all the suggestions made, including the desire by Member States for another such meeting in 2026.