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Update on the Hand-in-Hand Initiative

Executive summary

This document summarizes recent progress in the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative, with specific reference to:

- the ongoing increase in the overall number of HIH countries to 75 as of mid-February 2025, which reflects the global interest and the demand for larger and more ambitious programming for investments and concrete actions to transform agrifood systems, including three new Regional Initiatives at the Hand-in-Hand Initiative Investment Forum (HIH IF) 2024;
- the third expanded HIH IF took place in October 2024 with 29 Members and five Regional Initiatives presenting their investment opportunities for a total value of USD 15 billion; and
- the ongoing engagements of HIH with investors and development partners through the annual HIH IF, resulting in increasing commitments and ongoing negotiations with investors for a total value to date of USD 9.6 billion in government-led agrifood investments since 2022.

This document builds on information provided in previous reports to the Council. Additional information on the Initiative and details regarding specific country investment plans are available on the HIH webpage and on the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations corporate website, including the Dashboard and the HIH Geospatial Platform.

Suggested action by the Council

The Council is invited to take note of the progress made in the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative. In particular, the Council may wish to:

- a) welcome the increase in demand for support through the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and its Geospatial Platform, innovative tools and approaches; and the increase to 75 Members in HIH, and an additional five countries that have engaged in the use of the HIH tools and approaches;
- b) appreciate the ongoing engagements of HIH with investors through the annual Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum, related increasing commitments and ongoing negotiations with investors for a total value to date of USD 9.6 billion in government-led agrifood investments since 2022;
- c) support the need for increased technical and resource support to Members and its inclusion in the next planned Medium Term Plan; and
- d) welcome the three new HIH Regional Initiatives such as the Amazonia Initiative with the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, the Caribbean Small Island Developing States HIH Initiative with the Caribbean Community, and the Southern Africa HIH Initiative with the Southern African Development Community launched at the HIH Investment Forum 2024.

The Council is invited to provide guidance, as deemed appropriate.

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

Máximo Torero Cullen
Chief Economist
Tel: +39 06570 50869
Email: Maximo.ToreroCullen@fao.org

I. Introduction

1. This document responds to requests made by the Council of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), at its 176th Session, and provides updates on progress and results achieved in the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative.
2. The Director-General announced the Initiative on the sidelines of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, in September 2019. Members meet the criteria to join if they are Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), or food crisis countries (as defined by the Global Network Against Food Crises) and countries with large poor populations.
3. To date, 75 countries have signed on as members of the HIH Initiative:
 - a. **Africa** (38): Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
 - b. **Asia and the Pacific** (16): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.
 - c. **Europe** (2): Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
 - d. **Latin America and the Caribbean** (14): Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru.
 - e. **Near East and North Africa** (5): Iraq, Mauritania, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.
4. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) has recently also held a regional consultation to review Member Nations' interest in HIH and is currently planning on expanding the inclusion of more countries in HIH.
5. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative offers FAO Members and development partners programmatic support and an innovative way of strengthening, expanding and sustaining ambitious national programmes for agrifood systems transformation to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2 and 10. With the country-owned and county-led approach of HIH, Section II of this document focuses on the countries and regions, providing highlights of the major progress made under the HIH through the third edition of HIH Initiative Investment Forum (IF) held at FAO headquarters in October 2024.
6. Twenty-nine countries and five Regional Initiatives presented their investment cases to a global audience at the third edition of HIH IF, for a total value of USD 15 billion, with 115 investment cases and 120 million planned beneficiaries. Three new Regional Initiatives – Amazonia with Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), Caribbean SIDS with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Southern Africa with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) – were launched during the HIH IF 2024.
7. A key innovation and value addition of the HIH IF are the unique matchmaking bilateral meetings in which the engagement of governments with investors are facilitated and arranged by the HIH team, led by governments.
8. Almost 600 requests for matchmaking meetings were received in 2024, a significant increase from the 412 matchmaking meetings in 2023, and 110 matchmaking sessions at the HIH IF in 2022.
9. Since the HIH IF in 2022, USD 1.5 billion of investments have been committed and are under negotiation. From the HIH IF 2023, USD 2.7 billion of resources were committed and are under

negotiation and from the HIH IF 2024, USD 5.4 billion is under negotiation or committed by various investors, including international financial institutions (IFIs), the private sector and governments.

10. Based on the positive experiences of member governments at the HIH IFs (2022, 2023 and 2024), eight national-level HIH Investment Fora have been held and six more are planned in the coming months.

11. HIH also works in synergy with multiple other corporate initiatives, such as the 1000 Digital Villages, One Country One Priority Product, etc. Synergies are also being explored with efforts around the preparation of the Common Country Analysis in support of selected countries, as well as the food systems national pathways in a number of countries.

12. In preparation for the HIH IF 2025, the following countries have been identified to participate and will be supported by HIH: **Africa:** Angola, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Zambia; **Asia and the Pacific:** Bangladesh, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Tuvalu; **Europe:** Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and Paraguay; **Near East and North Africa:** Iraq and Mauritania. In addition, five Regional HIH Initiatives will also be present including the Amazonia, Caribbean SIDS, the Sahel, Southern Africa and the Pacific SIDS Investment Plan.

13. The FAO geospatial agro-informatics platform integrates information technology with earth observation remote sensing, agricultural data management, analysis and application to deliver reliable, timely, high-resolution, documented, integrated location-based information and analysis across diverse sectors and various sources.

14. The platform is built on open-source technologies and is a digital public good. The platform, initially designed to support the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, has grown to become a powerful tool for delivering FAO's work underpinning many applications (27 data explorer sites catering for specific thematic and regional communities), including the following: market-based transformation of agrifood systems, water stewardship, animal disease management, climate-smart agriculture, crop production early warning, ecosystem restoration, global federated integrated soil data, land cover, crop type mapping, crop calendar and phenology, and driving smallholder advisory services.

15. The application offers rich data exploration features, including search and explore, time-series analysis, data comparison across locations and time periods, visualization, geospatial analysis, reports and stories. The platform was continuously enhanced based on user feedback, application requirements, and emerging technologies, including Arabic language support, a virtual reality interface and machine learning capabilities.

16. The platform's thriving community witnessed significant growth (80 percent year-over-year increase): 100 workshops, 175 000 users from 186 countries collectively making 20 billion requests to 2 million layers of geospatial information and 5 000 datasets of data federated from 100 organizations.

17. Section II of this report focuses on those government-led investments in line with the HIH being a government-owned and government-led initiative. Sections III, IV and V of this document refer to the ongoing HIH work on human capacity development, monitoring and communications and the recent External Audit. More details on the country-level progress can be accessed on the HIH Initiative website and the dashboard.

II. Status update on country investments

A. Africa

18. With 38 Members participating in the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, the Africa region is experiencing steady progress and expressing high interest in receiving support from HIH.

19. The new **Southern Africa Initiative** was launched at the HIH IF 2024, co-designed and to be implemented with SADC. The key prioritized agrifood investments presented by SADC focused on

solar powered irrigation, private sector-led investments in solar pumps and, finally, on increased market trade and integration. Matchmaking meetings were held including with IFIs and regional banks as well as investors, and some engagements are already being followed up. The regional programme follows a phased approach and the investments on mechanization in agriculture are to be explored as the programme is developing. A subregional investment forum is planned to be held by mid-2025.

20. The **Sahel Initiative**, which is being implemented with the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel and the Economic Community of West African States leadership, returned to present their shared vision on investments on agrifood systems transformation at the HIH IF 2024, focusing on solar-powered irrigation, small reservoirs and private sector-led investments in solar pumps, as well as on increased market trade and integration. HIH matchmaking meetings were held with negotiations ongoing for engagement with an IFI, a regional/subregional development bank, as well as several investors. A subregional HIH investment forum is provisionally planned to be held in 2025 to progress these negotiations.

21. **Cameroon:** the Government of Cameroon participated in the HIH IF 2023 and in 2024 presenting investment opportunities in the development of rice value chain (irrigated rice, rainfed and low plain rice) and rice-fish culture, in line with the national rice strategy. Seven matchmaking sessions were held with interested partners (potential investors) including IFIs, investors, the private sector and traditional donors. Since the IF 2024, the Government has followed up with several investors engaged through the HIH IF matchmaking meetings, and discussions are ongoing with some partners including the Islamic Development Bank on a new cassava investment (value USD 200 million).

22. The matchmaking bilateral meetings have equally been an opportunity for the Government of Cameroon to discuss the possible support for the development of new value chain opportunities such as potato, soyabean and cashew. To support the mobilization of investment efforts and coordinated actions in line with the country's priorities, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has set up a multistakeholder National Rice Platform. So far, the Platform held meetings twice (on 6 June and 19 November 2024) and the third meeting is scheduled for the end of March 2025.

23. **Comoros:** the HIH and government analysis identified four areas of investments which were presented by the Government during the 2024 IF: banana, fisheries and aquaculture, and poultry development. In total, five matchmaking meetings were held, mainly with regional and international banks, and several engagements are being negotiated.

24. **Eswatini:** in September 2024, the country held an agriculture business and investment forum. Based on the consultations with the Government and HIH analysis, and in line with government priorities, investment cases delivered at the IF 2024 included aquaculture, food processing, grains and a seed multiplication facility. Six matchmaking bilateral meetings were held with IFIs, investors and the private sector during IF 2024, and some follow-up is ongoing. A follow-up investment forum is planned for the first quarter of 2025 where investors who were met by the delegation in Rome will be invited to the country for further engagements.

25. **Gabon:** the Government of Gabon participated in the HIH IF 2024 and presented their investment proposal on the Kango agroprocessing Zone, focused on banana (plantain), cassava, poultry and vegetables. In total, fifteen matchmaking meetings were held during IF 2024. Following the Investment Forum, the delegation who participated met the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of planning and foresight to share the mission report and discuss the proposal for the action plan and follow-up. Negotiations are continuing with partners met at FAO headquarters, and the country is planning to organize a national investment forum in spring 2025.

26. **Kenya:** During the 2024 IF, the country presented investments focused on forage and cotton seed production, maize and silage production, black soldier fly production, pasture storage and warehousing assets, cotton ginning, cake milling and oil production. Twenty-three matchmaking meetings were held, mainly with private companies, follow-up is ongoing with an investment fund on

cotton and animal feed production, and a local private company that has interests in tomato paste production has made further follow-up meeting requests to facilitate their investments in Kenya.

27. **Lesotho:** the Initiative started in 2022. The Government of Lesotho presented their investment cases at the HIH IF 2024 including piggery, poultry, aquaculture and potato. During IF 2024, in total, 13 matchmaking sessions were held with IFIs, associations, the private sector and development partners on prioritized investments and irrigation. Lesotho is also a member of the new regional HIH Initiative for the Southern Africa region.

28. **Madagascar:** the Initiative started in 2023 and the Government, through HIH and in line with government priorities, identified and presented their agrifood investments focused on rice, maize and red meats. Ten bilateral matchmaking meetings were organized with IFIs, associations, the private sector and development partners during IF 2024, and negotiations have started on the presented investments. The Government aims at assessing opportunities for profitable and socially inclusive investments for other value chains in the country utilizing the HIH technical tools.

29. **Nigeria:** the Government of Nigeria presented five investment cases of cassava, tomato, maize, dairy and fisheries in HIH IF 2024, and strong interest was raised at the matchmaking sessions. Seventeen matchmaking sessions were held with IFIs, associations, investors, the private sector and non-profit organizations during IF 2024. Follow-up discussions with a number of banks, bilateral agencies and investors are ongoing, led by the Government, with specific interest expressed in agroforestry carbon credit; furthermore, multinational companies are also interested in the value chains of tomatoes and cereals. In addition, IFIs expressed interest in supporting the Bank of Agriculture in Nigeria on investments in cassava and livestock cases. The Government committed significant resources in the national HIH programme in order to support co-financing and risk reducing interventions. A national investment forum to align national agrifood systems priorities with development partners is tentatively planned for mid-2025.

30. **Rwanda:** the investment cases presented by the Government during IF 2024 included tea, small livestock (piggery and chicken), potato production, avocado, chili and beef production. Ten bilateral meetings were held with interested partners including IFIs, investors, associations, global foundations, the private sector and traditional donors. The event had over 50 participants including development partners, IFIs, governments and the private sector with whom ongoing investments have also been matched and negotiations are ongoing.

31. **South Sudan:** based on the 2023 and 2024 IF, the Government of South Sudan, has successfully negotiated with the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) for potential investments including in rice through the Climate Resilient Agri-Food System Transformation (CRAFT) Programme large investment project. A new expanded investment is being pursued with the AfDB, based on the CRAFT projects mentioned above, and the HIH team has fielded an international partnerships and governance expert through extrabudgetary funding to support the Government's efforts in engaging local and regional private sector investments, linked to the possible interest of International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group in the country.

32. **Uganda:** the Initiative started in 2022. At the 2024 IF, the Government presented their investment cases in dairy processing, animal feed, maize processing and foot-and-mouth disease vaccination facilities. Ten matchmaking meetings were organized with IFIs, traditional donors and the private sector, and follow-up is ongoing.

33. **United Republic of Tanzania:** at the IF 2024, the Government presented their investment cases with a focus on Zanzibar covering seaweed and dairy-focused investments, designed with benefits for women and youth. Thirteen matchmaking sessions were held at the IF 2024 with interested partners including IFIs, the private sector, associations and investors, and follow-up is already underway with multiple Government Ministries, including investment related to carbon credits. Additional support is being planned in support of the Government interest in HIH, focused on Zanzibar but also the mainland of the United Republic of Tanzania through the FAO Technical Co-operation Programme.

34. **Zambia:** the Initiative started in 2022. A large national investment forum was held in September 2024 with multiple Ministries participating, as well as the Zambia Development Authority. Two Ministers participated and 120 participants reviewed and improved the Zambia investment notes. At IF 2024, the Government presented investment cases related to maize, soybean, honey and aquaculture. Sixteen matchmaking sessions were organized with IFIs, traditional donors and the private sector. Engagements with several partners and investors are identified, and related investments are ongoing. A large multinational company has made a significant investment of EUR 32 million in a seed processing plant. This investment will have a multifaceted impact, providing farmers with access to high-quality seeds, as well as critical financing and crop insurance support.

B. Asia and the Pacific

35. Sixteen countries from the Asia and the Pacific region are active members of the HIH Initiative and, based on interest from the governments, the FAO Regional Office is currently exploring the development of a new regional HIH Initiative, focused on rice/climate change. The FAO Regional Office is leading these efforts, which will build on existing work and may be linked to ongoing efforts on climate finance, with IFC and other key partners such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund.

36. **Bhutan:** the HIH investment proposals by the Government of Bhutan at IF 2024 included citrus, quinoa, rainbow trout, black pepper and organic coffee. The country engaged in nine bilateral meetings with key partners, including IFIs; a regional bank expressed interest in a USD 3 million climate-smart agriculture investment. All of these engagements are being followed up by the Government. The Government has also added egg as a HIH commodity with initial investment of USD 2 million through various funding sources under FAO. It was launched by the FAO Director-General and the Prime Minister in February 2025. A private company is also establishing a soil additive plant as the outcome from the national investment forum held in 2024.

37. **Cambodia:** the Government of Cambodia participated in the HIH IF 2023 and presented investment cases in rice, fisheries, cashew and mango at IF 2024. Eleven matchmaking meetings were held, and follow-up engagements are ongoing for financing with a number of private sector partners and multilateral financial institutions. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative has also extended its cooperation with more Ministries and development partners in the country to initiate a blended financing project for fishery-sector climate-change adaptation.

38. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative has been mainstreamed at national level through the cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to convene the first Cambodia Agriculture Forum and Exhibition. Key stakeholders involved in nine prime agriculture value chains will be invited to attend this event, and business matching among investors will be arranged. Cambodia is also one of the countries engaged in the emerging Asia Pacific regional initiative on rice/climate.

39. **Nepal:** a national HIH investment forum was held recently in which almost USD 30 million were committed by the private sector. At the IF 2024, the Government presented their prioritized agrifood investments in large cardamon, potato, aquaculture and Sichuan pepper. Eleven bilateral matchmaking meetings were requested, and negotiations are ongoing with a number of companies, investors and banks. Another national investment forum is planned to take place later in 2025 as the Government has sought FAO's technical support to analyse additional opportunities.

40. **Pakistan:** at IF 2024, the Government of Pakistan presented their prioritized investments in soybean/canola, potato, tea, aquaculture, sesame and grain storages. Ten matchmaking sessions were organized with IFIs, investors and the private sector, as well as with FAO technical divisions. These discussions are likely to lead the initiatives to increase capacities of relevant stakeholders in accessing export markets, strengthening the Government of Pakistan's existing systems on agriculture analytics and promoting opportunities for accessing concessionary finance for Pakistan's private sector.

41. **Papua New Guinea:** working in close collaboration with the Department of Agriculture as well as the Investment Promotion Agency, the Government of Papua New Guinea presented their prioritized agrifood investments based on their special agroprocessing Zones focused on cocoa,

vanilla and coconut at the IF 2024. A follow-up mission is planned by the HIH team in support of the Government's efforts with both interested international investors as well as partners and development banks. A recent investment, valued at USD 60 million by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has been successfully engaged by the Government as part of its upscaling of financing in agrifood systems.

42. **The Philippines:** the Government participated in the HIH IF 2024 and presented their prioritized agrifood investment cases on abaca, bamboo, deep water seaweed and mango processing. With strong interest expressed for matchmaking meetings, 13 bilateral meetings were requested, and negotiations are ongoing with a number of companies and partners. A new cooperation between the Government of the Philippines and Lao People's Democratic Republic was also initiated at the HIH IF, focused on rice. A Memorandum of Understanding has been progressed and will be signed in the coming weeks.

43. **Samoa:** the Government of Samoa identified and presented their prioritized agrifood investment cases in taro, cocoa and coconut at IF 2024. Eight matchmaking sessions were organized with IFIs, multi- and bilateral development partners and investors, including one buyer of agricultural products. In addition, a collaboration with Papua New Guinea on sharing improved coconut planting materials is planned under South-South Cooperation. Follow-up negotiations are also ongoing with a large international cosmetics company who are interested in the identified investments in coconut and refined coconut products.

C. Latin America and the Caribbean

44. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative has strong governments' interest and support at the highest level and, as a result, seven countries and two regional/subregional Initiatives presented their prioritized agrifood investments in the third edition of HIH IF 2024.

45. The new HIH Caribbean SIDS Initiative was launched at the HIH IF 2024, co-designed and implemented with the Caribbean Community and Common Market in a phased approach. CARICOM presented their investments in digitalized irrigation sector, improved water capture, storage and water management, as well as the rehabilitation of irrigation systems. Follow-up engagements are currently ongoing with CARICOM, and a new collaboration for engaging investors has been progressed with the UN Capital Development Fund who have started engaging with an impact investment fund on one of the investments identified. Preparations are also underway with CARICOM on developing new investment plans for the IF 2025.

46. The **Dry Corridor and Arid Zones of the Central American Integration System (SICA) region "Corredor Seco"** regional Initiative. In 2024, SICA presented their prioritized agrifood investments in generating regional public goods to promote technological innovation in agriculture and more effective governance with investments on: agricultural zoning for climate risk; digital soil mapping; strengthening agricultural research institutes in research, development and innovation; micro, small and medium enterprises and digital ecosystems; and integrated water solutions.

47. Eleven matchmaking meetings were held at IF 2024 with potential investors. To date USD 0.3 million were committed, funded by an international green financing institution, and a new negotiation for USD 30.9 million is underway with a regional bank, linked again to green financing. SICA is also in negotiation with a regional development bank for complementary resources for regional public goods of approximately USD 2.3 million.

48. **Amazonia:** at the HIH IF 2024, a new regional initiative in Latin America and the Caribbean was officially presented. The Hand-in-Hand Amazon Bioeconomy Investment Programme was prepared and led by ACTO, which includes Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela. The investment plan proposes enabling public goods and catalysing value chains as interventions to propagate the transition towards a sustainable Amazonian agrifood system.

49. Fourteen matchmaking meetings were organized at IF 2024, with strong interest from the various resource partners, including the private sector and development banks in the investment cases presented. Efforts by ACTO are ongoing with investors on these investment cases with HIH support, including one large investment with an IFI.

50. **Colombia:** with HIH support, the Government identified and presented the investment case focused on the Narinho Pacific province at the HIH IF 2024. With an emphasis on peacebuilding, the investment aims to cover fisheries, infrastructure and connectivity, energy and water, mangrove restoration and cooperative management. Twelve matchmaking meetings were organized at the IF 2024. The Government of Colombia has already committed USD 10.45 million to these investments, and there are ongoing conversations and roundtables planned with bilateral partners and regional banks and IFIs to support the scale-up of the investments in 2025. For the IF 2025, preparations are underway for the development of further investments in the port of Tumaco.

51. **Cuba:** the Government participated in the HIH IF 2024 and presented their prioritized agrifood investments in rice, grains, sugar and fruit chains. Five bilateral matchmaking meetings were requested with the Government and follow-up engagements are ongoing with a large private sector agrifood company on rice, international development partners and some FAO technical experts.

52. **Dominican Republic:** the Government presented their investment case on agro-industrial infrastructure development, strengthening producers' capacity and promotion of productive development and market access. The Government is in negotiation with the World Bank on a potential investment of USD 5.9 million and a number of private sector companies are also engaged. The Government of the Dominican Republic is already engaged with HIH to expand their investment cases for the IF 2025.

53. **Ecuador:** during the IF 2024, the Government of Ecuador presented investment cases focused on expanding the supply of high-growth and sustainable exportable products, as well as developing and strengthening the dairy value chain, aligned with Ecuador's 2024-2025 National Development Plan. Nineteen matchmaking sessions were held with interested partners during IF 2024 and follow-up is ongoing. Recently, USD 5 million were committed to these investments, of which USD 2.8 million funded by the GEF-8 Livestock-Agrifood System Program.

54. **Guatemala:** a participating country since 2022, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative in Guatemala has been incorporated into the public investment system. In 2024 the Initiative focused on supporting two national priorities: expanding access to irrigation infrastructure under the National Irrigation Plan and designing the "Avenues for Good Living Program" under the Presidential Planning Secretariat. Additionally, HIH has been included as a tool to prioritize public investments within the Strategic Guidelines of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Food from 2024 to 2028.

55. During the IF 2024, the Minister for Agriculture participated and presented its investment programme that focused on cocoa, cardamom and coffee value chains. Eleven matchmaking meetings were held with interested partners during IF 2024. Based on government-identified priorities, the national irrigation budget doubled, reaching USD 14.3 million in 2024, and negotiations are ongoing with a development partner who has shown interest in a potential investment of EUR 10 million for improving capacities of strategic stakeholders to access technical and financial resources to support sustainable investments in the sector.

56. **Paraguay:** during HIH IF 2024, the Government presented two investment cases in dairy and bananas. Eleven matchmaking sessions were requested during IF 2024, and discussions with a number of partners and investors are ongoing. USD 25 million was allocated by the Government in January 2024 in support of HIH investments and a new USD 5 million is under negotiation with an IFI for a project that uses HIH tools.

57. **Peru:** at IF 2024 the Government presented their prioritized investment case in Andean avocado, native potato, Andean grains and Andean camelids. Fifteen matchmaking meetings were requested at IF 2024 with one partnership announced with a private company on native potato processing/value addition. This has progressed to implementation in February 2025 (see also the Peru HIH webpage) and follow-up is ongoing with several potential investors and partners.

D. Near East and North Africa

58. **Iraq:** the Government of Iraq had prioritized the upscaling of proven interventions in lamb fattening and dairy at the HIH IF 2024, and five bilateral matchmaking meetings were requested with engagements initiated with several investors, including a development bank and bilateral development partners. Follow-up engagements are ongoing with the Government's request to expand the investment plans in preparation for the IF 2025.

59. **Mauritania:** the Initiative started in 2023. In line with Government's priorities, the HIH supported the targeting of specific territories for agrifood investments. The Government participated in the HIH IF 2024 and presented their investment cases in irrigated barley and animal forage as well as dairy. Nine matchmaking meetings were arranged, including with IFIs, and follow-up meetings are being arranged to discuss the presented investment cases as well as on horticulture.

III. Capacity Development

60. Human capital development in support of Members is at the core of HIH. The Hand-in-Hand is collaborating closely with several technical divisions, such as the Digital FAO and Agro-Informatics Division (CSI), the Statistics Division (ESS) and the Agrifood Economics Division (ESA), specifically on the now renamed Environmental eXternalities ACcounting Tool (EX-ACT), the online carbon accounting tool, in order to expand national capacity for the use and application of these tools. To date, 1 064 people have been trained under HIH in the Geospatial Platform and 888 people trained in advanced Stochastic Frontier Analysis.

61. As per feedback provided by partners and investors, from the experience of HIH Investment Forum in October 2024, climate-smart investments will be emphasized for the IF 2025. Three training courses on EX-ACT are planned for 2025 in multiple languages (English, French and Spanish), focused on the identified countries which will participate in the HIH IF 2025.

62. Two subregional trainings on the HIH Geospatial Platform are also being planned, one for the Pacific Islands, and one for the Southern Africa region. Both are being developed in close consultation with the respective Subregional Offices and will be tailored to the needs of each subregion, not only to optimize Member Nations' capacity enhancement, but also to facilitate future use of Geospatial tools to engage more investments.

63. Planning is also underway to expand the joint HIH/CSI/DataLab and EX-ACT booth to be positioned in the FAO atrium during the IF 2025. The booth registered a strong demand from HIH IF visitors last year with over 1 000 users from countries engaging and seeking information and demonstrations on the range of HIH tools and approaches.

IV. HIH Dashboard and Communication

64. The Hand-in-Hand dashboard provides an overview of the total number of countries engaged in the HIH (75 as of February 2025) and presents their progress in the HIH approach. The development of a programme dashboard has advanced in terms of data quality and automation within FAO's corporate systems, such as the Country Office Information Network for real-time monitoring and reporting.

65. Updated HIH infographic and outreach materials were developed and have been disseminated to Members. These were used extensively for FAO's briefings on the World Food Forum, as well as in engagements with investors and the private sector. The HIH IF webpage has also been expanded and includes all the country investment cases from the 2022, 2023 and 2024 IFs, and the IF 2025 webpage will be launched soon. The webpage also includes a "News" section and media reports on follow-up events, such as national investment fora organized by national governments and supported by HIH and investments, such as in Peru on value addition for native potato.

66. The HIH team continues to explore collaboration with the FAO Office of SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs (OSL) to develop communication materials around several HIH success stories in SIDS.

V. Planning a new methodology to monitor and evaluate the impact of Hand-in-Hand

67. Internal consultations were organized by the HIH team to explore options for low-cost and geospatial-based evaluation of the HIH at country level, in consultation with CSI, ESS and the [Rural Transformation and Gender Equality \(ESP\)](#) Division. Discussions focused on how to effectively map and monitor changes in poverty, including geospatial data primarily, using biophysical changes as well as in cropping and livestock patterns and infrastructure.

68. A detailed concept note¹ on this new approach has been developed and posted on the HIH website.

¹ See the concept note “Leveraging Earth Observation Data to Monitor and Evaluate the Hand-in-Hand Initiative” at: <https://data.apps.fao.org/hihi-dashboard/documents/Concept%20Note%20for%20M&E02012025.pdf>