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FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030 builds on more than a decade of progress, stemming from the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with the Private Sector (2013) and the [FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021–2025](#). This new iteration marks a renewed, action-oriented and forward-looking approach to strengthening partnerships with the private sector in support of the FAO *four betters*.
- The Strategy is the outcome of an inclusive and extensive consultation process and builds upon: (i) recommendations from FAO Members; (ii) feedback from private sector actors; (iii) lessons learned from FAO personnel, technical units and from Regional, Subregional and Country Offices; and (iv) recommendations from other United Nations agencies, particularly those based in Rome.
- Following the extensive consultations with the Members through the Regional Groups, as well as a series of ad hoc membership consultations, the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030 ensures an evidence-based approach to private sector cooperation, that is responsive to global and local challenges, and reflective of diverse stakeholder perspectives.
- Building on the lessons learned from the implementation of the previous strategies, the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030 introduces an action-oriented and impact-driven framework emphasizing decentralized engagement, streamlined operations, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure measurable outcomes and alignment with FAO’s mandate.
- The Strategy presents a set of key innovations and strategic shifts designed to enhance the efficiency, agility, and accountability of private sector partnerships. These include: (i) expanded definition of the private sector; (ii) prioritized thematic areas of intervention; (iii) streamlined due diligence processes; and (iv) strengthened accountability mechanisms.
- This Strategy includes: (1) a strong vision for collaborative private sector engagement; (2) core principles for engagement; (3) clear definitions of the private sector; (4) new and existing structures of engagement; (5) a focus on key strategic priority areas; (6) an expanded fit-for-purpose due diligence; and (7) strengthened accountability, transparency and monitoring tools. The document is also complemented by the main actions required to operationalize this Strategy.
- It should be noted that enhanced collaboration with the private sector under this Strategy is fully aligned to FAO’s intergovernmental nature. Accordingly: (i) FAO Members remain the primary interlocutors of the Organization; and (ii) the Strategy does not affect FAO’s Basic Texts, rules, procedures, or the composition of its Governing Bodies.

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review and provide guidance on the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030.

Draft Advice

The Committee:

- **reviewed and endorsed the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030;**
- **welcomed the extensive consultation and participatory process that led to its preparation; and**
- **recommended the Strategy for adoption by the Council.**

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I. Introduction

1. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) envisions a future where participatory, innovative and accountable partnerships drive the transformation of agrifood systems, enabling *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life* (the *four betters*), leaving no one behind. The private sector plays a vital role in this vision, bringing innovation, knowledge, expertise, human capital and investments to the global effort to achieve FAO's mandate. This is a pivotal moment to build on the momentum and deepen collaboration with actors from the private sector to deliver meaningful, lasting impact for the transformation towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.
2. At the same time, the global food security landscape is becoming increasingly fragile. Climate shocks, conflict and wars, trade disruptions, economic instability and financing challenges have exposed structural weaknesses in agrifood systems, making it harder for governments alone to ensure food security and sustainable agricultural development. These pressures are compounded by the spread of pests and diseases, antimicrobial resistance, water scarcity and extreme weather events. In this context, a new paradigm of collaboration is urgently needed – one that is grounded in shared responsibility, innovation and leaving no one behind.
3. FAO's engagement with the private sector has evolved significantly over the past two decades. This evolution reflects an organizational culture change, from ad hoc and cautious interactions to more strategic, proactive and long-lasting collaboration with the private sector. The initial [Principles and Guidelines for FAO Cooperation with the Private Sector](#) were established in 2000, laying the foundation for structured collaboration. This framework was thoroughly reviewed through an in-depth process beginning in 2010, culminating in the approval of the first FAO Strategy for Partnerships with the Private Sector in 2013. An [independent evaluation](#) of the 2013 Strategy was undertaken in 2019. Building on this and on the evolution of the private sector function, the [FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021–2025](#) introduced a more proactive and catalytic role for FAO, setting a clear path towards innovative, principle-based engagements that deliver meaningful impact while respecting UN cooperation guidelines. “Enhanced collaboration with the private sector under this Strategy is based on the understanding that: i) given the intrinsic nature of its membership and governance and FAO's status as an Intergovernmental Organization of the United Nations System, the main interlocutors of FAO are the Members; and ii) the Basic Texts, rules, procedures or composition of FAO's Governing Bodies are not changed or affected by this Strategy” (p. 3).ⁱ
4. The FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030 builds on the progress of previous strategies and aligns with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31. Developed through an inclusive and consultative process, the Strategy incorporates lessons learned from past experiences, feedback from Members and private sector actors, and insights from other UN agencies, particularly the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs). It is designed to be action-oriented, evidence-based and focused on delivering tangible and timely results on the ground, built on lessons learned from previous partnerships and strategies.
5. This Strategy promotes a culture of co-creation and innovation, emphasizing efficiency, expediency and agility as fundamental elements. It encourages the development of inclusive models that empower small-scale producers, women, youth and Indigenous Peoples and foster equitable access to markets, access to technologies and value chains, and highlights the need to overcome the systemic barriers to their participation. It supports inclusive digital transformation and fosters sustainable investment and practices. The Strategy also prioritizes sustainable production practices and climate resilience, encouraging private sector investment in nature-positive solutions, climate-smart agriculture and responsible resource management.
6. In response to growing financial pressures and shifting donor priorities, the Strategy calls for innovative financing mechanisms, including blended finance and impact investing, to mobilize private capital in support of development outcomes. It emphasizes the importance of research, development, and knowledge sharing. The Strategy encourages private sector participation in policy dialogue and multistakeholder governance processes to ensure coherence, transparency, and alignment with national, regional and global priorities.

7. FAO's renewed approach is anchored in principle-based and purpose-driven collaboration that delivers measurable impact, while upholding the established guidelines governing cooperation between the UN and the business sector.ⁱⁱ This approach reinforces due diligence, risk assessment and management and oversight mechanisms. It clarifies the principles that guide engagement and broadens the spectrum of collaborative modalities. These enhancements are designed to complement existing formal mechanisms and more accurately reflect the diversity and dynamism of private sector contributions.

8. Through this Strategy, FAO positions itself as an enabling partner in redefining the nature of collaboration to support the transformation of agrifood systems. It seeks to more effectively capture and elevate the private sector's contributions to the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and the *four betters*. In doing so, the Strategy underscores the crucial role of private sector actors in driving systemic change across all dimensions of sustainability.

9. Ultimately, the Strategy aspires to render private sector engagement more participatory, adaptive and results-oriented at all levels. It aims to ensure that partnerships not only advance FAO's mandate but also contribute substantively to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

A. Lessons learned from implementation of the 2021–2025 Strategy

10. **To be more effective in private sector engagement:** FAO needs to foster a more flexible, market-responsive approach while staying true to its mission of agriculture sustainability and food security. By taking stock of the lessons learned, FAO can become a more agile, collaborative, and impactful partner for the private sector, driving sustainable transformation of agrifood systems.

11. **Institutional evolution:** FAO's approach to private sector engagement has undergone a significant transformation, reflecting a broader institutional evolution in its role and strategic orientation. FAO is increasingly recognized as a trusted technical partner and neutral convener capable of fostering collaborative solutions to complex global challenges. This shift has enabled more strategic, long-term partnerships that are anchored in mutual benefit, aligned objectives and a shared commitment to sustainable development. This institutional evolution underscores FAO's growing capacity to serve not only as a catalyst for change but also as a long-term partner in agrifood systems transformation.

12. **Culture change:** FAO continues to engage in a significant culture change vis-à-vis private sector collaborations by adopting new ways of working with the private sector and recognizing the value the private sector could bring to the delivery of the *four betters*. The FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030 reinforces the Organization's internal culture change by promoting a shift from risk aversion to effective risk management in partnerships. It encourages the use of high-impact collaborative engagement and fosters a more agile, results-oriented mindset. This includes a shift towards efficiency in decision-making and expediency in engagement processes, ensuring timely action aligned with strategic priorities. Strengthened internal support and capacity building aim to embed a culture that is both compliance-driven and facilitative, thereby empowering its personnel to engage more proactively and strategically with private sector partners.

13. **Expansion of engagement across the FAO Strategic Framework:** FAO has significantly broadened its engagement with the private sector in support of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and its strategic aspirations of the *four betters*. Private sector partnerships include collaborations with agribusinesses, financial institutions, industry associations, micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), and philanthropic organizations.

14. **Policy influence through partnerships:** FAO's engagement with the private sector has played a pivotal role in shaping policy development, particularly in key areas such as sustainable natural resource management, environmental resilience and agrifood systems transformation. By partnering with a diverse range of private sector actors, FAO has strengthened its capacity to integrate innovative, market-driven insights into policy processes. These collaborations have reinforced the Organization's technical leadership and convening role, leading to the creation of multistakeholder

platforms that facilitate dialogue, promote shared solutions and address complex systemic challenges across the agrifood sector.

15. **Transforming value chains:** Private sector partnerships have helped link small-scale producers to a broader network of market actors including input providers, aggregators, processors, and distributors. These collaborations often combine technical assistance, digital innovation, finance, and data services to improve productivity, sustainability, and competitiveness throughout agrifood value chains, delivering tangible and timely results at the community and national levels.

16. **Tailored regional approaches:** FAO's Regional and Country Offices have played a crucial role in customizing private sector engagement to local contexts on focus areas such as smallholder finance and youth entrepreneurship, rural development, climate adaptation, digital innovation and market access, agritech and water management, sustainability standards, and trade facilitation.

II. Key challenges

17. **Enhancing FAO's private sector engagement:** To strengthen engagement approaches at FAO, the Organization must further improve its partnership structure, resources, culture and processes, as has emerged from the lessons learned. By adopting a more flexible, market-responsive approach – while staying committed to sustainability as well as food security and nutrition– FAO can become a more agile and effective partner in driving global agrifood systems transformation.

18. **Private sector engagement has evolved organically across FAO:** The engagement efforts at FAO have comprised a broad array of private sector actors across technical units, regions and countries, leading to a diverse set of partnerships. These efforts have largely emerged independently and reactively, rather than strategically, resulting in an engagement landscape that is rich but fragmented and difficult to scale up systematically. While collaboration has expanded across the Organization, the lack of a coordinated and systemic approach has limited the scalability and coherence of successful models. To maximize the impact and long-term sustainability of a private sector collaboration, a more integrated and strategic approach that aligns efforts across FAO's technical and decentralized structure is essential.

19. **Value chain approach as a catalyst for strategic private sector partnerships:** FAO recognizes that agrifood systems transformative partnerships need to be co-created, grounded in mutual benefit, and designed around the structure and dynamics of food value chains. The adoption of a value chain lens in developing private sector partnerships has improved alignment and impact. By ensuring alignment of private sector capabilities with country-specific needs and development goals, FAO is better positioned to facilitate transformative partnerships that contribute meaningfully to resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

20. **Regionally or nationally grounded engagement has proven to be effective and inclusive:** Experience has shown that the most effective partnerships are those developed at regional or national levels, where engagement strategies can be tailored to local realities. Experiences in FAO's Decentralized Offices globally show that Regional Offices are well-positioned to identify entry points, respond to local market dynamics and engage a mix of actors – from multinational agribusinesses to youth-led startups – based on contextual needs and capacities to promote regional and national priorities.

21. **Need for a dynamic risk management approach:** FAO has strengthened its due diligence and evidence-based risk assessment procedures to ensure safeguards while enabling engagement and maximizing partnership benefits. FAO regularly reviews its due diligence, risk assessment and internal partnership approval processes to streamline workflows and ensure fit-for-purpose application.

22. **Building skills and capacities for effective engagement:** FAO's technical expertise is well recognized. Efforts must concentrate on capacity development of FAO personnel to build internal capacity in partnership management and negotiation, to foster more strategic collaborations.

23. **FAO's value proposition:** FAO's value to the private sector lies in its ability to be a neutral convener supporting alignment with companies' core business priorities – such as strengthening food value chains, enabling innovation, and giving support to operating policies and regulatory environments. Recognizing and communicating this distinct value proposition is key to building sustainable partnerships. FAO's normative work, including sustainability guidance and standards, can be instrumental for the private sector to drive business operations towards sustainability goals.
24. **Sustained strategic, long-term partnerships:** FAO would need to capitalize on longer-term partnerships that are integrated into country programmes and global initiatives and enable sustainable transformation across agrifood systems.
25. **Outreach and visibility for sustainable private sector partnerships:** Effective outreach and visibility can play pivotal roles in FAO's collaboration with the private sector. The Organization should expand its outreach to diverse private sector actors, presenting FAO's mission, expertise and objectives in a way that resonates with a diverse array of private sector stakeholders. Building awareness, understanding and trust among potential partners is vital for fostering productive and sustainable partnerships that contribute to the development of resilient agrifood systems.
26. **Enhanced role of the private sector function within FAO:** Institutional knowledge on private sector partnerships is critical to promote and enable the establishment of sustainable and transformative partnerships in support of the *four betters* in line with country and regional level priorities. The services provided globally by the private sector function within FAO have expanded, going beyond strategic advice and guidance on the processes, to being an active player in negotiations with the partner and actively shaping the engagement and its outcomes.

III. FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030

A. *The vision: What we need to achieve together*

27. The FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030 builds upon the vision set out in the previous Strategy 2021–2025. The overall vision is *for FAO's private sector engagement to bring about transformative change and innovation, as well as measurable sustainable impact and benefits, to meet our aspiration of leaving no one behind through efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life.*¹ The Strategy will serve not only as a roadmap for engagement but also as a driver of internal culture change within FAO. It will foster a shift towards a more action-oriented and evidence-based approach, encouraging agility, efficiency, and expediency in engagement development and implementation. This cultural transformation aims to embed a mindset that is not only compliant and risk-managed but also proactive, results-driven and adaptable to the dynamic realities of agrifood systems.
28. FAO envisages that its private sector engagements will go beyond traditional partnerships – focusing on strategic, high impact collaborations that scale up innovation and accelerate multistakeholder efforts. These engagements will promote country-owned and country-led innovative solutions.
29. With this vision, FAO reinforces its commitment to working with the private sector as an equal partner in achieving its mandate.

B. *Principles for engagement*

30. FAO's engagement with private sector partners is guided by clear and well-considered principles which remain anchored in the updated Strategy. The principles are embedded throughout the implementation of this Strategy, particularly in the review process for private sector partnerships,

¹ The aspiration is explained in detail under the *Reviewed Strategic Framework 2022-31*
<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/62e91f34-65db-448f-af6e-2a5c0ec2667c/content>

as well as in the development of appropriate legal instruments and mechanisms/modalities for engagement.²

31. Engagements should:

- a) demonstrate a meaningful contribution to FAO's mandate, goals and mission, as well as to the national development goals of its Members;
- b) respect the values and guiding principles of FAO and the United Nations;
- c) not compromise FAO's neutrality, impartiality, integrity, independence, credibility or reputation;
- d) be effectively managed in order to avoid conflicts of interest and mitigate other risks to FAO;
- e) demonstrate a contribution to FAO's mandate, goals and mission, as well as to the national development goals of its Members;
- f) respect the intergovernmental nature of FAO and the decision-making authority of its Members, as outlined in FAO's Constitution;
- g) support and enhance, without compromise, the neutral and independent scientific and evidence-based approach that underpins FAO's work;
- h) protect FAO from any undue influence, especially in processes related to the formulation and application of policies, norms and standards;
- i) be conducted based on transparency, openness, accountability, integrity and mutual respect; and
- j) maximize local-level development impact and beneficiaries, particularly the smallholder farmers and their associations, as well as youth and women, respecting the principles of "leaving no one behind" and "do not harm".

32. Respecting the principles for engagement mentioned above, all activities of partnerships are aligned with national priorities and with FAO's mandate and the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. Partnerships are driven by real needs and demands on the ground. Joint initiatives with partners are developed through close and prior consultation with local communities and Indigenous Peoples, with the clear objectives of achieving Zero Hunger, eradicating poverty, particularly rural poverty, reducing inequalities, increasing decent rural employment, and improving access for smallholders to land and other natural resources, services, finance and markets, etc. These efforts aim to enhance livelihoods and protect the environment while preserving biodiversity and soil fertility.

C. Definition of the private sector

33. For the purposes of this Strategy, FAO considers the private sector to encompass a broad array of entities, ranging from farmers, fishers, foresters, livestock herders and MSMEs – including their group organizations, cooperatives and social enterprises – to large firms, both domestic and multinational companies, and philanthropic foundations.

34. This Strategy takes into account industry and trade associations, as well as consortia, multistakeholder platforms and networks that represent private sector interests. Any consortium, entity or foundation largely funded or governed by private entities will be considered part of the private sector.³ Academia and research institutions are not covered by this Strategy.⁴

35. More specifically, FAO engages with the following entities, among others:

² FAO may develop, as required, other legal documents applicable for partnerships with the private sector beyond the existing set (memorandum of understanding [MOU], letter of intent, etc.) to tailor to specific needs and requirements for the expanded areas of engagement, which will be guided by the principles for engagement.

³ This refers to entities established under national laws as for-profit enterprises.

⁴ Partnerships with academic and research institutions and with civil society are managed separately and are outside the scope of this Strategy. The importance of all non-government institutions for FAO is noted.

- a) **State-owned enterprises (SOEs)⁵:** These entities, while holding public ownership and governance, are considered part of the private sector, when they are established and operate under private law.
- b) **State-participated enterprises (SPEs)⁶:** State-participated enterprises are similarly considered part of the private sector.
- c) **Farmers and farmers' organizations⁷:** Farmers (including small-scale and family farmers) and farmers' organizations are important constituents, not only as private sector entities and agents of change, but also as beneficiaries of private sector engagement. FAO is committed to facilitating the advancement of the UN Decade on Family Farming and continues to prioritize its work focusing on family farmers, small-scale fishers and foresters. As part of its mandate, FAO works to ensure adequate representation and participation of producers' organizations at FAO meetings and processes to ensure their voices are considered and reflected.
- d) **Producers' organizations and cooperatives:** Producers' organizations and cooperatives play a pivotal role in empowering farmers, fishers and foresters, helping them to access markets, technologies and financial services, but also in boosting their productivity and capacity to innovate.
- e) **Micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs):** Micro-, small- and medium-sized agrifood and rural non-farm enterprises, including start-ups, play a critical role in achieving food security and eradicating poverty. FAO promotes the development of MSMEs as key drivers in realizing the socio-economic potential of the agrifood and rural non-farm sectors, with special emphasis on youth- and women-led businesses.
- f) **Large national and multinational companies:** Large firms (including large national and multinational companies) and multinational corporations and companies have developed bilateral private sector partnerships with FAO on a broad range of thematic topics.
- g) **Financial institutions:** Commercial banks, non-bank financial institutions, microfinance institutions, insurance companies and various types of private investment funds, such as private equity, impact investment and socially responsible investment funds, and other private investment institutions, play a critical role in improving the investment process and capitalizing on the potential of innovative finance to de-risk and mobilize private investments.
- h) **Multilateral development banks (MDBs) and national development banks⁸:** These entities provide financial and technical assistance for economic development, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The MDBs comprise international financial institutions owned by Member Nations. The national development banks are government-backed financial institutions established to support the economic development of a country by providing short- and long-term financing and investment for projects that contribute to national priorities such as infrastructure, industrial growth, innovation, job creation and social development.
- i) **Industry, trade associations and private sector consortia⁹:** Industry, trade associations and consortia enable FAO to achieve greater impact through collaborations with a range of

⁵ Engagements with state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are subject to a specific ad hoc due diligence process.

⁶ Engagements with state-participated enterprises (SPEs) are subject to a specific ad hoc due diligence process.

⁷ FAO tends to consider small-scale producer organizations under the scope of civil society, whereas commercial food producers are usually treated as private sector. However, the division is not always clear-cut. Therefore, these organizations may be considered on a case-by case basis to determine under which strategy they fall more appropriately.

⁸ Engagements with multilateral development banks and national development banks are subject to a specific ad hoc due diligence process.

⁹ The World Economic Forum, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and UN Global Compact are examples of the entities with which FAO has been engaging with under the 2013 Strategy.

committed, like-minded stakeholders that have the capacity to scale up for impact in terms of achieving food security and nutrition.

- j) **Philanthropic and private sector foundations:** Philanthropic and private sector foundations play a pivotal role in achieving the 2030 Agenda and are an important source of financing for development.

D. Definition of engagements

36. FAO engages with the private sector and the broader business community through a range of modalities, each involving a distinct role for the Organization. These interactions span from informal exchanges and knowledge-sharing platforms to fully developed partnerships that may include financial contributions. Regardless of the modality, all engagements aim to support shared objectives through dialogue, collaboration or co-investment. This approach aligns with the definition of partnership outlined in the FAO Organization-wide Strategy on Partnerships (2012) and reaffirmed in the [Transformative Partnerships Guidance \(2023\)](#): “Cooperation and collaboration between FAO units and external parties in joint or coordinated action for a common purpose. It involves a relationship where all parties make a contribution to the output and the achievement of the objectives rather than a solely financial relationship” (p. 1).ⁱⁱⁱ

37. To ensure clarity and consistency, FAO groups its private sector engagements into two broad categories: formal partnerships and informal or collaborative engagements. These categories reflect the degree of structure, legal formality, and mutual obligations involved in each type of interaction.

E. Definition of formal engagements or partnerships

38. Formal partnerships are structured collaborations between FAO and private sector entities that are governed by formal legal instruments, such as MOUs, LOIs, or other binding agreements. These partnerships are established to achieve clearly defined objectives, with roles, responsibilities and contributions explicitly outlined and mutually agreed upon.

F. Definition of collaborative engagements

39. Collaborative engagements are structured yet non-binding interactions between FAO and private sector actors, designed to advance shared goals through mutual learning, co-creation, and trust-building. These engagements are not governed by formal legal instruments but are guided by shared principles, aligned objectives, and mutual goals. They may include joint ideation, pilot initiatives, or technical exchanges, including through multistakeholder platforms without requiring formal agreements.

G. Why partner with the private sector?

40. FAO recognizes the unique role of the private sector in innovation, trade, finance, job creation and investment and its ability to impact upon agrifood systems transformation at scale, while promoting partnerships that are action-oriented, evidence-based, and focused on achieving tangible and timely results for agrifood systems transformation. FAO has a strong interest in increasing its engagement with the private sector to avail of this potential and to better respond to Members’ needs.

41. Among other aspects, FAO envisions that such engagements will:

- a) improve understanding of development issues, with a view to improving the design of solutions, taking into account the associated trade-offs;
- b) promote economic and social inclusion;
- c) facilitate equitable access to value chains and more profitable markets;
- d) support and scale up innovation;
- e) mobilize scientific and evidence-based expertise;
- f) play a catalytic role in changing the ways in which businesses operate and invest in food and agricultural systems;

- g) develop the capacities of smallholder farmers and MSMEs;
- h) advocate for policy and institutional change;
- i) contribute to adjustments in private sector priorities and business strategies which incorporate and promote sustainability practices;
- j) scale up financing for agrifood systems actors and investment in agrifood systems transformation to close key financing gaps;
- k) generate data that can help accelerate innovation and evidence-based decision-making;
- l) support the private sector to recognize its social responsibility to contribute to enhanced food security and improved nutrition of the population through sustainable forms of production that minimize the impact on the environment; and
- m) create employment opportunities and raise the level of income/improve livelihoods.

42. While recognizing the risk of undue influence by the private sector, FAO's normative work can benefit greatly from private sector knowledge, data, technology and innovation. Private sector partnerships can generate real-time knowledge and data, market intelligence and best practices, and facilitate the effective dissemination of information both nationally and globally.

H. Why should the private sector partner with FAO?

43. Many private sector firms and associations are demonstrating a growing commitment to aligning their business strategies, practices and investments with the values and objectives of FAO. Private sector actors are seeking the expertise of FAO, which can provide guidance on sustainable and socially responsible business practices.

44. FAO's history of private sector engagement suggests that the private sector considers the Organization as:

- a) a global leader in food and agriculture and a knowledge broker for governments;
- b) a "matchmaking" hub, bringing Members and relevant private sector entities together around shared priorities and investments;
- c) an independent, neutral, objective and honest broker of multidisciplinary alliances, able to facilitate communication between governments and the private sector, together with other non-state actors (NSAs)¹⁰;
- d) an advocate for innovation and digitalization in sustainable food and agriculture, management of natural resources to ensure food security and nutrition, the advancement of sustainable development, and the fostering of rural development worldwide, particularly for smallholder farmers;
- e) a provider of global norms and standards and a custodian of global policies, international treaties, codes of conduct and other instruments,¹¹ providing appropriate international standards that can be used by the private sector to improve development-related activities; and
- f) a mobilizer of public and private networks, supporting the reinforcement of data, information, and knowledge through its ability to rally and convene diverse stakeholders.

¹⁰ Three categories of NSAs are identified: private sector; civil society; and academic and research organizations. These follow the definitions under the Organization-wide Strategy on Partnerships, and the specific ones for FAO's Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021–2025 <http://www.fao.org/3/nd961en/nd961en.pdf> and Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations <http://www.fao.org/3/I3443E/i3443e.pdf>. The categorization and references are defined in the Administrative Circular 2021/07.

¹¹ Examples include the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) (FAO, 2012); the CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS, 2014); the Agreement on Port State Measures (FAO, 2016), the Voluntary Code of Conduct for food loss and waste reduction (FAO, 2022); and the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (CFS, 2021).

I. Why private sector engagement matters: Outcomes and benefits

45. The overall goal of this Strategy is to enhance engagement with the private sector in FAO's work, including at the decentralized level as "One FAO" to work towards more long-term sustainable solutions. More concretely, the desired outcomes of increased and more strategic collaborations between FAO and the private sector should include the following:

- a) Private sector partners, especially MSMEs in Small Island Developing States and Least Developed and Landlocked Developing Countries, are engaged in sustainable agrifood systems development, helping to revitalize rural economies and ensuring the economic participation of the poorest and most vulnerable stakeholders.
- b) Short- and long-term transformational and shared-value multisectoral partnerships with the private sector, such as the Hand-in-Hand (HiH) Initiative,¹² are established in response to specific beneficiary-focused needs, in line with the priorities of national governments.
- c) Partnerships and engagements with a focus on innovation, new technologies and new ways of working result in cost-effective, sustainable and scalable solutions to long-standing development challenges.
- d) Micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) have better access to finance and investment, while business environments are more sustainable for financial institutions and investors, drawing on FAO's expertise and international instruments for sustainability, such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Agrifood Systems.¹³
- e) Appropriate evidence-based policy incentive mechanisms are in place to orient the private sector towards greater sustainability.
- f) Private sector businesses are better aligned with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, and more committed to decreasing their environmental footprint and impact, sustaining global biodiversity and ecosystem services, reducing their impact on climate and ensuring sustainability.
- g) Private sector data and knowledge are increasingly more available and accessible through public-good repositories.

J. Guiding pillars

46. The Strategy builds on the pillars Connect, Support, and Sustain – first introduced in the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021–2025 – offering a more refined, impact-oriented framework for engaging with the private sector. These pillars reflect a strategic shift towards more proactive, participatory, and impactful engagement with the private sector.

47. FAO will proactively continue to **connect** with partners through diverse mechanisms, including the CONNECT Portal – a digital platform dedicated for managing partnerships transparently – and the informal Private Sector Advisory Group (PSAG), a forum to gather the views and suggestions of a wide and diverse range of private sector actors to support the implementation of the Strategy.

¹² Read about the HiH Initiative at www.fao.org/hand-in-hand/en

¹³ This is not an exhaustive list. Other examples include the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries (VG SSF); the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management; the International Code of Conduct for the Sustainable use and Management of Fertilizers; the Codex Alimentarius – International Food Standards (FAO/World Health Organization [WHO]); and the FAO/Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains, etc. FAO encourages private sector partners to consider adopting CFS policy instruments, given their voluntary nature, including CFS's Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (FAO).

48. To **support** this deeper collaboration with the private sector, FAO is enhancing its internal operational model with innovative tools, updated policy frameworks, and improved guidance for its personnel. These updates aim to streamline internal processes, such as risk assessment, facilitate due diligence, and provide practical resources to ensure that partnerships are built on transparency, accountability and mutual value.

49. Crucially, the Strategy seeks to **sustain** meaningful partnerships by embedding robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. FAO will track and share results aligned with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, ensuring that partnerships are assessed based on tangible impact. Through improved information sharing, annual reporting, and accessible knowledge products, FAO will scale up successful models of engagement and position itself as a trusted convener of various stakeholders to spearhead transformative private sector collaboration.

K. Structures for engagement with the private sector

50. FAO's priority partnership areas with the private sector include:

- a) **Leveraging the agrifood systems agenda:** Agrifood systems remain one of the most critical entry points for accelerating economic growth and progress. FAO is strengthening its role in leading global and regional coalitions that support the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems. The HiH Initiative exemplifies this approach by facilitating targeted investments and partnerships that drive long-term food security and economic growth.
- b) **Scaling up science, technology, and innovation:** The transformation of agrifood systems depends on greater investment in science, technology and innovation. FAO continues to enhance its engagement with the private sector to accelerate the adoption of inclusive digital solutions, precision agriculture, biotechnology, and climate-smart innovations that can improve productivity, sustainability, and resilience across the agrifood sector.
- c) **Partnering for healthy diets and to eradicate all forms of malnutrition:** FAO is committed to strengthening partnerships with private sector actors, research institutions, and consumer organizations to promote healthy, sustainable diets and combat malnutrition, including obesity. Increased engagement with food producers, retailers, and agribusinesses can help shape nutrition-sensitive food environments and ensure greater access to safe, nutritious and affordable food for all.
- d) **Facilitating more and better investment:** FAO continues to expand its efforts to promote public and private investments as key drivers for scaling up technical expertise, sustainable solutions, and inclusive business models. The focus remains on fostering responsible investments that support resilient and sustainable agrifood systems, while leveraging blended finance mechanisms to de-risk investments and mobilize private capital.
- e) **Promoting rural development and eradicating rural poverty:** FAO continues to expand strategic partnerships to support rural development and tackle poverty, inequality, and food insecurity. Through the HiH Initiative, FAO facilitates inclusive investments in rural areas, supporting smallholder farmers, MSMEs, women and youth. Emergency- and resilience-related private sector collaborations will also be further developed to strengthen resilience, particularly within the technical areas of FAO's mandate such as transboundary animal diseases, locusts, droughts and floods, including the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.
- f) **Capitalizing on data, non-traditional data sources and data science:** FAO continues to expand its data-driven approaches by integrating multisectoral data from diverse sources for real-time analysis, forecasting, and decision-making. This includes leveraging data and non-conventional data sources, such as social media analytics, remote sensing, artificial intelligence and open-access data platforms to enhance early warning systems, improve food security monitoring, and strengthen resilience-building efforts in agriculture.
- g) **Ensuring environmental sustainability, biodiversity mainstreaming and climate resilience in food and agricultural systems:** As agrifood systems face increasing climate

challenges, private sector innovation and investment are essential to reducing environmental footprints, mainstreaming biodiversity and strengthening resilience. FAO is working closely with its partners to scale up access to climate finance opportunities, particularly through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF), supporting initiatives that drive low-carbon, climate-adaptive and sustainable agrifood solutions.

- h) **Addressing food and water crises:** FAO plays a key leadership role in preventing, preparing for, and responding to food crises, including those caused by climate shocks, transboundary pests and diseases and global health emergencies. FAO remains committed to sustainable water management, recognizing that water scarcity and mismanagement are key drivers of food insecurity. Additionally, FAO promotes the One Health approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, plants, animals and ecosystems. This integrated approach is critical to addressing the root causes of food and water crises, ensuring long-term resilience and sustainability in agrifood systems.

L. Areas of collaboration

51. **Policy dialogue:** FAO supports the participation of the private sector in multistakeholder policy dialogue related to agriculture, the environment, natural resources, food security, and nutrition under FAO's mandate. Participation by the private sector provides a different viewpoint on complex development challenges and helps to improve corporate practices. It also helps to align industry standards with government policies and international standards.
52. **Capacity development:** FAO is collaborating with the private sector on capacity development activities in a number of areas, including activities specifically targeted at farmers, producers' organizations, cooperatives and MSMEs, to improve and enhance workflows in agricultural value chains.
53. **Resource mobilization:** FAO receives financial and in-kind contributions from the private sector to support FAO programmes and projects in areas of mutual interest.
54. **Technical cooperation:** FAO engages with the private sector on specific programmatic needs and challenges with defined technical specifications in FAO's areas of work. FAO works with private sector partners to share experiences and to design and deliver solutions to problems where existing solutions are not available or not appropriate.
55. **Knowledge and research:** The private sector contributes to FAO's knowledge and research capacity by providing data and information on market trends and emerging technologies. Private sector knowledge can make important contributions to public goods. FAO's technical advice is often requested by international public and private organizations.
56. **Advocacy and communication:** FAO works with the private sector to share and disseminate information and best practices related to key FAO priorities. Advocacy for FAO's work has been a long-standing form of engagement with the private sector, with the media helping FAO to promote Zero Hunger, for example.
57. **Additional areas of collaboration:**
- a) **Science and innovation:** The private sector helps to ensure that FAO applies not only modern science and technology but also adopts all forms of innovative approaches to new situations and challenges. The FAO Science and Innovation Strategy¹⁴ promotes collaboration with the private sector to scale up technologies and innovations in agrifood systems, especially in low- and middle-income countries. It aims to enhance equitable access to tools, education, and services that support more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems. FAO and the private sector work together to ensure that

¹⁴ Read the *FAO Science and Innovation Strategy* at <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cc2273en>

innovative approaches are used and brought to scale and that opportunities emerge to work towards achieving a world free from hunger, poverty and malnutrition.

- b) **Data sharing and dissemination:** FAO encourages and supports the sharing and dissemination of private sector data and information through global networks and as global public goods. The Organization looks to the private sector to complement and enhance the various agriculture data streams that it monitors and collects on a regular basis.
- c) **Support for financing and investment:** Agricultural and rural non-farm development requires high levels of private investment. While this traditional model of resource mobilization continues to exist, FAO is shifting the emphasis from funding to financing. This shift entails a major change of focus for FAO, from primarily mobilizing grant resources for its projects and programmes to catalysing, leveraging, blending and structuring different sources of domestic and international public and private financing, in order to achieve collective, transformative and sustainable development results. FAO seeks to engage in new mechanisms to increase sustainable investments in food and agricultural systems. This includes engaging with financial institutions, both public and private, domestic and international, to support financial mechanisms that facilitate responsible investments throughout agricultural supply chains.
- d) **Advocacy:** FAO is seeking to broaden multistakeholder and multidimensional partnerships with private sector entities for advocacy on sustainability issues, challenges, and solutions towards the *four betters*. This can include strategic alignments with existing private sector-led coalitions and consortia, including the World Economic Forum, the United Nations Global Compact and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

58. **Inclusive participation remains at the heart of FAO's engagement approach:** FAO ensures that the activities with the private sector are **equitable, transparent and accessible**, particularly for **smallholder farmers, MSMEs, women and youth** – all of whom play a vital role in sustainable agrifood systems transformation. FAO will:

- a) **Prioritize interventions in areas with high concentrations of smallholders, MSMEs, women and youth** – ensuring that private sector engagement contributes to inclusive economic growth. This includes initiatives such as the territorial approaches implemented under the HiH Initiative, which aim to drive investment in the most vulnerable rural areas.
- b) **Enhance transparency and accessibility** of private sector participation by providing public information that facilitates fair and competitive engagement opportunities.
- c) **Collaborate with governments to ensure that enabling conditions** – such as strong governance, human capital development, and supportive institutions – are in place to maximize the benefits of private sector investments for marginalized groups.
- d) **Strengthen partnerships with international financial institutions (IFIs)** and other global organizations to de-risk investments in a way that ensures smallholders, women, and youth entrepreneurs can access resources and markets more equitably.

IV. Focus

A. Five priority areas

59. This updated Strategy broadens the vision for FAO to become an Agrifood Systems Transformation Leader through private sector engagement where FAO can move beyond a funding-centric engagement with the private sector. Through comprehensive information-gathering during consultations with internal and external actors, FAO identified the following areas of focus to ensure alignment with global priorities and private sector capabilities:

- a) **Science, technology and innovation:** The transformation of food and agriculture systems depends on increased investment in science, technology, innovation, and climate mitigation and adaptation. FAO will strengthen collaboration with the private sector to promote technological advancements and accelerate adoption of digital solutions and climate-smart

practices that enhance productivity, sustainability, and resilience. FAO is expanding data-driven approaches by integrating multisectoral data for real-time analysis, forecasting, and decision-making. This includes leveraging non-traditional data – such as social media analytics, remote sensing, artificial intelligence (AI) and open-access platforms – to improve early warning systems, food security monitoring and climate-resilience. Joint initiatives will focus on precision agriculture, biotechnologies, AI solutions, and carbon sequestration to address food security and environmental challenges. These initiatives are designed to be action-oriented and evidence-based, built on lessons learned across FAO’s global programmes, and focused on delivering tangible and timely results. Expected outcomes include climate-resilient crops, smart farming technologies, capacity-building programmes for entrepreneurship, innovation hubs and digital platforms for data sharing, supply chain transparency, and climate adaptation. These partnerships will prioritize agility in piloting innovation, and efficiency in scaling up successful models. FAO aims to bridge the private sector and food security efforts while equipping businesses for climate-smart agricultural development.

- b) **Knowledge sharing and normative work:** FAO will strengthen engagement with private sector partners, smallholder farmers and governments to foster knowledge-sharing, develop best practices and support global standard-setting. The private sector contributes to FAO’s knowledge and research through data on market trends and technologies. By promoting collaboration, FAO will build inclusive value chains, helping businesses and smallholders benefit from knowledge exchange and market access. Partnerships will strengthen food safety regulations, data-driven policymaking, and responsible business practices. FAO’s role as a convener will support dissemination of agricultural data and research. Joint efforts will help establish food safety standards, advance climate adaptation, and reinforce ethical supply chains. Outcomes include harmonized safety protocols, improved regulatory frameworks, and training programmes for sustainability compliance. FAO will also promote innovative technologies, equitable financial services and market access for small-scale producers, while supporting emissions measurement and sustainable financing for MSMEs.
- c) **Environmental action:** In line with FAO’s commitment to a *better environment*, the Organization will continue to play a central role in guiding and coordinating global efforts related to climate threats and shocks, biodiversity and sustainability. FAO remains committed to supporting Members in strengthening their policy frameworks, institutional capacities, and technical capabilities to address weather-related challenges through the promotion of more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems. This includes the advancement of climate-smart agriculture, the adoption of nature-based solutions and the application of integrated approaches to the management of land, water, soil and biodiversity. Recognizing the critical role of the private sector in driving innovation, investment, and scalable solutions, FAO will further deepen its collaboration with private sector actors to support the implementation of national climate priorities. This includes facilitating access to climate finance, accelerating the adoption of low-emission technologies and fostering environmental-resilient business models. The private sector’s contributions – ranging from data, expertise, and research to infrastructure and financing – are essential to the transformation of agrifood systems and the achievement of sustainability goals.
- d) **Emergency and climate crisis response:** FAO will intensify collaboration with the private sector to bolster responses to food crises, natural disasters, and humanitarian and climate-related emergencies. Partnerships will focus on enhancing supply chain resilience, leveraging logistical and distribution networks, and strengthening emergency food assistance programmes, with a particular emphasis on addressing climate-induced disruptions. FAO will promote in-kind contributions such as equipment, transportation, storage facilities and expertise. Such contributions help ensure the expediency of the emergency response and improve the overall efficiency of crisis interventions. Private sector collaborations will also be further developed to strengthen resilience within the emergency and resilience–development–peace–climate nexus. Expected outcomes include the advancement of climate-adaptive storage solutions to mitigate post-harvest losses, and

long-term development interventions to face climate-induced food insecurity. FAO will also work to integrate climate adaptation measures into disaster risk reduction strategies, ensuring agricultural communities are better prepared for extreme weather events and long-term environmental shifts.

- e) **Resource mobilization and investments:** To accelerate progress towards *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind, FAO will mobilize both financial and non-financial resources from private sector partners. This includes fostering impact investment, promoting blended finance and supporting responsible agricultural investments, alongside the sharing of knowledge, technologies and expertise. The private sector plays a critical role not only in financing but also in contributing data, innovation and technical know-how, essential for transforming agrifood systems. Collaborative efforts will build public–private partnerships to scale solutions and bring technologies and financing to vulnerable stakeholders. FAO will prioritize sustainable finance models supporting long-term investments and systemic change. These efforts aim to enhance access to appropriate and affordable finance, digital payments, and knowledge-sharing for climate-smart agriculture, leading to more investment and sustainable agribusiness that supports decent rural employment and economic growth.

B. Six priority partners

60. Engaging with financial institutions, foundations, farmers' organizations, MSMEs, multistakeholder networks and individual private sector companies is essential for the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030 as these sectors provide critical resources, expertise and innovation to drive sustainable agricultural development and food security. Strengthening collaboration with these key actors allows FAO to leverage financial support, technical knowledge and strategic partnerships to enhance the impact of its initiatives. Given their growing influence in shaping global agrifood systems and sustainable development policies, these sectors have been identified as priority partners for the coming years.

- a) **Financial institutions** and development finance institutions provide funding, investment and financial services to support economic development, infrastructure and policy initiatives worldwide. They are essential partners in FAO's private sector engagement, particularly in funding agreements and investment initiatives, as they offer critical finance and opportunities necessary for the successful implementation of FAO's projects. These institutions can play a pivotal role in advancing global development, especially in agriculture and food security, by providing financial resources, technical expertise, and advisory support. Collaborating with financial institutions enables FAO to scale up its funding base for large-scale interventions, promote equitable financial services, and strengthen economic resilience, particularly in developing countries. Moreover, engaging financial institutions in investment initiatives is crucial when funding does not flow directly through FAO, as they offer valuable expertise in financial management, risk assessment and investment planning. Their involvement helps ensure efficient resource allocation, mitigates financial risks and enhances the sustainability of investment strategies. Through strategic three-way collaborations with Members and financial partners, FAO enhances its ability to drive large-scale impact in agricultural development.
- b) **Philanthropic and corporate foundations** are non-profit entities that provide funding, expertise, and strategic support to advance global development, and humanitarian and social impact initiatives. Foundations are critical partners for FAO, especially those focusing on agriculture, food security and rural development. This Strategy comprises philanthropic and private sector foundations. By collaborating with foundations, FAO can tap into resources, expertise and innovative approaches to tackle global challenges. FAO can align its objectives with the philanthropic goals of foundations, securing funding and expertise for projects that aim to transform agrifood systems. Foundations often bring a unique focus on long-term sustainability and can help FAO advance its mission in regions with high vulnerability to food insecurity and environmental threats.

- c) **Associations of farmers' organizations, MSMEs and umbrella organizations** are essential strategic partners to achieve impact on the ground. **Farmers' associations** are networks that unite to tackle shared challenges, pool resources, and advocate for farmer interests. They are vital for promoting sustainable agriculture, boosting productivity and improving market access for smallholder farmers. **Micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)** – including family farms and agribusinesses – play a key role in the agricultural value chain from production to distribution. **Umbrella organizations** unite related entities to coordinate efforts, share resources and amplify collective voices. They streamline communication, support policy advocacy, and facilitate joint initiatives, enhancing the overall impact of their members. These organizations are strategic partners in private sector engagement, helping to mobilize resources, expand access to funding and expertise and create synergies across the value chain. By engaging with umbrella organizations, FAO can scale sustainable solutions and accelerate systemic transformation of agrifood systems.
- d) **Innovative multistakeholder networks and entities** are collaborative platforms that bring together diverse actors, including governments, private sector entities, civil society, academia and international organizations. These networks foster dialogue, knowledge exchange and coordinated action to achieve shared goals. Engaging in multistakeholder platforms (MSPs) is crucial as it allows the Organization to leverage expertise, innovation and investment from multiple sectors while ensuring participation in decision-making processes and further enhance collaboration with the private sector. These MSPs provide FAO with access to industry insights and networks, facilitate policy dialogue and enhance the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices in addressing complex global challenges, such as environmental threats and food insecurity.
- e) **Smallholder farmers** form the backbone of global agricultural production and rural economies, particularly in developing regions. **Smallholder farmers are both partners and beneficiaries of FAO's work.** Strengthening their resilience, productivity, and access to resources is a key component of the Strategy. FAO works closely with private sector partners, including financial institutions, foundations, and agribusinesses, to improve smallholder farmers' access to credit, markets, and innovative technologies. By fostering inclusive-business models, supporting climate-smart agriculture, and promoting sustainable value chains, FAO ensures that smallholder farmers benefit from economic opportunities and are better equipped to withstand environmental and market shocks. Collaboration with farmers' organizations and MSMEs further amplifies FAO's efforts in advocating for policies that create enabling environments for smallholder farmers to thrive and contribute meaningfully to global food security.
- f) **Strategic individual private sector partners** like multinational corporations and companies have developed bilateral private sector partnerships with FAO on a broad range of thematic areas and geographies in recent years. These companies have many resources, including technical expertise, know-how and technology, and innovation tools that can be leveraged to support the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. Their expertise, data, research and capacity are fundamental for accelerating the transformation of the agrifood systems. FAO strives to embrace the diversity the private sector has to offer. Adapting partnerships to the regional and country context is pivotal to maximize engagement benefits as well as establishing ways to cooperate with businesses at the country level.

V. Proactive engagement

A. Investing in the field: Regional and country levels

61. **Need for tailored engagement approaches:** FAO's engagement with the private sector at the regional and country levels varies significantly due to local economic conditions, policy environments, and private sector dynamics and private sector capacity. In Africa, FAO has focused on scaling investments in agrifood systems and reducing investment risks through climate finance and trade facilitation. In the Near East and North Africa, there has been an increase in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, but more structured investment models are needed. In Asia and the Pacific, there is strong private sector interest in digital agriculture and carbon neutrality, requiring streamlined engagement processes. In Latin America and the Caribbean, FAO targets engagements focused on strengthening sustainable supply chains, capacity building, and empowering smallholder farmers.

62. **An evolving engagement process:** FAO's private sector engagement has evolved from a traditional process of involving private sector federations and associations to also engaging large multinational companies, MSMEs and local businesses. As part of this evolving process, FAO can tailor engagement approaches that are action-oriented, evidence-based and aligned with regional priorities.

63. **Streamline approval processes for faster decision-making:** Consultations with stakeholders revealed challenges in FAO Regional and Country Offices navigating the development of robust and impactful partnerships. Additionally, the length of the full private sector engagement cycle, from the initial discussions to instrument finalization, can discourage private sector engagement, particularly for MSMEs and local agribusinesses. Risk-conscious partnership approval processes have been streamlined to empower Regional Offices to approve engagements at a decentralized level, encouraging faster response times to private sector interests.

64. **Engagement with emerging markets and MSMEs:** FAO primarily collaborates with large multinational agribusinesses but MSMEs in developing markets remain largely untapped. Regional agribusinesses and startups in Africa, Asia, and Latin America struggle to access FAO's partnership frameworks, despite their critical role in local agrifood systems. The lack of systematized data on these potential private sector partners at the country level leads to missed engagement opportunities and requires the strengthening of private sector mapping at the country level. FAO Regional and Country Offices value local entrepreneurship and are empowered to step up engagement with local MSMEs.

65. **Increase the private sector engagement capacity of FAO Country Offices:** Establishment of private sector country focal points and enhancing regional training programmes for FAO personnel on private sector partnerships is essential for ensuring strategic relevance of proposals, as well as facilitating the clear and structured setup of roles, responsibilities, and expected outputs. Additionally, FAO Country Offices have expressed difficulty leveraging private sector partnerships signed at the global level in the local context, signalling a need for more coordination and flexibility for contextual adaptation.

B. Fit-for-purpose due diligence

66. **A robust and streamlined due diligence policy,** the Framework for Due Diligence and Risk Assessment/Management for Engagements (FRAME), was adopted by FAO in 2021.¹⁵

67. **The FRAME policy adopts the private sector Strategy's core set of guiding principles** for engagement. FRAME is fundamentally based on and embeds the following core elements:

¹⁵ The Framework for Due Diligence and Risk Assessment/Management for Engagements (FRAME) with Private Sector and other Non-State Actors was endorsed by the FAO Council in December 2021 [CL 168/REP - REPORT OF THE COUNCIL OF FAO. 168th Session \(29 November - 3 December 2021\) - paragraph 20a.](#)

- a) an evidence-based risk management approach;
- b) clear roles and responsibilities, including independent due diligence and risk assessment/management function;
- c) a streamlined risk-based due diligence process; and
- d) robust reviewing process for informed decision-making.

68. **The FRAME policy is aligned with UN Global Compact principles** and supports “a proactive approach to due diligence” within FAO, “going beyond a defensive approach”.^{iv} This facilitates an open approach to partnerships supported by evidence-based mechanisms for identifying, assessing, mitigating and managing potential risks of engagements, ensuring balance of risks with potential benefits while preserving FAO’s integrity, independence and impartiality.

69. **A non-exclusivity principle guides the FRAME policy** and accordingly, FAO does not grant exclusivity to any private sector partner or other non-state actor (NSA), nor does FAO’s engagement with an entity imply the Organization’s endorsement or preference for its products or services.

70. **FAO conducts due diligence along with a risk assessment and management review** before entering into a formal engagement with a private sector entity. These are necessary to preserve FAO’s integrity and neutrality according to FAO policies, rules and procedures. The review process ensures that each private sector partnership adheres to FAO’s principles for engagement and is relevant to FAO’s mandate and aligned with country priorities.¹⁶ Identification of fiduciary risk and development of related mitigation measures are also part of the due diligence risk assessment.

71. **When considering engagements with the private sector**, FAO prefers engaging with entities that demonstrate their consistent commitments and efforts supporting FAO’s mandate.

72. **FAO adheres to a set of exclusionary criteria**, which are applicable to engagement between FAO and the private sector. These criteria refer to business categories and practices considered inherently incompatible with the values of the UN, its treaties, or other international standards. FAO does not engage with entities that:

- a) **are directly engaged in** activities inconsistent with UN Security Council Sanctions, Resolutions, and Conventions (for example, UN policies on climate, biodiversity, transnational organized crime or terrorist financing) or other prevention measures, including the Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) standards of the International Monetary Fund’s Financial Action Task Force (FATF);
- b) **are complicit in** human rights abuses, tolerate forced or compulsory labour or the use of child labour;
- c) **do not align with** UN Global Compact Principles;
- d) **are involved in** the production and wholesale distribution of tobacco products, or whose revenues are derived from gambling (except lottery) or pornography; and
- e) **have systematically failed to** demonstrate a commitment to meeting, or failed to meet in practice, the principles of the UN, including statements or principles that are consistent with and reflect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Rio Declaration, the International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights or the UN System-wide zero tolerance policy on all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse.

¹⁶ In addition to the exposure of the entity to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risks, the most frequently identified risks to mitigate in proposed partnerships with the private sector are: a) the failure of the prospective partnership to provide the expected outputs, including benefits to FAO and its beneficiaries and stakeholders; b) unfair advantage, or perceived endorsement of the private sector entity’s products or services; c) perceived compromise of FAO’s integrity, neutrality, independence, credibility, reputation, or mandate; d) undue or improper influence exercised on FAO’s work, especially but not limited to policies, norms, and standard-setting; e) risks related to data protection and intellectual property; and f) potential conflicts of interest.

73. **In principle, engagements with entities falling within the FAO exclusionary criteria will not be pursued**, and existing partners should be disengaged if evidence of FAO exclusionary criteria arises during implementation.¹⁷ However, interactions may still be possible with some private sector or other NSAs assessed to present significant risks in exceptional cases.¹⁸

74. **The FRAME policy identifies a set of high-risk sectors**, which by their nature or operational context have potential to negatively impact communities and the environment and thus require particular attention prior to engagement.¹⁹

75. **A regular risk management review is undertaken**, whereby partnerships are monitored to assess whether expected outcomes are being achieved, and whether measures to mitigate risks, or to discontinue an engagement, should be taken. Risks of engagement are managed and escalated as required throughout the Organization. FAO leverages behavioural science to inform effective risk management and integrate findings into continuous improvements to processes and approaches.

76. **Decision-making workflows** for proposed engagements are based on risk tiers. Decision-making at all levels is informed by a triangulation of benefits, identified risks and risk mitigation measures. FAO safeguards against evidenced, potential or perceived conflict of interests that a private sector entity may have with FAO, or undue influence they may exert, or be reasonably perceived to exert, over the Organization's decision-making process or interests.

77. **In cases of disengagement and non-compliance with the Strategy**, FAO reserves the right to withdraw from partnerships where there has been a sustained absence of active collaboration between FAO and the partner, or where the partner does not comply with its obligations, either financial or programmatic, as agreed upon under the obligations arising from this Strategy.²⁰

78. **FAO continuously reviews internal policies for agility and fit-for-context evolution**, in consultation with stakeholders and other UN agencies. FAO's approach to due diligence and risk assessment is reinforced by its close coordination with other UN agencies, including as a co-lead to the Due Diligence Working Group within the UN Private Sector Engagement (UN PSE) network.

VI. Accountability and transparency

79. **Accountability is central to FAO's strategic partnerships with the private sector:** Through clear responsibilities, transparent processes, and robust monitoring systems, FAO ensures that these collaborations uphold organizational integrity and contribute meaningfully to its mission. Tools such as the FAO CONNECT Portal, the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, and structured annual reporting, play a supporting role by providing a comprehensive and transparent overview of engagements and outcomes. These mechanisms help foster trust among stakeholders, strengthen accountability, and maximize the impact of private sector partnerships, contributing to FAO's broader mission of advancing global food security and nutrition as well as sustainable development.

¹⁷ For example, where there would be a substantial benefit to FAO's beneficiaries and stakeholders of a clearly defined engagement supporting delivery of FAO's mandate, and if mechanisms can be put in place to protect FAO's interests.

¹⁸ In general, FAO will consider consistency of operations of the entity with decisions and recommendations of the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly.

¹⁹ Oil and gas; metals and mining; utilities; large infrastructure; large-scale agriculture and fishing; alcohol; chemicals; genetically modified organisms (GMOs); fast food; and sugar-sweetened beverages.

²⁰ Non-compliance can include behaviour that meets FAO's exclusionary criteria; the use of the engagement with FAO for purposes other than supporting the delivery of FAO's mandate, such as for commercial, promotional, marketing or advertising reasons; the misuse of FAO's name or emblem; or other actions by the partner that could have a negative impact on FAO's integrity, independence, credibility, reputation or mandate. A private sector entity's non-compliance with the provisions of this Strategy can have consequences for the entity concerned after due process, including a reminder, a warning, a cease-and-desist letter, a rejection of renewal of engagement or termination of engagement.

A. Customer Relationship Management

80. **Effective management of partnership data and information is critical to maintaining FAO's accountability** to both internal stakeholders and external partners. In recognition of this, FAO is committed to enhancing its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system through the implementation of a few targeted measures, including:

- a) **Dedicated CRM support:** The establishment of a dedicated administrative support role specifically focused on managing the CRM platform, ensuring data integrity, accuracy, and timeliness.
- b) **Streamlined partnership approval and monitoring:** The CRM platform facilitates streamlined processes for the review, approval, and monitoring of partnerships.
- c) **Enhanced CRM training and capacity building:** To improve CRM usage and accountability across FAO, tailored training programmes are regularly provided to focal points involved in private sector engagement. This requires not just new systems but a broader culture change that embraces transparency, data-sharing, and continuous performance monitoring.
- d) **Annual reporting:** As part of its accountability framework, FAO has already established annual reporting on formal private sector engagements. This annual reporting allows to evaluate the partnership effectiveness, thus enabling strategic adjustments to optimize collaboration and achieve FAO's objectives more effectively.

B. FAO CONNECT Portal: Enhancing accountability and transparency

81. The FAO CONNECT Portal serves as FAO's primary tool for enhancing partnerships' accountability and transparency. Launched in April 2021 as a central web-based platform, the CONNECT Portal serves as the official repository for information on all FAO private sector engagements, facilitating systematic access to partnership data and information. With information accessible in all six FAO languages, the CONNECT Portal offers examples of successful joint work with the private sector as well as key opportunities for the private sector to engage with FAO to achieve impact on the ground. Key features include:

- a) **Centralized repository:** All formal partnership agreements, including legal instruments (MOU, LOI), and detailed work plans and partnership focal point contacts, are systematically stored and easily accessible to FAO Members and FAO personnel through the CONNECT Portal. This centralized system ensures all partnership information is maintained in one authoritative source, eliminating fragmentation and discrepancies.
- b) **Real-time partnership updates:** The integration between the CRM system and the CONNECT Portal allows real-time updates on the status of partnerships, including new developments, ongoing activities, milestones achieved, and regular monitoring outcomes. This ensures that FAO stakeholders across headquarters, Regional and Country Offices have timely access to accurate information, enhancing internal coordination and informed decision-making. The CONNECT Portal is constantly updated, including relevant news for internal and external visitors. Partners' pages are updated annually or upon request, alongside the Annual Progress Reports, which are filled once a year by the focal points from technical units and Decentralized Offices.
- c) **Enhanced transparency:** By providing controlled yet transparent access to partnership information, the CONNECT Portal reinforces FAO's commitment to transparency. Internal FAO stakeholders and Members have appropriate visibility into partnerships, their strategic rationale, and operational details, thereby building trust and confidence in FAO's private sector engagements.

C. Continuous monitoring and engagement

82. Ensuring sustained accountability requires ongoing engagement with partners and continuous monitoring of partnership activities. FAO places significant emphasis on:

- a) **Regular partner reviews:** Structured periodic meetings with private sector partners provide opportunities for continuous dialogue, review of partnership performance, evaluation of mutual objectives, and identification of emerging risks or opportunities. This proactive engagement supports accountability by maintaining open lines of communication and promptly addressing any challenges or misalignments.
- b) **Outcome-based monitoring:** FAO employs outcome-based monitoring frameworks to assess the impact and effectiveness of private sector engagements. Clear indicators linked to FAO's planned results are used to measure and report on the evidence-based, action-oriented partnerships that deliver tangible and timely results, while incorporating insights built on lessons learned.
- c) **Responsive risk management:** Proactive identification of potential risks informs the establishment of pre-emptive mitigation measures specific to each engagement, at an early stage through the due diligence and risk assessment process. Continuous monitoring enables early detection of the realization of risks or issues within partnerships, allowing FAO to implement responsive mitigation measures promptly. This proactive risk management approach ensures that the integrity and alignment of engagements are maintained throughout the partnership life cycle.

VII. Synergies

83. FAO's strategic engagement with the private sector is firmly anchored in multilateral cooperation and guided by the recognition that no single institution can drive transformative change alone. In alignment with the broader objectives of the UN system, FAO is enhancing its collaborative mechanisms across the UN family including the RBAs, while leveraging the dynamic role of the informal Private Sector Advisory Group (PSAG). These synergies foster an integrated and coherent approach to private sector partnerships, enabling FAO to scale its impact, optimize the use of resources and ensure that engagement efforts remain aligned with shared values, global best practices and the transformation of agrifood systems.

84. As part of this approach, FAO continues to explore cross-agency collaboration opportunities in key areas such as sustainable agrifood systems, blended finance, digital innovation, and climate-smart agriculture. Together with agencies such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), FAO contributes to shaping private sector engagement in ways that leverage each agency's unique expertise while avoiding duplication. This includes joint efforts to promote responsible agribusiness investments, sustainable trade practices, digital solutions in agrifood systems and the development of common principles and tools that support impact measurement, risk management, and capacity development.

A. Advancing shared commitments through the United Nations Global Compact

85. As a specialized agency of the UN, FAO is firmly committed to aligning its private sector engagement with the principles, frameworks and values that underpin the UN system. A central pillar in this regard is the United Nations Global Compact, which promotes ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. FAO encourages private sector partners to adhere to these principles and uses them as key reference points within its due diligence, risk assessment and partnership development processes. These principles are fully integrated into FAO's operational mechanisms and serve as benchmarks for evaluating both prospective and ongoing engagements with the private sector.

B. Strengthening collaboration among Rome-based Agencies and across the United Nations system

86. FAO's approach to private sector engagement is reinforced by its close collaboration with the other RBAs – IFAD and the WFP. The three agencies share complementary mandates in advancing food security, nutrition and sustainable rural transformation. Strengthened collaboration among the RBAs offers a strategic opportunity to enhance coherence, maximize synergies and promote more coordinated engagement with private sector partners across agrifood systems.

87. FAO continues to work closely with IFAD and WFP to explore areas of alignment in private sector engagement approaches, building on each agency's comparative strengths – FAO's technical and normative leadership, IFAD's expertise in inclusive rural investment, and WFP's innovation in humanitarian logistics and partnerships. Coordination efforts aim to improve policy coherence, share good practices and foster more streamlined engagement with private sector actors at global, regional, and country levels.

88. FAO collaboration for the private sector also extends to other UN system entities. FAO participates actively in broader UN platforms on private sector partnerships, including the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) processes, engagement with UN Resident Coordinators, and system-wide coordination mechanisms such as the UN Business Advisory Council and the UN Private Sector Focal Points Network. These efforts contribute to the alignment of FAO's engagement practices with UN-wide standards and the promotion of joint approaches to innovation, investment and impact measurement.

89. Building on these synergies, FAO engages in strategic areas of joint interest with agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and World Health Organization (WHO). Examples include promoting green agribusiness models, supporting digital transformation in agrifood systems and advancing private sector participation in nutrition, climate finance and resilient supply chains. These initiatives reflect a shared commitment to agrifood systems transformation and underline the importance of collective action.

90. Consultations with RBA counterparts and UN focal points continue to inform FAO's evolving engagement models and ensure that its work with the private sector remains principled and aligned with the goals of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. FAO will continue to explore opportunities for collaborative approaches with the RBAs and other UN entities to foster shared learning, promote responsible investment and strengthen the enabling environment for sustainable private sector contributions to agrifood systems transformation.

91. FAO continues to explore opportunities for cross-agency collaboration on due diligence and risk management, working with partners such as WHO, IFAD and UNEP to strengthen environmental, social and governance safeguards in line with international best practices. FAO is one of the leads of the UN Private Sector Engagement (UN PSE) network, including within its Due Diligence Working Group. Efforts are also underway to enhance alignment in reporting and accountability through joint mechanisms that reflect private sector contributions.

92. As a specialized agency of the UN, FAO is firmly committed to aligning its private sector engagement with the principles, frameworks and values that underpin the UN system.

C. The evolving role of the informal Private Sector Advisory Group

93. Established as part of the implementation of the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021–2025, the informal Private Sector Advisory Group (PSAG) functions as a consultative mechanism to enhance dialogue with a broad and diverse range of private sector actors. It provides FAO and its Members with strategic advice and insights that help shape the Organization's evolving approach to transparent, responsible and impactful private sector engagement.

94. Composed of representatives from a wide spectrum of entities – including MSMEs, cooperatives, financial institutions, large corporations, multinational companies, private sector associations and foundations – the PSAG reflects the diversity of the private sector landscape across regions and agrifood systems. Its role is to serve as a platform for structured exchange, promote mutual learning and support FAO in identifying key trends, challenges and opportunities that can inform its strategic direction.

95. The PSAG contributes to the implementation of the Strategy's guiding pillars – Connect, Support, Sustain – by helping to identify areas of common interest, advising on responsible partnership approaches and offering perspectives on global and regional developments relevant to food and agriculture. The group also supports knowledge exchange and provides guidance on how FAO can strengthen accountability, sustainability and coherence of its private sector partnerships.

96. Looking ahead, FAO will continue to evolve the role of the PSAG as an agile and transparent platform for dialogue. This includes promoting broader participation from across regions and industry sectors and deepening its engagement in strategic areas such as innovation, sustainable finance and rural transformation and inclusive value chains. The PSAG may also serve to inform broader collaboration within the UN system and across the RBAs, contributing to shared learning and enhanced coordination on private sector engagement. Its perspectives may further support alignment with relevant UN frameworks and principles, such as the Right to Food and the United Nations Global Compact.

97. The FAO Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division will serve as a bridge between technical divisions and PSAG and will promote the incorporation of PSAG's feedback into FAO's strategic and knowledge products. FAO will continue sharing the regular updates on PSAG through the CONNECT Portal to inform Members and wider audiences on the evolution of this forum and its contributions.

98. Through its consultative approach, the PSAG helps to ensure that FAO's private sector engagement remains aligned with the Organization's mandate, values, and commitment to delivering transformative impact through equitable and sustainable agrifood systems.

D. Promoting institutional knowledge exchange through the PS-IDWG

99. The Private Sector Inter-Departmental Working Group (PS-IDWG), established as part of the implementation of the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021-2025, serves as an internal FAO forum for the exchange of views, conversations and updates on FAO private sector engagement.

100. Driven by FAO's collaborative approach to partnership with the private sector, this ongoing dialogue allows colleagues to share knowledge and strengths between Offices, Centres and Divisions.

101. The PS-IDWG provides a space for colleagues spearheading private sector partnerships within their divisions to engage in meetings and training sessions and contribute to the development of analytical tools aimed to strengthen FAO's engagement with the private sector.

102. The PS-IDWG members are expected to provide strategic inputs and advice on a wide range of matters pertaining to private sector engagement, from policy to private sector tools, such as capacity development, the partnership approval process, ongoing and prospective partnership progress, engagement thematic analysis, as well as provide inputs to key guiding documents for personnel on private sector engagements.

103. Driving more cohesive and informed decision-making processes, the PS-IDWG's continuous exchange of ideas fosters innovation and improves cross-sectoral collaboration.

104. Looking ahead, the PS-IDWG will continue serving as a bridge between the Private Sector Engagement Unit (PSUS) and technical divisions on general policy matters pertaining to private sector engagements, including the current and prospective partnerships pipeline.

105. The PS-IDWG will remain an important contributor to the achievement of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 by broadening FAO's engagement with strategic partners and by providing an enabling environment for the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs).

106. The PS-IDWG will continue playing a key role in cross-fertilization, collaboration and as a knowledge sharing forum to review the progress of implementation of the updated Strategy and development of new strategic approaches for engaging with the private sector.

107. The inputs and feedback from technical divisions and Decentralized Offices will be crucial to support the implementation of the updated Strategy and to plan innovative approaches and mechanisms to engage with the private sector.

**Annex 1:
Action Plan for the
FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2026–2030**

Action	Responsible Unit	Key Milestone
1. CONNECT – Maintenance and strengthening of strategic partnerships		
1.1 Enhance the PSAG role as a dynamic and transparent platform for dialogue	PSU ²¹	Structured periodic meetings with private sector partners established and conducted; promotion of broader participation from across Regions and value chains.
1.2 Facilitate regular PS-IDWG engagement	PSU	Structured periodic meetings with PS-IDWG membership organized, to share institutional knowledge and best practices of engaging with the private sector within the Organization.
1.3 Maintain and integrate CONNECT Portal with CRM for efficient process and real-time updates	PSU	Real-time updates and analytics on partnership status and figures available on the Connect Portal; enhanced support to transparent monitoring, and decision-making.
1.4 Pilot informal Regional Private Sector Advisory Group	PSU, FAO Regional Offices	Informal Regional Private Sector Advisory Group established in at least two Regions.
1.5 Refine processes, workflows, and approaches (including Due Diligence and Risk Assessment)	PSU, PSS ²²	Low-risk decision-making process reviewed; ongoing capacity building efforts for further streamlining (risk tiered).
2. SUPPORT – Capacity building, due diligence, and system enhancement		
2.1 Strengthen CRM accountability and management	PSU	Dedicated administrative support role established; trainings for all CRM focal points conducted.
2.2 Implement regional training programmes to build FAO personnel capacity on private sector engagement	PSU, FAO Regional Offices	Private sector focal points in each Regional Office to coordinate engagement efforts assigned.
2.3 Update the online Private Sector Engagement Guide for partners	PSU, PSS	Transparency for partners improved.
2.4 Host consultation workshops with key private sector stakeholders	PSU	Co-developed approaches with partners.
2.5. Develop modalities and tools to engage with the private sector	PSU, LEG ²³	Refine engagement modalities with the private sector for more agile and results-oriented collaboration.
3. SUSTAIN – Pilots, monitoring, and impact measurement		
3.1 Ensure continued and effective coordination between the Rome-based agencies and other UN agencies on private sector engagement	PSU	Regular meetings between Rome-based agency private sector units are established, including active participation in the UN Private Sector Focal Points Network meetings.
3.2 Publish Annual Private Sector Engagement Report	PSU, FAO technical units, and FAO Decentralized Offices	Annual Private Sector Engagement report published.
3.3 Hold quarterly review meetings of the Strategy Taskforce	PSU	Progress tracked and bottlenecks addressed.

Notes

²¹ Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division (PSU)

²² Project Support Division (PSS)

²³ Legal Office (LEG)

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- i **FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations)**. 2021. *FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement, 2021-2025*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb3352en>
- ii **United Nations**. 2011. *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights – Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework*. Geneva. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf
- iii **FAO**. 2023. *Transformative partnerships guidance – How transformative partnerships can help FAO to better deliver its strategic objectives*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8751en>
- iv **United Nations Global Compact**. 2025. The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact. In: *UN Global Compact*. [Cited 28 July 2025]. <https://unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>