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COUNCIL

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Update on the Hand-in-Hand Initiative

Executive summary

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

a) the ongoing increase in the overall number of HIH countries to 80 as of October 2025, which reflects the global interest and increasing needs from Members for larger and more ambitious programming for investments and concrete actions to transform agrifood systems, including two new Regional Initiatives i.e., African SIDS[1] and Pacific SIDS;
b) the ongoing engagements around the HIH investment plans with investors and key stakeholders at the annual Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum (IF), which resulted in increasing commitments and ongoing negotiations with investors for a total value to date of approximately USD 9 billion in government-led agrifood investments since 2022; and
c) the fourth edition of HIH IF which took place in October 2025, with 31 Members and six Regional Initiatives presenting their prioritized agrifood investment plans and opportunities.

This document builds on information provided in previous reports to the Council. Additional information on the Initiative and details regarding specific country investment plans are available on the HIH webpage https://www.fao.org/hand-in-hand. This webpage also includes links to the HIH Dashboard and the HIH Geospatial Platform.

[1] Small Island Developing States

Suggested action by the Council

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

a) welcome the continued growth in membership of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, now encompassing 80 countries;
b) recognize the increased demand from countries for the innovative technologies and approaches offered by HIH, particularly the Geospatial/Agro-informatics platform;
c) appreciate the recent briefing on FAO Hand-in-Hand Geospatial/Agro-informatics platform delivered to Members in response to suggestions made under the written correspondence procedure at the previous Council session;
d) appreciate the need to foster increased and at-scale investment in agrifood systems and the important role of the Hand in Hand initiative in supporting member governments;
e) appreciate the notable rise in agrifood investment interest from governments, international financial institutions, regional banks and the private sector in the Hand-in-Hand country-led investment plans; and
f) recommend that, in view of an increased membership and increasing demand for HIH tools and methodologies, additional technical expertise and resources are provided to ensure timely and effective support to Members.

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

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I. Introduction

1. This document responds to requests made by the Council at its 177th Session and provides updates on progress and results achieved in the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative.

2. The Director-General announced the Initiative on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019. Members meet the criteria to join if they are Landlocked Developing Countries, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries, or Food Crisis Countries (as defined by the Global Network against Food Crises), and countries with large poor populations.

3. To date, 80 countries have signed on as full members of the HIH Initiative:

a. Africa (40): Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

b. Asia and the Pacific (18): Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

c. Europe and Central Asia (2): Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

d. Latin America and the Caribbean (14): Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru.

e. Near East and North Africa (6): Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

4. There are also several countries which have started engaging and using the HIH tools and approaches which we call Hand-in-Hand "Approach" countries.

5. The Initiative provides Members of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and development partners with a programmatic support and an innovative way of strengthening, expanding and sustaining ambitious national programmes for agrifood systems transformation to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2 and 10. With the country-owned and county-led approach of HIH, Part II of this document focuses on the countries and regions providing highlights of the major progress made under the HIH, both during and because of the fourth edition of HIH Investment Forum (IF) 2025.

6. The fourth edition of HIH IF was held in October 2025, where 31 countries and six Regional Initiatives presented their investment plans to a global audience for a total value of USD 17.2 billion requested, with 118 investment cases and 159 million planned beneficiaries. Two new Regional Initiatives – African SIDS and Pacific SIDS – were launched during the HIH IF 2025. The HIH team and collaborators provided extensive technical support in the identification, design and preparation of the presentations of all of the government-led and prioritized investment plans. This involved FAO staff and experts based at headquarters, Regional, Subregional and Country Offices. This extensive support was designed not only to deliver a successful Investment Forum, but also to assist in facilitating engagements around government identified and prioritized investments.

7. A key innovation and value addition of the HIH IF are the unique matchmaking bilateral meetings, where the engagement of governments with investors is facilitated and arranged by the HIH, while discussions are led by governments.

8. In total, 624 bilateral meetings were requested from the 31 countries and six Regional Initiatives participating in the HIH IF 2025. This year, there was a significant increase in private sector engagement using the online Matchmaking App with 45 percent being requested from the private sector.

9. A series of events were organized to foster the engagement of a diverse group of agrifood investors in the investment plans presented by HIH countries and Regional Initiatives. These included, among others, the International Chamber of Commerce, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the Chefs' Manifesto, supported by the Government of Ireland.

10. Based on the positive experiences from the previous three editions at the HIH IFs (2022, 2023 and 2024), nine national-level and three regional HIH investment fora have been held to date this year.

11. Part II of this document focuses on those government-led agrifood investments, in line with the HIH being government-owned and government-led. Parts III and IV refer to the ongoing HIH work on human capital development, monitoring as well as communications strategy rollout. More details on the country-level progress can be accessed on the HIH website and the Dashboard.

II. Status update on country investments

A. Africa

12. Having reached 40 Members, the Africa region is expressing high interest in receiving support from HIH. **The new Africa SIDS Initiative** was launched at the HIH IF 2025, co-developed with the Indian Ocean Commission. The key prioritized agrifood investments presented at the HIH IF 2025 focused on integrated value chains development, blue economy and regional market and trade integration. During the IF 2025, 15 matchmaking meetings were requested by international financial institutions (IFIs) and regional banks as well as investors, and some engagements are already being followed up.

13. **The Sahel Initiative**, which is being implemented with the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel and the Economic Community of West African States leadership, returned to the HIH IF 2025 and presented their shared vision on investments in irrigation. With strong investor interest, 12 matchmaking meetings were requested by investors with negotiations ongoing for engagement with an IFI, a regional/subregional development bank, three private sector companies, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Office for Project Services.

14. **The Southern Africa Initiative** was re-presented at the HIH IF 2025, co-designed and to be implemented with the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The key prioritized agrifood investment plans presented by SADC focused on solar powered irrigation, private-sector-led investments in solar pumps, mechanization, agroprocessing and, finally, on increased market trade and integration. Fourteen matchmaking meetings were held, including with IFIs, regional banks and investors; some engagements are already being followed up, including five private companies and one impact investor.

15. **Angola**: the initiative started in 2021. The Government of Angola had participated in HIH IF 2023. This year the Government presented their investment case in grains. Twenty-three matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and the private sector, with follow-ups planned with two private sector companies, an IFI and an international partner on regional trade enhancement linked to the Lobito corridor investment.

16. **Burundi**: the initiative started in 2021. This year the Government presented their investment cases in tomato, rabbit, manioc and soy. Seven matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and private sector, with strong interest expressed by a regional bank which is being followed up, and with a private sector company on the tomato and soy investments presented.

17. **Cabo Verde**: the initiative started in 2020. The Government presented their investment cases in fleet reconversion and income integration investments. Ten matchmaking sessions were organized with IFIs, development partners and private sector, and an initial exchange on an investment was initiated with a regional development bank.

18. **Chad**: the initiative started in 2020. The Government presented their investment cases in maize, rice and spirulina. Eleven matchmaking sessions were organized with IFIs, development

partners and private sector; follow-ups are planned with five companies as well as engaging Green Climate Fund financing with the support of the Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment (OCB).

19. **Djibouti**: the initiative started in 2023. The Government presented their investment cases in vegetables, dates, aquaculture/fisheries and meat. Nine matchmaking sessions were organized with IFIs, development partners and the private sector. During the HIH IF, the Government of Djibouti signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a Norwegian company on aquaculture fisheries investments, planned for a value of USD 60 million. As a next step, a more detailed feasibility study will be included, building on the investment analysis already carried out.

20. **Eritrea**: the initiative started in 2021. The Government presented their investment cases on bananas, potatoes and anchovies. Eight matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and the private sector; follow-ups are planned with both development partners and three private sector companies.

21. **Ethiopia**: the initiative started in 2020. The Government of Ethiopia participated in HIH IF 2022 and 2023 editions. This year, the Government presented their investment cases in mechanization, animal feed, ranching and coffee. Twenty-six matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and the private sector. Ethiopia also participated in the Ministerial roundtable on coffee organized during the HIH IF 2025.

22. **Gambia**: the initiative started in 2021. This year the Government presented their investment cases in animal feed, ranching and coffee. Ten matchmaking sessions were requested and a follow-up is planned with one private sector company.

23. **Rwanda**: The Initiative started in 2020. The investment cases presented by the Government during HIH IF 2025 included tea, small livestock (piggery and chicken), potato production, avocado, and chili. Twenty-one bilateral meetings were requested by interested partners with eight follow-ups planned, including linking them to their local private sector.

24. **Somalia**: The Initiative started in 2021. The investment cases presented by the Government during HIH IF 2025 included sesame, maize, dairy and fodder. Ten bilateral meetings were requested by interested partners including IFIs, investors, associations, global foundations, private sector and development partners.

25. **South Sudan**: the Initiative started in 2023, and the Government has been successful in engaging investments in rice with a regional development bank. The Government identified and presented four investment cases in IF 2025 including sorghum, rice, fisheries and livestock (including dairy). Eleven matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, private sector and development partners during IF 2025, including on insurance, smallholder irrigation, livestock and agricultural data solutions.

26. **Uganda**: the Initiative started in 2022. This year, the Government presented their investment cases in dairy processing, animal feed, maize processing, leather products, mechanization and bananas. Thirty matchmaking sessions were requested; ten follow-ups are planned, mainly with private investors.

27. **Zambia**: the Initiative started in 2022. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases related to maize, soybean, honey and aquaculture. Twenty-four matchmaking sessions were requested, and a follow-up is planned with the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank (IFC) and private sector companies.

B. Asia and Pacific

28. The **Pacific SIDS Investments Initiative** was presented for the first time at this year's IF. The Initiative is based on Pacific Members' national priorities in agrifood systems, including key investment opportunities in taro, cocoa and fisheries. Twelve matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and the private sector. A regional bank indicated interest in engaging in

the investment plans based on the multigovernmental commitment and interest expressed at the HIH IF 2025, with ongoing follow-up with the FAO Investment Centre.

29. A side event was organized at the HIH Investors Lounge to present ongoing work of the Asia and the Pacific Regional Office with partners on innovative work on rice, covering sustainable rice production, reducing methane from rice and green bonds with a series of partners. This was well received and may evolve into a future HIH Regional Initiative.

30. **Bangladesh:** the Initiative started in 2021. The Government of Bangladesh participated in the HIH IF 2022 and 2023 editions. At IF 2025, the Government officials presented investment plans related to fruits and vegetables, onion and potatoes, oriental flowers and agriculture mechanization. Nine matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and the private sector; follow-ups are planned with two private sector companies, including one which proposed a visit to the country in December 2025.

31. **Bhutan:** the Initiative started in 2020. The Government of Bhutan has participated in all editions of HIH IF since 2022. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases related to poultry and eggs, coffee and buckwheat. Twenty matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and the private sector. During the bilateral meetings, a regional development bank showed interest and willingness to invest in the One-Child One-Egg Initiative. The Government is planning to arrange a second national investment forum in 2026, possibly jointly with the regional development bank. Additionally, the Government was also invited to participate in a new Regional Initiative on water.

32. **Lao People's Democratic Republic:** the Initiative started in 2020. The Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic participated in the first two editions of HIH IF in 2022 and 2023. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment plans related to rice, tea, coffee, chili and beef (cattle). Four matchmaking sessions were requested by the private sector, and a follow-up is planned with two private sector companies.

33. **Mongolia**: the Initiative started in 2024. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases related to meat (horse, mutton), cashmere, vegetables, warehouse and camel milk. Eight matchmaking sessions were organized with IFIs, development partners and private sector; follow-ups are arranged with the Asian Development Bank on cashmere and capacity development as well as with a private sector company, also on cashmere.

34. **The Philippines:** the Initiative started in 2024, and with a cross departmental taskforce, the HIH supported the Government in developing specific targeted investments based on the HIH typologies and mapping. The Government participated in the HIH IF 2024 edition as well and, for IF 2025, they presented their prioritized agrifood investment cases on abaca, bamboo, deep water seaweed and mango processing. Thirty-two bilateral meetings were requested, and follow-ups are planned with several companies as well as international and regional development banks on investment cases.

35. **Papua New Guinea:** the Initiative started in 2024, and the Government participated in the IF 2024. Since then, the Government has announced investments of USD 40 million in 2024, and a coconut investment from 2024 has matured into an investment by a private company with a value of USD 25 million, officially announced in October 2025. Seven bilateral meetings were requested by IFIs, banks and the private sector.

36. **Tuvalu:** the Initiative started in 2023. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases related to poultry and taro. Two matchmaking sessions were requested by an IFI development partner. During this matchmaking, a regional bank advised that they could support over 95 percent of the identified investment plans.

C. Europe and Central Asia

37. **Tajikistan** joined the HIH in 2020 and, with updated typology mapping, joined the HIH IF this year to present their prioritized agrifood investments focused on apricot, potato and pasture

improvement. Thirteen bilateral meetings were requested by regional banks, investors and the private sector with follow-ups planned with a regional bank, an IFI (at country level) on the investment cases, an invitation for an international initiative to visit the country and with three other private sector entities.

D. Latin America and the Caribbean

38. The **HIH Caribbean SIDS** Initiative was launched at HIH IF 2024, co-designed and to be implemented with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in a phased approach. The key prioritized agrifood investments focus on the SIDS shared issue of climate change and improved water management. The Initiative represents a concrete contribution to the implementation of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS, as well as the CARICOM 25 by 2025 Initiative.

39. At the IF 2025, CARICOM presented investments on digitalized irrigation, improved water capture, storage, management and the rehabilitation of irrigation systems. Twenty-eight matchmaking sessions were requested by potential investors and/or investment agencies. Engagements are ongoing on an Outcome Bond developed around this proposal with a Europe-based bank.

40. **Amazonia:** at the 2025 Investment Forum, an updated regional initiative was presented by the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, which includes Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela (Bolivian Republic of). The investment plan proposes enabling public goods and catalysing value chains as interventions to propagate the transition towards inclusive and sustainable Amazonian agrifood systems. Nineteen matchmaking sessions were requested, and six follow-ups have been identified with national/subregional banks and the private sector.

41. **Bolivia (Plurinational State of)**: the Initiative started in 2022. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases related to cocoa, amazonian fruits and camelids. Six matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and private sector.

42. **Colombia**: the Initiative started in 2023. The Government of Colombia also participated in IF 2024. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment plans related to coffee and cocoa. Twenty matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and private sector and follow-ups with three regional and international IFIs are planned, as well as with several companies.

43. **Dominican Republic**: the Initiative started in 2023. The Government of the Dominican Republic also participated in the IF 2023 and 2024 editions. At IF 2025, the Government presented an investment case related to bananas. Twenty-three matchmaking sessions were requested, and seven follow-ups are planned with IFIs, development partners and the private sector.

44. **El Salvador:** the Initiative started in 2021. The Government of El Salvador also participated in the IF 2022 and 2023 editions. At IF 2025, the Government presented an investment case related to coffee. Ten matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and the private sector.

45. **Guatemala**: the Initiative started in 2020. Guatemala presented in all editions of HIH IF 2022 to present, and it has mainstreamed the HIH methodology into government planning. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment plans related to development routes investment programme, municipality of Coban, Alta Verapaz and access to irrigation infrastructure in the dry corridor and Peten. Twenty-three matchmaking sessions were requested with 13 follow-ups planned with IFIs, development partners and the private sector.

46. **Mexico**: joined the HIH in 2024. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases related to maize, beans, rice and milk (dairy). Thirty-five matchmaking sessions were requested, and six follow-ups are planned with IFIs, development partners and the private sector.

47. **Paraguay**: the Initiative started in 2022. The Government of Paraguay also participated in the HIH IF 2023 and 2024 editions. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases related to aquaculture (fisheries) and financial infrastructure. Twenty-two matchmaking sessions were requested, and eight follow-ups are ongoing with IFIs, development partners and private sector.

48. **Peru**: the Initiative started in 2021. The Government of Peru participated in all editions of HIH IF from 2022 to present. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases related to grains, livestock and Amazonian bioeconomy. Twenty-four matchmaking sessions were requested, and four follow-ups are planned with IFIs and the private sector.

E. Near East and North Africa

49. **Iraq**: joined HIH in 2023. The Government of Iraq participated in the IF 2024 edition. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases on upscaling dairy production and processing, backyard lamb fattening and dates (palm) production and processing. Eight matchmaking sessions were requested by IFIs, development partners and private sector.

50. **Mauritania**: the Initiative started in 2023. The Government of Mauritania also participated in IF 2024. At IF 2025, the Government presented investment cases related to dairy, wheat, onion, potato and fodder. Eleven matchmaking sessions were requested, and follow-ups are planned with five private sector companies and one non-governmental organization.

III. Human capital development

51. **EX-ACT (short for Ex-Ante Carbon-balance Tool) Trainings 2025:** HIH organized three trainings, respectively in English, French and Spanish to cover countries' requirements, over the period from March to April 2025. In total, 111 participants from 36 countries in FAO Regional Offices (Regional Office for Africa [RAF], Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific [RAP], Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia [REU], Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean [RLC] and Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa [RNE]) participated in these training sessions.

52. **Thematic Training 2025:** The Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP) conducted two training sessions in English and Spanish respectively, covering awareness raising, skills and tools required to better understand and prioritize women empowerment in their advisory roles and when to identify and formulate investment proposals. In total, 38 participants including the focal points from the HIH team in headquarters, Regional, Subregional and Country Offices participated.

53. **GIS/SFA[2] trainings 2025:** The Digital FAO and Agro-Informatics Division (CSI) team conducted a training workshop for 23 participants from the Government of Gabon in May 2025. The CSI team conducted another training workshop for Subregional office for the Pacific Islands (SAP) for 16 participants from six SAP countries participated in this workshop. In 2025, the Agrifood Economics and Policy Division (ESA) team conducted multicountry support trainings on SFA-typology maps and investment notes in Latin American countries, attended by 86 participants from governments and FAO, including 39 participants from Peru, 30 participants from Paraguay and 17 participants from Bolivia.

IV. HIH Dashboard and communication

54. The HIH Dashboard provides an overview of the total number of countries engaged in the HIH (80 as of October 2025). The development of the programme dashboard has advanced in terms of data quality and automation within the FAO corporate system such as the Country Office Information Network for real-time monitoring and reporting.

55. The HIH team is planning to organize a webinar in the coming months for all HIH focal points in HIH countries on how to incorporate country data into the HIH Dashboard as per past Council's recommendations on increased automation.

56. Since 2023, the HIH team has arranged a HIH booth at the World Food Forum, bringing together the various elements of HIH for the World Food Forum participants. This year the booth had

[2] Geographic Information System/Sustainable Food and Agriculture

over 1 500 visitors with five sections on the HIH typologies, Geospatial and Agro-informatics platforms, a language learning module on HIH, the EX-ACT tool and the FAO's Data Lab.

57. The HIH IF webpage has also been improved and expanded, including all its Members' investment plans from the 2022, 2023 and 2024 IFs. The webpage is regularly updated and it now also includes a News section and media reports on follow-up events such as national investment fora organized by national governments and supported by HIH.