176th Session of the FAO Council

Item 6: Update on the Hand-in-Hand Initiative

The Council, at its 168th Session (CL 168/5), requested the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to provide regular updates on progress and results achieved in the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative. As of the end of October 2024, there are 72 governments signed on as members of HIH with an additional five countries engaged or using the innovative Hand-in-Hand tools and approaches such as the Geospatial Platform. As follow-up to the HIH Investment Forum (IF) in 2023, several members have taken the initiative to organize eight national-level Investment Fora.

A key milestone was also reached in October 2024 at the third global Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum, where 29 countries and five Regional Initiatives (Amazonia with the Amazonia Initiative with the Amazon Co-operation Treaty Organization, Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) with the Initiative with the Caribbean Community, Dry Corridor in Central America with the Central America Integration System, Sahel in Africa with the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel /Economic Community of West African States and Southern Africa with the Southern African Development Community) presented their prioritized agrifood investment cases to a global investor audience at FAO headquarters. In summary, the countries and Regional Initiatives presented agrifood investments for a total value of USD 15 billion, covering 115 investment cases and with an expected 120 million beneficiaries. Details of each country investment case and the progress made are included in the update.

The unique approach of the HIH also grew significantly with over 600 matchmaking meetings being requested by investors with participating members and Regional/Subregional Initiatives during the Investment Forum 2024. An updated online App is now operational which enables investors to connect with HIH members throughout the year.

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

Development of human capital is at the core of HIH support. The Geographic Information System team provided multiple specialized trainings to countries and 888 people were trained to date in advanced socioeconomic analysis. Based on investors' feedback from the Investment Fora in 2022 and 2023, HIH also supported three regional trainings across four regions on the FAO open-source Environmental eXternalities ACcounting Tool (EX-ACT) for 32 members during 2024. A strong interest was noted at the HIH booth at the HIH IF 2024 which featured the Geospatial Platform, the EXACT carbon accounting tool, artificial intelligence from the FAO Data lab and also virtual reality, with over 1 000 visitors; plans for expansion are foreseen in 2025.

The development of the HIH dashboard has advanced in terms of data quality and automation as well as an interactive globe developed to facilitate users' access and monitoring. Updated HIH communication materials and products have also been developed and disseminated and used extensively for FAO's briefings on the World Food Forum as well as in engagements with investors, stakeholders and the private sector.

The HIH webpage has been expanded and includes a new "News" section as well as media coverage on follow-up events from 2023 (and 2024) such as national investment fora. HIH is currently exploring the development of communication materials around several HIH success stories in the SIDS in close collaboration with FAO's Office of SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs (OSL).

The next Global HIH IF will be held in October 2025, at FAO headquarters in Rome, with the active participation of an estimated 30 HIH members and five Regional Initiatives which are foreseen to present their prioritized agrifood investment cases.

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