

Programme Evaluation Series

**Evaluation of the Food and Nutrition
Security, Impact, Resilience,
Sustainability and Transformation
(FIRST) Programme**

Project code: GCP/INT/244/EC

Management response

Overall response to the evaluation

1. Management welcomes the Evaluation of the Food and Nutrition Security, Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) Programme (GCP/INT/244/EC). In its conclusions, the evaluation recognizes the relevance of the FIRST Programme and its added value compared to other projects involving policy assistance. The evaluation also recognizes “the way the Programme has engaged in partnerships as one of its most salient successes”. The evaluation provides a set of recommendations mainly focused on the strategic orientation of FIRST. Management agrees with the conclusions of the evaluation as well as its recommendations, which will be implemented over the next two years’ transition phase before an eventual FIRST successor programme becomes operational.
2. In particular, Management agrees with the recommendation of developing a follow-up phase of FIRST. Discussions have already taken place with the European Union (EC-DEVCO) to develop FIRST successor programme aligned to the new priorities under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2021-2027) and the new European Union budget structure. Moreover, in view of the need in future for mobilizing funding also at country level, the recommendation of developing country-specific theories of change, linked to the FIRST’s overall theory of change, will also be implemented.
3. To enhance the sector policy dialogue and improve the effectiveness of FIRST, the evaluation recommends strengthening the triangular partnerships between FAO, the European Union and Government. This partnership is at the centre of the programme and some concrete actions are proposed to further reinforce the collaboration. In relation to the recommendation of broadening the spectrum of partners especially at country level, whereas partnerships with other UN agencies, donors, civil society and academia are already well-established in some FIRST countries, a particular emphasis will be given to strengthening engagement with private sector, including local SMEs.
4. Management is also fully aligned with the recommendation of making social transformation a programme priority by making gender equality and youth empowerment an integral part of policy assistance and policy dialogue under the current graduation strategies and the design of the successor programme.
5. Finally, Management welcomes the recommendations of improving country-level communication and exchanges among policy officers. An innovative approach both in terms of designing and facilitating technical cross-country exchanges as well as reframing communication at country-level is currently being tested as part of a wider communication and knowledge sharing strategy for FIRST.

Management response to the evaluation of the Food and Nutrition Security, Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) Programme					Sep 2020
Evaluation Recommendation (a)	Management response (b) Accepted, Partially Accepted or Rejected	Management plan			
		Actions to be taken, and/or comments about partial acceptance or rejection (c)	Responsible unit (d)	Time frame (e)	Further funding required (Y or N) (f)
<p>Recommendation 1. In order to support the longer-term process of policy reform and policy implementation to which FIRST has been contributing, and building on FIRST's comparative advantage and added value, and on the high level of trust gained with country partners and stakeholders, EU-FAO, in collaboration with other national and international development partners, should develop a follow-up phase to FIRST. The follow-up programme should be designed considering a programme duration of indicatively 6 years. This timeframe would allow country partners and stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of policy implementation and to draw lessons from a better understanding of what has worked, what has not, and what needs to be improved to adjust the current policy cycle and plan for the next one. It would also allow the global management team of the programme to consolidate (sub) regional and global analyses of lessons learned in order to share lessons and knowledge and to influence global governance processes.</p>	Accepted	<p>Initial discussions on a (5 to 6 year) successor programme have started with the EU and will be continued early 2021; after the completion of the internal restructuring in DEVCO and Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) programming. The successor programme will build on FIRST experience and be aligned to the new priorities under the next MFF (2021-2027) and the new EU budget structure.</p> <p>The FIRST programme has been extended up to the end of 2022. The coming two years will be used as a transition phase towards a successor programme whereby funding for country level work will increasingly have to come from national-level resources/envelopes.</p> <p>A proposal for the successor programme will be drafted in 2021 in close consultation with DEVCO, the EU Delegations and FAO Representatives to align with country priorities and needs.</p> <p>In order to maintain the FIRST country network intact before a successor programme can start, additional funds are needed. To this effect, an addendum for a budget increase has been submitted to DEVCO.</p>	FIRST Management	By end 2021	Y

<p>Recommendation 2. In the framework of the longer-term process of policy reform and policy implementation, FAO and EU should support partner governments to develop concrete plans to reform the public sector structures relevant to FNSSA governance, in line with the established policy priorities and investment plans. This should involve concrete commitments to adequately empower, resource and capacitate the public sector structures responsible for policy implementation at national and sub-national level; reform of parastatal organisations to overcome inefficiencies and lack of capacities, as well as allocating adequate budgetary resources consistent with the ambitions of the policies and plans. These reforms and plans should be country specific, addressing the specific challenges and bottlenecks identified, and seizing windows of opportunity.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>As part of the ongoing FIRST graduation strategies, Policy Officers are working closely with the EU and FAO to support governments with strengthening the policy/programme implementation capacities. In several countries, this includes generating evidence on the use of public sector resources and advocating for increased budget to the agricultural sector and/or to specific government structures (e.g. the National Office for Food Security, ONASA, in Chad). In other countries, the focus is also on supporting the decentralization process (e.g. the devolution in Kenya) and the allocation of more resources and capacities at subnational level (e.g. in Burkina Faso).</p> <p>These are long-term processes that require not only continued funding of the FIRST programme, but also, and more importantly, funding by EUDs and Governments involved in public sector reform programmes. Further, whilst the programme supports ongoing public sector reforms, public expenditure reviews, and strengthening of decentralized capacities, the main responsibility for actual allocation of financial and human resources lies primarily with the government. Unlike the EU, FIRST as a programme cannot ‘enforce’ national governments to deliver against concrete commitments. Therefore, in several countries, FIRST is contributing to ongoing EU Budget Support Programmes, which include public sector reforms as indicators for budget disbursement.</p>	<p>POs, FAO Country Offices and EU Delegations in specific FIRST countries</p>	<p>by end 2022</p>	<p>Y</p>
<p>Recommendation 3. The FAO Country Offices, the EUD and the supported ministries should strengthen their trilateral relationship, to enhance the sector policy dialogue and improve the effectiveness of FIRST. FIRST, FAO and EUDs should strengthen the working of the so-called FAO/EU/Government triangle through the increased use of FIRST (and FAO)</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>A good trilateral relationship is at the centre of the programme. It is challenged by high staff turnover from both the EUD and FAOR side. In addition to close monitoring of the partnership and periodic discussions on progress and way forward, the following two actions are foreseen to deepen the relationship and policy dialogue:</p>	<p>FIRST Management</p>	<p>By end 2022</p>	<p>N</p>

<p>products to deepen and expand the policy dialogue on FNSSA. In those countries where the triangular approach is not functioning as foreseen, there is a need to refocus/assess the situation to bring it back on track.</p>		<p>1) Cross-country FIRST network discussions, involving POs, EUDs, Government and FAORs (see also #8)</p> <p>2) Periodic discussions EU, FAO, Government and FIRST Management on strategic alignment to new priorities of EU, FAO and Government and development of successor programme.</p>			
<p>Recommendation 4. EU and FAO should encourage the development of a regional perspective for FIRST (not just country based) by addressing policy issues which have a clear regional/sub-regional dimension, such as trade, sanitary and phyto-sanitary regulations, pest management, use of shared natural resources (e.g. water, protected areas), and common problems affecting transboundary areas. FIRST could build on existing initiatives and dynamics that are already ongoing at sub-regional level through the various sub-regional organizations (e.g. G5 Sahel, CILSS, etc.).</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>To some extent, FIRST has already taken a (sub)regional approach – both thematic and geographically. Examples are the regional fisheries and aquaculture policy in ECOWAS and the policy support in the Pacific.</p> <p>In the coming two years, FIRST will take up a sub-regional approach (thematic and geographical) where appropriate. As by design, FIRST adds value to EU investments which mainly happen at country level, such an approach also depends on the direction, thematic and (sub)regional focus of the EUDs and DEVCO under the next MFF.</p>	<p>FIRST Management</p>	<p>End 2022</p>	<p>N</p>
<p>Recommendation 5. FIRST should develop country-specific theories of change within the logic of FIRST’s overall theory of change, building on the Policy Effectiveness Analyses and the Graduation Strategies. This should facilitate monitoring and reporting on country achievements in terms of outcomes and impact.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>Currently, the country graduation strategies and the annually updated country results frameworks already describe country-specific theories of change within the logic of FIRST’s overall theory of change.</p> <p>For the transition phase and the eventual successor programme, programme funds will increasingly come from the country level, resulting in individual projects each with their specific theory of change and results framework that will need to be aligned to the results frameworks of Government, FAO and the EU.</p>	<p>FIRST Management</p>	<p>End 2022</p>	<p>N</p>
<p>Recommendation 6. As FIRST support moves to policy implementation rather than policy development, the Programme should broaden the spectrum of its partners on the country</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>Beyond the FAO/EU/Government “triangle”, FIRST is already partnering with a number of stakeholders including other UN agencies and development partners, as well as the civil society including farmer’s</p>	<p>POs, FAO Country Offices and EU</p>	<p>By end 2022</p>	<p>N</p>

<p>and global levels, with a particular focus on family farmers and Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) across the agri-food sector.</p>		<p>organizations, women’s groups, etc. What FIRST should definitely strengthen is the linkage with the private sector, including local SMEs. This engagement has recently started for example in Kenya where FIRST is supporting the institutionalization of the Agriculture Sector Network (ASNET) as a coordination agency gathering the Government at both national and county levels, development partners, private sector and NGOs with the aim of triggering the envisaged 10-year transformation strategy of Kenya’s agriculture sector. Engagement with the private sector should be a key component of FIRST successor programme, in line with the EU’s “Farm to Fork” strategy, which has also a strong focus on linking with the private sector.</p>	<p>delegations in specific FIRST countries</p>		
<p>Recommendation 7. FIRST should build on the Policy Effectiveness Analyses by ensuring gender equality becomes a genuine priority as FIRST shifts its support to policy implementation.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>FIRST Management will take the following steps:</p> <p>1) Ensure gender equality (and youth empowerment) is a integral part of policy support and policy dialogue under the current graduation strategies by supporting the Policy Officers through network learning and skills development on gender-sensitive policy dialogue, technical support, and strategic alliances at country level. The starting point will be to understand FIRST (POs and Management Team) own gender biases and how policy dialogue is currently prepared and facilitated across the network.</p> <p>2) Ensure the gradual alignment to new EU priorities (especially the Farm-to-Fork strategy) during the coming two years and the development of a successor programme that genuinely incorporates a gender and youth perspective. This includes unpacking and understanding gender-equitable and inclusive agri-food systems transformation.</p>	<p>FIRST Management and POs</p>	<p>1) By end 2021 2) By end 2022</p>	<p>N</p>
<p>Recommendation 8. FIRST should improve its communication at the country level to present the longer-term policy objectives to</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>Recommendation #8 and #9 are interrelated and both part of a wider communication and knowledge management strategy that the FIRST Management Team</p>	<p>FIRST Management</p>	<p>By Q3 of 2021</p>	<p>N</p>

<p>which it is contributing and how it plans to do so. For example, policy briefs should be elaborated to better communicate the longer-term vision for the strengthening of the FNSSA policy environment in the country, based on the Policy Effectiveness Analysis and the Graduation Strategy.</p>		<p>is currently defining. In fact, lessons learnt from an FIRST response to the COVID-19 crisis have led to an innovative approach both in terms of designing and facilitating technical cross-country exchanges amongst FIRST Policy Officers and reframing communication at country-level.</p> <p>In terms of concrete actions, the Management Team is planning to: i) hold learning sessions with POs on key message definition and dissemination; ii) elaborate, in collaboration with the POs, a series of country-specific policy briefs/success stories around a well-established longer-term vision informed by the Global Think Piece and the country Policy Effectiveness Analyses.</p>			
<p>Recommendation 9. FIRST should encourage more exchanges between POs, especially at the bilateral and sub-regional levels, operationalising a platform for knowledge sharing and lessons learned combined with an annual meeting of POs and EU-FAO with other stakeholders to discuss emerging policy issues e.g. Climate Change, Innovation, Migration, Territorial approach to Rural Development, Agri-food Systems approach. This will enable POs to learn from each other and be kept abreast of major developments in the FNSSA area and to incorporate current thinking more systematically into their work.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>As reported above, cross-country exchanges amongst FIRST POs were piloted in July 2020 when FIRST POs and key partners were virtually convened to affirm the relevance of key messages in the Global Think Piece (GTP), as well as to discuss practical country-level applications of this global product. One of the conclusions was the need to continue with these peer-to-peer exchanges and to establish and communicate a country-specific longer-term vision to strengthen the FNSSA policy environment.</p> <p>In terms of concrete actions, the FIRST Management is currently designing a FIRST Global Learning Pathway (to be conducted between end of 2020 – early 2021) to exchange lessons learned and best practices in responding to COVID-19 and to integrate social transformation in country-specific policy dialogues contributing to the ongoing agri-food systems transformations. The learning pathway exchanges are virtual and don't require physical and synchronous presence of the network. Instead, we envisage different levels of online synchronous exchanges over the course of 2-3 months and host peer-to-peer exchanges and reflections on an asynchronous learning platform.</p>	<p>FIRST Management</p>	<p>By Q3 of 2021</p>	<p>N</p>