The global agrifood system faces considerable challenges in providing enough food of adequate quality to feed an ever-growing, aging and migrating population. The world is also changing at a fast pace with the emergence of an array of technologies. Digital technologies offer unique opportunities to improve food production and trade, especially for smallholder farmers, and to help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The agrifood system has undergone changes that have increased efficiency and profitability, yet it lags behind in terms of digitalization, which could play an increasingly important role in achieving the global goal of improving food security and rural livelihoods. However, digitalization can also have significant drawbacks. It may increase digital divides across the system, cause workforce displacement or be misused, as can be the case with data protection, data ownership, privacy rights and cybersecurity. Digitalization can also make it harder for smallholder farmers as they struggle to compete with new technologies, making the digital divide even more pronounced. In response to the request from 74 Ministers of Agriculture at the Global Forum on Food and Agriculture (GFFA) 2019, a concept note for considering the establishment of an International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture was prepared, and financially supported by Germany. The proposed role of the Digital Council, hereafter the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture, is to enhance international cooperation and the exchange of ideas and experiences across borders, creating synergies and avoiding the duplication of efforts. The International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture will support the rapid development of the digitalization of agriculture by ensuring expertise in using new digital tools, providing structured and strategic agricultural policy recommendations on digitalization to governmental and non-governmental actors, and strengthening international cooperation within the agrifood system to better confront challenges and develop plausible solutions.

WHAT DID THE PROJECT DO?
A concept note for a proposed International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture was prepared, with the aim of supporting agrifood system stakeholders in maximizing their potential through digitalization. In the first phase of the project, the concept note, which was produced as a result of consultations with approximately 355 stakeholders from more than 100 organizations, states that such an initiative would provide structured and strategic agricultural policy recommendations on digitalization to governmental and non-governmental actors and strengthen international cooperation in agrifood systems to identify challenges and possible solutions. In the second phase the key components for the establishment and operationalization of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture were implemented.

KEY FACTS

- Latest Approved Budget
  USD 499 996

- Duration
  September 2019 – May 2022

- Resource Partners
  Federal Government of Germany - Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL)

- Beneficiaries
  Rural populations, smallholder and family farmers, stakeholders in agricultural value chains, government ministries that oversee national food and agriculture systems and the general population
IMPACT

The International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture will promote dialogue on the digitalization of the food, agriculture, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry sectors, as well as land use planning and land use change. It will facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences on best practices and policy approaches between stakeholders, and create and/or strengthen linkages between international and multilateral fora mandated for the digital economy and those for food and agriculture, to improve coordination and synergies and to enhance awareness on impacts of digital technologies that are specific to food and agriculture.

ACTIVITIES

- A concept note for considering the creation of a “Digital Council for Food and Agriculture” was produced in collaboration with international organizations and presented at the 12th Berlin Agriculture Ministers’ Conference on the occasion of the GFFA.
- The concept note included the key elements for developing the Terms of Reference, such as the objective, scope, functions, roles and responsibilities and operating model, and was developed through design-thinking workshops, consultation meetings and mapping exercises that surveyed existing global initiatives covering agriculture in the digitalization age.
- FAO’s governing bodies initiated the process for its establishment by reviewing the Terms of Reference of the proposed initiative.
- FAO technical committees and the FAO Council reviewed the proposed initiative’s Terms of Reference and supported the establishment of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture.
- A funding strategy document was produced and may be utilized as a reference point for the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture.
- Potential members of the Online Multistakeholder Forum were identified, such as farmers’ organizations, the private sector, civil society and academia.
- Initiated the composition of the Inter-governmental Representatives’ Group and received nominees from Members.
- A coordination mechanism and workflow were developed for operationalizing the established International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture.

Partners

African Development Bank (AfDB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), United Nations World Food Program (WFP), World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

Project Title
Establishing the International Digital Council for Food and Agriculture

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