

**Project Evaluation Series**

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

**Project code: GCP/INT/244/EC**

**Follow-up report**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**  
Rome, 2023

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<p><b>Recommendation 1.</b></p> <p>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 six 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</p>	Accepted	<p>Initial discussions on a (five to six year) successor programme have started with the European Union 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>	<p>In 2021, FIRST management developed and discussed a concept note for a follow-up programme based on the inputs of the different EU Delegations and FAO Representatives.</p> <p>In 2021-22, FIRST worked closely with the EU Delegations to discuss, and where relevant formulate, follow-up programmes at country level.</p> <p>In 2022, FIRST management worked on an Addendum for a short no-cost extension to allow more time for those countries where EU Delegations intend to take over the FIRST policy work from their geographic envelope.</p> <p>In 2022, FIRST management supported the formulation of other related initiatives to ensure its insights, experiences and lessons are incorporated in the design.</p>	Advancing	<p>At global level, no direct follow-up programme will be funded due to changing priorities of INTPA-F3 and shift of funding from the global to country level in the EU.</p> <p>At country level, most FIRST countries have been successful in mobilizing resources to continue the policy work started under the FIRST Programme.</p>

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lessons and knowledge and to influence global governance processes.					
<p><b>Recommendation 2.</b></p> <p>In the framework of the longer-term process of policy reform and policy implementation, FAO and the European Union 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 organizations 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</p>	Accepted	<p>As part of the ongoing FIRST graduation strategies, Policy Officers are working closely with the European Union 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 European Union, FIRST as a programme cannot 'enforce' national governments to deliver against concrete commitments. Therefore, in</p>	In 2021–2022, FIRST worked closely with the European Union and FAO to support governments with strengthening the policy/programme implementation capacities through public expenditure reviews, advocacy, support to decentralization processes, facilitating more inclusive policy dialogue, etc.	Good	These are long-term processes. Impacts differ per country and are influenced by many diverse factors, including continued funding by EUDs, other donors and governments involved in public sector reform programmes, stability of government/elections, occurrences of other shocks/competition for resources (COVID-19, Ukraine war), etc.

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identified, and seizing windows of opportunity.		several countries, FIRST is contributing to ongoing EU Budget Support Programmes, which include public sector reforms as indicators for budget disbursement.			
<b>Recommendation 3.</b> 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/European Union/government triangle through the increased use of FIRST (and FAO) 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.	<b>Accepted</b>	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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Cross-country FIRST network discussions, involving POs, EUDs, government and FAORs (see also #8)</li> <li>ii. Periodic discussions European Union, FAO, government and FIRST management on strategic alignment to new priorities of the European Union, FAO and government and development of successor programme.</li> </ul>	In addition to monitoring the trilateral relationship at country level, FIRST management conducted periodic discussions with the EU Delegations on progress and way forward and set up a Global Learning network to facilitate cross-country discussions among POs, EUDs, governments and FAORs (see also recommendation #9).	Good	Where the trilateral relationship is good, countries managed to secure/are in the process of securing funding from the EU Delegation to continue the policy work started under FIRST (e.g. Chad, Guatemala, Palestine, Ethiopia)
<b>Recommendation 4.</b> The European Union and FAO should encourage the development of a regional perspective for FIRST (not just country based) by addressing policy issues which have a clear	<b>Accepted</b>	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.  In the coming two years, FIRST will take up a sub-regional approach (thematic and geographical)	Due to a delay in EU programming at a regional level, FIRST continued to work at country level (i.e. adding value to country-level investments).  An exception is ECOWAS, where FIRST is supporting the EU Delegation with the formulation of a	Advancing	As funding remains country-focused, follow-up work of FIRST also remains country level focused.

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regional/sub-regional dimension, such as trade, sanitary and phytosanitary 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.).		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.	programme on blue economy as a follow-up to the regional programme on governance in fisheries and aquaculture sector (PESCAO)		
<b>Recommendation 5.</b> 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.	<b>Accepted</b>	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.  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 European Union.	This recommendation is not applicable as there will not be an overarching follow-up programme at global level that connects different countries. That said, the individual country level follow-up projects have their own source of funding and own country-specific TOC and results frameworks.	Good	N/A
<b>Recommendation 6.</b> As FIRST support moves to policy implementation rather than policy development, the programme	<b>Accepted</b>	Beyond the FAO/European Union/government "triangle", FIRST is already partnering with a number of stakeholders including other UN agencies and development partners, as well as the	In 2021–2022, FIRST has been able to strengthen the linkage with the private sector, especially with local	Excellent	As a result of these different actions taken, FIRST country-and global level work has

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should broaden the spectrum of its partners on the country and global levels, with a particular focus on family farmers and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) across the agri-food sector.		civil society including farmer's organizations, women's groups, academia, 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.	SMEs, in a number of countries, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Chad, where FIRST contributed to establish an informal platform of SMEs in the agriculture and food sector. A capacity needs assessment of these SMEs was also conducted and an experience-sharing trip with the Agricultural Bank of Niger on SMEs' financing was organized in 2021 with support from FIRST.</li> <li>ii. ECOWAS, where FIRST focused on strengthening the contribution of the private sector to the fisheries and aquaculture sector through the elaboration of a plan for the modernization of maritime and continental artisanal fisheries, with specific actions to support the development of micro and small enterprises. FIRST also developed a practical and operational guide for the promotion of public-private partnership (PPP) to improve the contribution of the fisheries and aquaculture sector to food and nutrition security and the</li> </ul>		broadened its spectrum of partners with greater involvement of representatives of the private sector, youth and women, academia, innovators, etc. in the policy dialogues and implementation

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			<p>fight against poverty of vulnerable populations in West Africa.</p> <p>Further, at country level, FIRST played a very crucial role during the National Food Systems Dialogues in preparation of the UN Food Systems Summit held in September 2021. FIRST Policy Officers (e.g. in Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Cambodia, Chad, Niger, Uganda, etc.) engaged in organizing and facilitating strategic dialogues with a number of stakeholders including government entities, civil society, private sector, academia.</p> <p>At global level, FIRST management has set up an inclusive Global Learning Network (see recommendation #9), platforming the experience and insights of the private sector, women's organizations, youth representatives, academia, organizations involved innovation, etc. FIRST management also explored the potential of collaborating with social media platforms as means for citizens, and women and youth in particular, to play an increasingly direct and</p>		

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			organized role in shaping policy agendas and changing behaviours.		
<p><b>Recommendation 7.</b></p> <p>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>	<b>Accepted</b>	<p>FIRST management will take the following steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. 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.</li> <li>ii. 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.</li> </ul>	<p>FIRST management has ensured that gender and youth empowerment are integral parts of every learning event organized by the Programme through the Global Learning Network events</p> <p>FIRST has integrated gender and youth in all its policy dialogue work around the National Food Systems Dialogues.</p>	Advancing	<p>Whilst improvement has been made in terms of more inclusive policy dialogue and mainstreaming gender and youth issues, more needs to be done in terms of equipping Policy Officers and partners with the relevant skills, especially in challenging contexts.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 8.</b></p> <p>FIRST should improve its communication at the country level to present the longer-term policy objectives to which it is contributing and how it plans to do so. For example, policy briefs</p>	<b>Accepted</b>	<p>Recommendation #8 and #9 are interrelated and both part of a wider communication and knowledge management strategy that the FIRST management team 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</p>	<p>FIRST management supported countries with mainstreaming strategic communication in its annual planning, development of key policy messages, and the use of different forms of media. For example, in the Pacific, FIRST worked</p>	Advancing	<p>Whilst improvement has been made in terms of using communication more strategically, more needs to be done in terms of equipping</p>



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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>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>with a popular television programme (national cooking contest using local dishes) to incorporate key messages around obesity and NCDs.</p> <p>Another example is Cuba. In Cuba, an innovative initiative seeks to involve journalists and communicators in the dissemination of the new Food Sovereignty and Nutritional Education Law and its implementing plan. FIRST has joined efforts with the local José Martí International Journalism Institute and developed a virtual course on how to effectively communicate and report on food security and food systems issues, aimed at increasing the visibility and rigor of these topics in the Cuban media landscape. Over 50 journalists took part in the course, which is already preparing its second edition.</p>		<p>Policy Officers and partners with the relevant skills and know-how on using different forms of media more strategically</p>
<b>Recommendation 9.</b> FIRST should encourage more exchanges between POs, especially at the bilateral and sub-regional levels, operationalizing a platform	<b>Accepted</b>	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	In 2020, the shift towards online meetings in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic opened an opportunity to strengthen and expand the FIRST network in the virtual space. This led to the creation	Excellent	In the wake of the United Nations Food Systems Summit and the related National Food Systems Dialogues, the Global Learning Network

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for knowledge sharing and lessons learned combined with an annual meeting of POs and the European Union-FAO with other stakeholders to discuss emerging policy issues e.g. climate change, innovation, migration, territorial approach to rural development, agrifood 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>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 two-three months and host peer-to-peer exchanges and reflections on an asynchronous learning platform.</p>	<p>of the FIRST Global Learning Network (GLN), which has since convened at regular intervals a diversity of people from multiple countries (government staff, development partners, technical experts, private actors, representatives of women and youth groups, academia, innovators, etc.) in learning-focused and experience-based dialogues.</p> <p>The FIRST GLN dialogues are governed by the following principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Amplification: The network provides a space for open dialogue with the objective of learning. By bringing together different people with different perspectives, participants move beyond the comfort of their own vision of the system and start listening to the differences.</li> <li>ii. Anchoring: The dialogues platform concrete practical experiences. Participants are invited to reflect on what they hear, from their own</li> </ol>		<p>dialogues organized by FIRST have acquired even more prominence in the added value that FIRST offers to countries, as well as to other global partners interested in co-learning across countries. As food systems actors from across the world discovered the added value and cost-effectiveness of open dialogue in the virtual space, the GLN offered a neutral forum to continue and deepen the exchanges on the future of agrifood systems, salient innovations that can accelerate the achievement of sustainability and resilience, and reflection on what the big global discussions mean at national and local levels.</p>

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			<p>perspectives and engage in a shared learning experience.</p> <p>iii. Accompaniment: The GLN accompanies the individual learning process of participants who are willing to share their perspectives. Platforming real issues and organizing a dialogue around it helps to achieve this.</p> <p>iv. Appreciation: Accepting the different views is a big factor of successful dialogues.</p> <p>Furthermore, management moved away from a purely country focused backstopping approach to a sub-regional approach where POs meet and share their challenges and mitigation strategies.</p>		

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