

25th Session of the Committee on Forestry

Written Correspondence Procedure – inputs from Members (English version)

Item 8.1.a International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture – Terms of Reference

Member Name	Comments
USA (25 September)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The United States supports increased innovation, including digitalization in agriculture to increase sustainable production. • Thus, the United States supports the platform’s proposed role in knowledge sharing of best practices and raising awareness. • We note the recommendations from the Joint meeting of the Program and Finance Committees explicitly noted that the new platform should not have a policy setting function in its mandate; the recommendations of the Council made no mention of a policy function. • It is imperative the new platform avoid duplicating established work programs and activities of other international bodies with comparative advantage in policy areas involving information communication technologies, use of digital technologies and data, and digital economy, as well as multi-stakeholder forums providing recommendations and guidelines or supporting governments as they create new policy frameworks. • The United States requests that any terms of reference for this digital focus more on knowledge sharing, to fully remain within FAO’s mandate, and not duplicate authorities or mandates of other relevant international organizations. • With regards to the proposed provisions on policy guidance, the FAO should not duplicate policy guidance areas or ongoing work within the International Telecommunication Union, through its Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) and World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC), and the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) or its forums, created by UN General Assembly. • The United States proposes an alternative vision for the Digital Platform based on knowledge sharing in Annex 1 Alternative Outline – Mandate and Functions FAO proposed “International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture”. <i>(The Annex follows after the end of these comments.)</i> • We are concerned with the proposed governance structure described in the Executive Summary and Paragraph 8. • The United States will appreciate more information from FAO about the role of the Member States in overseeing the Platform. As currently described, the four separate components serve to diffuse action and responsibility across a range of bodies, with no clear locus of control or responsibility. • We recognize that Member States will be asked to propose "highly qualified public senior offices" for the "Inter-governmental Representative’s Group" but we also note that those officers, in the context of this Platform, are to act in their personal and not their national capacities. • Given the importance of digital agriculture, we would like to see some sort of reporting mechanism where recommendations and proposals from the Platform are submitted to the FAO Member States for their consideration

and approval. We believe this reporting structure is sufficiently important that we should delay approving this proposal until a satisfactory reporting structure is agreed.

***ANNEX - Alternative Outline – Mandate and Functions
FAO proposed “International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture”***

Mandate

- (1) Share knowledge of best practices and raise awareness of agricultural technology and digital products and related advisory services, to include availability, use and trade (local, regional, or international);
- (2) Share knowledge of best practices and raise awareness of educational tools and technical training products related to agricultural technology and digital products and related technology applications; and,
- (3) promote multi-stakeholder (public-private) dialogue related to 1 and 2;

Main functions of a digital agriculture platform to:

- promote dialogue on digital transformation, adoption of digital technology and market development for advisory services;
- favor the transformation of agriculture towards more efficient and sustainable use practices;
- foster exchange of knowledge and lessons learned of technologies through bilateral and multilateral dialogues*; encourage knowledge sharing of best practices to encourage reliable and affordable electronic connectivity in rural areas and farm communities;
- act as a cross-cutting initiative, working in synergy with other relevant organizations and activities, avoiding duplications with multi-lateral, international and/or country-specific/local organizations;

Indonesia (26 September)

- Indonesia thanks the Secretariat for preparing document COFO/2020/8.1a. We understand the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture will provide a voluntary and inclusive multi-stakeholder mechanism to enhance awareness, promote coordination, bridge the gap between multilateral fora for the digital economy and those for food and agriculture and provide policy recommendations to governments.
- We appreciate agricultural digitalization as an innovation that can support trade in agriculture and food products. This innovation will provide a bridge that connects private sector suppliers and farmers to open a new market, and enable governments to monitor and design policies effectively.
- In relation to the draft COFO/2020/8.1.a, Indonesia would like to suggest the following:
For paragraph 9 “*The International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture shall be funded by extra-budgetary contributions*”, we suggest that agricultural digitalization should involve financial sources which will enable product diversification.

Brazil (26
September)

Brazil would like to propose the following amendments to the Terms of Reference of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture:

- The mission of the International Platform, as currently drafted in section III of the text, gets confused with and replicates the objectives defined in section IV. Accordingly, sub-items “a” and “b” should be eliminated. Furthermore, the mission should include a reference to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, to frame the activities of the Platform in the context of the promotion of sustainable development in its three dimensions. Paragraph 6 could, thus, be redrafted with the following terms: “The International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture aims at providing an inclusive multi-stakeholder forum for identifying, discussing AND DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS ON the potential benefits and risks of digitalization of the food and agricultural sectors, WITH A VIEW TO CONTRIBUTING TO THE FULFILLMENT OF THE 2030 AGENDA”.
- In paragraph 7, item "a", the word “promote” should be replaced with “address”, to better reflect the idea that the digitization can bring benefits and risks;
- In paragraph 7, item "c", we suggest to change the text "that are specific to agriculture" to "that are specific to FOOD AND agriculture", in order to properly reflect the scope of the International Platform;
- In paragraph 7, item "d", we suggest to replace "support policymakers to formulate policies" by "support decision-making";
- Still in paragraph 7, item “d”, one of the objectives of the Platform is described as the development of recommendations, best practices and voluntary guidelines to support police makers. We are of the view that recommendations and guidelines aimed at supporting policymaking, even if of a voluntary nature, should be submitted to the approval of the relevant FAO decision-making bodies. A parallel can be made with the Global Soil Partnership, for instance – a mechanism in which participation is voluntary and whose technical recommendations on policy are often submitted for analysis and approval by COAG, Council and Conference. We, therefore, suggest that paragraph “d” be amended to include, at the end of it: “to be submitted to the review and approval of FAO's decision-making bodies, as appropriate”;
- In paragraph 8, item "b" (iii), we propose adding at the end of the sentence "for discussion and endorsement by the Inter-governmental Representatives Group”.

Brazil would also like to request the following clarifications regarding the Terms of Reference of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture:

- In paragraph 8, item “b”, we would like to understand the rationale for including only one regional institution among the members of the Advisory Committee;
- In paragraph 8, item “c”, we would like to understand how the discussions taking place in the Multi-stakeholder Forum will feed or connect to the work being developed in the remaining mechanisms, to guarantee a bottom-up approach. This should be made clear in the terms of reference;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As for financing and operationalization, it is not clear if the International Platform would be entirely funded with extra-budgetary contributions or if the activities of the Coordination Unit described in paragraph 12 would be borne by FAO's regular budget.
Argentina (26 September 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argentina appreciates that FAO maintains issues relating to innovation and digital tools at the heart of its programme of work, which is why we support the proposal of creating a Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture. • We are aware of the role played by digitalization in agriculture and food systems, which is why Argentina believe that it is important to rely upon a mechanism to discuss the impacts of digitalization and knowledge exchange to help Members develop new technologies and improve agricultural production, combat malnutrition and promote food security. • It is therefore important to adopt outlooks and approaches to reinforce food distribution and production systems, especially in light of the COVID-19 crisis, to prevent the negative impact of the pandemic on food security and nutrition. These tools, including digital tools, will help to find solutions and alternatives to help us find a way out of this situation, supporting sustainable and inclusive development and growth, and offering great opportunities for the food and agriculture sector. • It is also important to balance the training gap that exists between small producers and large companies so that the majority of producers are on an equal footing to benefit from these IT tools, enabling producer access to new technologies, develop training programmes and improve connectivity. Argentina would appreciate more detail on the planned mechanisms that will be used to implement these activities.
European Union (28 September)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States. • First of all, we welcome the decision of the FAO Council, taken at its 164th session in July, for FAO to host the International Platform for digital food and agriculture. • We would also thank FAO for preparing the Terms of Reference for this Platform, which address many aspects, such as the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and regional distribution, that are important to the EU and that are essential for finding widely acknowledged solutions to the key issues the Platform has to deal with. • However, reading the objectives of the Platform, we do not see a clear reference to forestry and forest matters. Therefore, we ask FAO to clarify the aspect of forestry in this respect. • Despite the need to clarify the open point, we would be ready to endorse the Terms of Reference.