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Progress on the Millennium Development Goals relevant to FAO/Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals

Executive Summary

2015 is the target year for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set in 2000, which ranged from halving extreme poverty and hunger to reducing child mortality and combating the spread of HIV/AIDS. The MDGs have been a milestone in global and national development efforts and promoted a culture of monitoring and evaluation. A new set of goals, known as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), will be endorsed at a UN Summit in September 2015. This document presents the progress made towards achieving the MDGs, namely those relevant to the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). It also describes the process leading to the development of the new set of SDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda and presents the proposed goals of direct relevance to the work of FAO. Furthermore, the document discusses issues related to the implementation of the new development framework and the required UN support, including by FAO, to ensure successful implementation at country level.

Suggested action by the Conference

The Conference is invited to review the progress made towards achievement of the MDG targets relevant for FAO and provide guidance to the Organization with regard to implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

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I. Progress on the Millennium Development Goals relevant to FAO

1. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were the first ever global framework to guide international development. An unprecedented support was raised for the eight Goals, with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders in mobilizing resources and catalyzing actions at all levels for their achievement. The Millennium Declaration and the MDGs have promoted a culture of monitoring and accountability. The MDG monitoring framework has driven development policy decision-making and helped to improve statistical capacity and data availability.
2. FAO has contributed to the achievement of the MDGs at global and country levels, in particular MDG 1 – “Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”, and MDG 7 – “Ensure environmental sustainability”. The Organization monitors four indicators related to MDGs 1 and 7, and reports on progress at the global level.
3. The first target under MDG 1 called for reducing by half, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty. In 1990, close to half of the people in developing countries lived on less than USD 1.25 a day. This rate dropped to 22 percent by 2010, achieving the MDG poverty target five years ahead of schedule. Meanwhile, the absolute number of people living in extreme poverty fell from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 1.2 billion in 2010. Despite this overall achievement, progress on poverty reduction has been uneven. Some regions, such as East Asia and South East Asia, met the target early, while other regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, still lag behind.
4. On the second poverty target, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, the share in total employment of unpaid family workers and own-account workers in developing regions declined to 56 percent in 2013 from 67 percent two decades earlier. This share decreased by 2.8 percentage points in the period of 2008–2013, compared to a decrease of 4.0 percentage points in the preceding five-year period (2003–2008). A high proportion of workers in vulnerable employment implies widespread informal work arrangements. Workers in such situations usually lack adequate social protection and suffer low incomes and arduous working conditions under which their fundamental rights may be violated.
5. The third target under MDG 1 called for halving, between 1990-1992 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger in developing countries. FAO’s latest estimates indicate that, globally, 795 million people are undernourished in 2014–16, down more than 167 million over the last decade and 216 million lower than in 1990–92. In the same period, the prevalence of undernourishment has fallen from 23.3 to 12.9 percent globally (SOFI 2015). Since 1990-92, 72 developing countries out of the 129 monitored have reached the MDG 1 hunger target, and nine countries are within reach of achieving the target. The global hunger target is within reach; however, this will require concerted and sustained political commitment at the highest level and an integrated approach for action.

SOFI 2015 Quote

Wide differences persist across regions. Some have made rapid progress in reducing hunger: Latin America as well as the Eastern and South-Eastern regions of Asia have all achieved [...] the MDG 1c hunger target [...] The MDG 1c target has been reached in the Caucasus and Central Asia and in the Northern and Western regions of Africa. Progress has also been recorded in the Caribbean, Oceania, Southern Asia, and Southern and Eastern Africa, but at too slow pace to reach the MDG 1c target. Finally, Central Africa and Western Asia are moving away from the hunger targets, with a higher proportion of undernourished in the population now than in 1990-92.

Unquote

6. Meanwhile, an estimated 99 million children under the age of five in the world were underweight in 2012. This represented 15 percent of all children under five, or approximately one in seven. The number of underweight children fell by 38 percent from an estimated 160 million children in 1990. At the same time, an estimated 162 million children under age five remain at risk of

diminished cognitive and physical development associated with stunting. The prevalence of stunting fell from an estimated 40 percent in 1990 to 25 percent in 2012, with all regions experiencing declines, except sub-Saharan Africa.

7. Besides the prevalence of undernourishment, FAO also reports on three indicators related to MDG 7: forest coverage; renewable water resource use; and the proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels.

8. There were around 13 million hectares of forest lost worldwide each year between 2000 and 2010, either through devastation by natural causes or because the land was converted to other land uses. As regards renewable water resource use, North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula in West Asia have withdrawal rates exceeding the limit of what is considered sustainable, while other regions' withdrawal rates were less than the threshold of sustainability. However, these regional figures mask huge differences within regions and also within countries, as many people in several countries live in areas of serious water scarcity. On marine resources, the percentage of fish stocks fished within biologically sustainable levels has declined, implying growing overfishing. Since 1990, the number of fish stocks depleted at unsustainable levels continued to increase, peaking at 32.5 percent in 2008 before declining to 28.8 percent in 2011.

II. From MDGs to SDGs

9. The world is a different place in 2015 than it was in 2000, and in this regard, there is a broad understanding that the Post-2015 Development Agenda, including a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be more than a follow-up to the MDGs. Although the MDGs have been formidable in mobilizing actions at all levels toward common development priorities, they have also faced criticism for inadequately addressing important dimensions of sustainable development and for encouraging siloed approaches to development. Member States have also insisted that the process leading to adoption of the new set of goals should be far more inclusive and participatory, driven and owned by the Member States themselves.

10. Today, the world faces interconnected challenges that cannot be tackled separately: food insecurity, malnutrition, climate change, natural resource scarcity, energy issues, persisting poverty – all influence, and are influenced by, one another. To address such challenges, the outcome document of the United Nations Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled *The Future We Want*, mandated the establishment of an Open Working Group (OWG) to develop a set of SDGs that should be “action oriented, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities”.

11. The OWG was established by the UN General Assembly in January 2013, and presented its proposed list of SDGs in July 2014. The OWG Report reaffirms the eradication of poverty and hunger as leading overall priorities. Consisting of a brief chapeau, 17 Goals and 169 targets, the Report offered a comprehensive vision for poverty eradication (Goal 1), for food security, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture (Goal 2), and for the sustainable use and management of natural resources (inter alia, Goals 12, 14 and 15).

12. Goal 1 tackles poverty in all its forms everywhere, addressing both absolute and relative poverty, and identifying social protection, equal access to land and other resources, as well as resilience, as key components in this effort. Critical issues and interlinkages reflected in FAO Strategic Objectives (SOs) 3 and 5 were also captured.

13. Contrary to the MDG approach, Goal 2 offers a comprehensive vision for food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, in much the same way as do FAO's Strategic Objectives 1, 2 and 4. Targets under this SDG address the critical access dimension of food security, the entire spectrum of malnutrition, the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, sustainable and resilient food production systems, and the maintenance of biodiversity and genetic resources. Various targets under other SDGs complement Goal 2 by addressing land tenure, water resources governance,

energy efficiency, food losses and waste, climate change, oceans and marine resources, ecosystems, biodiversity, forests, mountains and land/soils.

14. FAO perspectives on sustainable development, the centrality of sustainable natural resource use for rural livelihoods, and the critical role of small-scale food producers as agents of change and managers of natural resources are all strongly reflected throughout the OWG Report. Moreover, the link between food security and the environment has been recognized with concrete targets that balance the three dimensions of sustainability – economic, social and environmental. The SDGs also include a much broader push for sustainable use of natural resources for development than was the case with the MDGs, which only had one goal (MDG 7) related to the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

15. Since the Rio+20 Conference, FAO has promoted awareness that ecosystem services and natural resources are continuously used in different food production systems and, therefore, not only conservation, but also sustainable use and restoration are essential. This idea has now been comprehensively articulated in the OWG Report. Besides SDG 2, the aim of sustainably managing and efficiently using natural resources has been incorporated in target 12.2. Moreover, there are two SDGs – SDG 14 and SDG 15 – that deal exclusively with the management and use of natural resources, the first addressing oceans and aquatic resources and the second on ecosystems and biodiversity, forests and mountains, and land and soils.

16. The proposals contained in the OWG Report have been endorsed by Member States as meeting the criteria of defining an ambitious, transformative and universally relevant agenda and an appropriate basis for final negotiations of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Important tasks remain, in particular the work of putting in place a framework for measuring and monitoring such an ambitious agenda. The large number of proposed goals and targets presents a formidable challenge. Collecting data for indicators represents a cost, and supporting consistent and comparable measures at global level requires agreement on a common set of indicators. A manageable monitoring framework requires a minimum number of indicators, which should be mainly outcome indicators. Moreover, because SDG indicators will be universal, all countries will need to report on them, even though some targets may be adapted to particular country situations.

17. A critical constraint involves the resources available to support monitoring new SDG indicators, with only limited data existing for many dimensions of sustainability. In this regard, FAO is committed to working with Members and supporting the process of developing an appropriate and realistic monitoring framework for the SDGs.

III. Global Implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda: from MDG 8 to SDG 17

18. The Post-2015 Development Agenda will be adopted at a dedicated Heads of State and Government Summit on 25-27 September 2015. The final intergovernmentally agreed outcome will outline key financial and non-financial means of implementation (MoI), including measures to support enhanced trade, technology transfer and capacity building, and to address systemic issues. The finalization of the MoI package is expected to be informed by the outcome of the 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD), which will take place in Addis Ababa on 13-16 July 2015.

19. FAO has fully engaged in the FfD process since the beginning, and has underlined that chronic hunger and malnutrition are strongly affected by poverty and natural resource degradation. A recent World Bank study found that the proportion of the extreme poor living in rural areas has increased from 70 to 78 percent. Eradicating rural poverty – notably by promoting sustainable agriculture and food systems, and ensuring access to social protection mechanisms – is critical to eradicating poverty and to effectively addressing hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

20. Since Monterrey and Doha, food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture have been addressed through dedicated national and regional strategies, including, for instance, the Maputo Declaration and the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) and the

L'Aquila Food Security Initiative (AFSI), which paved the way for the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP) – a multi-donor trust fund created to finance strategic, inclusive, evidence-based agricultural investment plans of low-income countries.

21. Nonetheless, at the global level, there is an urgent need to boost financial resources dedicated to food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture. To be effective, such assistance requires an enabling environment consisting of well-developed policy frameworks, improved governance, principled partnerships and mutual accountability. In 2011, the additional net global investment needs (in terms of incremental public investment in agriculture and related areas) required to eliminate hunger by 2025 were estimated at USD 50.2 billion per year.

22. While the financing gaps may appear daunting, it is important to consider the much higher costs of the *status quo*. The costs of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies are estimated at 2-3 percent of global GDP, equivalent to USD 1.4-2.1 trillion per year. At the same time, food and nutrition security interventions and agricultural investments are among the most cost-effective development interventions, with multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. Studies have demonstrated that agricultural growth is, on average, at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth originating in other sectors and up to five times more effective in resource-poor low-income countries.

23. It will also be critical to build a renewed global partnership based on lessons learned from MDG 8, to tackle the development framework post-2015. This will call for the fulfilment of development assistance commitments – including, but not limited to, Official Development Assistance (ODA), North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, as well as fostering partnerships between multiple actors across all relevant areas and sectors.

IV. Transition from MDGs to SDGs: UN Support to Implementation at Country Level

24. To support countries in implementing the Post-2015 Development Agenda, particularly to ensure a smooth transition from the MDGs to the SDGs and promote a coherent and coordinated approach to sustainable development, the UN system is discussing a number of potential institutional adaptations. The post-2015 framework calls for country ownership and accountability for sustainable development. This implies the necessity for integrated, evidence-based approaches to policy formulation at national, regional and global levels, capacity development to ensure coherent, effective and inclusive governance, and efficient monitoring structures required to track progress in a timely manner.

25. To effectively support implementation of a transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda, the UN will need to consistently plan and manage for results, and review and align its results framework and priorities with the SDGs' framework. Enhanced country support for policy development and governance will be crucial, as the UN agencies will need to better respond to country needs while fostering country ownership in the implementation phase.

26. The UN system has already begun reviewing its working methods in the context of the UN “fit for purpose” process. Processes are underway through the ECOSOC Dialogue as well as the discussions and reform processes of the three pillars of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) (UNDG, HLCP and HLCM) to review the functioning of the UN development system and identify required changes.

27. The UN Development Group (UNDG) has recently agreed on a common vision for the longer term positioning of the UN development system. ECOSOC has also decided to convene a transparent and inclusive dialogue involving all relevant stakeholders on the longer term positioning of the UN development system, taking into account the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This will lead to the adoption of the next Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) in 2016, which will determine the future strategic direction of the UN development system. The UNDG Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) has been established to support an accelerated achievement of

the MDGs throughout 2015, while also advancing preparations for the successful implementation of the SDGs.

28. FAO's thorough internal strategic thinking process, launched in January 2012, aims at improving the delivery and impact of FAO's work by effectively translating its normative work into country-level impact and drawing upon its global knowledge to support Members' priorities in policy and investment. This is particularly the case with policy frameworks and other products established at *fora* such as FAO Technical Committees (Committee on Fisheries, Committee on Forestry, Committee on Agriculture and Committee on Commodity Problems) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which have been operationalized through FAO's Strategic Framework and Strategic Objectives (SOs). Such preexisting institutional feedback mechanisms have positioned the Organization well to effectively contribute to the SDGs implementation process and monitoring of progress.

29. The key challenges lie at the country level. A critical focus must be to enhance awareness of the SDGs in decentralized offices and ensure that FAO Representatives and staff are prepared to support the translation of the SDGs into nationally owned priorities and programmes.

30. With the development of Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs), FAO now fully responds to countries' priority needs in a manner that mobilizes and optimizes the use of operational capacities and knowledge of all concerned FAO Units, irrespective of their location. The support and coordination role provided to country offices by the relevant technical officers in the regional and sub-regional offices, by the decentralized network of CPF focal points and by Headquarters, ensures the comprehensiveness of the proposed approaches and that the key quality standards are met – relevance of FAO's results for the national agenda, feasibility of achieving the results as well as ensuring their potential sustainability.

31. FAO's corporate contribution to the post-2015 process has been consolidated by drawing on the reviewed Strategic Framework, the new Strategic Objectives and the Regional Initiatives as well as the Zero Hunger Challenge. The comprehensive vision of FAO's Strategic Framework is thus well reflected in the formulation of the SDGs and their targets.

32. As a result, Members may expect FAO to provide technical support to countries in the adaptation, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs at country level. The strengthening of capacity and support to decentralized offices would be a useful element for the Organization in contributing to the implementation of the SDGs. Ways to ensure the alignment and direct contribution of the reviewed Strategic Framework for the implementation of the SDGs at country level, as well as for monitoring progress, could be considered as part of the revision of FAO's work in the future.

V. Action sought from the Conference

33. The Conference is invited to:

- Review progress made in the achievement of the MDGs;
- Provide guidance to FAO as regards implementation of the new development agenda and the SDGs.