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# PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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**Evaluation of FAO's Cash and Voucher Assistance**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This evaluation assesses FAO's Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) portfolio and offers lessons to improve programming. Provided for immediate relief and to strengthen resilience and livelihoods, CVA modalities include unconditional cash transfers (UCTs), conditional cash transfers (CCTs), cash for work (CFW), vouchers, and input trade fairs (ITF). The evaluation examines the relevance, partnerships and coordination arrangements, effectiveness and efficiency, gender equality and inclusion, and enabling environment for delivering CVA.
- The assessment is based on an extensive review of internal documents and external literature, an analysis of 50 FAO CVA projects and 170 FAO evaluations, interviews with 69 key stakeholders, an online survey of FAO's 85 Country Offices, eight country case studies and three case studies of comparable UN agencies.

### **Findings**

- CVA is increasingly recognized by FAO as a set of relevant and flexible tools for programming, particularly in social protection programmes and in combination with livelihoods interventions in agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fisheries. Different CVA modalities can be combined, such as through Cash+ (unconditional cash with complementary activities) which can leverage FAO's technical expertise to use CVA to build resilience and operate along the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus. FAO may also provide CVA only to meet basic needs in isolation from wider livelihood objectives, but it does not have a clear comparative advantage to do so. Overall, FAO lacks a clear corporate vision and strategy on what different CVA modalities can achieve and the different pathways through which these modalities can contribute to desired outcomes.
- FAO established a range of partnerships and coordination arrangements for the use of CVA. CVA is increasingly linked with national social protection, which has provided FAO with a platform to engage in strengthening social protection systems. FAO coordinates well with other actors on the use of CVA at the operational level but not through joint programmes. More proactive engagement in global forums could contribute to raising FAO's visibility and influence.
- There is strong evidence that UCT and CFW effectively support food and other basic needs. The effectiveness of Cash+ approaches has been mixed and depends heavily on the relevance, quality, and timeliness of the accompanying agricultural inputs or training. Vouchers and seed fairs have been effective in encouraging the adoption of improved agricultural practices and supporting market development, but improvements to livelihoods and gains from CFW assets created remain inconclusive. The duration, size, timeliness, and frequency of cash and voucher transfers are critical factors influencing the effectiveness of CVA in achieving results. Problems with targeting (either in project designs or in implementation) affected CVA programming. An important driver of the effectiveness of CVA projects was the availability of adequate, predictable, and flexible financing. The evaluation also found that targets are set for the inclusion of women as CVA beneficiaries, albeit unevenly, and that gender empowerment is rarely an explicit objective.
- Projects consistently considered fiduciary, economic, security, and political risks, but tended to be less detailed on CVA-specific risks. Protection risks are inadequately assessed, mitigated, or monitored. Close attention is paid to environmental risks, which has resulted in an overly cautious approach to the use of cash transfers.
- A strengthened enabling environment is required to support the FAO's optimal use of CVA. Increasing the scale and use of CVA will require further support (training, guidance, tools, partnerships) to address gaps in knowledge and capacities in Country Offices. FAO also needs clearer guidelines governing the sharing, storage, and destruction of beneficiary data.

**Recommendations**

- Based on findings, the evaluation makes four recommendations for FAO to:
  1. **Develop a vision and strategy.** FAO needs corporate leadership for CVA to be impactful and delivered efficiently and in compliance with existing FAO policies;
  2. **Build capacity and preparedness.** FAO cannot meet critical demand for capacity building and needs to develop an approach to prioritizing strategically the use of scarce resources for capacity building and technical support;
  3. **Invest in evidence generation.** The evidence base of CVA has critical gaps that must be filled to support strategic and implementation decisions; and
  4. **Strengthen partnerships.** Effective partnerships are an essential pre-requisite for scaling the use of CVA, sharing knowledge, and leveraging technical capacities. Partners include governments, other technical agencies and networks, civil society, private sector organizations, and others.
- The full report is available on the [Office of Evaluation \(OED\) website](#).

**GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE**

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of the document and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.

## I. Introduction

1. This evaluation is the first comprehensive assessment of FAO's Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) portfolio. It seeks to offer lessons for future CVA programming. The evaluation examines the use of CVA as modalities to support the delivery of FAO's organisational goals and objectives, including humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP) objectives. CVA modalities include:<sup>1</sup> unconditional cash transfers (UCTs), conditional cash transfers (CCTs), cash for work (CFW), vouchers, and input trade fairs (ITF). Cash grants, in-kind grants, or supplier grants to private individuals and other entities fall outside the scope of the evaluation. In addition to FAO, the evaluation's main stakeholders are expected to include national governments, resource partners, other humanitarian and development agencies, implementing partners, and academia.

2. Focusing on FAO activities between 2018 and 2022, the evaluation seeks to answer five questions:

- To what extent is CVA being used in ways that build on FAOs mandate and comparative advantages to address the needs of beneficiaries?
- Does FAO ensure appropriate partnerships and coordination arrangements for the use of CVA?
- How and to what extent has CVA contributed to the effectiveness and efficiency of FAO interventions and in HDP nexus approaches?
- Did the use of CVA include a gender equality and social inclusion perspective, and consider other risks?
- To what extent has FAO established an appropriate enabling environment to encourage the use of CVA at scale?

3. Based on a theory of change of how FAO's use of CVA is hypothesized to contribute to organisational results, the evaluation relied on:

- a review of FAO documents (such as FAO manual sections 702 and 704, project progress reports and final reports), FAO evaluations, and published literature;
- a portfolio analysis of FAO's CVA projects based on a stratified random sample of 50 out of approximately 250 CVA projects approved between 2017 and 2022;
- interviews and small group discussions with 69 key stakeholders including both FAO and external CVA specialists;
- an online survey to FAO's 85 Country Offices to gather information about the awareness of, use of and coordination arrangements for CVA by Country Offices;
- eight country case studies, five with in-person field visits (Afghanistan, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Philippines) and three conducted remotely (Central African Republic, Ukraine and Zambia); and
- organizational case studies on the use of CVA by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

4. FAO has been implementing CVA interventions since 2001. Between 2001 to 2021, USD 345 million were transferred to CVA beneficiaries in 61 countries. CVA interventions are present in all regions, with Africa accounting for 85 percent of CVA transfers.

5. FAO recognizes a role for CVA in providing immediate relief, strengthening the resilience of livelihoods to future shocks (for example, drought and poor production), increasing agricultural production, improving food security and nutrition, and reducing rural poverty. FAO has been increasingly using an approach called Cash+, which complements the provision of cash (to meet

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<sup>1</sup> FAO Manual Section 702 Cash Transfers (2019); (ii.) FAO Policy on Cash- Based Transfer (2012); (iii.) Guideline for Public Works Programmes (2013); Cash-, Voucher- and Food -for Work (2013)

immediate, basic needs) with agricultural inputs, assets, activities or technical training (to build resilience).

6. FAO policy guiding the use of cash transfers was published in 2012, with operational guidelines on public works programmes, input trade fairs and voucher schemes developed in 2013. More recently FAO issued Manual Sections 702 on Cash Transfers (2019) and 704 on Vouchers (2022) to provide accountability frameworks, rules, and procedures governing the provision of the respective modalities. As a signatory to the Grand Bargain, FAO is committed to scaling up the use of CVA.

7. The remaining sections of this report include findings (Section II), conclusions (Section III) and recommendations (Section IV).

## II. Findings

### EQ1. To what extent is CVA being used in ways that build on FAO's mandate and comparative advantages to address the needs of beneficiaries?

8. *Cash and vouchers are increasingly recognized as highly relevant and flexible tools to achieve FAO strategic objectives in both emergency and development settings.* The flexibility offered by cash, and to a lesser degree vouchers, enables use of these modalities both to meet basic humanitarian needs and to enhance agricultural production. The flexibility of CVA makes it potentially useful in protracted and complex crisis contexts, where FAO is seeking to move from relief to resilience and development.

9. *Although growing, the use of CVA by FAO is still limited geographically and thematically.* Only a minority of FAO Country Offices have experience in using CVA and, for most Offices, CVA remains an emergency response. In development efforts, the use of CVA in livestock, fisheries, nutrition, and forestry lags the agriculture sector. The potential of CVA to support climate adaptation and anticipatory action is being explored.

10. *The role of different modalities in supporting different objectives is unclear.* There is no guidance on how specific CVA modalities can be used to contribute to various programme objectives. Analyses to compare and select different transfer modalities do not consistently assess beneficiary opinions or preferences. Consequently, Country Offices often use modalities they are familiar with rather than considering alternatives. Cash transfers have been used to complement, rather than substitute for, agricultural inputs provided based on the assumption that it is necessary for FAO to maintain control of input quality through direct procurement of inputs.

11. *FAO has a clear comparative advantage where CVA intersects with livelihoods in agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fisheries.* FAO's technical knowledge of productive sectors, the needs and constraints of small producers and of agrifood systems, and linkages with wider relevant institutions and services, sets it apart from the other UN agencies.

12. *FAO also has a comparative advantage in linking CVA with social protection systems.* This includes FAO's work to improve inclusion of rural producers in existing safety nets; strengthen linkages between CVA and enhanced livelihoods; reach rural target groups excluded in emergencies; and strengthen national shock-responsive social protection systems and mechanisms for anticipatory action.

13. *FAO does not have a clear comparative advantage in delivering unconditional cash to meet basic needs in isolation from wider livelihood objectives.* The distribution of unconditional cash to meet a range of humanitarian needs, as distinct from the use of unconditional cash to recover, build resilience or enhance livelihoods, has been implemented by FAO increasingly frequently. However, other agencies are often better placed to meet these needs.

### EQ2. Does FAO ensure appropriate partnerships and coordination arrangements for the use of CVA?

14. *Experience linking CVA with social protection is growing at FAO.* FAO is exploring using national beneficiary lists for targeting, harmonizing transfer values, and making referrals between FAO and government social protection systems. Experience implementing CVA has provided FAO with a platform to engage in strengthening social protection systems, including wider policy engagement,

programme design and administrative systems. There is limited evidence of the results of these efforts to strengthen systems due to gaps in FAO's monitoring and evaluation and to methodological challenges in measuring capacity strengthening initiatives.

15. *Coordination with other actors is generally focused on programme design, such as establishing transfers (targeting criteria and transfer amount and frequency) and fixing errors (deduplicating records).* There is widespread engagement of FAO country teams in cash working groups. More proactive engagement and leadership to raise or champion issues relevant for FAO could contribute to raising FAO's visibility and influence. Although most efforts (by FAO and other organizations) seek to meet basic needs of the most vulnerable, FAO's additional focus on livelihood recovery and resilience can lead to coordination challenges. Indeed, FAO often requires its CVA beneficiaries engage in some form of agriculture and different objectives can lead to significantly different transfer values.

16. *Joint work with other agencies – such as joint strategies or programming – is limited.* There are several barriers to coordination and collaboration. Competition between agencies is a particular issue in cash programming, as cash can be used to meet needs that transcend agency mandates. Coordination and in particular collaboration also take significant time and effort, especially when they require changes to existing operational systems and regulations. An excellent example is data sharing, which requires developing bilateral data sharing agreements and secure ways to share data in compliance with existing policies (this has yet to happen).

17. *Participation in global cash coordination frameworks is a highly relevant pathway for FAO to influence global debates.* FAO's collaboration in the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) is an example of constructive engagement in a global CVA forum. FAO's participation in this forum was seen as both active and effective, although it has not yet succeeded in raising specific issues affecting rural producers. The Global Cash Advisory Group, established in 2023, has an important role in influencing global leadership, advocacy, and technical capacity on CVA. While an important platform for FAO engagement, FAO is not currently a member of the core group and it is uncertain whether it has sufficient organizational resources to engage in a meaningful way. Last, the UN Common Cash Statement is another important global initiative seeking to improve collaborative procurement of financial services, data interoperability and harmonized programming. The results so far have been more limited than hoped for and it has required a high level of effort from signatory agencies. FAO remains a non-signatory participant but accesses all benefits of the collaboration without joining this forum; there appears little value in FAO increasing its engagement at present.

### **EQ 3. How and to what extent has CVA contributed to the effectiveness and efficiency of FAO interventions and in humanitarian-development-peace nexus approaches?**

18. CVA modalities act through different pathways to contribute to the higher-level objectives of FAO.

19. *There is strong evidence that UCT and CFW effectively support food and other basic needs.* Even where not the principal objective, a variable portion of cash transfers was found to be directed towards livelihood investments, including the purchase of agricultural inputs.

20. *There is considerable interest in the use of CVA to support anticipatory action,* including as a means of protecting livelihood assets in a disaster. In practice, anticipatory action is still being tested and has had the tendency to become an early response to an actual crisis, rather than enabling early action.

21. *The effectiveness of Cash+ approaches has been mixed and depends heavily on the relevance, quality, and timeliness of the accompanying agricultural inputs or training.* There is little evidence of the efficacy of receiving inputs alone compared to inputs alongside cash transfers. There is also no clear evidence that cash transfers "protect" agricultural assets from being sold, consumed, or destroyed. Poorly synchronised delivery of the cash and inputs often limited synergistic effects.

22. *One Cash+ modality – combining cash transfers and vouchers – is worth exploring as an alternative to cash and in-kind agricultural inputs.* In combination with cash, vouchers provide a form of transfer that (unlike direct in-kind assistance) enables beneficiaries to choose the input best suited to

their needs. Further research is also needed to study the comparative benefits of using cash transfers to replace in-kind transfers in an immediate post emergency context where timeliness is key.

23. *Vouchers and seed fairs have been effective in encouraging the adoption of improved agricultural practices and supporting market development.* Important factors influencing success include a retail network to partner with, consultations on beneficiaries' preferences and strong monitoring during implementation. In both Lesotho and Zambia, e-vouchers are now being used by Governments to distribute agricultural inputs to small farmers, drawing on the experience of FAO's pilot voucher projects.

24. *CFW has been used by FAO to develop or rehabilitate a range of community assets, but robust evidence on the sustainability of improvements to livelihoods and agricultural productivity gains from CFW assets created is generally weak.* Poor maintenance of community assets appears pervasive. CFW payments are mostly used to meet consumption needs, with limited and anecdotal evidence of livelihood investments of the wages.

25. *The duration, size, timeliness, and frequency of cash and voucher transfers are critical factors influencing the effectiveness of CVA.* There is no clear evidence on the amount, duration or frequency of transfers that are most effective in achieving different objectives, beyond the minimum expenditure basket needed to meet emergency needs. The amount and duration of transfers was often insufficient to meet livelihood objectives due to budget limitations and the scale of needs.

26. *Contracting processes delay delivery of CVA.* In theory the delivery of CVA should be simpler and quicker than the use of in-kind inputs. However, CVA delivery was often delayed significantly due to slow process of contracting financial service providers. This tended to improve over time once agreements were in place.

27. *Weaknesses in design and targeting during implementation reduced the effectiveness of CVA programming, although the scale of the problem was rarely quantified.* Many of the challenges encountered (such as procurement delays) did not apply only to CVA. Furthermore, targeting of development oriented CVA proved particularly challenging due to a lack of guidance on how to balance the goal of supporting the most vulnerable while working with those with more productive potential.

28. *An important driver of the effectiveness of CVA projects was the availability of adequate, predictable and flexible financing.* CVA funding was often short term and aligned with humanitarian, rather than resilience building, objectives. The presence of a strong digital infrastructure increased the efficiency, effectiveness, security, reach, accountability, and interoperability of CVA.

29. *Promising research by FAO on combining social protection and agricultural interventions has not been sufficiently leveraged.* FAO research from multiple countries demonstrated significant positive impacts of government social assistance on income-generating activities, including agricultural production. Overlapping targeting between the social cash transfers and farm input subsidy programmes was shown to increase the cost-effectiveness. This research was influential but has lapsed.

#### **EQ 4. Did the use of CVA include a gender equality and social inclusion perspective, and consider other risks?**

30. *Gender is not effectively mainstreamed in FAO's CVA.* A minority of projects specifically targeted female beneficiaries. There were some positive examples of measures to tailor designs to the needs of women, but this was not systematically done. Barriers or risks for women's participation in CVA programmes included difficulties in accessing CVA activities (gender norms, task burdens, transportation costs) and exposure to possible protection risks.

31. *The limited evidence available suggests that FAO is weak at considering and addressing inclusion issues for other vulnerable and marginalized groups in its CVA programmes, including people with disabilities and youth.* Wider inclusion is less frequently considered than targeting of women.

32. *Existing guidance and tools to promote inclusion are generic and there is no FAO guidance on considerations or best practices for inclusion in CVA.* There are still gaps in data systems capacity to

collect and analyse sufficiently disaggregated data and gaps in monitoring and feedback mechanisms to identify gender and inclusion risks.

33. *FAO seeks to use CVA to enhance the productive role of women and marginalized groups within agrifood systems.* However, there were no firm examples of projects where gender empowerment was an objective. A lack of gender equity and social inclusion capacity and expertise at country level, particularly within CVA projects, was identified as a constraint.

34. *FAO programmes consistently considered risks in project or programme design, including fiduciary, economic, security, and political risks.* These analyses were generally well developed with appropriate proposed mitigation measures. However, as CVAs are often a component of an overall project or programme and risk analysis, risk analyses conducted generally do not focus on CVAs and, when they do, tend to be less detailed on specific risks pertaining to CVA. Manual Sections 702 and 704 encourage the systematic application of risk analysis in CVA design, including more consistent and robust consideration of fiduciary risk.

35. *Protection risks are neither assessed nor mitigated in a systematic or robust way.* FAO guidance and toolkit on Accountability to Affected Populations (2022) may help once embedded at country level, but it does not cover specific protection risks in CVA or ways to mitigate them.

36. *Close attention is paid to environmental risks on FAO's programming, including CVA.* The application of environmental risk analysis in procurement of agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizer, pesticide, animal feed) favoured direct procurement due to concerns that beneficiaries will purchase 'poor quality' inputs, posing an environmental risk. This was not backed by analysis of the likelihood of this risk, potential impact or risk mitigation measures.

37. *There is growing acknowledgement of data protection and data sharing risks.* Consequently, other organisations have put in place stringent safeguards on data (what and how to collect, store, and destroy), sharing of data and ensuring beneficiary awareness of rights. In comparison, FAO lacks guidelines to implement its data protection policy in sharing, storing, and destroying beneficiary data.

**EQ 5. To what extent has FAO established an appropriate enabling environment to encourage the use of CVA at scale?**

38. *The lack of a corporate strategy has given rise to haphazard CVA development across regions and sectors.* An important driver influencing adoption of CVA is staff movements, which helps propagate new ideas. Donor requirements and peer pressure are other important driver for adoption.

39. *The new Manual Sections 702 and 704 help clarify administrative processes and rules to improve efficiency but are seen as rigid and oriented towards upward accountability and risk management.* These processes and rules were not meant as a tool or mechanism to enhance programme quality and the necessary accompanying technical guidance is insufficient.

40. *FAO headquarters have provided valued technical support to Country Offices to design and implement CVA transfers.* The Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER) cash team, Project Support Division (PSS) and Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP) provided significant and much appreciated technical support to Country Offices opting to use CVA. Headquarters technical support is focused on emergency and social protection programming, with relatively little attention to other development sectors. The available headquarters capacity is also over-stretched and Country Offices draw extensively on other sources of technical support including interagency coordination systems and other UN and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners.

41. *Digitalization of CVA transfers has improved timeliness and efficiency and reduced staff workload,* particularly in registration, de-duplication and reconciliation processes. Identification, Delivery and Empowerment Application (IDEA) has been a successful innovation which provides a valuable data management solution to support the use of CVA at scale and facilitate monitoring. However, many FAO Country Offices remain heavily dependent on excel sheets and paper records.

42. *Limited evidence is being generated from CVA interventions to support learning and improvements.* There is limited evidence of the impact or the optimal amount, duration, and frequency



of transfers to achieve livelihood and resilience objectives. Knowledge management was also weak with no institutional structures or systems to enable the centralisation of learning, leading to loss of institutional memory. This situation is not specific to CVA interventions and OER has established a MEAL Unit in headquarters that is credited with improving monitoring and advancing evidence consolidation.

43. *Increasing the scale and use of CVA will require further support to address gaps in knowledge and capacities in Country Offices through further training, strategic partnerships, guidance, and tools.* Limited Country Office capacities and expertise emerged as a major constraint to wider use of CVA, which requires a mix of upskilling Country Office personnel, recruiting CVA specialists and temporary postings of experienced staff. It also requires training personnel in CVA adjacent areas such as gender, response analysis, finance, and procurement, as well as ensuring senior managers acquire CVA related knowledge. Strategic partnerships with actors with operational experience can supplement in-house capacity. In FAO, current policy (2012) and existing technical guidance on the use of CVA (2013) is dated and rarely referred to by field personnel. Support for using vouchers is a particular gap.

44. *FAO lacks a clear updated organisational vision related to the use of CVA.* Policy statements in comparator organisations confirm the organisational commitment, at the highest levels, to use CVA and incentivize change, setting specific targets for increased use of CVA. Associated strategies were accompanied by the necessary human and financial resources for implementation, working across the nexus and a range of sectors. Comparator organisations also made strong investment in building field capacity and preparedness to support effective use of CVA, but this was strategically targeted on a limited number of high priority countries.

### III. Conclusions

45. *CVA modalities offer FAO the opportunity to deliver on its mandate.* In appropriate contexts, CVA can provide an effective and efficient means of working across the nexus. However, FAO design parameters – including transfer frequency, duration and amount – typically remain aligned with emergency rather than resilience or development goals.

46. *FAO has a niche to support governments and promote uptake of CVA modalities in national policies and programmes, developing links between social protection and rural development.* FAO has a comparative strength in working at the system level, with well-established relationships and partnerships with government ministries. However, this is a crowded landscape and requires clearer strategic positioning and enhanced internal capacity.

47. *FAO has a significant role to play in providing greater system-wide leadership and learning on gender, rural livelihoods and CVA.* Critical gaps in knowledge on the use of CVA for resilience and livelihoods persist. This includes demonstrating the impact of combining or substituting transfer modalities (cash, in-kind distributions, vouchers) while setting the frequency and amounts of transfers that work best to meet objectives. FAO has a respected voice in policy making circles but plays a limited role due to both limited evidence and limited representational capacity.

48. *FAO has yet to make systematic and optimal use of CVA across the organization with limited senior management buy-in on the use of CVA.* The absence of a vision, strategy, and implementation plan for scaling up the use of CVA leaves design and implementation decisions to individual preferences where the choice in the use of CVA modalities often rests on assumptions and past experiences, leading to repetition of established practices.

49. *Despite efforts to improve corporate procurement processes, delays continue to negatively affect the timeliness of both cash and voucher transfers, and accompanying inputs provided through Cash+ approaches.* Innovative approaches need to be more systematically explored and implemented and the risk appetite of management recalibrated.

50. *There has been insufficient investment in building the preparedness of Country Offices to support the delivery of CVA.* This requires an ongoing investment in building and sustaining organisational readiness and integrating CVA into organisational tools, systems, procedures, and staff capacities. The FAO approach has so far been largely reactive and a strategic approach is lacking.

51. *The FAO corporate human resources available to support the design and implementation of CVA-related programming are over-stretched, with consequences for programme quality.* Capacity limitations are exacerbated by the rapid spread of CVA use in smaller FAO Country Offices. This necessitates a shift from a demand-driven approach to strategic prioritisation to meet the management commitment to scaling up the use of CVA.

52. *Digitization is critical to use CVA efficiently,* which FAO is already advancing through IDEA. Although demand for the use of IDEA is growing, awareness at country level of this tool, and the necessary application of data protection and privacy guidelines, remains uneven.

#### IV. Recommendations

**Recommendation 1. Develop a vision and strategy. FAO needs corporate leadership for CVA to be impactful and delivered efficiently and in compliance with existing FAO policies.**

53. This includes:

**1.1** – Develop cross-functional mechanisms (such as a task force and a senior management-level steering committee) to formulate and implement a CVA strategy as recommended in 1.2. These mechanisms should bridge institutional siloes; enhance linkages between OER and technical division workstreams (including social protection); and, once approved, execute, monitor and report on the strategy.

**1.2** – Develop a corporate strategy on the use of CVA across the nexus – namely, to respond to emergencies, build resilience, enhance agricultural productivity and sustainable development, including of value chains. This should promote synergies between social protection and rural development, and gender transformative and socially inclusive programming. The strategy should incorporate theories of change that elaborate the pathways through which different CVA modalities are expected to contribute to stated objectives, leverage comparative advantages of FAO, and address FAO’s global positioning in global cash-related networks.

**1.3** – Develop results indicators to monitor and demonstrate effective delivery of the strategy and develop and implement an approach to reporting that ensures accountability at country and regional level for delivering on the strategy.

**Recommendation 2. Build capacity and preparedness. FAO cannot meet demand for capacity building and needs to prioritize resources for capacity building and technical support.**

54. This includes:

**2.1** – Develop a plan to build capacity in Country Offices to use CVA, select priority initiatives to begin implementing the plan in 2026 and identify how resources will be mobilized, prioritized and allocated to support implementation. The plan may include, for example:

- a) specific activities (such as strengthening existing guidelines including for response analysis, training for employees at all levels using internal and external resources);
- b) investments (such as key preparedness actions, recruiting specialists for regional or country offices to increase in-house expertise, establish standard metrics for ‘cash readiness’ across countries); and
- c) target countries to support gradual scale up while increasing quality in programming.

**2.2** – Accelerating the roll-out of the IDEA MIS tool, in conjunction with reviewing and revising data protection and privacy guidelines and conducting pilot Privacy Impact Assessments to assess compliance with data privacy and data protection standards.

**2.3** – In consultation with Country Offices, review and simplify Manual Sections 702 and 704 to maximize utility and efficiency.

**Recommendation 3. Invest in evidence generation. The evidence base of CVA has critical gaps (such as limited evidence of the impact of Cash+) that must be filled to support strategic and implementation decisions.**

55. This includes:

**3.1** – Develop a learning agenda that:

- a) identifies learning priorities;
- b) lays out a roadmap for country office teams to collaborate with relevant teams (monitoring, knowledge management and evaluation teams) to facilitate successful and well-coordinated generation of learning (from project design to data collection, analysis, review and reporting); and
- c) promotes the uptake of learning by decision makers to influence impactful use of CVA.

**3.2** – Pilot new approaches to delivering CVA, including use of CVA as a substitute to in-kind assistance for various objectives and sub-sectors as appropriate.

**3.3** – Prioritize opportunities to contribute rigorous evidence of effectiveness and efficiency of FAO's CVA interventions and, in consultation with OER, consider planning a follow up global assessment of FAO's use of CVA.

**Recommendation 4. Strengthen partnerships for preparedness. Effective partnerships are essential for delivering CVA. Potential partners include governments, other technical agencies and networks, civil society, and private sector organizations.**

56. This includes:

**4.1** – To support the delivery of CVAs, institutionalize good practices for preparedness to take advantage of operational partnerships at country level rapidly and effectively. These may include establishing pre-agreements with financial service providers in priority countries, leveraging existing contracts of other UN agencies, and establishing country-level rosters of pre-qualified implementation partners.

**4.2** – Accelerate data sharing agreements with governments and other agencies to facilitate efficient implementation (for example, by providing access to data in beneficiary, social and farmer registries). Collectively analyse risks and possible mitigation measures to inform FAO's partnership and data sharing agreements.

### EVALUATION TEAM AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

- This evaluation was conducted by the Office of Evaluation with a team of internal and external experts. The team included Mr Olivier Cossée (Senior Evaluation Officer), Ms Renate Roels and Ms Anne-Clémence Owen (Evaluation Specialists) and Mr Rami Assaf (Analyst). They worked closely with two international experts: Mr Nick Maunder (Senior Team Evaluator) and Ms Gabrielle Smith (Expert in social protection and cash transfers). Five national consultants assisted in the country case studies: Mr Rito Mabunda (Mozambique), Ms Karma Haidar (Lebanon), Ms Ginna Rakotoarimanana (Madagascar), Mr Khal Mohammad Ahmadzai (Afghanistan) and Mr Dante Dalabajan (Philippines).
- This evaluation benefited from robust quality assurance activities, including:
  - exit debriefs at the end of each country mission with Country Office personnel allowed the team to validate preliminary observations.
  - consultations with an internal reference group of representatives across internal FAO units engaged in CVA operations encouraged stakeholder engagement and feedback. This reference group included OER (particularly the Cash Team), PSS, Plant Production and Protection Division (NSP) (especially seed experts for voucher assistance), the Social Protection Team at ESP (who provided technical input on social protection and shock-responsive social protection systems), and CVA operatives in the five field-based country case studies. This group commented on draft deliverables and participated in evaluation workshops.
  - OED quality assurance reviews of key deliverables to ensure the methodological rigor of the design and quality of the analysis and report. Internal reviewers were OED Senior personnel, including Mr Olivier Cossée and Dr Clemencia Cosentino.
- The evaluation team gratefully acknowledges the insights and contributions of all reviewers, particularly in OER, ESP, PSS, and NSP, and colleagues in FAO Country Offices.