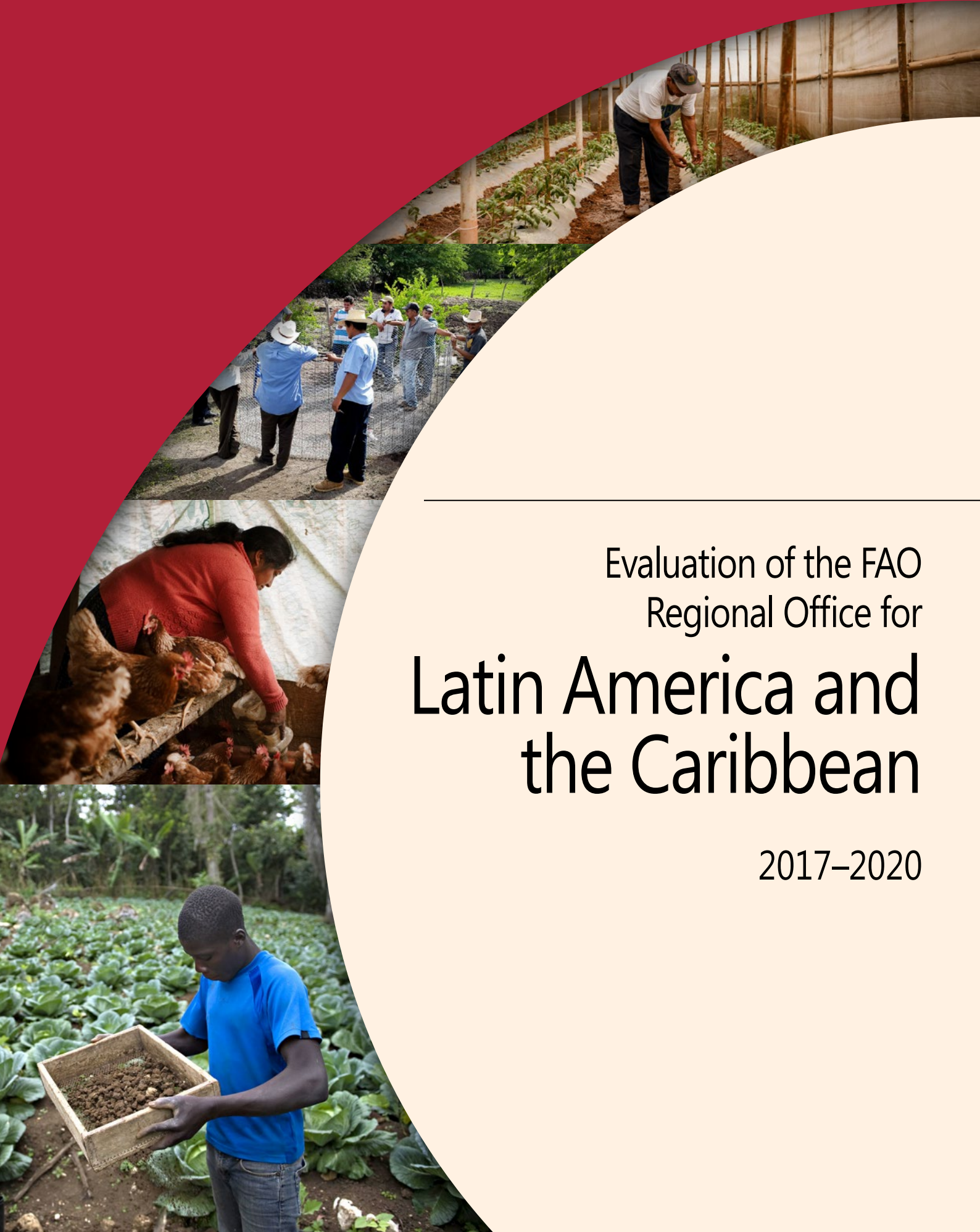




Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Country Programme Evaluation Series
12/2021



Evaluation of the FAO
Regional Office for
**Latin America and
the Caribbean**

2017–2020

Country Programme Evaluation Series

12/2021

Evaluation of the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

2017–2020

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Rome, 2021

Required citation:

FAO. 2021. *Evaluation of the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean 2017–2020*. Country Programme Evaluation Series, 12/2021. Rome.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The mention of specific companies or products of manufacturers, whether or not these have been patented, does not imply that these have been endorsed or recommended by FAO in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned.

ISBN 978-92-5-135454-4

© FAO, 2021



Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Intergovernmental organization licence (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo/legalcode/legalcode>).

Under the terms of this licence, this work may be copied, redistributed and adapted for non-commercial purposes, provided that the work is appropriately cited. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that FAO endorses any specific organization, products or services. The use of the FAO logo is not permitted. If the work is adapted, then it must be licensed under the same or equivalent Creative Commons licence. If a translation of this work is created, it must include the following disclaimer along with the required citation: "This translation was not created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). FAO is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original English edition shall be the authoritative edition."

Disputes arising under the licence that cannot be settled amicably shall be resolved by mediation and arbitration as described in Article 8 of the licence, unless otherwise provided herein. The mediation rules of the World Intellectual Property Organization shall apply <http://www.wipo.int/amc/en/mediation/rules> and any arbitration shall be conducted in accordance with the arbitration rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

Third-party materials. Users wishing to reuse material from this work that is attributed to a third party, such as tables, figures or images, are responsible for determining whether permission is needed for that reuse and for obtaining permission from the copyright holder. The risk of claims resulting from infringement of any third-party-owned component in the work rests solely with the user.

Sales, rights and licensing. FAO information products are available on the FAO website (www.fao.org/publications) and can be purchased through publications-sales@fao.org. Requests for commercial use should be submitted to: www.fao.org/contact-us/licence-request. Queries regarding rights and licensing should be submitted to: copyright@fao.org.

Cover photo credits (top to bottom):: ©FAO/Pep Bonet, ©FAO, ©FAO/Pep Bonet, ©FAO/Walter Astrada

Abstract

The study evaluates the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (RLC) with the aim of assessing the performance and added value of the work done by this Office in the region during the period 2017–2020 in support of the Organization’s work in Latin America and the Caribbean. The main information users are FAO personnel in the region and particularly those working in RLC.

The evaluation was carried out using a mixed methods approach, including desk analysis and data collection in three sample countries, including the three subregions where RLC implements actions. Information was also collected through an online survey of FAO personnel.

The evaluation draws up recommendations to improve the relevance of work on the three Regional Initiatives as well as strategies for adapting and implementing actions developed in the region. These included scaling-up to enhance FAO’s results, implementing policies to include the perspective of gender and that of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent, and generating evidence to support decision-making and actions to be developed to address the new context arising as a result of COVID-19.



Contents

- Abstract.....iii**
- Acknowledgements.....vii**
- Abbreviations and acronyms.....viii**
- Map of Latin America and the Caribbeanix**
- Executive summary.....xi**

- 1. Introduction.....1**
 - 1.1 Purpose of the evaluation1
 - 1.2 Intended users1
 - 1.3 Scope and objectives of the evaluation.....1
 - 1.4 Methodology.....2
 - 1.5 Limitations.....3
 - 1.6 Structure of the report.....3

- 2. Socio-economic and agri-food context5**

- 3. FAO in Latin America and the Caribbean7**
 - 3.1 Priority areas.....7
 - 3.2 Regional Initiatives7
 - 3.3 Network of decentralized offices in the region8
 - 3.4 Human and financial resources.....8
 - 3.5 Partners and donors in the region.....10
 - 3.6 Role of FAO headquarters and complementarities between global, regional, subregional and national levels.....11

- 4. Main findings.....13**
 - 4.1 Relevance of the Regional Initiatives for meeting the needs and demands of FAO Member Countries13
 - 4.2 Adaptation and implementation of actions developed based on the Regional Initiatives.....18
 - 4.3 Scaling up results.....33
 - 4.4 Generating and using evidence for decision-making36
 - 4.5 Incorporating vulnerable groups and promoting gender mainstreaming.....40
 - 4.6 Addressing the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic45

- 5. Conclusions and recommendations.....51**
 - 5.1 Conclusions51
 - 5.2 Recommendations.....55

- Bibliography.....59**
- Appendix 1. People interviewed.....63**
- Appendix 2. Purposeful sampling strategy for collecting field-level information.....68**
- Annexes.....69**





Tables

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1 • Human resources in the Latin America and the Caribbean region between 2018 and 2021..... | 9 |
| Table 2 • Latin America and the Caribbean budget by biennium (thousands of USD) | 9 |
| Table 3 • Main donors in the region (2017–2020) | 10 |

Acknowledgements

The evaluation team would like to thank all those who contributed to this evaluation, led by Thania de la Garza and managed by Carlos Tarazona and Michael Euler from the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED). The evaluation team was made up of Liv Lafontaine, Adriana Jaramillo, Alonso de Erice and Iván Moreno, as well Joaquín Lozano, Luis Gilberto Murillo and Thomas Reardon from the Regional Initiatives expert team.

The evaluation was carried out with the invaluable cooperation of FAO personnel whose insight, knowledge, advice and comments enabled this exercise to be carried out in an effective and timely manner.

The evaluation benefited from the inputs of many stakeholders, including government officials, farmers' organizations and the staff of other UN agencies, research centres and the private sector. Their inputs were crucial for enabling OED to triangulate the findings and develop useful conclusions and recommendations for FAO.





Abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|---------|---|
| CARICOM | Caribbean Community |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| FAOR | FAO Representative |
| RLC | FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean |
| SICA | Central American Integration System |
| TCP | Technical Cooperation Programme |

Map of Latin America and the Caribbean



Source: Map conforms to UN. 2020. Map 4170, Rev. 19. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).



Executive summary

Introduction


- 1 At its one 127th session, the Programme Committee approved an evaluation of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (RLC) with the aim of assessing RLC's performance and added value in support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) work in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- 2 The main users of the evaluation are FAO personnel in the region, particularly those working in RLC. Other users include personnel in decentralized offices and FAO headquarters, as well as Senior Management and Member Countries, among others.
- 3 This evaluation focuses on the period 2017-2020, which was characterized by several internal and external changes, including the appointment of a new Regional Representative, a review of the FAO Strategic Framework and organizational structure, the implementation of the United Nations' (UN) system reform, and the health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4 The evaluation was conducted using a mixed methods approach, including desk-based analysis and data collection. Qualitative information was collected through semi-structured interviews within RLC and in three countries selected from a purposive sample designed to reflect the widest possible mix of countries receiving support from RLC. Workshops were held with personnel from decentralized offices and an online survey was conducted among FAO personnel in the region.
- 5 The evaluation was conducted taking into account the human and financial resources available to the Organization in the region. Although some findings relate to these aspects, the capacity of the offices and their management methods were not examined in detail, because they are assumed to be a constant presence that RLC can call on to provide technical, operational and brokerage assistance in the region.
- 6 The evaluation team also included thematic experts to assess each of the Regional Initiatives. The three experts conducted in-depth analyses on the strategic relevance and contribution of the Regional Initiatives to FAO's work in the region and in addressing the priorities and needs of Member Countries. These analyses were used as inputs for the evaluation report, including for identifying findings and drawing up recommendations.
- 7 The evaluation terms of reference (Annex 1) identify key evaluation questions, designed to assess the strategic relevance, effectiveness, usefulness and influence of RLC in the region. The assessment of RLC was made against the potential role of the Regional Office in performing six key functions: i) leading the design of Regional Initiatives that are relevant for the region; ii) supporting the adaptation and implementation of Regional Initiatives; iii) promoting the scaling-up of results; iv) assisting with the generation and use of evidence; v) facilitating mechanisms for incorporating vulnerable groups; vi) coordinating adaptation processes in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main findings and the related conclusions and recommendations are presented based on these functions.

Main findings

Leading the design of Regional Initiatives that are relevant for the region

- 8 The Regional Initiatives have proven to be important instruments for linking individual demands and regional priorities with FAO's corporate objectives. They have evolved to better contextualize the needs of the region, but there is potential for greater interaction between the Initiatives and better use of the implementation mechanisms.



- 
- 9 Each Regional Initiative has its own difficulties and challenges. RI1 has evolved over the years from being aligned with and seeking to influence government policies towards a more specific role where it also seeks to influence key stakeholders and aspects of the region's agri-food systems as well as consumer habits. RI3 has made significant progress, transitioning from an emergency-response approach to a more holistic approach to risk reduction and climate change adaptation within a framework of sustainable production and climate resilience. RI2 focuses on lagging territories and RI3 focuses on territories that are non-agricultural but face climate challenges. RI2 is considered more complex because it embraces different factors including food systems, producers and family farming. It focuses on the poorest sectors as well as a broader section of farmers whose priorities range from basic needs to productive needs. Generally speaking, the main points of intersection were found to be between RI1 and RI2, both of which have a territorial focus.
- 10 FAO's work has made it possible to achieve a positioning and highlighted key concepts such as agri-food systems and sustainable and climate resilient agriculture in the region, through the different mechanisms and strategies adopted by each Regional Initiative. RI1 focuses on key issues to ensure access to healthy food. Given the potential growth in productivity, the Initiative worked with intermediate actors such as supply markets, as well as introducing themes such as "healthy environments" in the region. In the case of RI2, political dialogue has been important in encouraging changes in legislation and regulations, as well as work with subregional bodies. Positioning with regard to major funds and the corresponding large-scale mobilization of resources was the most important factor for RI3.

Supporting the adaptation and implementation of Regional Initiatives

- 11 The report viewed the use of different mechanisms to implement the strategic agenda of the Initiatives favourably, such as: i) opening up of dialogue and technical assistance on policies; ii) adaptation and expansion of projects; iii) integration of issues (through a territorial approach) with key actors; and iv) generation of capacities and resource mobilization. The Regional Office led the realignment of priorities, and supported policies and projects that promote issues addressed by the Initiatives. However, differences in emphasis, priority and progress are evident between the Regional Initiatives agendas. This is illustrated by some contrasts between the Caribbean, Mesoamerican and South American subregions.
- 12 RLC's work in driving the creation of a portfolio of projects that contribute to the Regional Initiatives has been effective in achieving consensus between countries over regional priorities. It has played a relevant role in aligning country needs with corporate objectives and it has been useful in guiding projects by providing specialized technical assistance in each Regional Initiative and conducting quality control checks on Initiative design. However, the implementation of quality programmes and projects is still beset by numerous challenges, namely: i) delays due to red tape; ii) the budget tied to projects, which prevents transition to a programmatic approach; iii) monitoring is restricted to the financial and administrative side, meaning that little relevant information is generated to improve implementation; iv) evaluation mechanisms are not implemented systematically and uniformly in the region - there is a need to encourage their use to improve and strengthen capacity building through learning; and v) few personnel are available for monitoring and evaluation activities.

Promoting the scaling-up of results

- 13 The report identifies cases where projects and actions have been scaled-up with the support of RLC. This has resulted in legislative and regulatory changes or increased project coverage, thus raising FAO's impact in the region. RLC's contribution in achieving the above has been substantive and useful, mainly by providing technical assistance, particularly through the role of the Lead Technical Officers and Regional Initiative Leaders. However, there is no institutional strategy to promote the identification of key drivers for scaling-up results based on organizational rather than personal learning.

Assisting with the generation and use of evidence

- 14 RLC continually produces a variety of regional publications and participates in discussion exercises and technical debates that serve as inputs to improve evidence generation and encourage the use of evidence in project development. The development of three innovative actions has been particularly noteworthy in this context: i) creation of a Knowledge Management Unit; ii) the Cluster Strategy; and iii) the project self-evaluation exercise. Since it was only recently implemented, it is not yet possible to assess its results in improving project design and implementation. The report identifies the monitoring of short- and medium-term results (i.e. not merely project operations) and facilitating the use of evidence as areas for improvement.

Facilitating mechanisms for incorporating vulnerable groups

- 15 RLC's actions have been useful and effective in advancing gender mainstreaming. Coordination of the network of focal points, technical assistance and capacity building have led to more projects designed to encourage gender equality. However, such exercises are not systematically applied in all country offices, nor do they have the same pace or impact. It is therefore necessary to keep up these actions and encourage those that speed up the maturation process of the mainstreaming strategy. RLC's actions to promote the inclusion of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent in the region are considered successful and relevant. Recognizing the gender team model in order to replicate it has brought progress in including such groups in the projects. However, the diverse characteristics of the groups and their settings have meant that the strategy is diverse and idiosyncratic, and the aggregate results are not very visible.

Coordinating adaptation processes in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic


- 16 RLC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been positive, helpful and effective. This has been welcomed in the region. Various actions were taken, including the almost immediate adoption of remote working conditions at the beginning of lockdown, the development of specific proposals for short-term care and medium-term recovery, as well as RLC's actions as a broker (facilitator of negotiations) between countries. However, efforts made by the network of FAO offices in the region will have to be maintained and consolidated. The perception is that the response will be long-term, given that this new emergency has increased the pressure of addressing pre-existing emergencies and threats.

Conclusions and recommendations

Leading the design of Regional Initiatives that are relevant for the region

- 17 The Regional Initiatives are holistic and consistent narratives that help respond to changes and needs arising in the region. They harmonize and bring coherence to the array of responses to the main multifactorial problems. The Regional Initiatives are also recognized as important tools for promoting FAO's policy messages, since they stem from debate and dialogue between countries, and reflect corporate objectives. The report recommends strengthening support to country offices to develop a comprehensive narrative that links planning with the Regional Initiatives, seeking points of intersection from which projects can derive in order to take advantage of interconnection between the Regional Initiatives.
- 18 RI1 focused on key issues to ensure access to healthy food. The theme of "healthy environments" or "healthy surroundings" was also introduced in the region. Given the exponential growth of the urban population, consumer issues have become more pressing. This has led FAO to work more closely with key intermediate stakeholders (e.g. wholesale markets) and to develop more relevant proposals to ensure the distribution and consumption of healthy food in the region.



- 
- 19 RI2 reflected rapid changes and important developments, which can be a constraint to the uptake and empowerment of its objectives within FAO and by partners at country level. The report recommends that under the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative, which provides the setting for RI2, headquarters should be asked to establish mechanisms to provide longer time frames. This will help the Initiative to be evaluated and its impact to be measured before its scope is extended or refocused. The report also concludes that RI2 must continue to encourage a holistic approach and the organization of sustainable agri-food systems instead of traditional processing methods.
- 20 The programmatic structure of RI3 does not explicitly reflect prioritization criteria for subregions and countries with specificities associated with greater vulnerability and less institutional capacity, which could limit the proactive use of resources. The report recommended emphasizing aspects of biodiversity as they relate to healthy and nutritious food and ecosystem services that improve territorial conditions and local productive systems (land and sea), as well as stressing the role of biodiversity in meeting the challenges of climate change, sustainable agriculture and health security; incorporating criteria in RI3 for emphasizing characteristic country themes based on biogeographic and cultural aspects and levels of vulnerability, risk exposure and institutional response capacity; and make explicit the programmatic structure to prioritize subregional zones and countries with specificities associated with greater vulnerability and risk exposure and lower institutional capacity, particularly in the case of Small Island Developing States in English-speaking Caribbean and Central American dry corridor countries.

Supporting the adaptation and implementation of Regional Initiatives

- 21 While FAO is considered to have a strong presence at institutional and national level, it is important to implement efforts to get even closer to the territory and local governments. This should be done by strengthening the territorial approach of projects in order to strengthen ownership and sustainability of the Regional Initiatives and actions. The report suggests that RLC should continue to reflect on the Regional Initiatives in order to adapt them to changing contexts. It should foster greater interaction between the Regional Initiatives to take advantage of opportunities for joint action.
- 22 On the other hand, there are mechanisms in place to drive the quality of the projects and their alignment with the Regional Initiatives, such as quality assurance reviews, the project appraisal checklist and the Project Task Force. However, bottlenecks were identified, such as the delay in forming task forces and the distribution of responsibilities between regional and subregional teams. The report recommends that RLC should revisit the systematic causes of delays and bring them to the attention of headquarters. The report also suggests that clear criteria should be established for selecting Lead Technical Officers, avoiding a situation where all the tasks are performed by too few people. Organizational learning should be encouraged, as well as the dissemination of information on bottlenecks in administrative processes differentiated by project type and partner and possible solutions. The cluster initiative can provide spaces that allow for delegation of responsibilities and capacity building, particularly through the work of communities of practice. This will hopefully free up space of those Lead Technical Officers who have more experience, so that they can bring a strategic vision to projects, thus sharing their learning.
- 23 RLC has been successful in mobilizing its own resources as well as national and international resources. It has also been able to secure strategic alliances by prioritizing a strategy of increasing and diversifying resource mobilization. Steps must be taken to ensure that FAO offices in the region have the capacity to implement the resources mobilized. The report recommends that RLC should develop diversified assistance strategies (technical assistance in drawing up proposals, brokerage and positioning, or information on partners and windows of opportunity), project type (GEF or UTF) and partner type (international banks, private sector and civil society). The strategy adopted by RLC's Rapid Growth Countries Support Team is important in this regard as it responds to changing country scenarios. The report also recommends that RLC should disseminate the resource mobilization and partner diversification strategy among offices in the region, particularly in countries with a high dependence on Technical Cooperation Programmes (TCPs) and a single funding source.


- 24 As part of the identification of new partners, more assistance is required from RLC when establishing partnerships with the private sector, international banks, regional and subregional bodies and even Ministries of Agriculture. Given the objectives of the 2020-2021 biennium mobilization strategy, which considers extending the mobilization of public and private investments although the Investment Centre (CFI) plays a central role, the report recommends that RLC should focus its efforts on mapping and identifying opportunities for matching supply and demand for investment with growth potential, as it has been doing through the Resource Mobilization Unit.

Promoting the scaling-up of results

- 25 It was not possible to identify a dedicated strategy for scaling-up projects. Despite the efforts of RLC, the subregional offices and FAO Representatives (FAORs), there are no specific criteria for recognizing success stories and assessing their feasibility for scaling-up. The report considers it important to implement actions for identifying success stories in a systematic manner and to have a clear strategy in place for scaling-up. The report recommends that RLC should define a strategy to guide the scaling-up of actions. Such strategy should address at least the following elements: identify success stories that can be adapted in the country or subregion, funding and cooperation of strategic partners such as the government, and technical and political implications that will allow a greater visibility of the intervention. It is also important to carve out a permanent space for identifying opportunities for scaling-up based on the communication channel already established with countries in order to include the strategic vision of the personnel.

Assisting with the generation and use of evidence

- 26 To ensure the use of evidence in decision-making, RLC must promote actions to monitor, evaluate and develop studies on the progress of programmes, projects and Regional Initiatives in Member Countries and in the region, establishing mechanisms to analyse the information collected and putting strategies in place to disseminate information. There is a lack of a strategy for systematic monitoring and evaluation, as well as for the management of knowledge generated in the region. The report considers that RLC should put a follow-up mechanism in place to promote improvement based on evaluation recommendations and allow for the exchange of lessons learned between countries when similar projects exist. The FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) can contribute to the design of this mechanism. The report recommends supplementing the efforts being made by OED to design a training programme for all monitoring and evaluation personnel working in subregional and country offices. The aim is to raise awareness and encourage operational and technical personnel to promote the use of monitoring and evaluation results. The Knowledge Management Unit will be crucial to this task. The Cluster Strategy also offers an opportunity for FAO personnel in the region to use more evidence for the continuous improvement of programmes and projects.
- 27 The monitoring task should be simplified and oriented to results, as it is focused on management. Corporate monitoring systems are usable, but they are fragmented and lack information for the operational follow-up. The country offices and some donors have therefore had to develop their own systems. It will be important to work together to ensure that the learning curve for users does not make these tasks too complicated. Training workshops should be facilitated for all FAO personnel in the region. Guides must also be developed and made available in the different languages spoken in Member Countries. Regarding the results-based approach, which is not yet systematically applied, RLC is advised to work together with the countries to select the most appropriate outcome indicators and promote their follow-up, as they provide key information for identifying success stories.
- 28 The self-assessment led by RLC on project quality was useful in identifying lessons learned. Possible actions for improvement were found, such as refining the quality criteria, reviewing methodology and timing considering workloads, and establishing a strategy for following-up recommendations and disseminating findings between countries. The report recommends that RLC should identify an appropriate time to develop it. RLC should also streamline the assessment in terms of relevance and management, and participation



and inclusion topics. The report also suggests comparing the project quality assurance exercises based on the project and self-assessment cycle in order to systematize lessons learned. The report also recommends consulting the Office of Evaluation to improve the self-assessment methodology.

Facilitating mechanisms for incorporating vulnerable groups

- 29 A clear, solid focal point structure is in place to address gender issues in the region, guided and directed by RLC. The structure for indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent is more recent and not at the same level of development. Both networks ensure that the issues they focus on are promoted and included in the various countries of the region, and their work is seen in a positive light. RLC must encourage the good practices that have been effective in the region in terms of achieving progress in the fulfilment of FAO's Policy on Gender Equality are considered by the network of focal points for indigenous peoples. The report recommends that RLC should continue with its training and information dissemination efforts throughout the region, by strengthening the structure for including indigenous peoples, as was done for gender. However, given the differences between indigenous peoples in countries of the region, this strategy should be more regionalized and backed by the recognition and enhancement of learning already present within the groups of people involved.
- 30 Disaggregated, gender-specific data are not in plentiful supply and up-to-date information is not always available. The report recommends that RLC, together with the subregional offices, should promote alliances with partners and donors that enhance data production work in order to obtain more effective diagnoses.
- 31 RLC has contributed to the mainstreaming of a gender approach in its programmes and projects through the RLC's Gender Officer, its gender team and the network of focal points, although this has not been done systematically. Gender mainstreaming has been encouraged by aligning the regional gender strategy with the Regional Initiatives. However, the fact that the focal points in country offices are not exclusively dedicated to these tasks limits the space for dialogue with the aim of drawing up work plans on these agendas. Although progress has been made in the region on including a gender perspective, the report recommends continuing with training efforts that have been carried out as well as to step up the dissemination of tools and documents between country offices with the aim of reducing the observed differences.
- 32 Despite the existence of guidelines and policies for obtaining free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), there are challenges to implementation. In order to deal with bottlenecks in FPIC implementation, the report recommends that RLC should promote the use of TCP resources to build capacity in order to foster systematic participation in governments and the achievement of free, prior and informed knowledge among countries.

Coordinating adaptation processes in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic

- 33 Various stakeholders, including regional organizations, perceive FAO's response to the pandemic as timely and effective. FAO's response was implemented within the United Nations framework, and RLC's response was implemented within the framework of the institutional response. The report recommends continuing with assistance efforts within the institutional framework, as internal and external stakeholders are all very accepting of these efforts. Similarly, the report advises RLC to continue building on its leading role as a broker (negotiation facilitator), which has allowed achievements such as bringing ministers together to discuss common problems arising from the pandemic. Good practices are identified to help make network dynamics more flexible in the context of the health emergency. However, there is a perceived burnout given the high rate of work and the change in workloads and duties outside the work environment due to the pandemic. The report recommends that RLC should continue with actions that have been put in place to maintain support to the country and subregional offices, considering the general toll on the teams, and more room should be allowed for social interaction.

- 34 Projects have been adapted to the new COVID-19 situation, which has led to savings on significant items such as travel and workshops. It will still be a challenge to ensure the continuity of projects that were temporarily halted, which will have to continue in a different context from the one in which they originated. One recommendation is to circulate criteria between decentralized offices in the region, which will enable decisions to be taken over which projects should continue and which should be adapted or are even dispensable in the face of the new challenges.
- 35 FAO's commitment to the post-COVID-19 agenda has allowed it to position itself strongly in the region so that it can have an impact on response and recovery plans. However, the implications of this strategy – apart from prioritizing issues – must be clarified. The recovery with transformation approach led by RLC before COVID-19 is a strength. However, the report recommends identifying which specific actions need to be taken for this to be effective, beyond prioritizing issues to be addressed or rescheduling project deliverables. Many of the priorities that are still being addressed were defined before the pandemic and are still in place. Therefore, the report recommends continuing to provide technical assistance to countries to enable them to adjust and adapt their public policy and management tools to the new normal after COVID-19.





1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

- 1 The 127th session of the Programme Committee of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) approved an evaluation of the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (RLC) with the aim of assessing the performance and added value of this office in supporting the work of the Organization in Latin America and the Caribbean with a special focus on assessing innovative measures and identifying good practices.

1.2 Intended users

- 2 The primary users of the evaluation are FAO personnel in the region and particularly those working in RLC. The following are also included: FAO personnel in other decentralized offices and at headquarters (who could learn from the good practices and lessons learned identified in the report); Senior Management (who would receive more information on the added value of the regional structure); and Member Countries (who would have access to more information on the relevance and effectiveness of the services provided by RLC).

1.3 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

- 3 This evaluation focuses on the period 2017–2020, which was characterized by several internal and external changes including: the appointment of a new Regional Representative; a review of FAO's Strategic Framework and organizational structure; election of a new FAO Director-General; implementation of the United Nations (UN) system reform; and the health emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4 The core objective is to evaluate the performance and added value of RLC in supporting FAO's work in Latin America and the Caribbean, considering the part played by the Regional Initiatives as mechanisms to facilitate such support.
- 5 The evaluation was conducted considering the human and financial resources available to the Organization in the region. Although findings were identified in relation to these aspects, the report does not review the capacity of the offices or their management mechanisms, because they are assumed to be constant elements available to RLC to provide technical, operational and brokerage assistance in the region. It would be convenient to supplement this assessment by carrying out an organizational analysis that considers the mechanisms and workflows in order to identify specific recommendations in these areas in view of the corporate changes that are being implemented.
- 6 The terms of reference (Annex 1) of the evaluation identified key evaluation questions stemming from the objective of assessing the strategic relevance, effectiveness, usefulness and technical assistance of RLC in the region. These questions were grouped into six areas of enquiry, which were used as a framework for evaluating RLC's role and work.
 - i. relevance of the Regional Initiatives for meeting the needs and demands of Member Countries;
 - ii. adaptation and implementation of actions developed based on the Regional Initiatives;
 - iii. scaling-up results;
 - iv. generating and using evidence for decision-making;
 - v. incorporating vulnerable groups and promoting gender mainstreaming;
 - vi. addressing the COVID-19 situation.

1.4 Methodology

- 7 The evaluation was carried out using a mixed methods approach, including desk analysis and data gathering. Qualitative information was collected through semi-structured interviews with FAO personnel and key partners (Appendix 2). This took place at regional level and in three countries selected from a purposive sample¹ (Annex 2) with the aim of ensuring that the responses obtained from countries receiving support from RLC were as heterogeneous as possible. The three models chosen represent different degrees of relative implementation of programmes and projects by FAO in the region and consider the capacity of country offices and the coordination and/or mobilization of technical support from RLC. The countries representing the models analysed were: Trinidad and Tobago (with a low degree of relative implementation by FAO), Nicaragua (with a medium degree of relative implementation by FAO), and Ecuador (with a high degree of FAO positioning). This ensured diversity at subregional level, which also shows different mechanisms of coordination between RLC and Subregional and country offices, and in the income level of countries, and offered an opportunity to focus on two countries with a high concentration of rural population, inequality, poverty and prevalence of undernourishment, where RLC could potentially have a high impact.
- 8 The evaluation team was supplemented by the participation of one thematic expert for each of the Regional Initiatives. They conducted in-depth analyses of the strategic relevance and contribution of the Regional Initiatives to FAO's work in the region and to addressing the priorities and needs of Member Countries.
- 9 The evaluation team assessed RLC performance in terms of its potential role in the region.² This model was built on the basis of: an analysis of elements considered in studies and evaluations of the performance of offices that are part of UN agencies; a review of regulatory documents on the functions of Regional, Subregional and country offices, RLC performance reports and the comments of the RLC management team.
- 10 The model includes six functions: i) leading Regional Initiative design that is relevant for the region; ii) support provided in adapting and implementing the Regional Initiatives; iii) scaling-up of results; iv) generation and use of evidence; v) facilitation of mechanisms for incorporating vulnerable groups; vi) coordination of adaptation processes in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 11 The desk analysis involved a review of 323 documentary units including databases, reports and other documents generated by RLC, subregional and country offices and FAO headquarters, received between July 2020 and March 2021. The qualitative data gathering included 35 exploratory interviews, conducted with RLC personnel between July and December 2020. The information gathering in countries, subregional offices and the headquarters was conducted between November 2020 and February 2021 and included 59 interviews with FAO personnel and 37 external stakeholders, mainly from national governments, subregional bodies and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- 12 The online survey was conducted from 11 to 22 February 2021 with the aim of expanding on the findings identified during the fieldwork. The survey was made available to all personnel in the region in English, French and Spanish (Annex 2), and resulted in 386 respondents, 262 of whom completed the questions used to strengthen the qualitative evidence of findings from this evaluation.

1 The evaluation was constructed considering various socio-demographic conditions in Member Countries as an indicator of needs, problems or demands. It also considered the organizational conditions in which implementation takes place, assessing the ability of country offices to meet needs in Member Countries, as well as the management of technical assistance provided by RLC to address the Regional Initiatives.

2 Ideal reference model on actions to be taken by RLC to achieve a satisfactory performance in order to carry out FAO's work and have an impact in the region, considering the objectives of the Regional Initiatives. This role was used as a reference framework for assessing the work of RLC during the evaluation period.

1.4.1 Stakeholder participation

- 13 Four workshops were held with key FAO personnel. Participants included the Regional Representative, the Deputy Regional Representative, the Regional Programme Leader, the Regional Initiative Leaders and the Subregional Coordinators. The first workshop introduced the design of the evaluation, discussed the proposed potential role of RLC, and identified what was expected from the evaluation. As a result, comments from RLC personnel were incorporated into the methodology. The second workshop outlined the criteria for the sample of countries where much of the data gathering was carried out. The workshop was organized so that strengths and weaknesses of the options could be discussed and led to the evaluation team defining a sample of three countries (Ecuador, Nicaragua and Trinidad and Tobago).
- 14 The third workshop outlined the preliminary findings and was conducted interactively so that the evaluation review team that was part of RLC personnel could identify the most relevant concerns and validate them. The agenda of the fourth workshop included a discussion of the evaluation conclusions and recommendations, based on the preliminary findings and guidelines shared with key FAO personnel in the region in the draft final report.

1.5 Limitations

- 15 The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were a limiting factor that prevented fieldwork from being conducted face-to-face at RLC offices as well as at the subregional offices and the other countries that were included in the sample. This meant that interviews had to be conducted remotely. Key people also had additional workloads due to the pandemic, which meant extending the time for data gathering in order to reach out to all relevant stakeholders.
- 16 Another limiting factor was relevant information. RLC and offices in the region hold a lot of information that could not have been interpreted for the evaluation without assistance from the RLC team, particularly for budget and human resources data, which suggests that the integration and interpretation is complicated.
- 17 The evaluation also took place within the framework of several structural changes made with the aim of reorganizing FAO's offices in the region, which meant that the existing policy documents on the functions of regional, subregional and country offices do not reflect the current functions of the regional offices. The evaluation therefore outlined a potential role for RLC that could serve as a benchmark for the functions that the office should set out to fulfil in order to achieve its objectives.

1.6 Structure of the report

- 18 The report is organized into five sections. Following this introduction, section 2 provides a brief overview of the socio-economic and agri-food context in the region. Section 3 describes the roles and functions of RLC and of FAO's decentralized offices. Section 4 includes the findings of the evaluation exercise regarding RLC's performance in its potential role, and section 5 presents conclusions and recommendations. Supplementary information (such as the bibliography used, the list of interviewees, the terms of reference, the survey results and the matrix of findings, conclusions and recommendations) is set out separately as appendices and annexes to the report.



2. Socio-economic and agri-food context

- 19 According to FAO, “the region of Latin America and the Caribbean is facing a rapid nutritional transition. Between 2000 and 2018, the hunger rate almost halved from 11.9 percent to 6.5 percent, and in virtually the same period, the prevalence of overweight and obesity in adults rose from 49.8 percent to 59.6 percent [...] This change in the nutritional situation is largely related to the rapid evolution of our food systems. New eating habits have emerged in a context where a greater proportion of the population lives in urban centres, has more sedentary habits, eats away from home more frequently and has less time to shop and prepare healthier food choices” (FAO, 2020a).
- 20 However, despite the region’s enormous wealth of potential natural resources, 50 percent of the rural population lives in poverty and 20 percent in extreme poverty (FAO, 2020b). Most of the rural population is economically dependent on agriculture and usually works in family units. Family farming therefore plays an essential part in the rural economy and employment, contributing to the food and nutrition security of countries, their local development, and regional efforts to eradicate hunger. However, family farming still faces multiple constraints despite its importance. Many countries in the region still do not have regulatory frameworks and incentives that guarantee the social and productive inclusion of family farmers, or adequate social protection systems that allow them to improve their living conditions.
- 21 The natural heritage of Latin America and the Caribbean has deteriorated due to the development of farming-related activities. According to FAO, “the sector uses 73 percent of the total volume of fresh water in the region each year. The area of degraded land is estimated to amount to almost 200 million hectares and 50 percent of agricultural soils suffer from some degree of erosion. Forest area decreased from 51.3 percent in 1990 to 46.4 percent in 2015, which has significant implications for biodiversity loss. In addition, more than half of the region’s fisheries are overexploited, affecting the volume of catches. The deterioration in the region’s natural resources affects the global environmental balance as well as the productive base on which agriculture and other sections essential for development and social well-being depend” (FAO, 2020c).
- 22 Latin America and the Caribbean is a multi-ethnic, multicultural and metalinguistic region. Nearly half of its rural population is female (FAO, 2017a); and more than 40 percent of people are ethnic indigenous and of African descent (FAO, 2019a). The vast majority of this population lives in conditions of poverty, inequality and marginalization. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on millions of smallholders and has made them more vulnerable in a context of uncertainty.





3. FAO in Latin America and the Caribbean

3.1 Priority areas

- 23 FAO's priorities in Latin America and the Caribbean in the period 2017–2020 are determined in the FAO Strategic Framework 2010–2020 (FAO, 2020d), in the Medium-Term Plan for 2014–2017 and 2018–2021, in the Work and Budget Programmes 2016–17, 2018–19 and 2020–21 (FAO, 2015a; FAO, 2019a) and in discussions on strategic and technical aspects that take place during the Regional Conferences, based on documentation provided by FAO.
- 24 At corporate level, the Medium-Term Plan 2018–2021 confirmed that global and regional trends and challenges underlying the Strategic Framework remain viable and have reinforced FAO's role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).³ These challenges formed the basis of the conceptual framework and the theory of change embedded in FAO's five strategic objectives (SOs):
- SO1 Help eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition
 - SO2 Make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable
 - SO3 Reduce rural poverty
 - SO4 Enable inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems
 - SO5 Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises

3.2 Regional Initiatives

- 25 Based on the corporate Strategic Objectives and the SDGs, and considering the region's socio-economic context, RLC set out three Regional Initiatives that were discussed and approved by the FAO Regional Conferences held in 2016, 2018 and 2020. FAO considers that they are a coordinated and multi-sector response to the main challenges that the region faces in its fight to eradicate hunger in the next decade while strengthening family farming, food systems and rural territorial development, and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, adaptation to climate change and disaster risk management (FAO, 2016a).
- 26 During the 36th session of the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (LARC36), a proposal was made to adapt the Regional Initiatives for 2020–2021, strengthening their support for the achievement of the SDGs, adjusting them to correspond to current trends and challenges and refining them to build on the achievements of the 2018–2019 biennium (FAO, 2020e):
- i. RI1, "Hunger-free Latin America and the Caribbean", was renamed "*Sustainable food systems to provide healthy diets for all*", highlighting the increased focus on increasing supply and financial and physical access to healthy food for all people, as well as improving information and eating habits concerning healthy foods. Work on hunger eradication will move to RI2.
 - ii. RI2, "Family farming and inclusive food systems for sustainable rural development", was renamed "*Hand in hand towards prosperous and inclusive rural societies*", highlighting the integrated approach to eradicating hunger and extreme poverty in lagging territories, creating new opportunities by benefiting from increased productivity, competitiveness and innovation, and promoting social and productive inclusion.
 - iii. RI3, "Sustainable use of natural resources, adaptation to climate change and disaster risk management", was renamed "*Sustainable and resilient agriculture*" and focuses on making progress in transforming agricultural and food systems to achieve increasingly environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient production and scaling-up technological innovations that improve the natural capital and environmental services, giving rise to better climate-smart productivity.

3 The FAO Strategic Framework underwent a fundamental change in 2020.

3.3 Network of decentralized offices in the region

- 27 FAO maintains a strong presence in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to implement the priority areas agreed with Member Countries in the region. Twenty-four country offices provide coverage for the 33 Member Countries, which are supported by two subregional offices and one regional office. The Regional Office has been located in Santiago de Chile since 1955, while the Subregional Office for the Caribbean (SLC), located in Bridgetown (Barbados), was established in 1996 and the Subregional Office for Mesoamerica (SLM), located in Panama, was established in 2007 (FAO, 2017c). The Caribbean region, in particular, has multi-country offices, which means they negotiate with more than one country in the region.
- 28 The regional offices spearhead the Organization's response to regional priorities by identifying, planning and implementing priority activities. They are also accountable for results achieved on the Regional Initiatives. RLC oversees the Subregional Offices (SLC and SLM) and the Country Offices and provides operational, administrative and technical support to ensure their more effective operation. It also supports dialogue on regional issues and contributes to capacity building and resource mobilization, and to establishing relevant alliances and partnerships in the region. RLC also prepares and facilitates the FAO Regional Conference, the Organization's Governing Body in the region where it also presents the conclusions and recommendations of the Regional Technical Commissions: the Latin American and the Caribbean Forestry Commission (LACFC), the Commission on Livestock Development for Latin America and the Caribbean (CODEGALAC), the Commission for Small-Scale and Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture of Latin America and the Caribbean (COPPESAALC) and the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC).
- 29 The subregional offices are part of FAO's decentralization strategy and provide knowledge and technical capacity to countries making up the subregions based on their demands, serving as the first point of contact for Member Countries. The support provided by the subregional offices focuses on technical issues, training and support for project planning, formulation and implementation in the subregion and its constituent countries, as well as providing follow-up for resource mobilization, along with the country Offices. In addition to monitoring subregional priorities, the subregional offices help establish relations with subregional organizations and with the implementation and monitoring of subregional projects. Under the leadership of the Subregional Coordinators, they seek to ensure consistency and alignment between national, subregional and regional priorities.
- 30 The country offices may be Partnership and Liaison Offices, FAO Representations, Multiple Accreditation Offices and Outposted Technical Officers. Country offices aim to assist governments in formulating policies, programmes and projects that contribute to achieving food security, alleviating hunger, promoting agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors, using resources in a sustainable manner, and meeting objectives related to the corporate vision and mission, currently aimed at achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs.

3.4 Human and financial resources

- 31 Table 1 shows human resources available in the region according to the FAO Regular Programme, while Table 2 shows the trend in the budget allocated to the region in the period 2016–2021. It can be seen that the Regular Programme allocation increased by 14 percent in nominal terms, from USD 77.2 million in the 2016–2017 biennium to USD 88.3 million in the 2020–2021 biennium, although the increase was much smaller in relative terms, from 7.6 percent of the net appropriation in 2016–2017 (USD 1 011 748) to 8.7 percent in 2020–2021 (USD 1 005 635). This is reflected in the change in human resources, which was largely unchanged, except for two positions.

Table 1 • Human resources in the Latin America and the Caribbean region between 2018 and 2021

| Office | Post count by grade group 2018–2019 and 2020–2021 | | | | |
|------------------|---|----|---|----|-------|
| | M | P | N | G | Total |
| 2020-2021 | | | | | |
| RLC | 3 | 32 | 5 | 40 | 80 |
| SLC | 1 | 9 | 2 | 10 | 22 |
| SLM | 1 | 10 | 3 | 6 | 20 |
| 2018-2019 | | | | | |
| RLC | 3 | 31 | 4 | 41 | 79 |
| SLC | 1 | 9 | 2 | 10 | 22 |
| SLM | 1 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 19 |

Legend: M: Management; P: Professional; N: National Officers; G: General Services.

Notes:

The number of posts reported in the Programmes of Work and Budget 2018-2021, not counting posts from other possible sources.

FAO. 2019b. Medium Term Plan for 2018-2021 and Programme of Work and Budget for 2020-21. FAO's results and priorities in Latin America and Caribbean (available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/my734es/my734es.pdf>) Accessed: 28 March 2021.

FAO. 2017d. Medium Term Plan for 2018-2021 and Programme of Work and Budget 2018-19 FAO's results and priorities in Latin America and Caribbean (available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ms278s/ms278s.pdf>) Accessed: 28 March 2021.

Source: Programme of Work and Budget for 2020–2021.

Table 2 • Latin America and the Caribbean budget by biennium (thousands of USD)

| Budgetary chapters | 2016–2017 | | 2018–2019 | | 2020–2021 | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| | Net appropriation | Extra-budgetary funds | Net appropriation | Extra-budgetary funds | Net appropriation | Extra-budgetary funds |
| 1 | 10 305 | 40 057 | 11 786 | 22 958 | 12 628 | 28 303 |
| 2 | 17 909 | 34 117 | 20 157 | 53 291 | 21 375 | 52 306 |
| 3 | 7 129 | 17 756 | 7 788 | 18 825 | 8 281 | 22 748 |
| 4 | 7 813 | 8 588 | 8 496 | 11 491 | 9 065 | 10 888 |
| 5 | 4 749 | 73 587 | 4 728 | 19 763 | 5 160 | 24 421 |
| 6 | 560 | - | 558 | - | 693 | 58 |
| 7 - TCP | 20 669 | - | 20 460 | - | 20 460 | - |
| 8 | 854 | - | 1 929 | - | 2 003 | - |
| 9 | 1 097 | - | 1 385 | - | 1 507 | - |
| 10 | 1 871 | - | 2 150 | - | 2 431 | - |
| 11 | 4 326 | 1 301 | 3 907 | 1 301 | 4 783 | 700 |
| Total | 77 282 | 175 407 | 83 342 | 127 629 | 88 386 | 139 424 |
| Grand total | 252 689 | | 210 971 | | 227 810 | |

Notes:

This section corresponds to 11 budgetary chapters (the five strategic objectives SO1-SO5, Objective 6 - Technical quality, statistics and cross-cutting issues; Objective 7 – Technical cooperation programme and functional objectives FO8-FO11).

FAO. 2015. Medium-term plan for 2014-2017 and Programme of Work and Budget for 2016-17 Results and Priorities for FAO in the Latin America and the Caribbean Region (available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/mm710s/mm710s.pdf>) Access: 28 March 2021.

FAO. 2017b. Medium-term plan for 2018-2021 and Programme of Work and Budget for 2018-19 Results and Priorities for FAO in the Latin America and the Caribbean Region (available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ms278s/ms278s.pdf>) Access: 28 March 2021.

FAO. 2019b. Medium-term plan for 2018-2021 and Programme of Work and Budget for 2020-21 Results and Priorities for FAO in the Latin America and the Caribbean Region (available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/my734es/my734es.pdf>) Access: 28 March 2021.

Source: Programme of Work and Budget (Annex II 2016–17, Annex 6 2018–19, Annex 6 2020–21).



3.5 Partners and donors in the region

32 FAO works with various governments and donors to mobilize funds allowing it to implement priority areas of work in the region. Table 3 lists the main donors over the last four years. It shows emerging donors such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), as well as non-traditional donors such as Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, while traditional donors such as the European Union and Italy have declined.

Table 3 • Main donors in the region (2017–2020)

| Year | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1 | Colombia | Brazil | GCF | GCF |
| 2 | European Union | GEF | Colombia | GEF |
| 3 | GEF | Norway | European Union | UNOCHA |
| 4 | Mexico | Colombia | GEF | European Union |
| 5 | Italy | European Union | UNJP | Italy |

Notes: FAO. n.d.a. Database with information on resource mobilization for the period 2017–2020. (Working Paper).
Source: Prepared by the authors based on information provided by RLC.

3.6 Role of FAO headquarters and complementarities between global, regional, subregional and national levels.

- 33 The presence of three office levels helps to strengthen FAO's presence in the region and enhance its impact. Following the principle of subsidiarity, the closest level provides support to the country offices: first the subregional and regional office and, if applicable, headquarters. The network of decentralized offices in the region operates in a complementary manner, concentrating more strategic areas and profiles in regional and subregional offices, and focusing local policy implementation and negotiation elements in the country offices. This is reflected in a constant demand for specialized technical assistance from the country offices to the subregional and regional offices and even to headquarters, where most of the Organization's personnel expertise is concentrated. The region contains country offices of the following types: Partnership and Liaison Offices;⁴ full FAO Representations;⁵ Representations co-located with (sub)regional offices;⁶ and Multiple Accreditation Offices.⁷
- 34 Today, the decentralized office network is undergoing a process of evolution, driven by headquarters. The aim is to increase the autonomy of the decentralized offices (regional, subregional and country), increase flexibility in the management of resources and ensure greater delegation of authority. In parallel, the Organization seeks to strengthen aspects such as the oversight, transparency and integrity of its network of decentralized offices. Overall, this strategy seeks to increase the capacities of country offices to improve their efficiency and responsiveness to the needs of Member Countries.⁸

4 In Colombia and Mexico.

5 In Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

6 In Barbados, Chile and Panama.

7 In Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Costa Rica, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname.

8 The June 2020 FAO Council is discussing these matters, and there is therefore an open agenda.



4. Main findings

4.1 Relevance of the Regional Initiatives for meeting the needs and demands of FAO Member Countries

- 35 Relevance was evaluated in terms of the clarity and added value of the Regional Initiatives, as well as the relevance of the conceptual design (including synergies) and of mechanisms of implementation for addressing the needs and demands of Member Countries.

Finding 1. The Regional Initiatives proved to be relevant instruments for linking individual country demands and regional priorities with FAO's corporate objectives. They have evolved to better contextualize the needs of the region. There is potential for greater interaction between the Regional Initiatives and better application of implementation mechanisms.

4.1.1 Clarity of Regional Initiatives

- 36 The Regional Initiatives embody comprehensive and clear narratives insofar as they incorporate elements that respond to changes and challenges in the region and have established a common language. This makes them understandable and contributes to their positioning, visibility and ownership at country level. They have evolved to incorporate progress made, as well as external and internal factors influencing FAO's strategic planning in the region. However, each of them has its own specificities and challenges.
- 37 RI3 has made significant progress, moving from an emergency approach to a more holistic view of risk reduction and adaptation to the effects of climate change within a sustainable production and climate resilience framework. This has been a useful connecting element to leverage new partners and stakeholders (e.g. Ministries of the Environment and Natural Resources, climate change focal points and Ministries of Finance). A narrative has been developed to overcome the supposed conflict between agriculture and environment. This positions the agriculture and food system sector as a key part of the solution. The narrative has made it easier to engage in dialogue, apply new tools and promote FAO's public policy messages in the region, as well as to generate programmes and projects of interest for Member Countries. RLC is well-placed to continue playing a pivotal role in providing analytical tools, new models, technical assistance and convening stakeholders for constructive dialogues, agenda setting and priority actions.
- 38 For RI2, the narrative has become more complex as it brings together different stakeholders in agri-food systems, such as small-scale producers and family farming. Therefore, it does not only focus on the poorest strata, but rather on the broader rural sector. This is a challenge due to the wide range of priorities of the various stakeholders, which range from basic to productive needs. This influences the priority themes of RI2 and its positioning within the Hand-in-Hand Initiative.
- 39 For RI1, we consider that the initiative has evolved over the years. Initially it was aligned with key issues, such as mitigation of hunger and malnutrition and seeking to influence government policies. Now it involves a more comprehensive approach including influencing key stakeholders and aspects of the region's agri-food systems, such as food supply chains (including the public and private sector in charge of processing, wholesale, retail, etc.), as well as consumer habits and policies for reducing obesity, overweight and malnutrition.

4.1.2 Added value of Regional Initiatives

- 40 Regional Initiatives have helped to position key concepts of an agri-food system. Previously, the focus was on issues relating to hunger, rural and agricultural development in the strict sense, but now they focus on new stakeholders including partners in international

organizations, green funds, the private sector and consumers, as well as in government. They have also enabled the promotion of messages on the strategic importance of the sector's productivity and resilience as a crucial element of sustainable agri-food systems. However, pockets of resistance to some of these new messages still linger in some countries and subregions.

- 41 For RI2, policy dialogue has been important in promoting changes in legislation and regulations, while work with subregional organizations has been valuable for generating information and awareness on issues such as rural poverty and youth employment with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and promoting and coordinating interests with the Central American Integration System (SICA) in areas such as employment and non-agricultural rural activity as a complement to agriculture. In the Caribbean, these issues do not seem to be a high priority on the public agenda because the issue of rural poverty lacks momentum. Throughout the evaluation, overall concerns were raised about the particular complexity and challenges in the Caribbean, not merely as they related to RI2.⁹ For example, vulnerability and exposure to extreme weather events and climate change due to their status as Small Island Developing States with lower institutional capacity, and the biogeographic conditions of the subregion, especially in terms of their unique coastal and marine ecosystems. The local ethnic, racial and cultural context is not very known nor understood and clearly differentiates the subregion from the rest of the region. These specificities have implications for FAO's work in the subregion. For RI3, the evolution has allowed for the positioning and enhanced visibility of key concepts in the region, such as sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture, particularly regarding access to green funds. This served as a link to strengthen contacts with new allies and stakeholders, such as Ministries of Environment and Natural Resources and Ministries of Finance, as well as other stakeholders such as subnational governments, small producers and civil society organizations. Both paths have led to the scaling-up of actions, either by enhancing large-scale projects (such as those funded by GCF or GEF), or technical assistance, as well as enhancing the visibility of key stakeholders such as rural communities.
- 42 For RI1, FAO initially (but not so much during the last three to four years) built on work with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and focused on key issues to ensure access to healthy food, as this is crucial for food security. The Regional Initiative also introduced the theme of "healthy environments" or "healthy surroundings" in the region. Given the exponential growth in the urban population, there is also greater focus on issues affecting consumers, which led FAO to work more closely with key intermediaries (e.g. wholesale markets) and to develop more relevant options to ensure the distribution and consumption of healthy food in the region. Partnerships with entities such as the Latin American Federation of Supply Markets (FLAMA) and increased cooperation with the private sector have been of great assistance. Other factors are work done by headquarters on food loss and waste; previous work with wholesale markets in Brazil; work on food distribution in the region; FAO-Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) initiatives on obesity and the wave of new research on this topic over the last decade.

4.1.3 Regional Initiative conceptual design and synergies

- 43 The conceptual design of Regional Initiatives allowed for a better alignment of priorities and made it possible to promote policies and projects of interest to Member Countries. The personnel survey in the region suggests that approximately 77 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that the Initiatives have helped their work. Regional Initiative teams have been effective in defining strategies, finding entry points and addressing country needs. However, understanding and operationalizing the many factors considered in the Regional Initiatives can be complex. This can be a risk if actions are dispersed as it hinders effectiveness in achieving the expected results at country level and their contribution to regional and global corporate goals and objectives. The report finds that the Regional Initiatives still have room for improving the focus on their component elements and their complementarity and interconnectedness in order to avoid the risks associated with dispersion.

⁹ In the case of RI2, the concept of "family farming" is not commonly handled as such in Caribbean countries. The segment is referred to as "small-scale producers". However, in the nomenclature and classification of projects by thematic cluster within RI2, they are not included under the heading of "family farming", but come under the "value chains" approach, under the umbrella of RI2 with the aim of including these small-scale producers.

4. Main findings

- 44 The Regional Initiatives are also characterized by their numerous points of intersection. For example, RI2 focuses on lagging territories, which are territories of great natural wealth that are crucial for climate action and are partly emphasized by RI3, as well as value chain projects where there is intersection between RI1 and RI2. The implementation of sustainable management programmes for agriculture and ecosystems services has a direct impact on the living conditions of the rural population. This has facilitated the design of projects with an integrated approach and greater resource mobilization (such as the Poverty, Reforestation, Energy and Climate Change Project [PROEZA] in Paraguay, and the Amazonian Integral Forest Conservation and Sustainable Production Program [PROAmazonia] in Ecuador), and provision of technical assistance for the reformulation of government programmes (such as the *Bono Productivo* food production voucher scheme in Nicaragua). The evolution of RI1 towards issues relating to logistics and agricultural market operations forged links with RI2 as this work is carried out in secondary towns and rural villages and is part of a rural territorial development approach.
- 45 RI2 recently made progress in the topic of innovation in agri-food systems and their sustainability. This was achieved through knowledge exchanges triggered through forums, conferences and symposiums on innovations in agri-food systems and their sustainability, such as regional events in Buenos Aires (Argentina) in 2018 and in Montevideo (Uruguay) in 2019. Such events seek to empower rural communities in the face of changes brought about by social, economic, digital and environmental innovation, where information and communication technologies (ICTs) can make an effective contribution to meeting the challenges of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Since 2017 in Barbados, the Caribbean agenda has laid greater emphasis on issues such as climate-smart agriculture, financial services and value chains, which help to reduce net food imports in the subregion.
- 46 RI3 has given rise to innovation loops related to climate-smart agriculture in Nicaragua and other Central American dry corridor countries, as well as sustainable fisheries on the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast and REDD+ projects in Ecuador. Innovation has also come about through the transformation of agricultural outreach packages as a public management tool, backed by financial incentives and financial services. Innovative ways of incorporating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in the framework of resilience and multi-source hazard risk management are evident. One example is the IRES project in Cuba funded by GCF, which aims to improve food and nutrition security and increase the resilience and stability of local food production systems, employment and access to water. The application of tools such as AGRIDATA, digital modelling systems to generate national soil organic carbon maps, as well as the establishment of Agricultural Stress Index Systems (ASISs) for agricultural drought monitoring and early action plans to prevent their impact are other examples of innovation in risk reduction and adaptation to climate change. The agroclimatic roundtables set-up in Colombia are another example of innovation for the coordination of actions in risk reduction and adaptation to climate change. Another aspect that could be strengthened is the development of mechanisms for the offices to leverage successful experiences in other countries in the region, including generating more synergies with cooperating partners (such as the experience with FLAMA) and the presentation of joint initiatives. The new Regional Initiatives – Sustainable food systems to provide healthy diets for all (RI1); Hand in hand towards prosperous and inclusive rural societies (RI2); and Sustainable and resilient agriculture (RI3) – have great potential in this area.
- 47 In the case of RI1, which by its nature interconnects conceptually with RI3 – which focuses on sustainability – and RI2 – which focuses on productive inclusion – from a conceptual viewpoint. To date, work under RI1 has not emphasized the link between producers, consumption patterns and sustainability, but may do so in the future as a logical next step. In particular, we must consider that supply chains are long within countries and subregions and sustainability cannot simply mean short supply chains.
- 48 For the most recent 2020 version of RI2, progress has been made on issues of innovation in inclusive production systems and their sustainability, seeking to empower rural communities in the face of the changes brought about by social, economic, digital and environmental innovation, which is aligned with the objectives of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative to move towards digital agriculture and digital rural societies.

- 49 RLC faces major challenges when addressing the RI2 priority themes and its new definition under the Hand-in-Hand Initiative. Member Countries in the region have given it an explicit mandate. The 22 countries participating in the recent FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (LARC36) commented explicitly on RI2 and gave even greater emphasis to family farming, making it central to the agenda. It is noteworthy that 83 percent of the 22 countries that raised priorities during LARC36 mentioned family farming, fisheries and agriculture, and 61 percent emphasized social and productive resilience. All this highlights that the expectations of success in the region for RI2 are high during this new phase. It must therefore capitalize on progress made in recent years and lessons learned during the evolution it has undergone since its original formulation in 2014.
- 50 The new RI3 responds to the main sustainability and resilience problems in the region and can facilitate the mobilization of increased resources by leveraging its positioning regarding large funds. The capacity of RI3 to promote innovation on climate change and biodiversity issues – as part of an inclusive territorial development approach – will be crucial going forward. There is scope for cooperation between countries over the organization of regional and subregional projects in order to obtain backing from major environmental funds to meet common challenges.
- 51 It has been found in general that the three Regional Initiatives have evolved during the 2014–2020 period in terms of their statements of intent, pillars, priority countries, differentiators and extensions of scope. Details of this evolution can be found in Annex 3.

4.1.4 Mechanisms for implementing the Regional Initiatives

- 52 The use of different mechanisms to implement the strategic agenda of the initiatives was viewed positively, namely: i) opening of dialogue and technical assistance with policies; ii) adaptation and expansion of projects; iii) incorporation of themes in food systems and key stakeholders (such as private sector associations for lobbying and the organization of actions within the sector); iv) capacity-building and resource mobilization.
- 53 The regional work allowed the debate to be taken up to country level by opening up dialogue. Evidence of this is the work done with SICA, which opened up discussion on social protection and economic promotion in the subregion and made it possible to bring it down to country level. Other actions included promoting the formulation of a regional law together with FAO, and the Parliamentary Fronts for a legislative framework on nutrition topics. Other work was done with SICA on intra-regional trade and the fluidity of the supply chain between countries, based on infrastructure and regulatory reforms. In the Southern Cone, work was carried out with the Specialized Meeting on Family Farming (REAF), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and with Brazil's South–South Cooperation programmes to promote political dialogue, differentiated policies and the establishment of registers of family producers, among other measures. Another example of creating platforms for dialogue and high-impact advocacy was work done with the Latin American and Caribbean Platform for Climate Action in Agriculture (PLACA), launched within the framework of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2019 (COP25).
- 54 Regarding the adaptation and expansion of projects, regional work made it possible to provide contextualized responses to the needs of each subregion. For example, in Central America, the concepts of food system resilience, competitiveness and intra-regional trade, which are so important for this subregion, were brought together. This was important for addressing food loss and waste and taking down trade barriers between countries and government investment logistics.
- 55 The term small-scale farming was also used to describe the activity and family farming was treated as a concept related to the Southern Cone agricultural model (particularly in Brazil). With the support of RI2, programmes were aligned and implemented to respond to the conditions of this sector in the subregion. This resulted in the development of a very powerful agenda in conjunction with Member Countries, their governments, SICA and CELAC. Similarly, the large-scale mobilization of resources strengthened the political

4. Main findings

position of RLC to influence the public policy agenda and promote new issues and solutions based on the strategic vision set out in RI3. One indication of this strengthening is a broader range of institutional partnerships and dialogue with Ministries and agencies other than Ministries of Agriculture, with RLC support for country offices. RLC's role in leading the mapping of opportunities, providing targeted support and promoting tangible capacity building for resource mobilization (plans, systems and personnel) has contributed to the success of this line of action.

- 56 The inclusion of a territorial approach and key stakeholders and groups has allowed more sustainable results to be achieved. The Colombian peace deal is the most evident example of incorporating a territorial approach as part of the RI2 narrative, including a focus on vulnerable groups as well as establishing mechanisms to lift people out of poverty by giving them productive opportunities and not merely social protection. While more planning and coordination have been lacking in the Caribbean,¹⁰ other related issues that have been present (including school feeding and extension programmes) allow for a broader dialogue on family farming in the subregion.
- 57 Government capacity building has contributed to the formulation of policies, programmes and legal frameworks to strengthen the uptake of initiatives. For example, in the case of Nicaragua, support was provided as an institutional strengthening measure for the formulation of the Strategic Plan of the Nicaraguan Fisheries and Aquaculture Institute (INPESCA), which included additional capacity building measures and paved the way for the implementation of sustainable fisheries models. This has been important for family farming work, mainly in Central America and the Southern Cone.¹¹ However, there is a clear need to increase institutional capacity in RLC and in the country offices to ensure that they can contribute to this process more effectively.
- 58 RLC has led the realignment of priorities and encouraged policies and projects that promote issues addressed by the initiatives.¹² However, there are differences in emphasis, priority and progress in the Regional Initiative agendas. These are evident in certain contrasts between the Caribbean, Mesoamerican and South American subregions. From a regional perspective, subregional idiosyncrasies in the form of specific contexts and differences related to geographical factors, environmental, climate-related and socio-economic risk profiles and the political and cultural context are still a challenge. Differences in institutional capacity are a determining factor in such cases.
- 59 The Ministries of Agriculture attach less priority to the topics of small producers and their productive potential and thus relate to them more as social policy beneficiaries. Therefore, RLC, subregional and country offices have worked to raise awareness, build capacities and provide technical evidence on the productive potential of small producers, and on the impact of this production on rural poverty reduction. They have also worked to promote and support greater coordination between social policies and policies to promote production. One outstanding example is their work with SICA. FAO should also forge links with Ministries of Economy and Social Development, among others, to promote the family farming agenda and inclusive agri-food systems. We should take advantage of the fact that we have a longer relationship with these partners than the Ministries of Agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is promoted by the family farming agenda and productive inclusion as central themes of RI2, which is responsible for projects that are already at an advanced stage in countries such as Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru.
- 60 RI1 has done important work on food loss and waste in recent years. RLC raised the issue in the region. Policies, programmes and networks with the private sector were then approved in several countries of the region with the support of RLC/RI1.

10 RLC is carrying out studies in three countries with headquarters that will help highlight the topic of rural poverty in the Caribbean.

11 Although no systemic exercise has been carried out to quantify this type of result, the FAO Training Centre has methodologies in place for monitoring the training that is carried out. However, this is only one of the methods used to strengthen governmental capacities.

12 This realignment refers to FAO's shift towards being more relevant to the needs of the region in terms of the food systems and nutritional changes that are ongoing, and also to the updating of governments and the general debate, insofar as FAO helped modernize the debate in some parts of the region.

4.2 Adaptation¹³ and implementation of actions developed based on the Regional Initiatives

EQ 1. How effective, relevant and useful has RLC's work been for adapting and implementing actions based on the three Regional Initiatives?

Finding 2. RLC's work in driving the creation of a portfolio of projects that contribute to the Regional Initiatives has been effective in reaching consensus on regional priorities among countries; relevant in aligning country needs with corporate objectives; and useful in guiding projects through specialized technical assistance in each Regional Initiative and having access to quality control processes for their design.

- 61 The implementation of quality programmes and projects still faces numerous challenges, namely: i) the delay caused by red tape; ii) the budget attached to projects that prevents transition to a programmatic approach; iii) monitoring is restricted to the financial and administrative part, meaning that little timely information is generated to improve implementation; iv) evaluation mechanisms are not systematically and uniformly implemented in the region, particularly in terms of promoting their use to improve and strengthen capacity building through learning; v) few personnel are available for monitoring and evaluation activities.
- 62 RLC's performance contributes to the adaptation and implementation of Regional Initiative actions in the region. The report assessed how adequate, relevant and useful the work done by the regional office has been in terms of the support it provides for data analysis, as well as in conducting policy advice and dialogue with Member Countries. It also assessed how effective RLC has been in supporting Member Countries to broker and promote FAO's policy messages.
- 63 In order to meet this requirement, the report analysed to what extent RLC provides countries with clear analyses and diagnoses of problems that are relevant in those countries and in the region (analytical work), as well as the mechanisms that enable it to help effectively persuade national governments and that lead to the development of programmes and projects.

4.2.1 Relevance and usefulness of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean's analytical work

- 64 In relation to the analytical work and the supply of technical information for decision-making that RLC must provide to Member Countries, the report found that, through its decentralized network, it can obtain first-hand information (on management and results) by having people on the ground in the countries working in planning and in the design and implementation of programmes and projects. This allows RLC to access information in real time, unlike other agencies and donors that do not have such a network. Similarly, RLC can coordinate with headquarters and other partners to carry out studies and generate knowledge output that allow for a more complete analysis of the problem to be solved.
- 65 Worthwhile coordination work is being done in this regard between RLC and headquarters over the implementation of a research and technical assistance in policies agenda that is producing results in some countries (e.g. in Nicaragua) by helping to improve the management of tax resources in order to promote the sector. One example of this is work done between the RLC team and the FAO Agrifood Economics Division (ESA) at headquarters, which has progressed in two tangible ways: first in the analysis of policies, programmes, projects, laws and national plans linked to family farming in selected countries, and second in the analysis of data based on censuses and surveys on rural poverty in the region. Another example is

13 This refers to country ownership of high-quality Regional Initiative-related programmes and projects.

4. Main findings

the set of surveys conducted by the RI1 team, including work carried out in 2020 to consider the situation brought about by the pandemic and taking advantage of the partnership with FLAMA. This produced information on problems faced and actions to be taken by wholesale markets in real time.

- 66 FAO has first-hand information that is often not available to other agencies or donors, because having people in the field gives it access to reliable information in real time on projects implemented within the framework of the Regional Initiatives. However, up-to-date factual information is not always available in the region. For RI2, the information should contribute to the ideological debate between those who downplay the importance of family farming and those for whom it is sacred. It is therefore appropriate for RLC to play a more active role in generating, updating and disseminating information – particularly on family farming – in terms of measuring its true social, demographic and economic weight, the changes that have taken place between categories, current dynamics, its production value, territories, how much it contributes to gross domestic product (GDP) and the potential of family farming to connect with agricultural export chains. This information can be used for making sound public policy decisions. The latest data available in Ecuador, for example, is for the year 2000, and this affects all decisions and planning; provincial governments must draw up their territorial development plans every four years, and they are forced to base them on outdated information.
- 67 For RI2, an agenda of research and technical assistance in policies has been set-up between RLC and headquarters. This is expected to yield results that will help generate information, such as that mentioned above, by organizing data, censuses and surveys.
- 68 This area of work has been relevant insofar as it has been developed hand in hand with other strategies that complement and strengthen the analytical work, such as sharing knowledge and political dialogue. For example, the RLC RI2 team, together with experts from headquarters, travelled to various countries to outline proposals and the results of various studies. They organized courses on rural poverty and social protection (online and face-to-face) for middle management in Ministries. They also prepared influential publications such as the 2018 Overview on Rural Poverty Report and set-up discussion committees (e.g. in Colombia), seminars and workshops in various countries or at subregional and regional level.
- 69 The RI3 team has also used and adapted FAO tools to the context in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as AGRIDATA, digital modelling systems to generate national soil organic carbon maps, guidelines for the establishment of Agricultural Stress Index Systems and early action plans to prevent their impact. Another relevant example concerns the contribution to REDD+ projects and the need to protect forests and biodiversity through support with technical tools for data collection and processing. Through these activities, carried out with project funding, the team also influenced the action frameworks of large funds by technically coordinating the specific needs of the agriculture sector and food systems. However, there is still scope for encouraging more exchange and developing learning links beyond individual projects.
- 70 As part of the work of RI1, a series of papers was produced on strategic issues such as food loss and waste, obesity and the resilience of wholesale markets. The knowledge generated contributes to policy discussion and formulation as part of FAO's work in the region with Ministries of Agriculture and Health and the Parliamentary Front against Hunger (PFH) in Latin America and the Caribbean, whose outcomes include policies on taxation of soft drinks, food labelling and regulations on food loss and waste. However, there is still scope for exchanges and complementarity, and the development of learning links beyond individual projects.
- 71 These actions are considered useful for positioning key concepts, issues and actors within the region's agenda. However, the usefulness may be limited as major challenges are identified regarding the systematic integration and dissemination of information generated in the field as well as in the subregional offices. In particular, areas of opportunity are identified in the systematization of key actions that contribute to the identification of results on the Regional Initiatives. First, although there have been periodic evaluations of

environmental fund projects, particularly those of GEF, there is a clear need to systematize these evaluations from a regional perspective. This wealth of knowledge is very important in supporting the evolution of RI3. Similarly, information could be systematized on how to build better capacities for formulating and implementing policies, programmes and legal frameworks relating to the issues covered by RI2 and RI1.

4.2.2 Challenges for strengthening advocacy on Regional Initiative issues

- 72 In a region with good capacity, where several of the Ministries of Agriculture employ well-trained technical personnel, FAO technical assistance holds no attractions unless it brings with it financial resources, whether those are FAO's own resources or resources resulting from a partnership. This is particularly true for RI1 and RI2, in line with the resource mobilization strategy for the 2020-2021 biennium, which has the following priorities: i) the search for new sources of funding and the expansion of current ones; and ii) strengthening mobilization and developing territorially coordinated strategies with all possible actors respectively. This action is developed across countries to identify funding opportunities. The online survey¹⁴ established that RLC can promote topics to strengthen its presence and advocacy on family farming issues and inclusive food systems. Fifty percent of respondents stated that synergies should be generated with cooperating partners and joint initiatives should be submitted, while 35 percent believed that we must develop partnerships with the academic world and knowledge centres, get closer to territories and local governments, and seek greater rapprochement with the private sector.¹⁵
- 73 As a UN agency, consideration should be given to seeking multi-stakeholder and multi-level solutions between the various agencies in the system, and not merely sectoral agencies. In Trinidad and Tobago, FAO leads the technical debate on agriculture with the Government. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) complements this with its lead on climate change issues, which is an example of working together on the agri-food agenda. Another example of synergies with different actors is the joint work with CARICOM on the value chains of edible roots and tubers in the Caribbean where the partnership benefits from the presence of FAO's regional presence, supplemented by private sector institutions and companies involved in processing and trade, as well as universities in the region and CARICOM's research team.
- 74 In the specific case of RI2, given the complex situation described above, rapid changes and major developments can be a hindrance to personnel uptake and ownership of the Regional Initiative's objectives within FAO and by in-country partners. The report recommends that the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative framing RI2 should be used as a starting point for calling on headquarters to establish mechanisms for setting longer periods of at least four years,¹⁶ in order to share, implement and monitor results. This will facilitate impact evaluation and measurement before extending or refocusing the scope.
- 75 In general, considering the marked differences in the uptake of the Regional Initiative agenda at subregional level, it is important to capitalize on successful experiences at country, subregional and regional levels in order to comply with the mandates of LARC36 and 2020 adaptations to the Regional Initiatives.

14 The survey question was: Select options that represent areas of opportunity for FAO in the region that RLC could address to strengthen its presence and impact on family farming and inclusive food systems (Select up to four options, considering the most relevant). Response options: More active role in the generation and dissemination of information on family farming; Generate more synergies with cooperating partners and submit joint initiatives; Develop alliances with academia and knowledge centres; More work on green finance; Forge links between producer associations and the public sector; Get even closer to territories and local governments; Get closer to the private sector; Participate more in project implementation, without neglecting the strategic vision and policy dialogue; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO.

15 Based on the results of the survey applied to FAO personnel in the region, administrative personnel were filtered for this data. This made it possible to calibrate the "don't know/not applicable" responses. Up to four options could be selected for this question.

16 To cover two LARC sessions, instead of every two years, as has recently been the case.

4.2.3 Key actors for strengthening or enhancing the focus of the Regional Initiatives in the region

- 76 FAO is very present in public policy at institutional and national level, but it would be beneficial to get even closer to local governments – as in Colombia with the territorial development programmes, or in Honduras at the community level – to ensure that programmes and projects are more sustainable and become policies instead of just projects. This would be important for reinforcing aspects of ownership and sustainability. The observation applies to projects as well as the Regional Initiatives.
- 77 In order to implement family farming policies with programmes, in some countries it would be beneficial to become aligned with and form partnerships with the NGOs most active at country level in order to better capitalize on experiences and scale-up to policy level. In Brazil, FAO has worked closely with TRIAS, a Belgian NGO, to facilitate access to credit for family farming. Similarly, to strengthen progress on targeting rural poverty while benefiting from the opportunities that economic growth has brought to the region, support could be reinforced by experts in agroindustries and agribusiness chains to avoid dependence on being primary producers and aspire to be processors as well. In both cases, the country office is required to identify actors and establish a contact.
- 78 In the online survey,¹⁷ respondents identified FAO's areas of opportunity in the region – and that RLC could address to strengthen its presence and impact on family farming and inclusive food systems – are primarily (50 percent) to generate more synergies with partners that provide resources and submit joint initiatives. This was followed by the three options (accounting for approximately 35 percent): forge alliances with academia and knowledge centres; get even closer to territories and local governments; and achieve greater rapprochement with the private sector¹⁸
- 79 For the private sector, FAO is a guarantor, a validator of private sector debate and research, not only in the commercial field. Conditions are ripe for greater cooperation with the private sector, especially given the recent expansion of stakeholders FAO seeks to engage with, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as well as cooperatives. However, these relationships must be built on and better use must be made of the memorandum of understanding signed with Cooperatives of the Americas, to show the value of the private sector and the fact that FAO can forge links with the public sector and producer associations. One example of work with the private sector is, in Argentina, coordination between FAO, the Ministry of Agriculture and supermarket chains such as Carrefour, which allowed the drafting of regulations on food loss and waste.

4.2.4 Spaces for advocacy and dialogue to establish policy messages

- 80 Regarding FAO policy messages, it was stressed that the Regional Initiatives are relevant tools¹⁹ because they stem from the debate and dialogue that takes place between countries as part of the Regional Conferences in which FAO's mandate for the region is discussed. LARC provides a framework for an orderly, coherent and balanced debate that is updated every two years and is the only formal space provided for members to collectively express their priorities and assistance requirements. This ensures arrangements can be made for allocating expenditure, promoting good practices and guiding fund allocation. This Conference defines strategic priorities for attention based on needs and problems that countries consider relevant.

17 The survey question was: Select options that represent areas of opportunity for FAO in the region that RLC could address to strengthen its presence and impact on family farming and inclusive food systems (Select up to four options, considering the most relevant). Response options: More active role in the generation and dissemination of information on family farming; Generate more synergies with cooperating partners and introduce joint initiatives; Develop alliances with academia and knowledge centres; More work on green finance; Forge links between producer associations and the public sector; Get even closer to territories and local governments; Get closer to the private sector; Participate more in the implementation of projects, without neglecting a strategic vision and policy dialogue; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO.

18 Based on the results of the survey applied to FAO personnel in the region, administrative personnel were filtered for this data. This made it possible to calibrate the "don't know/not applicable" responses. Up to four options could be selected for this question.

19 In terms of this report, "relevance" means the extent to which the objectives of an intervention are consistent with beneficiary requirements, country needs, global priorities and/or partner and donor policies.

- 81 There are other platforms for dialogue between RLC and Member Countries in addition to the Regional Conference. For example, the Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) are formal spaces for each Member to express individual demands and discuss FAO partnership priorities at country level. Work is also carried out by the Regional Initiative teams to ensure that projects have a political vision, providing strategic as well as technical advice; the support provided to country FAO Representatives (FAOR) for dialogue and negotiation with ministers, particularly when there is a change of government in a country, when they act as a kind of historical record for the national government. Another arrangement involved bringing in international funding sources that raise the profile of the initiatives, making them more attractive by enabling access to large-scale projects. This has been particularly important in the work and positioning of RI3, given that it was necessary to go beyond our natural partners and work with other Ministries such as Ministries of the Environment. Something similar occurred with RI1, but with Ministries of Health in this case.
- 82 LARC and other platforms promoted by RLC for dialogue with Member Countries are generally effective. The last Regional Conference (conducted online because of the pandemic) was attended by 92 Ministers and Deputy Ministers from various government agencies, which reflects interest by Member Countries. Regarding the opinion of personnel working in the region, the online survey²⁰ found that 12.2 percent of respondents in FAO regional offices consider that the platforms for dialogue promoted by RLC are always sufficient for expanding ownership of the Regional Initiatives by Ministries other than Ministries of Agriculture; 29 percent considered that they are almost always sufficient; and 27.9 percent believed that they are occasionally sufficient.
- 83 In terms of RLC support to establish dialogue among national governments, one strength is that external stakeholders consider that the added value of cooperating with FAO (at country and subregional level) lies in its technical and resource mobilization capacity, which has contributed to the training of national technicians and officials. This strength lies in FAO's decentralized operating structure, which gives it greater implementation capacity than other United Nations system agencies. The work of the subregional offices, which complements that of RLC, is central to this promotion. One example in the region is the work that the Subregional Office for Mesoamerica (SLM) does with SICA, its partner for message promotion and project implementation. Another example is the work that the Subregional Office for the Caribbean (SLC) does with CARICOM.
- 84 Work done with Ministries of Agriculture is particularly relevant as they are traditional partners in national governments, allowing for greater breadth and alignment of FAO's agenda with national plans. However, we can continue expanding interaction with other government agencies; for example, those related to environmental, health and social development issues, with which we have less history of cooperation. To this end, RLC should take advantage of the subregional offices beyond the actions of the country offices, because issues of interest and long-term cooperation agendas that would sometimes be impossible at national level are feasible when different countries within a subregion come together. In the environmental field, the clearest examples include actions related to deforestation and diversity loss.
- 85 Given the space that FAO has gained by taking over project portfolios previously handled by multilateral agencies in the countries (such as UNDP), the report identifies a need for greater specialized technical support. This must be concentrated in RLC, and to a lesser extent in the subregional offices, and allows for greater participation in national processes (both in scope and frequency of actions). This will allow for greater participation in national processes (regarding both scope and frequency of actions). It will involve reassessing the technical assistance approach to move from strictly technical advice to implementing investments in projects with a multi-factorial approach involving various government agencies.

20 The survey question was: Do you think that the spaces for dialogue with countries promoted by RLC (such as Regional Conferences, events and seminars) are sufficient to expand ownership of the Regional Initiatives by Ministries other than Ministries of Agriculture (such as Environment or Education)? Response options: Never; Hardly ever; Occasionally; Almost always; Always.

86 The response to countries' needs has been timely and useful in times of crisis.²¹ For example, FAO was the first organization to make plans for assistance and support available to Nicaragua in assessing the damage caused by the hurricanes in November 2020. Regarding COVID-19, external stakeholders (such as CARICOM) acknowledge that the Organization sometimes responded earlier than other organizations. This effort was attributed to RLC and coordinated work with the subregional offices. Within the context of the current pandemic, it has also been acknowledged that RLC's work allowed to address significant challenges such as food distribution (work done by the RI1 team together with FLAMA).

4.2.5 Supporting the design and implementation of programmes and projects

87 RLC also contributed by supporting the formulation and implementation of relevant and high-quality Regional Initiative programmes and projects, which set out to reflect priority needs for assistance in the country context. This requires the mobilization of good quality and timely technical assistance (e.g. through the field programme) for the design and implementation of such programmes and projects.

88 The planning process is robust. It is a consolidated activity because orderly processes are defined for its development, which identify those responsible at each stage at programme and project level. It is also relevant, because it is prepared and reviewed in a participatory manner, which generates commitment from the parties and supports implementation. It is useful because it establishes quality controls for the content. One example is the joint definition of strategic lines between the three levels of office and a review of the content developed by technical teams.

89 Regarding programmes relevance, it was established that country level planning instruments – such as the Country Programming Framework and the Biennial Work Plan – are associated with the Regional Initiatives, the Strategic Framework and even the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. However, consistency in project alignment is not always present, as the link is by association and there is not always a strategic vision to determine which projects should be developed in view of their contribution to fulfilling objectives. It would therefore be desirable for RLC to support country offices in developing a comprehensive narrative to be established in the existing CPF preparation process, looking for points of intersection between the Regional Initiatives from which the projects flow that link back to the CPFs. This type of intersection would allow for a programmatic view when performing the planning and programming exercise. The relationship between planning and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework adds a new piece to the national and corporate planning jigsaw, which makes everything more complex. A second challenge limiting the scope of actions is reconciling the programmatic approach of the CPF and the Regional Initiative with a project-based resource mobilization approach. This involves mobilizing resources that address the programming pillars from which specific projects are derived, based on the needs of Member Countries.

90 Regarding the online survey,²² even though prioritization criteria are in place, 36.3 percent of respondents recognized that one of the main challenges in planning is linking the narrative with the Regional Initiatives; 24.4 percent consider that the challenge is to identify priorities and incorporate them in the CPF; 31.3 percent identified problems with aligning plans with the budget as challenges for country and subregional offices – and 27.1 percent, identified putting the priorities in the Work Plan into practice as a challenge.

21 "Useful" means that this facilitated the action and "timely" means that the support arrived in time to be used.

22 The online survey question was: What challenges do country offices and subregional offices face in planning and programming activities which require assistance from RLC? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: Establish a narrative to link planning to the Strategic Framework; Link the narrative to Regional Initiatives; Identify priorities and incorporate them into the CPF; Operationalize priorities in the Biennial Work Plan; Link priorities and operations to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework; Link planning to budget; No challenges identified; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO.

4.2.6 Diagnostic information for programmes and projects

- 91 FAO's diagnostic information output is considered a benchmark for programmes and projects. It is appreciated by partners and in-house personnel. The documents used for this purpose are clearly identified in planning and design, but the dissemination process could be more targeted to ensure the information on good practices and lessons learned is timelier and more accessible.
- 92 The qualitative work showed that in contexts where the capacity of country offices is low considering their size and there is less coordination or mobilization of technical support from RLC in relative terms (low implementation),²³ such as in the Caribbean, there is a perceived scarcity of data for carrying out diagnostics. This could lead to repercussions due to having to identify and characterize problems based on extrapolation or outdated data. This influences project planning and implementation, as it takes longer to collect or identify such information. This extra time is not considered in development processes, which may delay project start-up.
- 93 RLC is making efforts to organize and disseminate relevant information. For example, at regional level, newsletters are circulated among the decentralized offices (containing relevant information for the design of programmes and projects), a Knowledge Management Unit was recently set-up and the Cluster Strategy has become operational. Regarding the latter, 15.3 percent of respondents²⁴ expect the exchange of information to improve, and 11.1 percent expect information generation to improve.
- 94 The project clusters are collaborative and dynamic structures, developed from communities of practice that bring together FAO personnel from different areas and positions to help support technical officers and expand technical assistance capacity, as well as the interface between Regional Initiatives and projects. The clusters represent the operational responses of the programmes and are grouped on the basis of interrelated projects according to their topics, type of public policies, technical content and/or contributions to the Work Plan (RLC, 2020). They are designed to act as communities of practice and learning, and take the form of a number of modular and flexible multidisciplinary teams. This means that new groups can be set-up or changed as necessary to adapt to programme requirements and the evolution of the project portfolio in the region. Each cluster is made up of a group of multidisciplinary experts who will be located in different offices (headquarters, regional, subregional and country). These communities of knowledge and practice are expected to facilitate exchanges. They will serve to share lessons learned, improve learning and knowledge management processes, create synergies between projects and even contribute to greater financial efficiency. Cross-communication between clusters is also sought because some experts will be part of more than one cluster.
- 95 At subregional level, strategies have also been developed to obtain information. For example, the Subregional Office for the Caribbean (SLC) adapts regional documents such as the Overview of Food Security and Nutrition to use the information in the planning, implementation and monitoring phases. One example of good practice by the Subregional Office for Mesoamerica (SLM) is that it takes advantage of its relationship with SICA and the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA) to execute letters of agreement and Technical Cooperation Programmes (TCPs) that are able to improve the flow of information. This has resulted in procedures such as the Regional Agricultural Market

23 In order to analyse three contrasting cases, three countries were chosen for the evaluation to show different degrees of relative FAO implementation in the region. This was determined by analysing: i) the capacity of country offices based on regular budget distribution, number of GCP, UTF and other projects; and ii) the coordination and mobilization of RLC technical support estimated from the number of TCP projects, number of missions and number of regional projects in the country. See Annex 2 for further reference.

24 The survey question was: In the context of innovations promoted by RLC, what do you expect the Cluster Strategy to contribute to the development of programmes and projects, and the mobilization of technical assistance? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: Increased outreach and more flexible identification of personnel with specific knowledge; Identification of complementarities and synergies between projects; Increased efficiency in task delegation through the creation of communities of practice; Improved integration between teams; Enabling the sharing of consultant costs between projects; Facilitating thematic links between regional initiatives; Creating economies of scale; Helping the scaling-up of projects; Facilitating thematic links between regional initiatives. I do not consider that I contribute to the Cluster Strategy; Don't know/The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

Intelligence and Monitoring System (SIMMAGRO); partnerships to develop subregional or national studies and for the collection of information with the direct participation of FAO, in coordination with Country Statistical Offices, for example the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). Attempts have also been made to bring these efforts down to national level, as in Panama, where an initial study was conducted at the end of 2020 to identify trade opportunities and market access for products post-COVID-19.

- 96 RLC can contribute to the search for platforms with partners and donors that enhance the data generation and systematization work, supporting the opening of opportunities for the subregional offices to expand, share and maximize the strategies they have been developing. This can enable the contextualization and relevant breakdown of information, particularly in countries where data is scarce. Subregional cooperation can reinforce and enhance capacity building, while contributing to coordinated work on information generation in the region.
- 97 Regarding FAO platforms for diagnostics, interviews carried out in country offices showed that personnel do not always use the information because although RLC disseminates these sources, not all personnel use platforms such as the FAO Corporate Database for Substantive Statistical Data (FAOSTAT) and Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition (GODAN). The online survey²⁵ corroborates this finding: 51.9 percent attributed lack of training in the use of the platforms as a constraint to their use; 23.7 percent identified lack of time to consult such information; and 19.8 percent identified lack of information breakdown on the platforms.

4.2.7 Mechanisms to promote project quality in the region

- 98 Quality is directly promoted by RLC. This concept is part of the project cycle and deeply ingrained in the personnel in the region. There are two operational mechanisms for quality assurance: reviews of quality criteria (relevance, feasibility and sustainability) in each project; and operational checklists that guide the fulfilment of key elements during the formulation stage, given the characteristics of the project. This is reflected in the logical frameworks and the budget, which contribute to the internal coherence of projects.
- 99 The second mechanism that FAO and therefore RLC promotes to ensure quality is concerned with the formation of task forces, particularly the role of Lead Technical Officers in guiding project design and implementation. The Project Cycle Guide requires the Lead Technical Officer to approve project technical quality implementation actions. The right mix of skills is sought through these teams to ensure the technical, operational and administrative effectiveness of the project throughout the cycle. The survey²⁶ confirms two processes where the support of RLC is considered most relevant: 46.9 percent identified project design technical review; and 45.8 percent identified project implementation operational support.
- 100 One bottleneck that could limit the quality defined under these parameters is the delay in setting-up technical teams. This is partly attributed to the difficulty in quickly identifying the appropriate technical experts when the required expertise is highly specialized and not necessarily found in subregional offices. This is more often the case in situations where capacity is low in small country offices and there is less coordination or mobilization of technical support from RLC in relative terms (low implementation such in as the Caribbean), as there is less availability of personnel with technical expertise than in other

25 The survey question was: FAO operates platforms (such as FAOSTAT and GIEWS) that provide information that can be used for diagnostics. What are the constraints to consulting and using such information for diagnosing national problems? Response options: Lack of time to consult the information; Lack of training in the use of the platforms; Lack of relevant information on the platforms; Lack of updated information on the platforms; Lack of information disaggregation on the platforms; Greater usefulness of information not found on these types of platforms; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

26 The survey was: When is the assistance provided by RLC most useful? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: In strategic discussion with FAO country/subregional offices; In technical reviews of project design; In operational support for project implementation; In sharing lessons learned from other countries; In identifying funding sources; When the FAO country/subregional office seeks to link with other relevant agencies or actors; There is no added value in the assistance provided by RLC; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

subregions. The criteria for selecting Lead Technical Officers are also unclear because the only requirement is that he or she should be appointed by the formulator considering the principles of subsidiarity and relevant technical expertise, unlike the Funding Liaison Officer, who is chosen according to the resource partner and the type of project.

- 101 Another identified bottleneck is the distribution of responsibilities in regional and subregional teams, given the growth in the region's project portfolio. In the current project portfolio, 48.9 percent was found to be under the supervision of ten Lead Technical Officers, who in turn are concentrated under the Regional Initiative Leaders in RLC and subregional offices. The structure of the Organization, including personnel assigned to the office, should be reviewed due to this portfolio growth and the emergence of new funds and more complex projects, allowing for a flexible structure according to the needs of the countries.
- 102 Both elements suggest that institutional channels are inadequate for identifying technical expertise. Although the current mechanism for identifying Lead Technical Officers complies with the principles of subsidiarity, flexibility and a cross-cutting relationship in terms of support, it has two repercussions. The first is that the workloads generate delays in the design, approval and implementation process (given adjustments in the first two), as well as in results. In addition, the concentration of expertise within few people only limits the generation of institutional learning and the adequate flow and distribution of technical expertise between subregions.
- 103 Quality assurance weaknesses were identified in the project design process, particularly with regard to the formulation of results, outputs and indicators, stakeholder consultations and effective monitoring and evaluation arrangements (Divvaakar, 2020). The project quality self-assessment exercise performed in the implementation phase coordinated by RLC is useful for diagnosing the challenges and strengths and can be complementary to the project cycle quality review. This is because the latter focuses on the first three phases (identification, formulation and approval) while the self-assessment emphasizes the aspects of implementation and monitoring.
- 104 The project cycle quality criteria review focuses on design, while the self-assessment examines the results of implementation. This means it can be a process of validating certain elements reviewed in the project cycle, such as relevance, technical soundness, management in terms of implementation feasibility, social participation and inclusion and sustainability in terms of capacity building. This can lead to lessons learned ahead of the mid-term evaluation exercise that RLC must build on and disseminate.
- 105 The self-assessment exercise is valuable, but the fact that personnel have limited time must be considered. The best time to perform the exercise must be identified in order to pick the best moment for its application and for using the information. The dimensions can also be reduced and simplified – e.g. the relevance, management, and participation and inclusion dimensions – while seeking to enhance their application by focusing on the assessment of aspects that are considered relevant to the adaptation, adjustment and innovation defined in such dimensions. It has been suggested that the relevance dimension should focus on analysing the project's capacity to anticipate or adapt to emerging priorities; the technical quality dimension should focus on analysing the validity of the technical strategy defined at the time of formulation, given that the region is constantly affected by natural disaster, when resilience and innovation are key factors.
- 106 The self-assessment exercise should allow for the breakdown of results and provide a platform for dialogue and feedback with the country offices. In other words, it is a possible mechanism for identifying, diagnosing and mapping challenges in design and implementation that allows lessons learned to be grouped by project type, funding source, theme, Regional Initiative, territories and/or subregions. This is relevant considering the heterogeneous results of the exercise, showing no discernible patterns, and suggests different challenges, needs and weaknesses. The exercise can contribute to define intersections and identify potential points of cooperation required between RLC's different areas of work such as the Field Programme and the Resource Mobilization Unit, considering the quality challenges by project type and funding source, as well as contributing to a programmatic approach.



4.2.8 Technical assistance from the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

- 107 Technical assistance provided by RLC can contribute more to the strategic management through the reorganization and delegation of responsibilities. Limited space is set aside for strategic reflection due to the workloads of Lead Technical Officers, particularly of the Regional Initiative Leaders in the RLC and subregional offices (who carry out various tasks to support country agendas and promote political dialogue, among others). Such reflection can lead to a programmatic view that identifies synergies and complementarities between projects, because staff members have a good overview of the national, subregional and regional actions that are being implemented. The challenge is to translate the experience that resides in the people (concentrated in few people, in particular few Lead Technical Officers) into institutional learning. In this regard, the cluster initiative could promote elements that allow for the delegation of responsibilities and a focus on strategic work. This particularly applies to the work of the communities of practice, which could free up space for Regional Initiative Leaders to provide a strategic vision while delegating some of their day-to-day responsibilities to consultants.
- 108 On the other hand, there is a need to improve the Cluster Strategy implementation learning curve: without institutionalized rules for cluster formation and the definition of roles (such as that of the facilitator), undesirable behaviour can spread and be reinforced. For example, the ability of consultants to network with other cluster members or the delegation of facilitators again concentrates technical expertise in the hands of a few. The online survey²⁷ established that 38.5 percent of personnel expect this initiative to identify complementarities and synergies

²⁷ The survey question was: In the context of innovations promoted by RLC, what do you expect the Cluster Strategy to contribute to the development of programmes and projects, and the mobilization of technical assistance? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: Increased outreach and more flexible identification of personnel with specific knowledge; Identification of complementarities and synergies between projects; Increased efficiency in task delegation through the creation of communities of practice; Improved integration between teams; Enabling the sharing of consultant costs between projects; Facilitating thematic links between Regional Initiatives; Creating economies of scale; Helping the scaling-up of projects; Facilitating thematic links between Regional Initiatives. I do not consider that I contribute to the Cluster Strategy; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

between projects, and 32.4 percent expect the process of identifying personnel with specific knowledge to be more agile and that there should be greater rapprochement with them.

- 109 To enhance the scope of the Cluster Strategy, more sharing is required between different areas in the country offices – not just the technical areas. The country offices can also play a role in feeding back local implementation experiences in which qualified technical personnel also play a part.
- 110 The project cycle also highlights elements that seek to ensure appropriate financial, technical and operational management of projects. For fieldwork, elements that can limit project relevance and quality were identified. These mainly affect early stages of implementation when delays may occur due to bureaucratic and inflexible procurement and contracting processes, or legal agreements requiring administrative, financial or intellectual property aspects to be addressed. This generally results from lack of awareness and non-compliance by partners.
- 111 Projects are also monitored through corporate platforms, where monitoring focuses on financial compliance rather than results. Moreover, few global, subregional or regional projects allocate resources to country offices in countries where few human resources are available to cover all activities. Moreover, the lack of country offices participation in the approval of global projects (in which they are included largely during the signing of the agreement) limits project ownership and the relationship with counterparts. Similarly, the collection and analysis of key information that feeds back into implementation is limited.
- 112 This opens up certain opportunities for RLC. The value of RLC lies in generating and disseminating information²⁸ on good practices. This applies not only to the technical side, but also to administrative, financial and operational aspects. Fifty percent of online survey respondents²⁹ agreed that the support provided by RLC is most useful in terms of sharing lessons learned from other countries. However, to be useful, these must be timely and accessible.
- 113 Procurement, contracting and legal processes are defined at headquarters. However, RLC has compiled information on the bottlenecks faced by the country offices and has promoted their attention by headquarters, which has resulted in improvements in the procurement processes. RLC could also play a more active role in integrating and disseminating information on administrative processes differentiated according to type of project and partner, sharing this information with partners in clear and appropriate language for negotiation and dialogue. This would mean contextualizing administrative processes according to project types and the needs of partners. Interaction between the Knowledge Management Unit and the Administrative Area in RLC may be important in this regard. Systematizing and disseminating the results of mid-term evaluations could be an input for this purpose. It is also important to continue ensuring the country offices' adequate knowledge of requirements that must be met in order to carry out a procurement process that is compliant with regulations.
- 114 Project sustainability is another key element for ensuring quality. The following challenges are identified in this regard: project duration, particularly short-lived TCPs, may limit the achievement and monitoring of long-term processes such as capacity building, institutional changes (changes in standards and behaviour) and establishing dialogue and trust between stakeholders; lack of resources for following-up, monitoring and evaluating results; which leads to challenges defining exit strategies and scaling-up projects; the self-assessment identifies the definition of exit strategies as one of the criteria with the greatest weaknesses (36 percent).

28 It is acknowledged that the network area has made efforts to promote personnel exchanges. This took place online during 2020, when personnel in the countries recognized that it enhanced work and morale.

29 The survey question was: When is the assistance provided by RLC most useful? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: In strategic discussion with FAO country/subregional offices; During technical reviews of project design; In operational support in terms of project implementation; In sharing lessons learned from other countries; In identifying funding sources; When the FAO country/subregional office seeks to link with other relevant agencies or actors; There is no added value in the assistance provided by RLC; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

4. Main findings

- 115 There is recognized interest in promoting the use of TCPs as catalysts in the region. TCPs can serve as initial capital for the preparation of large projects, thus paving the way for an increase in the amount spent on projects and a reduction in their number (FAO, n.d.b.). TCPs can be a gateway for coordinating a programmatic approach; as FAO's main resource, they can attract and channel extra-budgetary resources to national, regional and global priorities, in turn decreasing project dispersion. This will involve attracting more resources and supporting the regulatory and policy work carried out through them with personal and extra- budgetary resources, enhancing their results and contributing to corporate objectives, as was done in the last biennium. However, this presents a number of challenges. The first relates to the proportion of total TCPs in the project portfolio, which will involve a relatively high design and monitoring workload for the country office compared to other large project types (GCPs, GEF, etc.).³⁰ The second challenge is to change the perception and orientation regarding the use of TCPs within country offices. In particular, although value is attached to TCPs for institutional capacity building in the region, the catalytic effects of this type of project³¹ are not directly observed in the composition of most country office portfolios.³² In general, slightly more importance is attached to legal, regulatory and policy changes, mainly in the Mesoamerican and South American subregions (FAO, n.d.c.).
- 116 The lack of human resources to cover all fieldwork tasks cropped up consistently as an obstacle to carrying out evaluation activities. A similar ratio of existing posts was identified between the Subregional Office for the Caribbean (SLC) and the Subregional Office for Mesoamerica (SLM) (considering staff members and vacancies). However, when the number of consultants in each office is included (44 for SLM and 12 for SLC), SLM employs almost twice as many personnel as SLC. These differences are due to the use that subregional offices make of available project resources for personnel recruitment, and the share of the "pool funds" they receive.^{33, 34} Since SLM's project portfolio is bigger, it receives more funds and thus employs more personnel.
- 117 Given that the distribution of these resources in the region was 62 percent, 27 percent and 11 percent in 2019, and 67 percent, 23 percent and 10 percent in 2020 for RLC, SLM and SLC respectively, the main scope for action in SLC is through the efficient use of resources generated by its projects and by enhancing the subregional project implementation strategy that has been followed. The Cluster Strategy may be relevant for developing communities of practice that encourage economies of scale in this respect, in terms of enhancing the use of consultants distributed throughout different offices – country, subregional, regional and headquarters). Under this single model principle, the offices would be more flexible, so that consultants could be shared and deployed depending on the current portfolio of the country offices. RLC's role is crucial in this regard, particularly the parts played by Field Programme Managers, Regional Initiative Leaders and personnel overseeing the Network Office.
- 118 RLC is clear about the differences between the offices in the region, their resources (human and financial), functioning and operability. This is why it has worked on designing differentiated actions to support the different types of offices through the Network Office and within the framework of the transformation processes in the region. Examples include capacity building and the creation of spaces for the exchange of experiences.

30 Considering the overall number of projects, 58 percent of the countries in the region have 50 percent or more TCPs in their current project portfolio.

31 There is a perception, mainly among FAORs in the region, that TCPs lead to a sustainable impact in some cases. FAO. Baseline for analysing the catalytic effect in terms of resource mobilisation for the 2018-2019 portfolio. (Working Paper).

32 Analysing the composition of the portfolio over time and emphasizing the use of TCPs and their links to other projects may offer an opportunity for more accurate monitoring of changes in the perception and orientation of TCPs in country offices and the region as a whole. More elements for assessing their contribution to the expected catalytic effects would be desirable. It must also be acknowledged that measuring such effects can pose challenges, such a monitoring long-term processes: several factors beyond the ones stemming from the implementation of TCPs can contribute to this.

33 The FAO RLC Assistant Director-General wrote: "Funds derived from vacant posts enter a 'pooled fund' that is distributed in accordance with a formula with objective/quantitative variables, which was agreed by consensus when we instigated the "One FAO = One Budget" approach in the region". (Verbatim extract)

34 FAO. 2018. The Budget Management Team, Item 3, Vacancy Rate Equalization. 03 December 2018. (Presentation) "Professional Post Equalization (P1 to 5) since decisions over which posts are filled are made on a regional basis. The distribution will be determined by the proportion that each office contributes to field programme delivery, following the principle that the Regular Programme supports the Field Programme."



4.2.9 Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean support for resource mobilization

- 119 One important contribution made by RLC is to mobilize external and internal support for the achievement of regional and country objectives. The evaluation analysed whether RLC has been successful in mobilizing its own national and international financial resources and securing strategic alliances for implementing the Regional Initiatives, in addition to the technical assistance already analysed.
- 120 RLC has prioritized a strategy that guides, increases and diversifies resource mobilization through various actions such as the systematization and organization of information (database of organizations, funds and instruments, etc.), monitoring, institutionalization of processes and market intelligence, all guided by goal setting. The goals are³⁵ considered ambitious, but they have allowed increased resource mobilization. The material analysed by the evaluation shows that these goals motivate the work of country offices, prompting them to seek other sources of funding, as well as partnerships to attract more resources. The online survey respondents³⁶ mainly attribute the increase in resource mobilization to the link with GCF and GEF (58.4 percent), diversification of partners and donors (46.6 percent) and participation in international projects (32.4 percent). In this context, the main contributions made by RLC to the country and subregional offices in terms of resource mobilization are primarily the drafting of proposals (32.4 percent), followed by the definition of mobilization goals (24.8 percent). Although the strategy has increased resource mobilization, it will be important to review the effect this has on donor diversification. Currently, ten offices in the region are responsible for 79 percent of resource mobilization (including RLC). Resource mobilization is more than 50 percent dependent on the main donor in 27 offices throughout different countries (FAO, n.d.a.).

35 According to the Resource Mobilization Report of December 2020, the sum of mobilized resources amounts to USD 196 791.59.

36 The survey question was: In recent years, the Latin America and the Caribbean region has increased resource mobilization. To what do you attribute the increase in resource mobilization? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: Resource mobilization targets defined by the Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean through the Resource Mobilization Unit; Diversification of partners and donors; Link with large funds such as green climate funds; Disappearance or weakening of competing agencies; Participation in subregional, regional and global projects; In my country/subregion, no increase in resource mobilization is perceived; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

4. Main findings

- 121 This implies important changes in the size of the portfolio and its composition – and hence its scope – given the situation and the established 75 percent increase in the mobilization target between biennia for the region as well as delivery projections in Member Countries. This means there are a number of challenges in project implementation. The first is the implementation capacity to manage both changes in the offices in the region. This leads to pressures in operational, administrative and technical capacity, which add to the challenges mentioned above (FAO. 2019c).
- 122 A second challenge is the potential risk of exacerbating the dispersion of actions given the growth in the portfolio, and thereby hampering efforts to steer mobilization towards a programmatic approach. The work of country offices in formulating targets for resource mobilization in the CPF with the assistance and guidance of RLC is crucial in this context insofar as this tool makes it possible to establish a link with regional and corporate priorities and is also flexible enough to adapt to new needs and circumstances in Member Countries. It also poses challenges in terms of improving the definition of national mobilization goals and creating a link with and contributing to regional mobilization goals. An additional difficulty is the availability of funds, which are mainly in the environmental portfolio. Goal setting and guidance from RLC will be crucial to avoiding bias in resource mobilization.
- 123 A third challenge concerns the marked differences between countries in terms of resource mobilization concentration. This reveals uneven needs and capacities in Member Countries (and donor interests), and therefore diversified support strategies (technical assistance for drawing up proposals, negotiating and positioning, or information on partners and windows of opportunity), project type (GEF or unilateral trust fund [UTF]) and type of partner (international bank, private sector, civil society). In the case of the Caribbean subregion, for example, these challenges are pronounced as the countries have higher incomes and means compared to the Latin America countries, which implies that some donors are not interested in investing there.
- 124 However, the establishment of a Rapid Growth Countries Support Team is considered a relevant and timely measure as it supports countries from an administrative and operational point of view once their project portfolio has expanded and further capacity building is required to implement large-scale projects. This means that the Support Team is a complementary measure that responds to new opportunities for access to large funds, which have made it possible to increase small portfolios very quickly. This can be used to encourage country offices to seek to diversify their resource sources as they have to guide to support them in administrative expansion issues. The online survey³⁷ found that the support received from RLC by the Rapid Growth Countries Support Team is always or almost always rated as sufficient, useful and timely (46 percent on average for all three categories).
- 125 The Rapid Growth Countries Support Team works with countries to carry out an early self-diagnosis of capacity gaps in the office in order to implement actions that are proactively coordinated between the technical, administrative and financial areas throughout the project cycle. It provides personalized capacity building support and guidance, including the identification of additional human resources for implementation and possible funding sources in coordination with the network area. The main area of opportunity lies in linking different efforts (building capacity in the office and resource mobilization) with the programmatic area. The idea is to consider liaising with the Resource Mobilization Unit, which applies a theme-based approach rather than a project-based approach when finding and reaching out to donors. The Unit also carries out information support and systematization work to identify specific opportunities, funds, calls for proposals, specific contracts, cooperation behaviour profiles, priority areas and trends and proactively move forward in continuing the Network Office's work to expand capacity in country offices that do not have an expanding portfolio but have limited human resources due to budget constraints.

37 The survey question was: If you work in an office supported by the "rapid growth group", has the support received from RLC been sufficient, useful and timely? Response options: Never; Hardly ever; Occasionally; Almost always; Always; Don't know.

4.2.10 Support provided by the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean for strengthening strategic partnerships

- 126 Regarding the relationship with partners and donors, the online survey³⁸ found that RLC's support is most needed when establishing partnerships with the private sector (32.1 percent), international banks (27.9 percent), regional and subregional organizations (24 percent) and even with Ministries of Agriculture (22.9 percent). The first three are of relevance given the interest in links with the private sector, and regional priorities, given the objectives of the 2020-2021 biennium mobilization strategy in terms of opening up the concept of resource mobilization to include the mobilization of public and private investments. While the Investment Centre (CFI) has an important role to play in this regards, it is also acknowledged that RLC has some room for manoeuvre. It can leverage this by focusing its efforts on mapping and matching supply and demand for investment opportunities and potential growth, hence the relevance of the Resource Mobilization Unit's market intelligence work in conjunction with the work of the Rapid Growth Countries Support Team. The former is geared towards generating framework agreements with such stakeholders.
- 127 These framework agreements and the systematization of processes can contribute to a more strategic and programmatic approach because it is easier for country offices to approach and take shortcuts with these organizations. This will make it possible to steer away from short-term project relationships (because they are easier) and pave the way for such agreements to open the door to long-term cooperation, encompassing countries with similar interests and needs as well as projects. Some country offices have made such efforts to develop framework agreements. However, given the length of the processes and lack of regional agreements with certain institutions, funding opportunities are not pursued, and more immediate solutions have to be opted for in order to meet objectives and goals.
- 128 RLC's guiding role within this process is also valued for the way it supports country offices in ensuring that all institutional processes pursue a relationship-building strategy as well as speeding up the analysis of opportunities and risks associated with processes in this sector. This particularly applies to the private sector. It was found that the regional and subregional offices both contribute to the analysis and identification of conflicts of interest in this sector, given their closeness to such stakeholders and their knowledge of the specificities of the subregions and their own countries.
- 129 The mobilization strategy and its link with the diversification of partners is considered to be clearly established at regional, subregional and country level with the aim of strengthening the relationship between countries' resource partners and allies (in implementation, where appropriate) and with FAO, insofar as this makes it possible to reinforce the technical positioning of the Organization and to attract more resources. RLC's actions are considered relevant and timely to involve the use of the resource mobilization strategy to diversify donors beyond the traditional options, as well as to define specific lines by Regional Initiatives, in addition to conducting an institutional analysis to identify sound operational partners where there is an opportunity for using the Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM) as part of the strategy of the Rapid Growth Countries Support Team.
- 130 In general, work on the positioning of RLC and enhancing the visibility of the Regional Initiatives is highlighted, which supports the aim of progressing towards achieving the Strategic Objectives particularly when it refers to new alliances with regional institutions, insofar as these contribute to establishing platforms that the country offices can take advantage of. The importance of adopting a view of and approach to alliances that guides work at subregional and national levels is acknowledged, as well as the importance of linking and facilitating access to knowledge about partners and allies. The relevance of political backing for RLC is also identified in some contexts.

38 The survey question was: When the country/subregional office seeks to establish partnerships, with which actor does it require the most assistance from RLC? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: Ministries/Departments of Agriculture; Other Government Ministries/Departments (e.g. Environment); Parliaments; Private sector; International banking; Subregional/regional bodies; Civil society organizations; Academia; Other UN system agencies; No RLC support is required for partnerships; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

- 131 Subregional offices are considered to play a worthwhile role in conveying and linking subregional specificities in order to channel appropriate resource opportunities to meet demands arising in countries in the subregion. Hence the importance of differentiating work and strategies in the subregions. For the Subregional Office for Mesoamerica (SLM), important work is considered to have been done in identifying areas of work on common interests with senior managers of organizations such as the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and SIECA. In addition to establishing relations between FAO operational personnel and these organizations – which involved a lot of hard work and few resources – this allowed access to more resources. In other words, more technical work led to the mobilization of greater resources. For the Subregional Office for the Caribbean (SLC), the definition of joint strategies has been effective in mobilizing resources at subregional level. The Subregional Office participated actively in this work in strategic and political terms. Similarly, the inclusion of SLC in the Rapid Growth Countries Support Team helps provide administrative assistance to ensure that country offices are ready to expand their portfolios (this group includes Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago). SLC and this joint strategy are believed to play a worthwhile protective role against adverse political or social settings that make certain countries less attractive to donors, and the strategy is valued due to its ability to make more efficient use of local and regional human resources.
- 132 This poses two challenges. The first concerns sharing and strengthening the strategy for mobilizing and diversifying partners and alliances, as well as mobilization for this biennium. This particularly applies to countries with a high number of TCP projects such as SLC countries (with the exception of Guyana, Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago) or a high concentration in one source of funding, as in the Mesoamerican subregion. The second challenge is to link the various national and subregional strategies to the regional objectives and strategies, so that it is possible to link both elements of the mobilization strategy to the strategy for diversifying partners and allies in addition to defining goals by country and defining guidelines by Regional Initiatives. Therefore, it is important to link the programming areas (with the technical teams) because it enhances their efforts to discuss and strategically guide actions by Regional Initiatives, with the Resource Mobilization Unit, the Rapid Growth Countries Support Team and the network area by fostering platforms for administrative and operational exchange as well as technical exchange.
- 133 In conclusion, the added value of RLC, in terms of FAO's organizational structure, lies in providing feedback to headquarters on what is going on in the region. This means that its work can provide input in three areas. First, RLC's proximity to the situation on the ground in the region allows it to contextualize the various scenarios and use this information to design better strategies, or at least adapt the proposals issued by headquarters. Second, RLC can prioritize the demands of Member Countries, distinguishing between what is necessary and what is urgent, and therefore act as a more accurate conduit for the actions that must be taken. Lastly, it can propose lines of action to headquarters that facilitate the establishment of partnerships (which are often regulated by corporate rules).

4.3 Scaling up results

EQ 2. How effective has RLC's contribution been in scaling up results in the region?

Finding 3. Several examples are identified where projects and actions have been scaled-up with the support of RLC, resulting in legislative or regulatory changes or increased project coverage, thus increasing FAO's influence in the region. RLC's contribution in achieving the above has been substantive and useful, mainly through technical assistance, highlighting the role of the Lead Technical Officers and Regional Initiative Leaders in identifying good practices, facilitating pilot schemes and using TCPs as catalysts. However, there is no institutional strategy to promote the identification of key enablers for scaling-up results based on organizational rather than personal learning.

134 The Regional Representative's office has set itself the challenge of scaling-up actions with a view to driving results and achieving greater impact. Scaling-up means influencing policies and legislations that have an impact on large population groups, attracting more resources to develop projects beyond their previous limits, differentiating between the work of FAO and that of civil society organizations, and influencing policies and regulatory issues that can have an impact on a country's legislation. Scaling-up also has to do with extending the coverage of actions, however, RLC believes that many of the relevant scalable projects, including very interesting projects with a clear local impact, are not very appropriate for the role of FAO, especially considering that there are many other competent actors in Latin America and the Caribbean that are better qualified for this type of very local project.

4.3.1 Actions to develop a scaling-up strategy

135 In order to scale-up projects, it is felt that RLC should carry out actions that allow it to identify successful cases that have the potential for scaling-up and have had a high impact in a country or subregion; it should have a clear scaling-up strategy that considers the results to be obtained, the financial and human resources needed,³⁹ and the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. To make projects more relevant, RLC must work on a political agenda that considers the national public agenda and that of other relevant actors (national and international) that have an influence in Member Countries and in the region. It must also seek strategic alliances to increase resources for scaling-up programmes and projects with actors within national governments, the private sector and other UN organizations. Lastly, to increase FAO's political dialogue in Member Countries, RLC and the subregional offices should go beyond their role of technical cooperating partners by encouraging the placing of issues relevant to FAO on the public agenda, particularly in the absence of regional leadership. These actions were used as benchmarks for the evaluation.

136 The fieldwork and desk analysis showed that RLC did not deploy any specific strategy for scaling-up projects. Although there are many examples of projects that have been scaled-up, through catalytic TCPs, good practices shared between countries or because the scope or coverage of projects were expanded through increased funding, there is no corporate vision for identifying and steering an ordered scaling-up strategy.

137 RLC, subregional offices and FAORs coordinate various actions to identify success stories with potential for scaling-up, namely supporting pilot projects; developing catalytic TCPs; work done by Lead Technical Officers in identifying and demonstrating when a project goes beyond what is planned; the results of the recent self-assessment exercise; discussions with national task teams or operational committees; and the work of country focal point networks; among other. However, there are no specific criteria for recognizing success stories and the feasibility of scaling-up.

138 For the dissemination of good practices, it is important to have close links with RLC, which promotes innovative practices, because experiences are not disseminated in a coordinated and systematic way. Information on scaling-up is not systematized but remains at project level, which is a weakness. More information is also required on results for social, economic and environmental aspects.

139 No shared notion or minimum requirements for the scaling-up of actions, projects and programmes is identified and there is therefore no strategy for scaling-up. Because all projects require the approval of RLC, the Regional Office has some involvement in deciding whether or not projects are catalytic or scalable.

140 It is recognized that there are greater opportunities for scaling-up due to large funds and that interinstitutional alliances must therefore be strengthened to promote proposals jointly, particularly for the inclusion of indigenous peoples and gender mainstreaming.

³⁹ One element to consider is the relocation of consultants involved in the projects or the termination of their contracts. This interrupts the process of systematic documentation and effective dissemination for scaling-up.

4. Main findings

Linking experiences between the countries of the region and other regions where FAO is present can help to find out what work can be useful when developing a scaling-up strategy. This can be done based on South-South Cooperation.

- 141 Scaling-up requires an effective communication channel with RLC for requesting action reports and holding more strategic discussions with the team of officers in order to jointly select topics and sectors to expand and scale-up.
- 142 Regional Initiatives are useful for linking the agendas of FAO, Member Countries and other stakeholders. RLC provides support and guidance in linking country priorities to FAO priorities, particularly through a review of CPFs. In general, the donor agenda does not have much influence on drafting the CPFs, but CPFs are useful for establishing grounds for intersection with the funds. The regular meetings held between RLC and FAORs have operated as a mechanism for communication and joint agenda building at subregional level.
- 143 RLC, subregional offices and country offices promote strategic alliances to increase financial, human and technical resources with a view to developing the proposed evidence-based projects. The development of such alliances attracts resources and key partners, but information collected in the field did not identify specific or different actions when seeking to develop alliances for the scaling-up of successful cases.
- 144 RLC needs to design and coordinate a strategy that promotes successful cases with potential for scaling-up. Such strategy must start by identifying when a case is scalable. While scaling-up requires information on operational feasibility – and some stakeholders recognize that the implementation process must be bottom-up – elements that favour scaling mechanisms are identified. For example, incorporating political as well as technical aspects in the design gives the intervention greater visibility. Involvement in the participatory design process of national governments in project acceptance favours its implementation. Strengthening interinstitutional alliances for the joint promotion of proposals – particularly regarding the inclusion of indigenous peoples and gender mainstreaming – can be helpful, as well as linking with other actors to find out what works in other countries.
- 145 The most important factor is to systematically identify good practices. At present there is no awareness of specific criteria that can be used to identify success stories and the feasibility of scaling up.⁴⁰ However, using a checklist to identify good practices was proposed during the consultancy stage for the setting up of the Knowledge Management Unit at the RLC. The checklist contains substantial coverage of specific elements that reflect the quality of such practices, such as: geographical coverage, actors and stakeholders, target beneficiaries, context, objective, methodological approach, results, impact, success factors, constraints, sustainability, replicability and scaling up, testimonials, related resources and contact details (FAO, 2020e).
- 146 The strategy must also consider disseminating evidence of good design and implementation practice to relevant stakeholders in a timely and systematic manner. Being aware of the outcome of the evaluations of similar projects in other countries allows people to learn from the experience of others and act on early warnings. This necessarily requires the measuring of project results.
- 147 Countries perceive three main keys to success in scaling-up actions, programmes and projects. Online survey respondents⁴¹ first reported that they had identified success stories that can be adapted in the country or subregion (41.6 percent), which can be strengthened by applying the checklist for the identification of good practices; second,

40 At no point in the evaluation did RLC provide a specific document identifying specific criteria for recognizing success stories and the feasibility of scaling-up, nor was any reference made to such criteria during the interview phase with FAO actors.

41 The survey question was: What elements have been key to upscaling actions, programmes and projects? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: Having sufficient funding; Identifying success stories that can be adapted in the country or subregion; Communicating the results of FAO's actions in a timely manner; Having the collaboration of other agencies of the United Nations system; Having the collaboration of other strategic partners; The government's ability to implement actions; Participation and appropriation of beneficiaries; Do not know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

having sufficient funding (37.4 percent) where platforms for dialogue with the team of officials in charge of the projects/programmes can be established to identify which issues, sectors and subsectors can be expanded and scaled-up; and third, the Government's capacity to implement actions (34.7 percent). On the other hand, the cooperation of other UN system agencies is currently least significant, despite the impetus given to it by the new internal guidelines set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which forms a fundamental part of the reform process.

4.4 Generating and using evidence for decision-making

EQ 3. To what extent have the monitoring and development of learning from initiatives contributed to increased evidence-based decision-making?

Finding 4. RLC continuously produces various publications at regional level and participates in discussion exercises and technical debates that serve as inputs to improve the generation of evidence and promote its use in project development through three innovative actions: i) setting-up the Knowledge Management Unit; ii) the Cluster Strategy; iii) the project self-assessment exercise. Since these were only implemented recently, it is not yet possible to assess their results in improving project design and implementation. One area of opportunity that stands out for the timely generation of evidence is the application of short- and medium-term results monitoring in areas other than project management. Facilitating the use of evidence is also identified as an objective to be addressed.

148 The evaluation sought to identify the extent to which the monitoring and development of learning from initiatives contributed to increased evidence-based decision-making. This implies that RLC must have mechanisms in place for generating evidence from FAO and external agencies and also make use of this evidence. It was therefore felt that RLC should promote actions to monitor, evaluate and develop studies on the progress of programmes, projects and Regional Initiatives in Member Countries and in the region, and have a pool of relevant information for taking public policy decisions and supporting public policy decision makers. It should also promote and support the development of innovations in policies and programmes that contribute to the development of Regional Initiative activities and transformation processes in the region. It should analyse the information collected to identify good practices and lessons learned in terms of public policies, and process it to generate evidence for decision-making that can be used, in understandable language and in a systematized manner. It should disseminate relevant information among stakeholders: RLC human resources, FAO headquarters, subregional and country offices, national governments, UN organizations and donors. In conclusion, it should use the information to design and implement high quality, evidence-based programmes and projects.

4.4.1 Monitoring actions

149 Programmes and projects are monitored using two main platforms; the Financial Arrears Alert Anticipation System (SAFRA – unofficial, but useful for cross-checking project information) and the Field Programme Management Information System (FPMIS), which is the main tool for project monitoring. These tools can mainly be used for the effective monitoring of project management.⁴² They have been very useful for this purpose (the Programme Planning, Implementation Reporting and Evaluation Support System [PIRES] is also available for planning). Despite comprehensive and continuous monitoring of project management, the monitoring tools currently available do not facilitate results-oriented monitoring.

⁴² FPMIS is managed by the Technical Cooperation (TC) Department and provides institution information on all extra-budgetary funded activities, as well as the Technical Cooperation Programme and the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS) projects funded by the Ordinary Programme.

- 150 Corporate monitoring systems such as the Country Office Information Network (COIN), PIREs, FPMIS and other internal systems such as SAFRA are useful, but they are fragmented and lack information for operational monitoring. The country offices and some donors have therefore been required to develop their own systems. Because these focus mainly on tracking financial resources and outputs, no feedback is provided for improving programme performance and the effectiveness of results (FAO, 2019d). It would also be desirable for the systems to share information automatically (FAO, n.d.d.) because it makes it particularly difficult for country offices to gain a full picture of the contribution of projects to their programme.
- 151 The FPMIS is planned to be replaced with the Project Lifecycle Management System (PROMYS), which seeks to move away from a project-based approach to a programmatic approach, which is in line with RLC's intention to adopt a programmatic approach throughout the region that will also serve as an example for other regions. Although the implementation of PROMYS is still seen as a promise, the move towards this type of approach may be a solution to the concentration of monitoring on management elements. RLC must continue to work on its adoption or integration into PROMYS to overcome the limitations of monitoring tools in terms of operation follow-up and the results of programmes and projects.

4.4.2 Evaluation actions

- 152 Information obtained from evaluations is useful for establishing lessons learned and for improving projects, but it is difficult to identify results in a timely manner. Following-up evaluation recommendations is crucial for making use of information obtained from evaluations. RLC, together with the Office of Evaluation (OED), should have a follow-up mechanism in place that promotes improvement based on evaluation recommendation and allows for the exchange of lessons learned (positive and negative) between countries when similar projects exist. This mechanism can be applied to the results of internal and external evaluations, which translates into individual and non-institutional learning.
- 153 The region lacks the capacity to exploit the results of project evaluations conducted in the region and translate them into good project and policy practices for design and implementation. The current evaluation system uses a lot of resources to generate reports that are read by few and often not used for strategic, programming or operational decisions.
- 154 The survey⁴³ highlighted that time is a constraint for country offices, making it difficult for them to monitor all their projects and programmes. However, the main constraint is human resources focused on the task (66.4 percent), followed by financial resources (44.3 percent). Staff time occupied third place (40.8 percent).⁴⁴
- 155 There was found to be a lack of a systematic strategy for monitoring and evaluation, as well as for the management of knowledge generated in the region (the latter problem is being addressed with a new Knowledge Management Unit, which is at an embryonic stage, meaning that its results or contribution to resolving this problem cannot be assessed yet).

4.4.3 Strategy for capacity building in monitoring and evaluation

- 156 Monitoring and evaluation activities require specialized human resources for their effective implementation. Some countries do not have an adequate organizational infrastructure to deal with the tasks required for this activity. Recent measures to decentralize evaluation functions promoted by headquarters could provide RLC with more resources for doing this.

43 The survey question was: What are the limitations of the country/subregional office to monitor all its programmes and projects? Response options: Human Resources; Financial resources; Time; Technical capacity; Limited utility; Do not know / The content of this question does not relate to my functions and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

44 Out of the 262 responses received to this question, 180 relate to country offices. Of these, 4 relate to Caribbean countries, 83 to Mesoamerican countries and 93 to South American countries (considering the integration of FAO subregional offices when assigning countries to each subregion).

- 157 The absence of robust project monitoring arrangements has been repeatedly highlighted in evaluations and audits, but many country offices continue to implement projects without plans, human resources or budgets for monitoring and evaluation.
- 158 Regarding constraints to evaluating all projects and programmes at country office or subregional office level, the survey results highlighted the following: human resources was the main constraint (61.8 percent), followed by financial resources (47.3 percent) and time (45.4 percent), with only 1.5 percent of respondents pointing out that the fact that such an exercise is considered to be of little use is another constraint.⁴⁵
- 159 Survey results are consistent with what emerged from interviews conducted by the evaluation team, where it was mentioned that “monitoring activities take a lot of time and resources to follow-up and the distribution of these tasks may exceed the operational capacities of staff”.
- 160 Monitoring information is widely used in implementation, as well as evaluation information, when available. This happens without RLC having to do anything to encourage this. It was found that RLC has no strategy for developing coordinated technical capacities for generating and using information derived from monitoring and evaluation processes, because each country manages them according to its own needs.⁴⁶

4.4.4 Dissemination of good practices and evidence for decision-making

- 161 RLC has played a relevant and positive role in promoting the development of good practices among countries and their implementation. In the survey,⁴⁷ countries identify the exchange of lessons learned from other countries (50 percent) as one of the elements where RLC support is most useful. This result is consistent with what was found in interviews conducted by the evaluation team, where it was established that discussion forums (meetings, calls, events, webinars, etc.) promoted by RLC contribute to this. However, practices are not linked and shared in a coordinated and systematic way. Although information is available on lessons learned, support is needed from RLC to systematize it, as there is no process in place for this purpose. The Knowledge Management Unit will play a crucial role in addressing this challenge.
- 162 The Knowledge Management Unit is indeed expected to play an important role in dissemination, but also to serve as a think tank that compiles good practices and – together with the Cluster Strategy – strengthens the work of subregional offices under the coordination of RLC. It is considered important to establish a framework of reference for this purpose that allows information to be shared internally, considering: type of information, time frame for its dissemination and users, meaning who requires it and where this information is required. The experience of RLC’s social communication area may be useful in this regard, considering its experience in positioning and benchmarking with other similar agencies, as well as its products and audience differentiation strategy.
- 163 It was found that RLC has several platforms for disseminating relevant information to stakeholders and that it does so continuously, for example during regular meetings with

45 The survey question was: What are the limitations of the country/subregional office to evaluate all its programmes and projects? Response options: Human resources; Financial resources; Time; Technical capacity; Limited utility; Do not know / The content of this question does not relate to my functions and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

46 The survey question was: What are the limitations of the country/subregional office to monitor/evaluate all its programmes and projects? Response options: Human resources; Financial resources; Time; Technical capacity; Limited utility; Do not know / The content of this question does not relate to my functions and activities within FAO; Other (please specify). Out of the 262 responses received to this question, 180 relate to country offices. Of these, 4 relate to Caribbean countries, 83 to Mesoamerican countries and 93 to South American countries (considering the integration of FAO subregional offices when assigning countries to each subregion).

47 The survey question was: When is the assistance provided by RLC most useful? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: Strategic dialogues with FAO offices in the country/subregion; Technical review of project design; Operational support in terms of the implementation of projects; Sharing lessons learned from other countries; Identifying sources of funding; When the FAO country/subregional office seeks to link with other agencies or actors; There is no added value in the support provided by RLC; Do not know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

4. Main findings

FAORs, strategic publications for the Regional Initiatives such as the Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean, conducting webinars, seminars and publishing press releases, among other things. Evidence comes in the form of reports generated from the annual meetings of representatives, for example the meeting held in October 2019. The meeting report shows that good practices were shared during the event. This technical information is generally available and timely. This responds to the need to be aware of the outcome of the evaluations of similar projects in other countries, in order to learn from the experience of others and act on early warnings.

- 164 One good practice identified was the work done by RLC's Communications Unit in disseminating evaluations, through "FAO in the media", which distributes news to all FAORs and RLC personnel.
- 165 The communication team has set-up focal points for the Regional Initiatives to prepare reports that share good practices concerning the Initiatives. From 2018 onwards, annual documents have been produced to share good practices and examples illustrating the main results for the year on the Regional Initiatives (FAO in Latin America and the Caribbean 2019 / Latin America and the Caribbean Annual Report 2018). This represents a strength.
- 166 Given the amount of information on projects and programmes available, there is an acknowledged need for a more organized way of sharing it that considers the type of actor to whom the information is addressed, for example, technical staff, operational staff, partnership management, communication strategies, and so on. Language can be another barrier to accessing information, because not all countries in the region speak Spanish. This mainly affects the Caribbean subregion. The new Knowledge Management Strategy, which will consider cluster issues in its development, is presented as a solution. However, RLC will have to prioritize its correct and comprehensive development because it is still under preparation.
- 167 A need is recognized for an interactive pool of information classified by subject to facilitate searches. Dissemination via email makes the information difficult to use, because the relevant email is often lost in peoples' inboxes. The Knowledge Management Unit is currently in the process of being implemented. RLC must prioritize this process, while developing it in alignment with the priorities of the region and the Organization, represented by the Regional Initiatives as well as the specific themes on which the work of offices in the region is concentrated (represented by clusters). This will make it possible to fulfil one of RLC's central functions as set out in the document "Latin America and the Caribbean Regional and Subregional Functions and Structure: A view to the future". The knowledge management function should be one of the most important *raison d'être* of the Regional Office. This function is currently carried out in a tacit, unsystematic, unmethodological, scattered manner, which is disconnected from the monitoring and evaluation function and excessively influenced by anecdotal and casual observations.
- 168 The self-evaluation exercise has been useful in identifying lessons learned from projects that have not been evaluated. Suggested improvements include: redefining the quality criteria to be reviewed through the self-assessment as well as its methodology and timing, considering the workload; determining whether it is necessary to carry out the self-assessment when the project is subject to external evaluation; and establishing a system for following-up recommendations and even sharing findings between countries. The survey⁴⁸ found that the main challenges of the self-assessment exercise – as identified by FAO personnel in Latin America and the Caribbean – relate to the exercise methodology (35.5 percent), definition of quality criteria (32.4 percent) and following-up of recommendations resulting from the exercise (30.2 percent). It will be important for RLC to concentrate its efforts on methodological issues. For example, it must focus on following-up recommendations and compiling lessons made available by other offices, rather than on supporting country offices, which do not perceive any challenge in this regard.

48 The survey question was: Within the framework of the innovations promoted by RLC, which do you consider to be the main challenges of the "Auto evaluation (self-assessment) of the quality of FAO projects in the implementation phase"? Response options: Timing of the exercise; Methodology of the self-assessment; Definition of quality criteria; Backstopping by RLC; Follow-up to recommendations from the self-assessments; Value added of the exercise in comparison to other evaluation exercises; Do not know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

- 169 The clusters, which were conceived as communities of practice, offer an opportunity for FAO personnel in the region to make more use of evidence for the continuous improvement of programmes and projects.
- 170 RLC has a wealth of information on the region and the projects implemented. This is widely disseminated externally due to the work of the social communication area. However, challenges persist for internal dissemination. In addition, no specific efforts have been made to analyse the quality of the evidence developed. The mapping of potential users should be considered for this purpose, as well as the addition of a research agenda to guide and organize the generation of outputs, bearing in mind the technical assistance needs of countries in the region. The learning that already exists in the social communication department responsible for external dissemination can be considered for this purpose.

4.5 Incorporating vulnerable groups and promoting gender mainstreaming

EQ 4. How effective has RLC been in promoting programmes and projects that promote equality between women and men as well as the inclusion of indigenous and tribal peoples, and African descent population in the region?

Finding 5. RLC's actions in advancing gender mainstreaming in projects have been useful and effective. The coordination of the network of focal points, ongoing technical assistance and capacity building using a range of instruments has resulted in an increased number of projects designed with gender equality aspects in mind. However, exercises are not systematic in all country offices, nor do they have the same pace or incidence. FAO therefore need to keep up these actions and encourage the ones that accelerate the gender mainstreaming strategy maturation process – such as generating disaggregated data, information about existing gaps, participation in inter-agency groups and facilitation of evidence use.

Finding 6. The actions that RLC has taken to promote the inclusion of indigenous and tribal peoples and African descent population in the region are considered accurate and relevant. Taking the RLC gender team as a model to promote work in this area (coordination of a network of focal points, training and assistance) has allowed progress to be made in including such groups in the projects. However, the diverse characteristics of the groups and their settings mean that the strategy is disparate and idiosyncratic, and the aggregate results are not very visible.

Finding 7. It is considered important to continue with regular training (capacity building) for the focal points and to consider the possibility of progressing with the readjustment of responsibilities to increase the amount of time devoted to gender issues and issues relating to indigenous and tribal peoples and African descent population.

- 171 The question of how effective RLC has been in promoting programmes and projects that favour equality between women and men as well as the inclusion of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent in the region was answered by: assessing the actions coordinated by RLC to highlight gaps between groups in the context of the Regional Initiatives; the existence of criteria for incorporating these perspectives in

projects; cooperation with cross-cutting UN agencies in the design and implementation of programmes and criteria; having direct investments to address these issues – as well as monitoring and evaluating the reduction of gaps and documenting progress in the region.

4.5.1 Network of focal points

- 172 Through its network of focal points and the permanent support of the Gender Officer and the Indigenous Peoples' Officer, RLC promotes a technical learning process through project consultation and feedback, the dissemination of experiences from different countries, regular meetings and training strategies.
- 173 A clear, solid focal point structure⁴⁹ is in place to address gender issues in the region, guided and directed from RLC. The structure is not at the same level of development in the case of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent. The gender and indigenous peoples' focal points in the country offices are not exclusively dedicated to this task. This limits the existence of sufficient room for dialogue in order to create working plans on these agendas and can weaken these networks at certain times. Considering the large amounts of resources that projects related to large green funds have attracted, their great mobilization potential and their strong calls for action on gender and indigenous peoples' issues, RLC could increase the specialization of focal points, progressively seeking to ensure that they no longer cover other responsibilities or that they concentrate mainly on these issues. The work done by the two teams (gender and indigenous peoples) on preparing clear guidelines for formulators is reflected in a reduction in project approval time.
- 174 RLC has contributed to the mainstreaming of a gender approach in its programmes and projects through RLC's Gender Officer, its Gender Team and the network of focal points. The FAO Policy on Gender Equality was used as a guide and the FAO Regional Gender Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean 2019–2023 is perceived to be a good tool for strengthening its adoption and compliance with overall FAO policy. This is consistent with the findings outlined in the regional report for Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the Evaluation of FAO's Work on Gender.
- 175 There is a difference between the achievements of the gender focal point team and network and those of the indigenous peoples' team.⁵⁰ However, it is important to positively highlight the work of both networks, which ensures that the issues they focus on are promoted and included in the various countries of the region. This does not reflect any weakness on the part of the indigenous peoples' team, because their work is just beginning. RLC must encourage the indigenous peoples' focal point network to take up good practices that have been effective in the region in terms of achieving progress in the adoption and fulfilment the FAO Policy on Gender Equality. One repeated challenge that exists in both cases is that the people who serve as gender focal points perform multiple functions and this sometimes limits the extent of their participation in this area.
- 176 RLC has promoted gender mainstreaming by aligning the strategy with Regional Initiatives and through a feedback process to ensure that projects are aligned with the Regional Initiative by incorporating a gender approach and including specific lines of action. This is specifically stated in the FAO Regional Gender Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean 2019–2023. The inclusion of gender as a cross-cutting element in the new Cluster Strategy will help underpin these efforts.

49 Focal points are FAO personnel in the decentralized offices in the region who primarily perform a specific role in each office and then, as a secondary role, act as a focal point (i.e. acting as focal points is not their only or main task).

50 Outstanding achievements identified during the interviews and in the documentary review include: the strength of the network of focal points, greater coverage of personnel in training on gender issues, more disaggregated information generated and shared and greater proximity to groups at headquarters.

4.5.2 Identification of gaps

- 177 The survey⁵¹ found that 68.3 percent of personnel employed at FAO offices in the region agree or strongly agree that RLC has encouraged reflection on the need to highlight inequality between women and men and promote actions to reduce existing gaps. However, 5.4 percent stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, the survey⁵² showed that 51.9 percent of personnel in the offices agree or strongly agree that RLC's support in generating evidence (through the country gender assessment, among others) has made it possible to deepen the mainstreaming of the gender perspective into FAO's programmes and projects, while 6.1 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. To achieve this, RLC must continue to promote the analysis of gaps (so far carried out only for gender) especially on issues such as rural transformation and women's empowerment in the sector, food, environment and production; and promote courses of action and the dissemination of good practices that help reduce these gaps in countries of the region, considering their specific contexts.
- 178 RLC's efforts are complemented by gap analyses and gender action plans that should be strictly included in GEF and GCF projects, which account for a significant share of the project portfolio.
- 179 The document entitled "Regional Synthesis 2019" shows that in the four years leading up to the gathering of information for the report (2015–2019), 17 countries in the region, in addition to the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), did not carry out national gender assessments. This is consistent with findings from the interviews, where it was mentioned that updated information on gender is not always available.

4.5.3 Progress in gender mainstreaming policy and the inclusion of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent

- 180 The subregions present different challenges in terms of gender and the inclusion of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent. One example is the great differences that exist in the Caribbean⁵³ and the rest of the region regarding the situation of persons and peoples of African descent; this requires the adoption of specific strategies in the subregions.
- 181 In addition to FAO's existing network of focal points, the agencies of the UN system organize forums for communication and discussion on these issues, with members such as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), which helps position the agenda at the global level. RLC encourages participation in interinstitutional groups and even participates directly in them itself.
- 182 The progress made in promoting gender mainstreaming is a success story in the region and can provide many lessons learned to help promote the strategy for including indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent, which is currently at an early stage. However, it must be recognized that the challenges it poses are different to those of the Policy on Gender Equality.
- 183 In the area of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent, the need for efforts must be mapped more actively by subregions, countries or groups of countries.

51 The survey question was: Please indicate your assessment of the following statement: RLC has promoted, in the country/subregional office, a reflection on the need to make inequality between women and men visible and promote actions that reduce existing gaps. Response options: Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Don't Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree; Don't Know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO.

52 The survey question was: Please indicate your assessment of the following statement: RLC's support in generating evidence (through the country gender assessment, among others) has made it possible to deepen the mainstreaming of the gender perspective into FAO's programmes and projects. Response options: Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Don't Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree; Don't Know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO.

53 Other characteristics of the Caribbean identified during the interviews that sets it apart from the rest of the region is that, in terms of gender, there is a greater participation of women in relative terms, and also a smaller indigenous population.



The main challenges and constraints identified⁵⁴ by FAO personnel in Latin America and the Caribbean offices regarding respect for and inclusion of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent were that of obtaining the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of indigenous peoples (28.2 percent), a budget allocation within the project to ensure adequate implementation of the Indigenous Peoples Plan (IPP) (26 percent), prior evaluation of the impact on indigenous peoples (25.2 percent) and obtaining data disaggregated by indigenous group and geographic location (22.5 percent). Through the Indigenous Peoples' Officer, RLC must strengthen communication with the network of focal points to address the challenges and constraints identified. The recommendation is to follow the model that has been used for years by the gender team.

- 184 Documents published by RLC and previous evaluations contain evidence of the effective role played by FAO in including gender mainstreaming in its programmes and projects. However, it was noted that gender is not yet systematically mainstreamed in FAO projects and programmes. This may be due to insufficient capacity building of personnel and implementing partners. Progress has been made in that the RLC gender focal point no longer individually reviews concept notes and project documents, but instead the focal points are embedded in countries as part of a mentoring process aiming to build this type of capacity in personnel, radiating out from the focal points. This responds to the identification, in previous evaluations, of a knowledge gap regarding approaches and methods for including a gender perspective in technical interventions.
- 185 Little disaggregated and specific data is available on gender issues (particularly for the Caribbean) and the lack of data is even more marked for indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent, which means there is a risk of these issues becoming invisible. The lack of data affects opportunities for monitoring and evaluation (e.g. data are still needed in order to set baselines before measuring the resulting gaps).

54 The survey question was: Considering the elements of Environmental and Social Standard 9 (ESS) "Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Heritage"; what are the main challenges or limitations for the inclusion and respect of indigenous, tribal and Afro descendant peoples? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones) Response options: Identification of indigenous peoples; Carrying out the prior assessment of the impact on indigenous peoples; Obtaining data disaggregated by indigenous group and geographic location; Classifying the risk level given the current criteria; Obtaining free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of the indigenous peoples; Preparing the Indigenous Peoples Plan (IPP) (when the project risk level requires it); Budget allocation within the project to ensure adequate implementation of the IPP; Assessing the potential adverse impacts on cultural heritage; Implementing mitigation measures (where necessary); Establishing operational controls to verify compliance; Developing monitoring arrangements with direct involvement of all stakeholders (under FPIC); Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO.

- 186 The four main challenges or constraints to gender mainstreaming identified in the survey,⁵⁵ considering the steps defined in the project cycle, are as follows: i) addressing gender implications in the formulation of expected impact, results and outputs (36.3 percent); ii) developing gender capacity and raised gender awareness among project personnel and relevant partners involved in implementation (32.8 percent); iii) identifying differentiated effects and proposing gender-sensitive solutions (27.1 percent); iv) defining gender-sensitive indicators (26 percent).
- 187 Various projects include components of gender and including indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent, but resources are not always earmarked directly for these issues.
- 188 The evaluation team's findings regarding progress in gender mainstreaming are aligned with some of the conclusions identified in the Regional Report for Latin America and the Caribbean concerning the Evaluation of FAO's Work on Gender. For example, positive results can be seen from the years of work in raising awareness of the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into FAO's work in the region. Gaps remain in terms of knowledge of methods and approaches to gender mainstreaming but the good work being done by the Gender Office and her team in terms of communication and capacity building aims to reduce these gaps. The advice is to continue capacity building and strengthen the dissemination of tools and documents between country offices.
- 189 The Evaluation of FAO's Work on Gender in 2019 identified the FAO Policy on Gender Equality as the guiding document on gender mainstreaming. However, its implementation focuses on minimum standards due to the difficulty of adapting the document to regional needs. The recent publication of the FAO Regional Gender Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean 2019–2023 seeks to facilitate the implementation of a gender policy in the region by establishing strategic gender lines of action associated with the Regional Initiatives. At policy level, FAO has contributed to the creation of gender-related legislation and policies in the region.
- 190 Gender, as a cross-cutting issue in some FAO reporting systems, is mainly presented as a disaggregation of data by gender, leaving out aspects of women's empowerment, among other things. This not only limits the ability to monitor gender achievements but, more importantly, limits the possibility of planning more effectively. Monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming is beginning to happen.
- 191 Regarding the inclusion of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent, the evaluation team found aspects that coincide with processes of change set out in the document "Indigenous people and people of African descent" in the 2030 Agenda Series. The following elements stand out in this regard.
- 192 Technical advances can be identified, driven by a greater interest in mainstreaming and intercultural approach. This is reflected by the setting-up of a network of focal points in the region and the inclusion of an Indigenous Peoples' Officer in RLC. However, application of the approach is limited by a lack of technical instruments to pave the way for its integration into the planning, design and implementation processes of programmes and projects. The multiple functions performed by focal points in the country and subregional offices may be another limitation. Additionally, the involvement of experts from these peoples in FAO personnel, in general, is scarce, or in the case of Afro-descendants, non-existent.
- 193 Despite the existence of guidelines and policies for obtaining free, prior and informed consent, there are challenges to implementation in practice. One option is to promote the

55 The survey question was: Considering the steps defined in the project cycle, what are the main challenges or limitations for the inclusion of the gender perspective? (Select up to three options, considering the most relevant ones). Response options: Identifying gender differentiated effects and proposing gender-sensitive solutions; Addressing gender implications in the formulation of expected impacts, results and outputs; Defining gender-sensitive indicators; Identifying gender-related capacity gaps in implementing institutions; Allocating sufficient human and financial resources to guarantee women participation and benefits; Developing gender-capacity and raised gender awareness among project personnel and relevant partners involved in the implementation; Collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated data for monitoring and evaluation to track implementation progress; Monitoring with a participatory and gender-sensitive approach; Disseminating gender-related lessons learned; Don't know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO; Other (please specify).

use of TCP resources for training addressed at government officials to encourage systematic participation and the achievement of free, prior and informed consent.

- 194 The quality of statistics on indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent must be improved because there is little disaggregated data. It has been suggested that disaggregated statistics should be included in annual country reports, or that their non-existence should be acknowledged.
- 195 The importance of including the issue of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent in knowledge management strategies must be highlighted so that greater attention can be called to such issues. This will help fill gaps in the availability of information while also identifying good practices and benefiting from lessons learned.
- 196 Differential actions for the inclusion of vulnerable groups require a comprehensive and specific inclusion framework and corresponding strategies and action plans. In the particular case of indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent, RLC has developed outstanding actions to promote visibility and analysis on a regional scale, highlighting the central role of these populations (FAO, 2021a). However, the actions and messages relating to people of African descent are not powerful enough.
- 197 One recommendation for continuing to include indigenous and tribal peoples and people of African descent in FAO's work in the region is to follow-up on steps taken to include a gender perspective, but with a more regionalized strategy, supported by the recognition and appreciation of lessons learned regarding the groups of people involved.

4.6 Addressing the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

EQ 5. How effective has the RLC been in coordinating an appropriate response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Finding 8. RLC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been positive, useful and effective. This has helped build FAO's reputation in the region as the Organization responding in the timeliest manner. Various actions were taken, including the almost immediate adoption of online working conditions at the beginning of lockdown, the development of specific proposals for addressing the crisis in the short-term and for medium-term recovery, as well as the part played by RLC as a broker between countries. However, the network of FAO offices in the region will have to keep up and consolidate its efforts, as it is perceived that the COVID-19 emergency will need a long-term response while also dealing with the pre-existing group of emergencies and threats. Two areas of opportunity are the increased proportion of social care-oriented projects and the reduced ability of personnel to provide timely support to countries, which is a risk that may affect the Organization's performance.

- 198 RLC had to address the situation caused by COVID-19 by coordinating a response to the health emergency. The evaluation analysed the actions taken by RLC in five interrelated areas in order to assess the effectiveness of such actions.

4.6.1 Developing courses of action to address problems already identified in a timely manner to address the new situation

- 199 FAO's response has not been isolated. It was implemented within the UN framework and RLC's response was in turn implemented within the framework of the institutional response.

The Working Group on the impact of COVID-19 has been formulating courses of action through a recovery strategy with transformation, prioritizing post-COVID-19 recovery, where the priority issues are: job creation, social protection and generation of new opportunities.

- 200 Many projects had to be reoriented and adapted to the new COVID-19 situation, which also led to savings in significant items such as travel and workshops. In other cases, such as the school feeding project, resources were redirected to the preparation of handbooks and some COVID-19 health guidelines for the management of family farming production for schools. The challenge of establishing how to ensure continuity for projects that may have stopped momentarily and will have to continue in the new normal remains.
- 201 Despite the context associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that this implies, FAO has ensured follow-up and continuity to the implementation of most of its projects in the region, under the leadership of RLC. Switching the work to online methods has opened up new opportunities for optimizing resources. However, it is hard to imagine that work on the ground can be completely replaced. Some projects have suffered delays because human resources have been unable to travel. However, the survey results⁵⁶ show that approximately 70 percent of people working in the country and subregional offices agreed (42.4 percent), or strongly agreed (24.8 percent) that the actions taken by RLC allowed the offices to continue implementing their projects. Another positive aspect has been the flexibility shown in adjusting the deadlines for some projects.
- 202 One of RLC's greatest achievements in response to the pandemic has been its role as a broker. In this capacity, it has fostered dialogue between different actors in the region in order to agree on the best way to deal with the situation. The subregional and country offices have also played an important role in this regard; one example is the Subregional Office for the Caribbean's (SLC) participation in preparing CARICOM's post-COVID recovery strategy.
- 203 Many of the priorities to be addressed predate COVID-19 and are still present, although efforts must be made to make the necessary adjustments. One example is school feeding, which affects 85 million children in the region, 10 million of whom rely on it as their main source of food (FAO, 2020g). The region will face the challenge of maintaining school feeding programmes. As this challenge is common to different countries, RLC will have to play a central role in addressing it.

4.6.2 Generating information on the effects that COVID-19 will have on problems facing the region in the short-, medium- and long-term

- 204 FAO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic includes diagnostic studies on the possible impacts of the pandemic on various subsectors. This will help address areas that need to be strengthened to achieve recovery. FAO's commitment to the post-COVID-19 agenda has enabled it to position itself strongly in the region in order to have an impact on care and recovery plans.
- 205 Resources have been assigned for the generation of evidence, including the following (FAO, 2020h):
- i. Material for the Regional Conference COVID-19 update and adjustments to FAO's regional priorities to address impact on food security and nutrition, and food systems.
 - ii. COVID-19 Report (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean - ECLAC-FAO): Preventing the COVID-19 crisis from becoming a food crisis: Urgent measures against hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean.

56 The survey question was: Please indicate your assessment (Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Don't Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree; Don't Know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO) of the actions taken by RLC to address the context of the pandemic. Elements of the actions to be assessed: They have enabled the Office to provide timely advice and guidance to government counterparts and development partners; They have allowed the Office to conduct analyses and studies on the impact of COVID-19; They have allowed the Office to continue with the implementation of its projects; They have enabled the Office to mobilize additional resources in support of the country's efforts to respond to the effects of COVID-19; They have placed the well-being of persons working in country and subregional offices at the centre.

- iii. FAO has been publishing a weekly newsletter that provides useful information, tools and resources to decision makers in government, the private sector and civil society to support the design and implementation of measures intended to combat the effects of the pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean. This newsletter is produced in partnership with ECLAC.
 - iv. Microanalysis: short data analyses on the effects of the pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean were published on a weekly basis.
 - v. DataLab: a freely accessible tool that organizes and analyses daily information on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food and agriculture, value chains, food security and actions taken. Its main objective is to provide countries with the necessary information and data and to strengthen their decision-making processes. A Twitter-based alert system was set-up to monitor disturbances in the region in real time.
- 206 Countries have also been able to generate context-specific information with the support of RLC. The survey results show that personnel in the country and subregional offices mainly agree, with 36.6 percent of respondents⁵⁷ believing that RLC's actions have enabled the office to carry out analyses and studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 207 RLC is taking steps to ensure that the recommendations and findings identified in COVID-19-related studies are incorporated in country level public policies and in the recovery programmes developed by the Ministries with a view to ensuring that the response is managed in such a way as to bring recovery with transformation. However, there is a need to clarify what this strategy entails, beyond prioritizing issues.

4.6.3 Resource mobilization and strategic partnerships

- 208 There is a perception among various stakeholders, including regional organizations, that FAO's response to the pandemic has been timely and effective. One example is FAO's response to CARICOM's request for support in developing an action plan in response to COVID-19. It was identified that FAO responded quickly and was able to cooperate to develop the "COVID-19 Response Agri-food Plan" and the "COVID-19 Risk Mitigation Framework" in less than one month. CARICOM found both to be extremely valuable and was able to use them to implement courses of action in the context of the pandemic.
- 209 In Central America, at subregional level, market niches have been found to develop publications jointly with international bodies, such as the Latin American Integration Association (LAIA), the Executive Secretariat of the Central American Agricultural Council (SE-CAC), SICA and SIECA. Studies have been conducted with the latter on trade opportunities and market access for rural small and medium enterprises and family farming in the context of international trade with a focus on intra-regional trade. At country level, a study was begun on trade opportunities and market access for Panamanian products in the post-COVID-19 era. FAO, together with IICA, also supported the Hemispheric Meetings of Ministers and Secretaries of Agriculture, the first of its kind: three sessions have already been held.
- 210 Similarly, the Secretariat of Central American Social Integration (SISCA) requested support from FAO together with EUROSOCIAL (in the European Union) for formulating a post-COVID-19 recovery plan; SE-CAC requested assistance from FAO and IICA for its post-COVID 2020 agricultural plan. A meeting of the Council of Ministers for Economic Integration (COMIECO) was also held between Ministers of Foreign Trade and Agriculture, where FAO provided valuable support for activities in the post-COVID-19 era.

57 The survey question was: Please indicate your assessment of the actions taken by RLC to address the context of the pandemic. Response options: They have enabled the Office to provide timely advice and guidance to government counterparts and development partners; They have allowed the Office to conduct analyses and studies on the impact of COVID-19; They have allowed the Office to continue with the implementation of its projects; They have enabled the Office to mobilize additional resources in support of the country's efforts to respond to the effects of COVID-19; They have placed the well-being of persons working in country and subregional offices at the centre.

4.6.4 Making structures and resources more flexible for emergency response

- 211 Despite the constraints of remote working and country level decisions, RLC has been able to provide technical support and advice in the region. RLC has monitored the situation closely, sharing experiences, recommendations, protocols and guidelines for field and remote work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to redirect and adapt projects. RLC coordinates regular meetings to monitor the status of the pandemic in Member Countries, and also produces a series of webinars and newsletters.
- 212 These actions are reflected in the survey results, which shows that more than 60 percent of personnel in country and subregional offices who responded to the survey⁵⁸ consider that the platforms opened up by RLC for communication and support in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic have been sufficient – almost always (34.4 percent) or always (31.7 percent) – useful – almost always (36.6 percent) or always (35.2 percent) – and timely –almost always (32.9 percent) or always (34.7 percent) – for developing courses of action.
- 213 FAO made digital tools (public and free sites) available to personnel to cope with the new normal and dynamics determined by the COVID-19 crisis in work and personal settings. Some examples included online courses offered by the learning platform you@fao.org, including: i) How to be part of a positive work environment; ii) Leadership in times of crisis; iii) Navigating change in difficult times; iv) Decision-making in stressful situations; v) Agile leadership: how to cope with the new normal; vi) How to reconcile remote working with real life in times of crisis. Information of interest to FAO employees is also continuously circulated through in-house FAO's Latest newsletters, which contain articles, news, publications, regulations and so on.
- 214 In this context, it was found that RLC considered staff welfare in actions taken to address the COVID-19 pandemic, as corroborated by the survey results,⁵⁹ which showed that 43.5 percent expressed full agreement with this argument. RLC also took explicit action, such as hiring a psychologist, whose services were made available to staff. This was considered good practice because it helped ensure work dynamics were more flexible in the health emergency (other factors included remote working, training and webinars to address work stress and flexible working hours).
- 215 Stakeholders such as Ministries of Agriculture and Parliaments in the countries interviewed highlighted the work of the FAO offices in continuing to provide support and carry out most of the activities planned, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is further borne out by the survey results,⁶⁰ which show that more than 55 percent of people working in country offices and subregional offices agreed (37 percent) or strongly agreed (18.3 percent) that the actions taken by RLC enabled them to provide timely advice and guidance to government partners and other partners during the pandemic.
- 216 A survey conducted by the Association of Professionals in FAO (AP in FAO) showed that the COVID-19 pandemic provided FAO personnel with the opportunity to successfully work remotely and fulfil the Organization's mandate despite the fact that this arrangement was not widespread practice in FAO in the past when it was not offered as an option at management level and was even actively discouraged. However, the experience brought positive benefits. Examples included shorter travel times and greater flexibility in work schedules, allowing personnel to adapt to heavier workloads and personal obligations. The

58 The survey question was: To what extent the support provided by RLC to foster an enabling working environment with country and subregional offices, including communication and assistance, in the context of the pandemic has been sufficient, timely, and useful in developing courses of action? Response options: Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Usually; Always; Do not know.

59 The survey question was: **Please indicate your assessment of the actions taken by RLC to address the context of the pandemic:** They have placed the well-being of persons working in country and subregional offices at the centre. Response options: Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Don't Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree; Do not know / Does not relate to my functions at FAO

60 The survey question: **Please indicate your assessment of the actions taken by the RLC to address the context of the pandemic** - They have enabled the Office to provide timely advice and guidance to government counterparts and development partners. Response options: Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Don't Agree nor Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree; Do not know / The content of this question does not relate to my roles and activities within FAO.

results show that 84 percent of FAO personnel surveyed are happy with the remote working arrangement offered during the COVID-19 pandemic; and approximately 87 percent stated that they wish to continue remote working in the future, after the pandemic (FAO, 2020i).

- 217 Despite the good practices implemented in Latin America and the Caribbean, the work performed by RLC is perceived to be very demanding or urgent, in a context where staff members are exhausted by the high rate of work and changing workloads due to the pandemic. This is also reflected in negative impacts on the quality of work according to a survey conducted by the Association of Professionals in FAO, which found that respondents perceived: an increased workload; fieldwork is impossible; lack of interaction with colleagues; lack of equipment or office set-up; insufficient workspace; inability to hold face-to-face meetings, which also applies to FAO partners (not only to FAO colleagues).



5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

5.1.1 Relevance of the Regional Initiatives for meeting the needs and demands of countries

Conclusion 1. RLC has led the design of Regional Initiatives with holistic and coherent narratives that respond to changes and needs in the regions. They have also been relevant in harmonizing the array of responses to the major multi-factorial problems addressed. However, the regional perspective promoted in the Regional Initiatives has limitations regarding the inclusion of subregional specificities due to geographical factors, environmental, climatic and socio-economic risk profiles and differences between political, ethnic, racial and cultural settings. This is compounded by differences in institutional capacity, which affects the understanding of and adaptation to the Regional Initiatives.

218 Although FAO is considered to have a strong presence at institutional and national level, we must strive to get even closer to the territory and local governments (considering its political organization and its technical cooperation scheme with international organizations) by strengthening the territorial approach of projects in order to strengthen the ownership and sustainability of the Regional Initiatives actions. Articulation of projects to ensure that they contribute to the strategic vision of the Regional Initiatives is not always coherent. RLC could support the country offices in developing a more holistic narrative, making greater use of intersections between the Regional Initiatives and advise on analysing the feasibility and timeliness of coordination between territorial and subnational levels.

219 There are opportunities for the regional perspective promoted in the Regional Initiatives to support country level work more effectively, for example by promoting a better understanding of the technical approach set out in the initiative, particularly in areas and territories where concepts are new or difficult to understand, and by facilitating the linking and positioning of FAO with Ministries other than Ministries of Agriculture, associated with social, economic and environmental development.

5.1.2 Adaptation and implementation of the Regional Initiatives at country level

Conclusion 2. RLC has opened up areas for policy dialogue and the dissemination of information on regional perspectives in an effective manner that has had a positive impact on the adaptation of the Regional Initiatives. It has supported the design and implementation of quality projects and resource mobilization. However, certain bottlenecks limit the adaptation and implementation of the Regional Initiatives in Member Countries.

220 The Regional Initiatives are relevant tools for promoting FAO's policy messages stemming from debate and dialogue between countries. The Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean sets out an orderly, coherent, balanced and up-to-date discourse that provides mechanisms to promote good practices and guide fund allocation based on the needs and problems that countries consider most relevant and highlight as priority themes in the region. Development partners consider that the added value of partnership with FAO lies in its technical and resource mobilization capacity, in which RLC plays a fundamental role. This is why more assistance is required from RLC when establishing partnerships with the private sector, international banks, regional and subregional organizations and even with Ministries of Agriculture.

- 221 RLC has initiated actions to organize and circulate information that is relevant for project design to more effectively improve the adaptation of the Regional Initiatives. It has established different practices and mechanisms, such as circulating newsletters, setting-up the Knowledge Management Unit and developing the Cluster Strategy, but implementation details are still lacking and this aspect must be institutionalized
- 222 Quality is enhanced by arrangements that support ownership at project level, such as quality criteria reviews, appraisal checklists and setting-up task forces. However, bottlenecks that may limit quality were identified, such as the delay in forming task forces and the distribution of responsibilities between regional and subregional teams. Both elements refer to institutional channels for identifying technical expertise that are not fit for purpose. This in turn leads to delays in the design, approval and implementation process and the concentration of expertise in a few people (a few Lead Technical Officers in this case) and barriers to the generation of institutional learning. The Cluster Strategy could allow the dissemination of knowledge and the delegation of responsibilities to make room for strategic planning.
- 223 RLC has been successful in mobilizing its own resources as well as national and international resources and in securing strategic alliances, since it has prioritized a strategy of increasing and diversifying resource mobilization (with a strong emphasis on major environmental funds). However, the limited implementation capacity of some offices in the region poses administrative and organizational reputational risks with donors, partners and beneficiaries, as well as an increase in the dispersion of actions which makes it difficult to steer resource mobilization towards a programmatic approach. Measures such as the setting-up of the Rapid Growth Countries Support Team are considered relevant and timely.
- 224 RLC has the opportunity to enhance its coordinating role in the region to strengthen the adaptation of the Regional Initiatives in Member Countries via the CPFs, through the following actions: i) notifying headquarters of common issues faced by countries in administering and financing projects, as it has done on other occasions; ii) supporting headquarters with information to design courses of action that make technical assistance more effective in the regional and subregional context; and iii) providing feedback to headquarters to distinguish between priority and urgent needs.

5.1.3 Scaling-up results

Conclusion 3. RLC has provided support for scaling-up results, particularly as a facilitator in establishing relationships with strategic partners and a provider of technical assistance. However, there is no scaling-up strategy that systematically identifies success stories and their scaling-up feasibility.

- 225 Personnel at country level believe that there are three main keys to success in scaling-up actions, programmes and projects: i) identifying success stories and good practices; ii) having sufficient funding and opportunities for dialogue with teams of officers in charge of projects; and iii) cooperation with strategic partners, which include the government due to its implementation capacity.
- 226 RLC does not have a dedicated strategy for scaling-up projects. Despite the efforts of RLC, the subregional offices and the country offices, there are no specific criteria for recognizing successful cases and assessing their potential for scaling-up. Actions should be implemented to systematically identify successful cases, and a clear strategy for scaling-up should be in place that considers the necessary financial and human resources, as well as design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. Scaling-up also requires the systematization of information, the coordinated and systematic dissemination of experiences and minimum criteria when identifying potential actions for scaling-up.

5.1.4 Generating and using evidence for decision-making

Conclusion 4. RLC has carried out actions to support the generation of evidence on the evaluation and management of knowledge generated in the region. However, results are incipient and there is a need to strengthen capacities and develop mechanisms to generate evidence and facilitate its use.

- 227 Useful monitoring platforms are available for programmes and projects, but they are fragmented and lack information for monitoring results. The country offices and some donors have therefore had to develop their own systems. There is also a lack of a systematic strategy for monitoring and evaluation, as well as for the management of knowledge generated in the region. Implementation of the PROMYS initiative could improve access to operational and management information once the initiative is taken up by the Organization. To ensure the use of evidence in decision-making, RLC should promote actions to monitor, evaluate and develop studies on the progress of programmes, projects and Regional Initiatives in Member Countries and in the region, establishing mechanisms to analyse the information collected and putting strategies in place to disseminate information to relevant stakeholders.
- 228 RLC should establish a follow-up mechanism that promotes improvement based on evaluation recommendations and allows for the exchange of lessons learned between countries when similar projects exist. The Office of Evaluation (OED) can contribute to this mechanism. The new Knowledge Management Strategy was found to partly address these challenges, although it is only just being implemented.
- 229 The online survey shows – and this is in line with findings from interviews – that the main constraint identified by FAO personnel in monitoring all programmes and projects is the issue of operational capacity and resources: lack of human resources (66.4 percent), lack of financial resources (44.3 percent) and lack of time (40.8 percent). Although information is available on lessons learned, support is needed from RLC to systematize it. The Knowledge Management Unit could do this job.
- 230 The self-assessment exercise was useful in identifying lessons learned. Possible actions for improvement were found, such as refining the quality criteria, reviewing methodology and timing considering workloads, and establishing a strategy for following-up recommendations and disseminating findings between countries. The clusters offer an opportunity for FAO personnel in the region to increase the use of evidence for the continuous improvement of programmes and projects.

5.1.6 Incorporating vulnerable groups and promoting gender mainstreaming

Conclusion 5. RLC contributed to gender mainstreaming in its programmes and projects and promotes the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as indigenous people, African descent population, and tribal groups. However, the differential approach is not intersectional and does not respond systematically to the specificities of each group. Gender issues, the area where the greatest progress has been made, are not yet systematically incorporated and there are no resources fully dedicated to the effective incorporation of vulnerable groups. Moreover, disaggregated data and updated information are not always available. Despite the existence of guidelines and policies for obtaining free, prior and informed consent, there are challenges to implementation in practice.

- 231 A clear, solid focal point structure is in place to address gender issues in the region, guided by RLC. The structure for indigenous and tribal peoples and African descent population is not at the same level of development (it is even more limited in the case of African descent population and tribal peoples). However, it is important to highlight the good work done by both networks, which allow these core issues to be promoted and included in different

countries of the region. RLC must encourage the indigenous peoples' focal point network to take up good practices that have brought positive results in the region in terms of achieving progress in the adoption and fulfilment of FAO's Policy on Gender Equality and ensure that African descent population and tribal peoples are included in this effort as well as indigenous peoples.

- 232 RLC is making progress in putting these groups at the centre in terms of regional perspective and response, but this is not yet systematically reflected in priorities, programmes and projects or in the composition of teams.
- 233 Special mention should be made to people of African descent, who require specific attention because their specific ethnic, racial and cultural characteristics render them invisible. This emphasis could have important implications for the Caribbean due to its population which is largely of African descent, its coastal-marine biogeography made up of Small Island Developing States, and its perceived genuine isolation from the rest of the region. This highlights the importance of continuing to study the agency by which people of African descent are excluded and its implications for FAO's work in the region.
- 234 Gender mainstreaming has been encouraged by aligning the strategy with the Regional Initiatives. However, the fact that the focal points in country offices are not exclusively dedicated to these tasks limits the space for dialogue and for drawing up work plans on these agendas.
- 235 The gender perspective is not yet systematically mainstreamed in FAO projects and programmes. This may be because personnel and partners involved in implementation lack capacity. Furthermore, disaggregated, gender-specific data are not in plentiful supply and up-to-date information is not always available.
- 236 Although some projects consider gender and the inclusion of indigenous people, African descent population and tribal groups, resources are not always earmarked directly for these issues.
- 237 The existence of safeguards, guidelines and policies for free, prior and informed consent has contributed to the mainstreaming of these aspects in project design. However, there are challenges to implementation in practice. Resources could be mobilized for training courses to encourage systematic participation and the provision of free, prior and informed consent. As before, few disaggregated data are available in this area.

5.1.6 Addressing the COVID-19 situation

Conclusion 6. RLC led a short-term strategy to address the pandemic in Member Countries that external stakeholders perceived to be positive, useful and effective. The Organization's flexibility in personnel and project management helped ensure the continuity of work in the region.

- 238 Various stakeholders, including regional organizations, perceive FAO's response to the pandemic to have been more effective and timely than that of other UN agencies in the region. Moreover, FAO's response has not been isolated. It was implemented within the UN framework and RLC's response was implemented within the framework of the institutional response.
- 239 Good practices were identified that helped establish more flexible working conditions in response to the health emergency (remote working, psychological support, and training/webinars to deal with work stress, flexible working hours and so on). The results show that 84 percent of FAO personnel surveyed are satisfied with the remote working arrangements offered during the COVID-19 pandemic, and approximately 87 percent stated that they wish to continue remote working in the future, after the pandemic. However, despite the

good practices, burnout was a problem among personnel in the region, given the high rate of work and the changing workload due to the pandemic.

- 240 Adapting projects to the new COVID-19 situation led to savings on the voluntary contribution budget (that cannot be used in other projects) on important items such as travel and workshops. However, the challenge remains of ensuring continuity for projects that may have momentarily halted and will have to carry on in the new normal. Some stakeholders also believe that the fact that most projects are geared towards social support is a risk. Lastly, although switching the work to online methods has opened up new opportunities for optimizing resources, it is hard to imagine that work on the ground can be completely replaced.
- 241 FAO's commitment to the post-COVID-19 agenda has allowed it to position itself strongly in the region so that it can have an incidence on care and recovery plans. However, the medium-term implications of this strategy – apart from prioritizing issues – must be clarified.

5.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. RLC must continue to reflect on the conceptualization of the Regional Initiatives in order to adapt them to changing contexts in the region.

Several actions are suggested for this purpose:

- i. Promote longer time periods for sharing, implementing and monitoring results, which make it easier to evaluate and measure the impact of the actions regarding their contribution to the strategic vision of the Regional Initiatives.
- ii. Promote projects with a systems approach that incorporate a holistic focus and organization of sustainable agri-food system in relevant territories among country offices.
- iii. Analyse the viability/relevance of introducing criteria for defining thematic and geographical emphasis in subregions and countries exhibiting certain determining features associated with greater vulnerability, lower institutional capacity and relevant differences in cultural context.
- iv. Consider building alliance-forming capacity to drive development in the territories and with other stakeholders.
- v. Consider the promotion and enhancement of biodiversity concepts related to healthy and nutritious food and ecosystem services that improve territorial conditions and local productive systems (land and sea), as well as the contribution made by biodiversity in addressing the challenges of climate change, sustainable agriculture and health security.

Recommendation 2. RLC must promote interaction between the Regional Initiatives in the debate over the demands of Member Countries and technical assistance, which will help enhance a strategic programmatic view of the Regional Initiatives.

Several actions are suggested for this purpose:

- i. Lead a strategy to exploit areas of intersection between the Regional Initiatives more effectively.
- ii. Promote existing dialogue with Member Countries and facilitate and establish, when necessary, new areas for high-level, regular, cross-cutting dialogue with new stakeholders and between various Ministries.
- iii. Strengthen support to country offices for developing a holistic narrative that makes it possible to link country-level planning with the Regional Initiatives, seeking points of intersection between the Regional Initiatives at project design and implementation.
- iv. Encourage the development of a technical assistance approach that supports investments in multi-sectoral projects with the involvement of various government agencies, not just the Ministries of Agriculture.

Recommendation 3. RLC must promote actions that have an incidence on the ownership of Regional Initiatives by countries.

Several actions are suggested for this purpose:

- i. Identify and secure partnerships with other cooperating entities and multilateral financial institutions in the region and, in particular, promote greater involvement with the private sector in order to define sustainable partnerships, coordinate interests and define lines of action, and – where appropriate – access greater budgetary resources.
- ii. Promote the systematic quantification of results on issues related to inclusive food systems, as well as impacts on emissions and biodiversity in order to increase the robustness and raise the profile of this critical task for the region.
- iii. Promote successful experiences at country level in terms of data collection, censuses and studies to systematize and disseminate updated and reliable information on family farming.
- iv. Build institutional capacity in terms of human resources in country, subregional offices and RLC with expertise in areas of greater demand, such as the pillars of FAO's risk management and resilience.

Recommendation 4. RLC must strengthen its resource mobilization strategy to continue adapting projects based on the strategic vision of the Regional Initiatives and to encourage a more active participation of Member Countries.

Several actions are suggested for this purpose:

- i. Develop diversified strategies depending on the type of assistance (technical assistance in drawing up proposals, negotiation and positioning, or information on partners and windows of opportunity), project (GEF or UTF) and partner (international banks, private sector, civil society).
- ii. Map and identify opportunities where the supply of investment funds or investment sources can be matched with demand where there is growth potential.
- iii. Disseminate the resource mobilization and partner diversification strategy among offices in the region, particularly in countries with a high dependence on TCPs and a single funding source.
- iv. Lobby large funds, particularly environmental funds, to create more funding windows for subregional and regional projects.

Recommendation 5. RLC must develop actions to improve project implementation in order to increase the effectiveness of FAO support.

Several actions are suggested for this purpose:

- i. Address systemic causes of delays and encourage headquarters to address the problems.
- ii. Disseminate information on bottlenecks in administrative processes that is differentiated according to project type and partner and possible solutions.
- iii. Identify information "niches" or spaces with partners and donors that enhance use of FAO data and evidence in the region, in order to speed up their application in planning processes as well as in the formulation of diagnostics and projects.
- iv. Establish a regular training programme to build the capacities of country and subregional office personnel in the use of FAO data, tools and information systems.
- v. Establish clear criteria for the appointment of Lead Technical Officers, avoiding the concentration of knowledge in a few people and encouraging organizational learning.
- vi. Simplify operational monitoring actions to free up capacity for results-oriented monitoring that improves implementation in real time.

Recommendation 6. RLC must define a strategy for scaling-up actions that will ensure FAO's actions have a greater impact.

Several actions are suggested for this purpose:

- i. Develop a strategy that includes at least the following elements: documentation of success stories that can be adapted in the country or subregion; sufficient funding and cooperation of strategic partners such as the government; and identification of the technical and political implications ("political economy") that will give the intervention greater visibility.
- ii. Continue strengthening inter-agency alliances to jointly promote proposals that allow greater access to funds.
- iii. Take advantage of the communication channels and technical personnel that RLC has gained in countries so that the strategic scaling-up vision can be incorporated by the team of project officers when developing projects and programmes as part of the scaling-up strategy.

Recommendation 7. RLC must develop a holistic strategy for using monitoring and evaluation results to facilitate the development of evidence-based projects.

Several actions are suggested for this purpose:

- i. Supplement the efforts being made by the Office of Evaluation (OED) to design a training programme for all monitoring and evaluation personnel working in the subregional and country offices to raise awareness and encourage operational and technical personnel to promote the use of monitoring and evaluation results.
- ii. Jointly with headquarters, suggest that the PROMYS initiative should effectively simplify the monitoring of operational management and enable results-oriented monitoring.
- iii. Conduct regular results evaluations that generate information to improve interventions and know their results for dissemination.
- iv. Compare the results of the project quality evaluation carried out during the project cycle with the self-assessment results to facilitate implementation of recommendations and lessons learned.

Recommendation 8. RLC must strengthen its strategy for mainstreaming equality between women and men when designing and implementing projects.

Several actions are suggested for this purpose:

- i. Encourage the establishment of alliances with partners and donors who appreciate the value of data production work for improving gender-based diagnoses, and encourage the subregional offices to do the same.
- ii. Continue training and information dissemination efforts in all offices in the region to reduce observed differences between offices.
- iii. Strengthen efforts to make women central to policies, programmes and projects.
- iv. Coordinate a differentiated strategy that considers the specificities of the subregions.⁶¹

Recommendation 9. RLC must take action to streamline and strengthen the strategy for including indigenous, Afro descent and tribal groups in order to comply with the principle of leaving no one behind.

- i. Several actions are suggested for this purpose:
- ii. Continue strengthening the organization of focal points for the inclusion of indigenous peoples, as was done for gender, and consider African descent population and tribal peoples in this effort instead of just indigenous peoples.

⁶¹ For example, in the Caribbean, where there is greater participation of women in relative terms from a gender perspective and where marked differences are evident in relation to the rest of the region regarding people of African descent, these differences must be smoothed out when creating strategies.

- iii. Promote the inclusion of technical and administrative personnel of indigenous and African descent in programmes and projects and in subregional and regional offices.
- iv. Include the topic of indigenous, tribal and African descent population in the strategies that the Knowledge Management Unit must coordinate to disseminate evidence.
- v. Encourage the allocation of TCP resources for capacity building that promotes systematic participation and the achievement of free, prior and informed consent among countries.
- vi. Coordinate a differentiated strategy that allows for subregional specificities; for example, the Caribbean has institutional, ethno-racial, cultural and biogeographical specificities that are different from those in Latin America, and they have significant implications for programmes and project operationalization.

Recommendation 10. RLC must carry out actions that maintain support for country and subregional offices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic while acknowledging the additional workload and efforts being made by personnel to fulfil their responsibilities.

Several actions are suggested for this purpose:

- i. Together with headquarters, continue with actions that have been put in place to maintain support to the country and subregional offices, considering the general toll this takes on the teams and allowing more room for social interaction or non-work spaces that allow personnel to meet the domestic demands of working at home.
- ii. Promote criteria to determine which projects should continue and which should be given lower priority among decentralized offices in view of the medium-term challenges posed by the pandemic.
- iii. Strengthen technical assistance to countries so that they can adjust and adapt their public policy and management tools to post COVID-19 as well as their role as brokers helping the country offices to liaise with regional and national authorities.
- iv. For ease of consultation, Annex 4 links the recommendations in this section with areas of opportunity and the stakeholders involved in addressing them.

Bibliography

Association of FAO Professional Staff. 2020. Initial findings of the global employee survey on teleworking at FAO - past, present, future. Internal document.

Brenes-Castillo, C.E. y Pulgarín-Rodríguez, C.E. 2020. Guía para fortalecer la gobernanza de la pesca en los territorios indígenas de Centroamérica: Hacia la revitalización de las diversas formas de pesca indígena para la afirmación de la gestión territorial. Panamá. (also available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9294es>).

Bruno, B., Ivanovic, C. 2020. Mujeres rurales, protección social y seguridad alimentaria en ALC – Desafíos actuales y aportes del enfoque sistémico a la política pública con enfoque de género. En *Alimentación, agricultura y desarrollo rural en América Latina y el Caribe*, N.º 23. Santiago de Chile, FAO. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5092es/ca5092es.pdf>).

Correa, N.B. 2019. Pueblos Indígenas y población afrodescendiente. En *Alimentación, agricultura y desarrollo rural en América Latina y el Caribe*, N.º 24. Santiago de Chile, FAO. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca5500es>).

Divvaakar, S V. (2020). Knowledge Management Unit at FAO RLC. Outline for scope and operationalization. Working Paper.

Divvaakar, S. 2020. Presentation of the Knowledge Management Unit at FAO-RLC, Outline for scope and operationalization. Santiago de Chile (borrador).

FAO, FIDA, OPS, PMA y UNICEF. 2020. *Panorama de la seguridad alimentaria y nutrición en América Latina y el Caribe 2020*. Santiago de Chile. (also available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2242es>).

FAO. 2011. *Política de la FAO sobre pueblos indígenas y tribales*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/i1857s/i1857s.pdf>).

FAO. 2013. *Política de igualdad de género de la FAO – Alcanzar las metas de seguridad alimentaria en la agricultura y el desarrollo rural*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/i3205s/i3205s.pdf>).

FAO. 2015a. Ajustes al Programa de trabajo y presupuesto para 2016–17. Nota informativa N.º 5 de noviembre de 2015. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/mp143s/mp143s.pdf>).

FAO. 2015b. *Medium Term Plan for 2014-17 and Programme of Work and Budget for 2016-17*. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/mm710s/mm710s.pdf>).

FAO. 2015c. *Plan a plazo medio para 2014–2017 y Programa de trabajo y presupuesto para 2016–2017*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/mm710s/mm710s.pdf>).

FAO. 2016a. *FAO Regional Initiatives for Latin America and the Caribbean*. [Cited on 28 March 2021]. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/i5414s/i5414s.pdf>).

FAO. 2016b. Resultados y prioridades de la FAO en la región de América Latina y el Caribe y examen estratégico regional. Lista de documentos del 34.º período de sesiones de la Conferencia Regional de la FAO para América Latina y el Caribe. Ciudad de México. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/regional-conferences/larc34/documents/es/>).

FAO. 2017a. *Atlas de las mujeres rurales de América Latina y el Caribe: “Al tiempo de la vida y los hechos”* [Atlas of rural women in Latin America and the Caribbean – keeping pace with life and events]. Santiago de Chile. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/americas/noticias/ver/en/c/1062502/>).

FAO. 2017b. *Medium Term Plan for 2018-21 and Programme of Work and Budget for 2018-2019*. [Cited on 28 March 2021]. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ms278s/ms278s.pdf>)

FAO. 2017c. FAO Decentralized Offices: Where Knowledge Becomes Action. [Cited on 27 February 2021]. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/es/c/3c3fd543-653a-4124-8747-f33d2ba53869/>).

FAO. 2017d. *Medium Term Plan for 2018-2021 and Programme of Work and Budget 2018-19*. FAO's results and priorities in Latin America and Caribbean/ [Cited on 28 March 2021]. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ms278s/ms278s.pdf>).

- FAO.** 2017e. *Evaluación de la contribución de la FAO a la reducción de la pobreza rural a través del Programa Estratégico 3*. Oficina de Evaluación de la FAO (OED). Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/evaluation/highlights/highlights-detail/es/c/885498/>).
- FAO.** 2017f. *Evaluación de los logros institucionales realizada en 2017*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/about/strategic-planning/corporate-baseline-survey/corporate-outcome-assessment-2017/es/>).
- FAO.** 2017g. *Marco estratégico revisado. C 2017/7 Rev.1*. Oficina de Estrategia, Planificación y Gestión de Recursos. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ms431s/ms431s.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2017h. *Oficinas descentralizadas de la FAO, donde el conocimiento se transforma en acción*. Oficina de Apoyo a las Oficinas Descentralizadas. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/i7474s/i7474s.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2017i. *Plan a plazo medio para 2018–2021 y Programa de trabajo y presupuesto para 2018–2019*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ms278s/ms278s.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2018a. *Anexo 7 para la web: Resultados respecto de las dimensiones regionales*. C 2019 Series, C 2019/8-WA7 [MW815e]. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/programme-committee/pc124/documents/es/>).
- FAO.** 2018b. *Regional Synthesis Report RLC Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations*. Roma. Internal document.
- FAO.** 2019. *Estrategia regional de género de la FAO para América Latina y el Caribe 2019–2023, Autonomía, económica, igualdad de derechos y lucha contra el hambre y la malnutrición*. Santiago de Chile. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca4665es/CA4665ES.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2019a. *Pueblos indígenas y población afrodescendiente* [Indigenous peoples and people of African descent]. Santiago de Chile. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5500es/ca5500es.pdf>.
- FAO.** 2019b. *Medium Term Plan for 2018–21 and Programme of Work and Budget for 2020–2021*. [Cited on 28 March 2021]. (also available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/my734es/my734es.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2019c. *Strengthening Internal Capacity for Large-Scale Project Implementation*. Draft Working Paper.
- FAO.** 2019d. *Evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework*. Rome. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6453en/ca6453en.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2019e. *Evaluación de la labor de la FAO sobre cuestiones de género. Informe resumido*. Lista de documentos del 41° período de sesiones de la Conferencia de la FAO, C 2019/27 [MZ024]. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/conference/c2019/documents/es/>).
- FAO.** 2019f. *Evaluación del Marco de resultados estratégicos de la FAO*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6453en/ca6453en.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2019g. *Evaluación del trabajo de la FAO en género. Informe regional: América Latina y el Caribe*. Oficina Regional de la FAO para América Latina y el Caribe. Santiago de Chile. Draft.
- FAO.** 2019h. *Evaluación del trabajo de la Oficina de la FAO para Mesoamérica, SLM (2012–2017)*. Oficina de Evaluación de la FAO (OED). Roma. Draft.
- FAO.** 2019i. *La comunicación en la FAO*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca4834en/ca4834en.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2019l. *Memoria Reunión de Representantes 22–24 de octubre, 2019*. Santiago de Chile. Internal document.
- FAO.** 2019m. *Plan a plazo medio para 2018–2021 y Programa de trabajo y presupuesto para 2020–2021*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/my734es/my734es.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2019n. *Plan a plazo medio para 2018–21 (revisado) y Programa de trabajo y presupuesto para 2020–21 que presenta el Director General*. Lista de documentos del 41° período de sesiones de la Conferencia de la FAO, Serie C 2019 LIM [MZ709]. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/conference/c2019/documents/es/>).

FAO. 2019o. Regional Synthesis Report RLC Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations. Roma. Internal document.

FAO. 2019p. *Resultados y prioridades de la FAO en la región de América Latina y el Caribe y examen estratégico regional*. Lista de documentos del 35.º período de sesiones de la Conferencia Regional de la FAO para América Latina y el Caribe, LARC/18/5 [MV886]. Montego Bay, Jamaica. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/regional-conferences/larc35/documents/es/>).

FAO. 2019q. *Revisión interna de las estructuras regionales de la FAO*. Oficina de Apoyo a las Oficinas Descentralizadas. Roma. Internal document.

FAO. 2019r. Strengthening Internal Capacity for Large-Scale Projects Implementation. Santiago de Chile. Internal document.

FAO. 2020a. *Transforming food systems to achieve healthy diets for all* FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean.

FAO. 2020b. *Hand-in-Hand towards prosperous and inclusive rural societies*. Mexico, List of documents of the 36th session of the Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/nc699es/nc699es.pdf>).

FAO. 2020c. Building stronger, climate-resilient farming. FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean.

FAO. 2020d. *Overview of programmes related to FAO's strategic objectives*. [Cited on 28 March 2021]. (also available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/nc990es/nc990es.pdf>).

FAO. 2020e. *Results and Priorities for FAO in the Latin American and Caribbean Region*. [Cited on 28 March 2021]. (also available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/nc936es/nc936es.pdf>).

FAO. 2020f. *Emerging Ideas on scope and operationalization, Presentation following consultations with a selection of RLC staff*. Draft Working Document.

FAO. 2020g. *FAO warns of the impact of COVID-19 on school feeding in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 17 March 2020. [Cited on 27 March 2021]. (also available at: <http://www.fao.org/americanas/noticias/ver/es/c/1266856/>).

FAO. 2020h. *COVID-19 update and adjustments to FAO's regional priorities to address impact on food security and nutrition, and food systems*. [Cited on 27 March 2021]. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/nd635en/ND635EN.pdf>),60

FAO. 2020i. *Association of Professionals in FAO*. Initial findings of the global employee survey on teleworking at FAO - past, present, future. 20 November 2020. FAO Internal Document.

FAO. 2020j. *Anexo 2 para la Web: Indicadores y metas relativos a las realizaciones para 2018–19*. Roma. (also available at http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/Progr_Comm/PC_124-documents/MW762s-WA2.pdf).

FAO. 2020k. *Anexo 3 para la Web: Número de puestos por grupos de grados y unidades orgánicas*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/nd238es/nd238es.pdf>).

FAO. 2020l. *Discussion Note on Country Office Transformation Phase II*. Oficina de Apoyo a las Oficinas Descentralizadas. Roma. Draft.

FAO. 2020m. *El enfoque programático en América Latina y el Caribe*. Santiago de Chile. Internal document.

FAO. 2020n. Encuesta de satisfacción de socios con las Oficinas de la FAO en ALC, presentación de resultados finales. Santiago de Chile. Internal document.

FAO. 2020o. Estrategia de movilización de recursos Bienio 2020–2021 de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura (FAO) para América Latina y el Caribe. Santiago de Chile. Internal document.

FAO. 2020p. *Evaluación del Programa de cooperación técnica de la FAO*. Serie de evaluaciones temáticas. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/cb2473en/CB2473EN.pdf>).

FAO. 2020q. *FAO en América Latina y el Caribe 2019*. Santiago de Chile. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9115es/CA9115ES.pdf>).

- FAO.** 2020r. Informe de gestión de la Unidad de Movilización de Recursos RLC. Santiago de Chile. Internal document.63
- FAO.** 2020s. *Informe sobre la ejecución del Programa en 2016–2017 y en 2018–2019*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/pir/pir/es/>).
- FAO.** 2020t. *Informe sobre la ejecución del programa para 2018-2019*. Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/nc390es/nc390es.pdf>).
- FAO.** 2020u. *Resource Mobilization Report RLC*. Santiago de Chile. Internal document.
- FAO.** 2020v. *Service Plan, Rapid Growth Countries Support Team*. Santiago de Chile. Internal document.
- FAO.** 2021a. *Forest governance by indigenous and tribal peoples. An opportunity for climate action in Latin America and the Caribbean*. 2021. <http://www.fao.org/americas/publicaciones-audio-video/forest-gov-by-indigenous/en/>
- FAO.** 2021b. *Oficina Regional de la FAO para América Latina y el Caribe*. [Online]. <http://www.fao.org/americas/prioridades/plan-celac/acerca-de-celac/es/>
- FAO.** n.d.a. *Database with information on resource mobilization for the period 2017–2020*. Working Paper.
- FAO.** n.d.b. *Guide for the management of the TCP in the RLC Biennium 2020-2021*. Working Paper.
- FAO.** n.d.c. *Survey Questionnaire for FAORs. Evaluation of FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP)*. Working Paper.
- FAO.** n.d.d. *Latin America and the Caribbean Regional and Subregional Functions and Structure: A view to the Future*. Working Paper
- FAO.** n.d.e. Base donde se analiza el efecto catalítico en términos de movilización de recursos de la cartera del bienio 2018–2019. Roma. Internal document.
- FAO.** n.d.f. Guía para realizar el ejercicio de autoevaluación de la calidad de los proyectos FAO en la fase de implementación. Internal document.
- FAO.** n.d.g. Guide for the management of the TCP in RLC Biennium 2020-2021. Internal document.
- FAO.** n.d.h. *Guide to the Project Cycle*. Roma. Internal document.
- FAO.** n.d.i. Latin America and the Caribbean Regional and Sub-Regional Functions and Structure: A view to the Future. Strategic Review Paper. Internal document.
- FAO.** n.d.j. Survey Questionnaire for FAORs. Evaluation of FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP). Internal document.
- Ganuzá, E., et al.** 2014. *Evaluación de las Oficinas Regional y Sub-Regional de la FAO para América Latina y el Caribe. Informe final*. Oficina de Evaluación de la FAO (OED). Roma. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/bd640e/bd640e.pdf>).
- RLC.** 2020. *El enfoque programático en América Latina y el Caribe (August 2020)* [The programmatic approach in Latin America and the Caribbean (August 2020)]. FAO Internal document sent by RLC to the FAO Representatives.
- UNSDG.** 2019. *Marco de Cooperación de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo Sostenible. Directrices internas*. Grupo de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo Sostenible. (also available at https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/ES_UN%20Sustainable%20Development%20Cooperation%20Framework%20Guidance.pdf).

Appendix 1. People interviewed

| Last name | First name | Organization | Position |
|-------------|-------------|---|--|
| Agostini | Astrid | FAO headquarters | Coordinadora del Clúster Nacional de Monitoreo Forestal |
| Agostinucci | Guido | FAO headquarters | Coordinador del Consentimiento libre, previo e informado (CLPI) |
| Aizaga | Marcelo | Colectivo “Qué rico es comer” - Ecuador | Comunicador Comunitario |
| Alleyne | Marion | FAO Trinidad and Tobago | Representante Adjunta de Programas de la FAO |
| Alonso | Arlin | Asamblea Nacional (AN): Frente Parlamentario contra el Hambre - Nicaragua | Diputada, Presidenta de la Comisión de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales y del Equipo de Seguimiento a Soberanía y Seguridad Alimentaria |
| Andino | Marcela | Consortio de Gobiernos Provinciales del Ecuador | Subdirectora |
| Arlen | Anna-Lisa | FAO European Union | Experta en Políticas del Programa FIRST |
| Barrionuevo | Ney | RIMISP-Ecuador | Director del RIMISP |
| Baugh | Shaun | CARICOM | Gerente de Programa, Desarrollo Agrícola y Agroindustrial |
| Beduschi | Luis | FAO RLC | Oficial de Políticas en Desarrollo Territorial |
| Aragón | José Benito | Ministerio de Economía Familiar, Comunitaria, Cooperativa y Asociativa – Nicaragua | Viceministro |
| Berdegue | Julio | FAO RLC | Representante Regional de ALC |
| Boodram | Natalie | Instituto Caribeño de Recursos Naturales (CANARI) | Oficial Técnica Superior |
| Brack | Matthew | Instituto Nicaragüense de la Pesca y Acuicultura (INPESCA) - Nicaragua | Director de Planificación Institucional |
| Brito | Claudia | FAO RLC | Oficial de Políticas, Experta en Género y Sistemas Sociales e Institucionales |
| Cáceres | Vanesa | FAO Ecuador | Representante Asistente de Administración |
| Calderón | Ligia | FAO Nicaragua | Especialista en Gestión de Riesgos |
| Carrasco | Eveling | FAO Nicaragua | Especialista en Género, Juventud y Pueblos Indígenas |
| Castellón | Liseth | FAO Nicaragua | Asistente de Programas |
| Castillo | Enrique | FAO RLC | Oficial de Programa de Campo |
| Chavarría | Leonardo | Consejo Interuniversitario de Soberanía y Seguridad Alimentaria / CIUSSAN – Nicaragua | Representante de la Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería (UNI) ante el CIUSSAN y Coordinador Técnico |

| Last name | First name | Organization | Position |
|----------------|-------------|---|---|
| Cheaz | Juan | FAO SLC | Oficial de Comercio y Comercialización de la FAO para el Caribe |
| Chicas | Verónica | FAO SLM | Especialista en Género |
| Christensen | Ida | FAO headquarters | Asesora técnica en temas de Género e inclusión social |
| Clarence | Candice | EMA-Trinidad y Tobago | Asistente Ejecutivo en la Autoridad de Gestión Ambiental |
| Clarke | Renata | FAO SLC | Representante Subregional de la FAO el Caribe |
| Clarke | Barton | Instituto de Investigación y Desarrollo Agrícolas del Caribe (CARDI) | Director Ejecutivo |
| Clavin-Smith | Devern | FAO-SLC | Asistente de Programa |
| Cordero | Otilia | Universidad de Cuenca | Coordinadora Carrera de Nutrición |
| Crowley | Eve | FAO Chile | Representante Regional Adjunta de la FAO para ALC y Representante de la FAO en Chile |
| Darce | Flor | FAO Nicaragua | Representante Adjunta de la FAO – Administración |
| Davis | Benjamin | FAO headquarters | Líder de programa estratégico – interino – del Programa estratégico de la FAO sobre reducción de la pobreza rural |
| Davis | Randi | PNUD Trinidad y Tobago | Representante Residente |
| De la O | Ana Paula | FAO headquarters | Asesora del Programa Estratégico de Reducción de la Pobreza Rural |
| De Lannoy | Anne | FAO RLC | Oficial de Comunicaciones |
| Do-Lum | Juliana | FAO SLM | Oficial Nacional de Administración |
| Duncan | Martina | FAO SLC | Oficial de Recursos Naturales |
| Espina | Ángela | Asamblea Nacional (AN): Frente Parlamentario contra el Hambre - Nicaragua | Vicepresidenta de la Comisión de Educación y Miembro de la Comisión de Producción |
| Esposito | Nazario | UNOPS Nicaragua | Representante UNOPS |
| Estrada | Mariana | FAO headquarters | Gerente de Programa y Mujeres Indígenas - Especialista en conocimiento |
| Fernández | Yon | FAO headquarters | Líder del Equipo de Pueblos Indígenas |
| Flores | Johanna | FAO Ecuador | Oficial de Programas |
| Flores | Rubén | FAO RLC | Oficial de Políticas |
| García-Cebolla | Juan Carlos | FAO headquarters | Director del Equipo del Derecho a la Alimentación |
| Ginsburg | Michael | FAO headquarters | Oficial de Emergencia y Rehabilitación |
| Granados | Sara | FAO RLC | Asesora Regional en Sistemas Alimentarios Inclusivos y Eficientes |
| Gutiérrez | Javier | Ministerio del Ambiente y los Recursos Naturales – Nicaragua | Viceministro |

| Last name | First name | Organization | Position |
|-----------|------------|--|---|
| Harrison | Roberto | SICA | Secretario Ejecutivo del Consejo Agropecuario Centroamericano |
| Hernández | Rolando | FAO SLM | Consultor Comercio Agroalimentario y Digital Zona Mesoamérica |
| Holmes | Ignacia | FAO RLC | Oficial de Políticas, Medio Ambiente y Cambio Climático |
| Intini | Joao | FAO RLC | Oficial de Políticas de Sistemas Alimentarios |
| Ivanovich | Catalina | FAO RLC | Consultora de Género |
| Jean | Francis | FAO | Oficial de Seguridad Alimentaria |
| Kaimowitz | David | FAO | Gerente de instalaciones forestales y agrícolas |
| Kalikoski | Daniela | FAO headquarters | Líder Adjunta de Programa del Programa estratégico de reducción de la pobreza |
| Kaminker | Anabella | FAO RLC | Oficial de Estrategia y Planificación |
| Kellman | Anthony | FAO | Oficial de Seguimiento y Apoyo del Programa de Campo |
| Kuperman | Myriam | FAO RLC | Consultora de Movilización de Recursos |
| Laurent | Thomas | FAO headquarters | Director General Adjunto de la FAO |
| Lazo | Olga | FAO Nicaragua | Responsable de Planificación y Monitoreo |
| Leal | Fernando | Instituto de Protección y Sanidad Agropecuaria (IPSA) -Nicaragua | Director de Planificación Institucional |
| León | Víctor | FAO headquarters | Oficial de Estrategia y Planificación |
| León | Iván | FAO | Representante de la FAO en Nicaragua |
| Llauger | Raixa | FAO SLM | Oficial de Agricultura |
| López | Dina | FAO SLM | Oficial de Cooperación Sur-Sur |
| López | Vyjayanthi | FAO SLC | Oficial de Protección y Producción Vegetal |
| Marcia | Ana | Ministerio Agropecuario-Nicaragua | Secretaria General |
| Marcillo | Karina | FAO Ecuador | Consultora de Apoyo a Programas |
| Martínez | Martha | FAO RLC | Oficial de programa (Red de las Representaciones de la FAO) |
| Meza | Jorge | FAO Paraguay | Representante de la FAO en Paraguay |
| Miranda | Daniela | FAO headquarters | Consultora-Unidad de Gestión |
| Mireles | Mauricio | FAO RLC | Oficial de Políticas para Pueblos Indígenas e Inclusión Social |
| Moers | Peter | FAO RLC | Oficial de Programa del Programa de Cooperación Técnica |

| Last name | First name | Organization | Position |
|-----------|----------------|---|--|
| Morales | Manuel | Organización de Productores: Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG)- Nicaragua | Presidente de la UNAG |
| Mordt | Matilde | PNUD Ecuador | Representante Residente Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo |
| Morrison | Judith | Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo | Asesora Principal de la División de Género y Diversidad |
| Morrison | Jamie | FAO headquarters | Director y Líder del Programa Estratégico |
| Namdar | Mina | FAO RLC | Coordinadora de la Unidad de Gestión |
| Ndiaye | Tacko | FAO headquarters | Oficial de Género en la División de Equidad de Género y Desarrollo Rural |
| Nieto | Salvador | SICA | Secretario Ejecutivo de la Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo |
| Obando | Miguel | Instituto Nicaragüense de Tecnología Agropecuaria (INTA) | Codirector Ejecutivo y Director Cooperación Externa |
| Ortiz | Hivy | FAO RLC | Oficial del programa de campo |
| Page | Estelle | FAO SLC | Oficial de Programa |
| Parajón | Argentina | Asamblea Nacional (AN): Frente Parlamentario contra el Hambre - Nicaragua | Coordinadora del Frente Parlamentario contra el Hambre |
| Parreño | Lenín | Banco de Desarrollo de América Latina (CAF) | Economista de país en Cofinanciamiento de Pequeños Productores |
| Pérez | Andrés | PRONACA Ecuador | Gerente Relaciones Institucionales |
| Persaud | David | Ministerio de Planificación y Desarrollo - Trinidad y Tobago | Director de Desarrollo de Políticas y Planificación Ambiental |
| Piña | Leticia | FAO headquarters | Oficial Forestal |
| Prescott | Neila | FAO Trinidad y Tobago | Representante Asistente de Administración |
| Rabzuck | Pablo | FAO SLM | Oficial de Sistemas Agroalimentarios |
| Rapallo | Ricardo | FAO Guatemala | Representante de la FAO en Guatemala |
| Re | Humberto | Ministerio de Ambiente- Ecuador | Subsecretario Cambio Climático |
| Redondo | Melvin | SIECA | Secretario General |
| Rickoy | Anna | FAO RLC | Oficial de Resiliencia y Gestión de Riesgos |
| Ríos | Israel | FAO SLM | Oficial de Nutrición |
| Robertson | Reuben | FAO Trinidad y Tobago | Representante de la FAO en Trinidad y Tobago |
| Rosero | Pamela | FAO Ecuador | Relaciones Institucionales y Comunicación |
| Rosero | María Gabriela | FAO SLM | Consultora en Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional |

| Last name | First name | Organization | Position |
|--------------|------------|---|---|
| Rugama | Yuri | Pesca Artesanal Gobierno Regional Autónomo- Nicaragua | Responsable de la agrupación de Pueblos Indígenas |
| Ruíz | Juan | Fondo Internacional de Desarrollo Agrícola (FIDA) – Nicaragua | Director de País y Coordinador Sub Regional |
| Safa | Alejandra | FAO headquarters | Consultora en Política de Género |
| Salas | Ina | FAO RLC | Oficial de Evaluación |
| Sanches | Adoniram | FAO SLM | Representante Subregional de la FAO Mesoamérica |
| Scott | Kinnon | Banco Mundial (BM) – Nicaragua | Representante del BM en Nicaragua |
| Sepúlveda | Norvin | Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza (CATIE) – Nicaragua | Representante del CATIE en Nicaragua |
| Sharewood | Stephen | Colectivo “Qué rico es comer” | Investigador |
| Takagi | Maya | FAO Nicaragua | Líder Regional de Programa |
| Tapia | Lissy | FAO SLM | Oficial de Apoyo Programa y Monitoreo de Campo |
| Tarazona | Carlos | FAO OED headquarters | Oficial Superior de Evaluación |
| Téllez | Rosemary | FAO Nicaragua | Asistente de Programa |
| Troestsch | Sara | FAO SLM | Oficial de Programación y Gestión |
| Troya | María | Tribuna Ecuatoriana de Consumidores y Usuarios | Directora Ejecutiva |
| Valdés | Cecilia | FAO RLC | Especialista Regional en Comunicaciones |
| Vallejo | Virginia | FAO Ecuador | Facilitadora Nacional del Mecanismo para Bosques y Fincas (FFF) |
| Valls-Bedeau | José | FAO headquarters | Oficial de Programa del Programa Estratégico de Sistemas Alimentarios |
| Villacres | Gabriela | Ministerio de Educación- Ecuador | Gerente del Proyecto Alimentación Escolar |
| Vinet | Rodrigue | FAO headquarters | Asesora Superior de Desarrollo y Asuntos Humanitarios |
| Von | Pieter | FAO RLC | Oficial Forestal |
| Zagarese | Lorenza | FAO headquarters | Oficial de Programa |
| Zarate | Erika | FAO SLM | Especialista Agricultura Familiar y Sistemas Alimentarios Sostenibles Mesoamérica |
| Zelaya | María | Agencia Suiza para el Desarrollo y la Cooperación (COSUDE) | Oficial de Programa |
| Zelaya | María | Agencia Suiza para Desarrollo y la Cooperación (COSUDE) – Nicaragua | Oficial de Programa de la COSUDE |
| Zimmermann | Agustín | FAO Ecuador | Representante de la FAO en Ecuador |

Appendix 2. Purposeful sampling strategy for collecting field-level information

- 1 The objective of the evaluation is to identify how the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (RLC) intervenes in the countries of the region. Therefore, the aim of the sampling strategy was to identify a sample of countries that represent different country office implementation models. The implementation models consider two elements: one is the countries' social and demographic conditions, which may indicate their needs, problems or demands, and the second is the organizational conditions in which the implementation of FAO's work in the region takes place, that is country offices capacity to address the country's needs and the level of technical support from RLC for Regional Initiatives implementation.
- 2 The evaluation built a matrix comprising over 50 variables to analyse the characteristics of each country. The criteria for selecting the variables included variables with recent information (2017 to 2020, the evaluation period) and availability of data for all or a majority of the countries in the region. Also, information generated or used by FAO as a reference to support the work of the country offices was also taken into account.
- 3 For each category, the evaluation team created "indexes" by integrating specific indicators. Also, it defined ranges based on the data distribution of each variable. Based on the indexes built, the evaluation identified three different models. These models are attractive due to the potential generation of lessons learned about the performance of RLC. Model 1 considers countries with the least country offices capacity and the lower RLC technical support mobilization. Model 2 represents the average characteristics in both categories. Model 3 is the opposite of the first model. It considers the countries with greater country offices capacity and technical support mobilization. Under these models, three countries were selected for field-level study: Trinidad and Tobago (low degree of implementation), Nicaragua (medium degree of implementation), and Ecuador (high degree of implementation). On the one hand, this selection guarantees diversity on subregional composition and income levels. On the other hand, the possibility of focusing on two countries with a high concentration of rural population, inequality, poverty and undernourishment prevalence, where RLC has a high potential to influence, is another plus.

Matrix for sample selection

| Category | What do we want to measure? | Variables |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Social and demographic characteristics | <p><i>What are the country's needs, problems or demands?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics of the countries in the region • Diagnostic variables related to the Regional Initiatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Country income » Rural poverty percentage » Poverty incidence rate, based on the rural poverty line » Proportion of population living below the national poverty line » Poverty gap » Gini index » Undernourishment prevalence » Proportion of degraded land over the total area » Climate risk index |
| 2. FAO programme and project portfolio | <p><i>What is the country's capacity to solve the problems?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variables included country offices resources allocation, as well as the mobilization of resources at the country level. <p><i>How does RLC manage technical support in the countries?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variables included the type and level of assistance and technical support to the countries of the region. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Regular programme allocation » GCP, FFU and other projects » TCP projects » RLC missions (capacity building and technical support) » Regional projects in the countries » Subregional classification |

Annexes

Annex 1. Terms of reference

<http://www.fao.org/3/cb6481en/cb6481en.pdf>

Annex 2. Online survey results

<http://www.fao.org/3/cb6482en/cb6482en.pdf>

Annex 3. Evolution of the Regional Initiatives

<http://www.fao.org/3/cb6483en/cb6483en.pdf>

Annex 4. Prioritized matrix of findings and recommendations

<http://www.fao.org/3/cb6484en/cb6484en.pdf>

Office of Evaluation
E-mail: evaluation@fao.org
Web address: www.fao.org/evaluation

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy