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Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Subregional Offices for Asia and the Pacific

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive summary

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Office of Evaluation (OED)

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Executive Summary

Background

ES1. In October 2011, in consideration of the interest raised by the Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices for the Near East presented earlier that year, the FAO Programme Committee asked the Office of Evaluation to carry out similar evaluations in all FAO regions over the following two years. Priority regions for 2012 were Europe and Central Asia and Africa. The evaluations in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Asia and the Pacific were planned to start in 2013. All these exercises were requested to follow a similar methodology, in particular in terms of consultation with FAO membership in the respective regions.

ES2. These evaluations were carried out in the backdrop of a dynamic governance environment and at a time of transformational changes in FAO led by the Director General (DG) and launched in early 2012, which also includes the deepening of a corporate approach to decentralization. It was nevertheless considered that the evaluation of FAO's offices in Asia and the Pacific would provide additional and more in-depth evidence of challenges facing decentralization in the Region since 2004. Within the wider premise that evaluation feedback provides the essential ingredients of a knowledge-based learning organization like FAO, this evaluation aims to generate important lessons which would contribute to further enhancement of FAO's work on decentralization.

The Evaluation process

ES3. OED started the scoping phase for the Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices for Asia and the Pacific in February 2013. The Evaluation team was led by an external senior consultant, comprised three other senior consultants and three OED evaluators.

ES4. The Evaluation adopted a participatory approach and consulted extensively with FAO stakeholders, both external and internal. The views of FAO employees on their own work, institutional arrangements, achievements and challenges were canvassed extensively throughout the whole evaluation process; the draft Terms of Reference and draft report were circulated and comments and suggestions were taken into account as considered appropriate. Equally, the views of FAO Members, clients and users of FAO products and services, and partners of the Organization were sought extensively through interviews, country visits, questionnaire surveys, phone interviews and meetings.

ES5. Similarly to the other evaluations of regional and sub-regional offices, also the Evaluation in Asia and the Pacific took the Independent Evaluation of FAO Decentralization completed in 2004 as 'time zero' for scope and analysis. All FAO policies aimed at strengthening the corporate decentralization process were initially mapped. Given the breadth of changes that occurred in this domain, in particular since 2010, a few key areas were selected for more in-depth analysis, namely: governance, resources available to the Region; priority setting; resource mobilization; delivery as One FAO; and support services. Further,

the Evaluation included the in-depth assessment of one main technical sector, Animal Production and Health (APH). This provided insights about relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of FAO's work in the Region that were brought to bear in the overall analysis.

ES6. The Evaluation visited a sample of countries, to directly canvass the opinion and perceptions of national stakeholders on FAO's structure and performance. In-country meetings with national and international institutions were held, as appropriate; direct interaction with end-users of FAO projects was also part of the work at country level, at both the institutional and community levels. Visits were carried out to: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, and Papua New Guinea.¹ RAP in Bangkok was visited twice, first during the preparatory phase and the second time, with the full Evaluation team. SAP in Apia was visited once.

ES7. Consultation with FAO Membership took place beyond the country visits. A meeting with the Chairs of the Regional Groups was held in May 2013 and Members had the opportunity to be briefed and express their views on the Evaluation. Members' views on FAO's performance in the Region were sought throughout the Evaluation process, through interviews during the country visits and a survey questionnaire. The report will be presented with the Management Response, at the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC) in March 2014.

ES8. The Evaluation used a range of quantitative and qualitative tools to generate empirical evidence from both primary and secondary sources to address the evaluation issues and questions. A carefully prepared comprehensive design matrix with focussed issue based questions guided the process of information and data collection and facilitated maintaining the consistency and alignment with the main evaluation questions. These included:

- the analysis of corporate policies, strategies, Circulars, DG bulletins, decisions made by FAO Governing Bodies, reviews and any other relevant document aimed at strengthening FAO's network, processes and procedures for enhancing delivery and impact at country level;
- the adequacy of FAO staff resources and skill mix for the Region were examined;
- group and individual semi-structured interviews, harmonized through check lists;
- a questionnaire survey to the member countries of the Region, to reach out to and canvass the opinion of a larger number of FAO Members than possible through country visits;
- a questionnaire survey to FAO Staff working in the Region, to expand on a number of issues related to use of time and FAO's decentralization policy;
- desk-studies and analysis of: project portfolios; project cycle management of a sample of representative initiatives; administrative and operations transactions and records; and
- a benchmarking of FAO's geographical coverage with other specialized UN agencies in the Region.

ES9. The Evaluation faced some constraints and limitations as well, in particular the absence of corporate standards, time-use records and baselines made it difficult to measure

¹ The Evaluation planned to visit Tuvalu. However, logistical constraints prevented this from happening.

corporate performance. Also, the survey questionnaire to Member Countries was sent directly, or through the FAORs, to a minimum of three key governmental partners in all Member Countries in the region. The low response rate was barely adequate to draw conclusions from it, and this did not provide as robust a feedback as anticipated. Lack of institutional memory and prevalence of new staff in many offices created a void in completeness of assessment at the country level.

Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

ES10. The Evaluation had to respond to two over-arching questions:

- i. the progress made by the Organization in implementing corporate decisions to decentralize its functions and roles to the Region; and
- ii. the results of FAO's decentralization policies and procedures on corporate delivery to its Members in the Region.

ES11. The simple answer to the first question above was, in the view of the Evaluation: 'FAO has made progress in transferring responsibilities from HQ to RAP, but disproportionately less so beyond this to the country level'. There are no doubts that country offices have seen their independence increase quite substantially over time, through greater delegation of authority in procurement, recruitment, priority-setting, etc., and several of these consolidated through GRMS in 2013. Also, the capacity and visibility of FAO at country level in a number of countries has been strengthened through the merging of the Emergency and Rehabilitation teams into the FAO Representations. Nevertheless, quoting one informant, "*There is a perception that the push to decentralize and delegate from Rome has resulted in convergence and recentralization in Bangkok.*" And indeed, as evidence in the report shows, for a number of processes and procedures, RAP appears to be playing more a role of 'Central Control', and much less of enabling and connecting element between the country level and HQ.

ES12. The Evaluation considers that it would be important to alleviate this perception with expression of clear intent and commitment of the organization to extend the delegation of appropriate business processes to the CO level. It is essential that the policy documents from Headquarters on decentralization and delegation clearly state the centrality of the role of the country offices in enhancing FAO's effectiveness as an organization and in supporting the country level outcomes. The corporate commitment to delegate appropriate and deserving responsibilities to the CO level beyond the RO should be made clear to all based on inclusive discussion, assessment, and choice of delegation issues, phased delegation plan and accountability. The RO should be more proactive in their intent and action to reflect this in their work plan and reporting to HQ.

ES13. At the same time, an open question remains on the extent to which, and most importantly what and where, FAO should actually decentralize to the country level. In Asia and the Pacific, like elsewhere in the world, the development status and needs of many Members are rapidly changing: this requires a rethinking and reform of the current pattern and modality of providing support and making an impact at national level. The Organization should reflect on this and propose alternative models of presence and cooperation to its diversified membership.

ES14. The other potential challenge would be to sustain the competitive edge and added value of FAO as a global specialized agency by ensuring that resources of the Organization are judiciously shared between competing demands of the normative and technical functions and the programmatic demands of the decentralized level. Hence, decentralization measures would require a continued careful rebalancing and calibration with any structural and modality shifts that may be introduced in the process of organizational change.

ES15. The answer to the second question is more complex. There is no doubt that RAP has strengthened its own profile and presence in the Region. In all countries, RAP is very visible and undoubtedly the main reference point immediately above the country offices. RAP technical officers are the *de-jure* Lead Technical Officers for all national and regional projects. The relative majority of the normative products for the Asia-Pacific region are issued by RAP, SAP and country offices, taken together, in the Region. The approval process of TCPs has improved in terms of efficiency and the allocation of the TCP resources appears to be fairer and more equitable than before. Tools and processes like the CPF, the Project Cycle Guide and the Resource Mobilization strategy and guidelines have been well received and recognized for their facilitative role in programme management and delivery, even at this early stage.

ES16. The measures introduced look promising and indicate move in the right direction in many spheres. Nevertheless, it will inevitably take time before they demonstrate broad based and tangible results in terms of size and coherence of the project portfolio at country level, quality of project documents, efficiency in implementation and in generating outcomes and impacts. The Evaluation considers that evidence of improved quality of the delivery, in terms of relevance; effectiveness and impact, is yet to be significantly visible.

ES17. The Evaluation found further confirmation of the important role that FAO plays in Asia and the Pacific. Member Countries in the Region, to a different extent and in different modalities, recognized FAO's distinctive competence and technical knowledge as a global organization and valued FAO as advisor and partner for all that broadly relates to agriculture, food security and safety and sustainable use and management of natural resources. This also confirms that FAO needs to maintain its global normative and knowledge edge while responding to emerging realities in Member Countries. Providing products and services of high quality to such a diverse clientele, is indeed a major challenge for the Organization. This can only be met if FAO thinks and acts "as one" to anticipate, listen, analyse and respond to the needs of member countries, to the best of its corporate capacity. It also requires a seamless mutually reinforcing and supportive integration between its normative and technical functions and country level policy advocacy and programmatic work.

Institutional set-up

ES18. As of 2013 FAO has significant presence in Asia: 13 countries had a dedicated fully-fledged FAO Representation, and one Regional Office. Some imbalances in presence still exist, due both to historical reasons and country size, with the result that some low income and lower-income countries might require, and possibly deserve a stronger FAO's presence than is currently the case, also due to the importance of agriculture in their economic development model. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made in this respect since the

June 2012 approval of two Deputy FAOREps and a Programme and Partnership Development Officer in PNG. In this respect, as this Officer will be acting as the head of FAO's programme in the country and his/her reporting line will be to the ADG/RR, the Evaluation **suggests** transferring responsibility for the technical and operational backstopping of the PNG field programme from SAP to RAP as well, to ensure coherence of approach and transparency in terms of responsibility and supervision.

ES19. In the Pacific, FAO's presence was found to be very thin. The distance factor in the Pacific plays a big role in terms of time and cost of travel. Hence creative solutions to extend the coverage are being implemented. Good work was noted by National Correspondents but this did still not appear to be enough, considering the very circumscribed mandate of NCs. Also in this Region, significant progress was being made in late 2013 with the planned posting of four AFAOREps in the Region. However, the location of the FAO Sub-regional Office in Apia, Samoa, creates a relative disconnect with most other UN agencies in the Region and the key regional organizations like the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), all located in Fiji. If a move to Fiji for ease of operation in the Region should not be feasible for FAO, SAP **should consider** locating one international staff in Fiji with a policy, coordination and resource mobilization role. Similarly, FAO might consider contributing to the UN jointly funded Liaison Officers in some of the countries, to attend to day to day liaison work with governments.

ES20. The Evaluation **strongly suggests** that with the newly enhanced country coverage mechanisms and the clear need for more effective servicing of the Members in the Sub-region, SAP should be institutionally allowed a higher level of autonomy and delegation of full authority in programming, operations and administration, as well as in its access to directly draw from wider FAO knowledge and resource base including HQ-based units.

ES21. On reporting lines, since 2010, all FAOREps in the Region report to the ADG/RR in RAP, who then reports to the Deputy Director-General for Operations. This has undoubtedly clarified the line of communication and responsibility, which should help in efficiency gains and in identifying real bottlenecks. RAP is also clearly the first port of call for technical and administrative support from country offices in Asia, while SAP should play this role only for the Pacific countries. Better communication should be ensured however from HQ and RAP to the country offices, in particular those linked to multi-accredited FAO Representations.

ES22. FAO Representations in the Region have earned significant acceptance and recognition by the governments for their active engagement and responsive support. The country offices are viewed as the backbone of FAO presence in the countries and the gateway to securing FAO assistance and support. The Evaluation noted that two fundamental elements drive the credibility of FAO country presence. First, the competence and ability of the FAO Representative who is the main face and voice of the Organization in the country. The Evaluation noted how issues of integration, visibility and communication with national stakeholders, largely dependent on the professional, managerial and inter-personal skills of the Representative. Second is the ability to respond to requests, which depends on both access to and predictability of high level technical support from RAP and HQ by the country office and the maintenance of a critical mass of FAO capacity at country level. Efficiency and effectiveness of response will also depend on the enabling environment and support provided by HQ and RAP.

ES23. In terms of governance, the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference embraced its new role on priority-setting as of 2010. Member Countries confirmed, albeit mildly, that they appreciated the new role of the Conference and that this was an important forum for discussion. An unresolved issue was the low participation and voice of the South-west Pacific Group, which is a separate group of Member Countries in the ‘informal’ governance mechanism of the Organization. The Evaluation **suggests** to both RAP and OSD to systematically ensure that enough space is given in the agenda of the APRC to issues of concern of the Pacific Small Island States.

ES24. Another pending issue in the context of FAO Regional Conferences in general, is the formal link between the Regional Technical Commissions and the RC itself. The five Regional Technical Commissions in the Asia-Pacific region represent significant collective technical experience and are quite active and well respected. The APRC made significant progress on recognizing their role, in 2010 and 2012, by agreeing that *‘the recommendations emerging from the regional technical commissions could be considered to be the regional priorities for the sub-sectors they cover’*. As it appeared that this decision had not yet been adequately received by FAO Secretariat, the Evaluation formulated Recommendation 5.

Priority setting and planning

ES25. Responsibility for taking the lead on priority-setting and planning at the regional, sub-regional and country levels was delegated to the Regional Representative, Sub-regional Coordinator and FAOREps respectively in 2010. This represented a major shift in the decision making process in FAO, with major bearing on the way and on what the Organization eventually delivers at country level.

ES26. At country level, as of late 2013, 18 Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs), in addition to the Pacific Multi-country Programming Framework, had been formulated and were either endorsed or in the final stages of preparation. In general terms, both governments and resource partners were consistent in their appreciation of this instrument and FAOREps indicated the value of using CPFs as a basic reference document with partners to describe the work of the Organization in the country for a given period.

ES27. The CPFs largely met the objective of setting priorities for the Organization at country level fully responding to the development priorities of the member countries, as well as providing inputs into the UN Development Assistance Framework when timing was favourable. However, the preparation of CPFs in most cases appeared to have missed the opportunity of leveraging the Organization’s technical experience early on in the CPF cycle. RAP and HQ require having institutional responsibility to support the CPF process substantively with technical support and advice particularly during the initial situation analysis and priority identification stages. Also, there was very limited integration of gender equality perspective in the CPFs. Thus, the Evaluation considers of great importance adding early on in the CPF formulation process, an in-depth consultation between FAOREp and RAP on the main areas and thrust of work wherein FAO can have a comparative advantage in any given country. This would also ensure the compliance of the CPFs with corporate policies on Gender and Capacity Development, both listed among the recurrent weaknesses. Recommendation 1 tackles this aspect.

ES28. A number of different arrangements for organizing CPF formulation had been developed. Positive experiences were noted in some countries through the identification of an inter-ministerial entity that took the lead for negotiating the CPF on behalf of the national government: this allowed for a more even identification of national priorities among the different areas of work of FAO. The Evaluation **suggests** that wherever possible in consideration of the national institutional context, this approach should be followed to ensure balanced participation of all of the ministries and departments concerned in the FAO priority setting process at country level.

ES29. At regional level, RAP formulated two Regional Priority Frameworks over the Evaluation period, the first Regional Office to embark in this activity. Its formulators are to be congratulated for being proactive in this regard. The second Framework, for the period 2010-19, was discussed and endorsed by the APRC in 2010 and re-confirmed in 2012. The lack of a results framework limited its potential as a tool for guiding corporate work in the Region and its exclusive focus on RAP's activities, did not provide a cohesive statement of the work of the Organization as a whole in the Region.

ES30. During 2013, FAO has gone to great lengths to roll out its new Strategic Framework: in this context, it would be more effective if future regional priority frameworks and related progress reports, were cast within the overall Strategic Objectives and outcomes of the SF and have a direct relationship to the expressed needs of the Member Countries in the Region and the national CPFs. The Evaluation also **suggests** that reports on the implementation of the regional component of the strategic framework should be comprehensive and discuss the whole gamut of products and services response of the Organization to the Region, including those by HQ, RAP, SAP and country offices.

ES31. The reviewed FAO SF should offer the opportunity to strengthen the connection and alignment between HQ and DOs in its programmatic work, as well as to create greater synergies across different modalities of work. However, by the end of 2013 there had been little participation and contribution by the sub-regional and country level offices to the formulation process, despite their lead responsibility for priority setting at the country level. Such engagement is critical to achieve consistency between national priorities and the SF of the Organization. Recommendation 1 below addresses the two key issues raised on priority setting.

Recommendation 1: To FAO, on inclusiveness of the process for the identification of the SF results hierarchy and the CPFs

In recognition of the respective lead roles and competences at the different levels of priority setting, the Evaluation recommends that:

- a) specific mechanisms be established for an active and structured participation of the heads of all FAO Decentralized Offices, including Regional and Sub-regional offices and Country offices, in the identification and development of Strategic Framework results-based hierarchy; and
- b) CPF formulation process include a very early step of in-depth consultation between FAOREps, Regional Offices Multi-Disciplinary Teams, representatives of the SOs teams and HQ technical divisions, on the main areas and thrust of work wherein FAO can have a comparative advantage in any given country.

Resources

ES32. The Evaluation assessed the allocation of FAO Regular Programme budget to the decentralized network in Asia and the Pacific, for the period 2004-2015, with data originating from the Programmes of Work and Budget for the six biennia concerned. Over time, the relative share of RP resources to the Region has remained around 20%, although in nominal terms, the budget did increase. However, the Net Appropriation for the Asia-Pacific Region Decentralized Office Network grew less over time than for the entire network of DOs.

ES33. The total extra-budgetary resources for the Asia-Pacific region increased three times over the Evaluation period, most of this due to a steep rise of resources allocated to national projects in Asia. Emergency and rehabilitation initiatives, which overall represented 43% of the total portfolio, also partly contributed to the increase.

ES34. The responsibility for the management of the portfolio shifted over time: whereas Lead Technical Units have consistently been HQ-based units, the LTO function progressively moved to RAP and in 2013, 75% of LTOs were located in RAP. Additional delegation of authority from HQ to the country offices on operational responsibility followed a similar trend; the most recent step in this process took place in 2013, with the transfer of Budget Holder responsibility to FAOREps for emergency and rehabilitation projects.

ES35. Another key source of funds for DOs, and FAO units in general, is the recovery of the Administrative and Operational Support (AOS) costs, part of the Project Support Costs (PSC). The target for each country in the Asia-Pacific region in 2013 varied enormously, from USD 5,000 in Bhutan to USD 1.2 million in Afghanistan. The key issues related to AOS distribution are: i) its linkage to the actual delivery of the respective project: the Evaluation considers that a revision of this principle is warranted but it is also aware that no short-term solution can be expected; ii) the lack of clarity in the calculation of AOS; iii) the timing of its distribution; and iv) reimbursement of costs incurred by decentralized offices for the delivery of global and regional projects. In consideration of its importance, the Evaluation analysed the whole mechanism in great detail in the report and formulated Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 2: To FAO, on the current AOS mechanism

The Evaluation recommends that the rules and procedures regulating the calculation and distribution of AOS be revised as follows:

- a) information available on AOS should be harmonized across the different corporate systems;
- b) the PSC/AOS policy should be better communicated to the COs and a help-desk should be established in HQ to provide assistance on the matter;
- c) AOS need to be posted/made available to users according to a publicly available time-schedule;
- d) a mechanism should be established ensuring that financial and in-kind contributions by decentralized offices to the management and implementation of regional and global projects are equitably reimbursed.

ES36. The Evaluation also assessed in detail the progress made in the Region in the implementation of the Resource Mobilization and Management Strategy (RMMS). Despite the formulation of a Regional RMMS and the inclusion in virtually all Country Programming

Frameworks of a financial ‘tag’, there was little evidence of other achievements. Issues included limited support available to country offices, the need for a change in culture, administrative obstacles to enter project agreements with International Financial Institutions (IFIs), among others.

ES37. In the view of the Evaluation, RAP and SAP are the best placed to support and service the other DOs in their respective areas of command, in developing both their RM and Communication strategies. The RM and the Communication experts in RAP should have the experience and qualifications to support all other DOs. This would enable economies of scale, sharing lessons and experiences, networking across countries with the same resource partners and identifying themes of common interest for pooling resources from interested partners. Thus, the Evaluation formulated Recommendation 3 on this topic.

Recommendation 3: To RAP and SAP, on Resource Mobilization and communication

The Evaluation recommends that RAP and SAP become responsible for the following functions:

- a) supporting and servicing DOs in the Region to develop and implement their Resource Mobilization strategies;
- b) developing a resource mobilization community of practice within their areas of influence;
- c) supporting DOs in developing communications plan, providing quality assurance during implementation, including for the production of communications materials for resource mobilization, as well as more general awareness purposes.

ES38. At the same time, the first level of engagement with potential resource partners should rest squarely with the FAO Representative. This requires the Representations to be agile in partnership building, positioning and creating a demand for FAO through policy level contributions and engagements, both project and non-project, in the country. As mentioned earlier, FAO needs to align the recruitment and assignment of FAOREps with clearly defined competency and skill profiles, as required in these posts in light of these new responsibilities.

ES39. Although a number of countries in the Region are classified as middle-level income, the Unilateral Trust Fund project modality has not been frequently used. Greater potential seems to exist for the South-South Cooperation modality. In this respect, the role for COs will also need to grow, to ensure that S-SC programmes meet the needs of requesting countries, and that expertise provided is adequate. While coordination will continue to be a HQ function, DOs may need to be strengthened to play an increasing role as S-SC expands. A decision will need to be made on how to recover such costs, either as an organizational contribution, or as a part of the extrabudgetary contributions of the countries providing S-SC expertise.

Delivery at regional and country level

ES40. The Evaluation assessed the Animal Production and Health in depth, as a case study of how decentralization had impacted in practice on one technical area of work of the Organization. RAP had in 2013 three APH experts, responsible for carrying out activities funded through both the Regular Programme, including the Secretariat of APHCA, and extrabudgetary resources. In Bangkok and other countries, there are also Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD) teams, initially set up to control the Highly

Pathogenic Avian Influenza which have progressively expanded, in collaboration with key partners, to consider other diseases and other livestock development issues.

ES41. The ECTAD teams in the Region were assessed as being very strong and competent, and providing a model of FAO's effective performance in the Region. Their success is due to good leadership, good communication and facilitation skills, sustained and high levels of funding, all supported by sound technical capacity and broad experience of many of the staff throughout Asia. ECTAD drew considerable advantage from its creation under FAO's centrally managed emergency response mechanism in the Emergency and Rehabilitation Division (TCE), before being very much decentralised to the Region. In fact, it can be argued that the major technical strengths of the Organization in the field of transboundary animal diseases are now located in Asia. This was an achievement quite unique given the nature of the initial emergency. Nevertheless, the Evaluation considers that some useful lessons can be learnt by the Organization and its membership also for its 'normal' model of decentralization:

- important synergies can be achieved whenever sustained funding is available from some committed donors;
- sound highly qualified technical teams comprising both international and national staff can be established when the Organization can draw from top-notch expertise;
- clarity on lines of reporting, roles and responsibilities, sustained through close, intensive communication are important to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of action;
- HQ and decentralized teams must fully share and be committed to common objectives, strategies and approaches, and must trust and respect each other, to achieve established goals.

ES42. RAP Senior Management applied a strict interpretation of the rule establishing the responsibility of Lead Technical Officer for all national and regional projects in the Region. Admittedly, RAP MDT is the largest FAO regional office, and maintaining technical capacity in only one location, both from Regular Programme and extra-budgetary resources, has been positive for the Region in terms of critical mass of expertise. Even so, however, these resources have not been enough to provide adequate technical support to all FAO activities in the Region and the approach did not appear to bear positive results across the board. Issues of competence in some specific areas of work, as well as diverse and excessive work-loads, undermined the quality and timeliness of the technical and policy assistance and support provided at country level.

ES43. The core challenge for FAO is to efficiently deliver products and services to its Members which are timely and quality assured. This requires systematic technical backstopping of projects at country and regional level and technical clearance of documents and projects is the last step in a chain of actions through which the Organization ensures the delivery of quality products and services to its Members. With limited number of technical staff and their overstretched workload, RAP's ability to carry out this function in a systematic and timely way is heavily constrained leading to less than satisfactory and staggered delivery in many instances. This should be addressed as a priority concern. Within RAP's overall oversight, some alternative solutions were indicated in Section 9.1.1, and range from greater flexibility in identifying technical expertise in the Organization, including at country level to

backstop other initiatives, to developing MoUs with regional centres of excellence to improved recovery of TSS.

ES44. None of the options proposed will represent on its own a major break-through to the core issue, which is the scarcity of technical expertise in the Organization to meet the requests of the Member Countries in terms of field programme design and implementation. Nevertheless, having the flexibility of access to a set of measures and applying them in different combinations may contribute to mitigate the scarcity. The Evaluation considers that RAP's rigid interpretation of the corporate rule of having LTOs as close as possible to the countries, should be applied with some flexibility keeping in view the overarching objective of expediency and efficiency. The Organization should also revise its procedures to maintain the quality control on consultants while decreasing the bureaucracy attached to each recruitment process. Furthermore, the Organization should further reflect on the almost excessive demand on LTOs, as foreseen in the most recent version of the Project Cycle Guide, in terms of management and operational tasks. Although longer testing of the approach and more analysis will be required, there is a strong risk of over-loading specialized technical officers with tasks that would be more effectively carried out by development generalists with stronger managerial skills, who could even be posted at national level when the size of the field programme would so justify.

ES45. A related issue is the recurrent weakness in the design of FAO projects and programmes. Section 9.1.1 suggests a number of possible options to tackle this major recurrent weakness, namely staff capacity development, more user-friendly systems and help-desk function. Each of these has limitations and requires resources; others could be identified by FAO itself and implemented as most appropriate. Recommendation 4 was formulated to address these issues.

Recommendation 4: To FAO and RAP, on technical expertise

The Evaluation recommends that FAO and RAP:

- a) develop a more comprehensive and flexible system to draw upon technical expertise within the Organization and the Region to complement existing RAP capacity, in order to more effectively meet the demand for technical services of its Members;
- b) monitor attentively the performance of LTOs under the new Project Cycle Guide, through time-recording systems, and allow open feedback and discussion among key players on systemic bottlenecks and possible ways forward;
- c) ensure that FAO projects and programmes meet quality standards of design and formulation.

ES46. A recurrent issue was that HQ and RAP frequently by-pass country offices on a number of occasions: when identifying regional or global projects that would engage the countries; inviting national governments staff to capacity development activities or technical/expert consultations; and discussing with national institutions initiatives in the context of the regional technical commissions. This is detrimental not only to the image of the Organization, but also to the quality of project formulation and implementation and to the sustainability of outputs. The up-coming country work-plans should be a major tool to limit this from happening, and the Evaluation **strongly underlines the need** for this to happen.

ES47. A related issue are the themes and issues to be tackled at the regional level: the findings of the Evaluation indicate that the work of the regional technical commissions, and their priorities and recommendations, should become a key source of guidance for identifying and formulating regional programmes, both TCPs and initiatives funded through extra-budgetary resources.

ES48. An additional closely related issue concerns the identification and formulation mechanism developed by RAP to identify and formulate regional TCPs, which appears to be quite effective. A flaw in the mechanism is however the absence of consultation with FAOREps during the selection process, who should be informed and involved in the vetting process as they are the most knowledgeable about country needs within FAO. Also, their support will be required in ensuring the government request and, at a later stage, for implementation. Recommendation 5 addresses all these related issues.

Recommendation 5: To FAO and RAP, on regional programmes

In order to enhance the relevance, effectiveness and impacts of regional programmes, including their relevance and ownership at country level, the Evaluation recommends that:

- a) FAO technical officers in HQ and RAP always communicate with the concerned country office, at the time of initial planning of any initiative involving the specific country;
- b) The identification and formulation of regional programmes, both TCPs and extra-budgetary funded, draw on the priorities of work identified by the technical regional commissions; and
- c) FAOREps be involved in the RAP-led process of identification and selection of regional TCPs and other regional and global projects.

ES49. Evidence showed that performance of FAO in Asia and the Pacific in integrating a gender perspective in the technical work of the Organization and in terms of gender balance among professional and senior staff has been rather unsatisfactory. It is clear that until HQ takes strong action and develops a proper accountability framework on gender in particular on staffing including at senior level, little progress will be made. Similar poor performance was noted on the integration of social inclusion/protection in the work of the Organization in the Region and in the availability of relevant competence and skills among staff. Recommendation 6 is addressed to RAP on these issues.

Recommendation 6: To RAP on gender analysis and social protection capacity

The Evaluation recommends that RAP take immediate steps to increase gender and rural/social development capacity in RAP by hiring a Gender Expert with strong experience in gender and rural/social development issues in order to support the regional Gender Focal Point network and the country offices, integrate gender analysis and gender equality and rural/social development perspectives in the CPFs at both outcome and output level and in the normative and knowledge products, and fully implement the Gender Equality Policy. In consideration of the likely long delays in filling the post, RAP should also secure expertise on a short term basis.

ES50. In relation to corporate tools and processes in support of delivery, the major change has been the deployment of GRMS. The overall impact as of mid-2013 was positive and training had been consistent across countries. Issues attached to lack of experience in its use were progressively diminishing. Two main complaints were systematically voiced: firstly, processes had to adjust to the system, rather than vice-versa; and secondly deployment of GRMS implied a re-centralization of a number of operations and authorizations, contrary to the decentralization process. Also, all concerned consider that further training and a post-deployment support plan are critical to ensure the sustainability of the system. In this context, the Evaluation formulated Recommendation 7.

Recommendation 7: To FAO, on further support to GRMS

The Evaluation recommends that FAO continues its support to the implementation of GRMS. Necessary actions are as follows:

- a) There is an urgent need for a robust post-deployment plan including, but not limited to, further training;
- b) Super-users should be placed within the decentralized network where they can best service the operations being carried out;
- c) Expanded and informed access to reporting functions within GRMS should be granted to all Decentralized Offices as soon as possible;
- d) Certain approval hierarchies (e.g. travel, recruitment) should be revisited; and
- e) Responsibilities for GRMS need to be clarified, in order to ensure the timely and effective execution of transactions in support of operations.

Staffing

ES51. Over the Evaluation period, there has only been a moderate increase in the total number of Regular Programme posts in the Region. No comparison over time was possible for Non-Staff Human Resources, as GRMS can only provide data on this since its deployment. In December 2013, the total number of FAO employees with duty stations in the Asia-Pacific Region was 1984. Of these, the large majority was in Asia, with only 82 posted in the Southwest Pacific. Out of the total, 19% were staff members and 81% were NSHR.

ES52. Following a review of its skill-mix, RAP revised its staffing profile to better match needs in the Region and the number of technical posts increased in 2012/13 for the 2014/15 biennium. Also in SAP, a much smaller office, actions had been taken in 2013 to add required sectoral capacity to the existing range of skills and competences that was insufficient to cover the needs of the Region.

ES53. In general, the great majority of FAO employees across all DOs in the Region feel they are over-stretched in terms of work-loads and that opportunities lack for training and career development. Technical officers stated that they are dedicating more time to administrative and operational work, to the detriment of technical tasks.

ES54. The size of staffing of country offices fluctuated widely, depending on the size of the Field Programme and the AOS resources generated at country level. Some country offices had hundreds of employees, while countries with a small field programme were struggling with an inadequate number of human resources compared to the needs and were caught, in the words of a staff member in one such office, in the '*staff poverty cycle*'. There is some evidence that RAP, through the allocations of the FAOR Network resources, addressed to some extent the imbalance between countries that were 'better endowed' with high levels of extra-budgetary resources and countries that did not have the minimal staffing resources to tap into opportunities of extra-budgetary funding by developing new projects and programmes. Further improvements appeared feasible. The Evaluation **suggests** that FAO considers this option in support of its decentralization policy, as an investment to strengthen some of the country offices in the most resource-constrained situations.

ES55. Several issues were identified in relation to the management of Non Staff Human Resources. Some of these related to the addition in RAP of further checks to the standard procedures for the recruitment and management of NSHR, which was cause of inefficiencies and delays in the delivery of FAO's work. Further, there is an urgent need to revise the types and conditions of the various NSHR contracts. The Evaluation is aware that this is one of the activities in the Office of Human Resources (OHR) strategy, and **encourages the Organization to make it an urgent priority**. Most importantly, there seemed to be a de-facto conflict between the need for consistency and harmonization in the interpretation and application of corporate HR policies in Asia and the Pacific and the double reporting lines of the HR officer in RAP, which was originating a parallel FAO HR policy in the Region.

ES56. The report discussed in detail the procedures that affect negatively efficiency of delivery in Section 7.5. Among others, the Evaluation **suggests** that for efficiency purposes, travel procedures deserve a higher level of delegation to the country offices where there is operational and administrative capacity to handle this set of procedures. Alternatively, all travel procedures should be concentrated in the Region, so as to make the entity in charge clear. In the spirit of enhancing both decentralization and harmonization of corporate policies wherever the Organization works, the Evaluation formulated Recommendations 8 and 9.

Recommendation 8: To FAO, on reporting lines of the Human Resources offices

To ensure a consistent application of the corporate HR policy, the Evaluation recommends that the position of HR Officer in all Regional Offices be out-posted from OHRD, similarly to what is currently the case for other staff.

Recommendation 9: To FAO, on delegation of authority on recruitment of international consultants

The Evaluation recommends that further delegation of authority to Budget Holders be given for the recruitment of international consultants where there is sufficient capacity within the respective DO.

Partnerships

ES57. In the Asia and Pacific region, FAO has been a stable and valuable development partner for the Member Countries for many decades. Its involvement has spanned many specialties in its areas of competence, with varying roles including initiator, facilitator, catalyser and implementer. Governments in the Region appreciate FAO's contribution to their efforts in policy development and capacity building in various sectors.

ES58. On a number of themes, however, many national governments in the Region are joining forces with their neighbours through the Regional Organizations, e.g. ASEAN, SAARC and SPC, which are increasingly taking on a leading role in these functions. FAO **would be well placed** to develop and consolidate a mutually beneficial partnership equation with these bodies. The Organization should position itself as a provider or broker of cutting-edge knowledge and solutions, also by clearly identifying the areas where it can bring value added applying its distinct comparative advantage.

ES59. Collaboration with the UN agencies, at both regional and country level, is constructive and active. This happens through collaboration in joint regional initiatives, participation in UN Country teams, formulation and management of UN Joint Programmes.

ES60. Last, the Evaluation found little experience of partnership with either civil society or private sector in its investigations. Civil society organizations do play a service-provider role in the implementation of FAO projects, but other potential roles as articulated in the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society are not well developed.

Overall conclusion

ES61. The transformational changes the Organization is going through represent a major watershed in the way FAO works. Decentralization was stated to be a goal and an enabling factor at the same time. At the end of 2013, when writing this report, it was still early to assess in a meaningful way how these changes will work out and what impact they will have at the country level in the medium to long term. Some early benefits were visible and appreciated in the Decentralized Offices and by the Members. FAO management reflected maturity and prudence, in responding to lessons and challenges emerging in the process of decentralization.

ES62. The biennium coming to a close has shown a spirit of consolidation of lessons and response through more supportive and compensatory measures. This augurs well in preparing and paving the way to the new way of working that started in January 2014. A number of questions and issues will recur and newer ones will emerge, as to be expected. This will require monitoring, vigilance and a continuous search for new solutions. One of the challenges facing the Organization remains how to maintain a critical balance between FAO's profile as a global normative and knowledge organization with its intellectual capital and technical edge, and its core mandate of providing technical, advisory and programmatic services at regional and country levels, which requires increased decentralization of authority for efficiency and effectiveness. FAO should aim at merging the two competing profiles into one integrated Organization that builds on both its strengths to best serve the Member countries. In this context, the unfolding decentralization strategy will have to be carefully balanced and calibrated with the longer term vision of the Organization.