

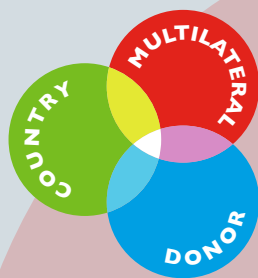
MOPAN

Multilateral Organisation
Performance Assessment Network

Synthesis report

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Executive Summary · 2014



MOPAN

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of an assessment of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) conducted by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). MOPAN reports provide an assessment of four dimensions of organisational effectiveness (strategic management, operational management, relationship management, and knowledge management), an assessment of the evidence of the organisation's relevance and development results, and snapshots of FAO performance in each of the six countries included in the survey.

FAO is a specialised United Nations agency that envisions “A world free from hunger and malnutrition where food and agriculture contribute to improving the living standards of all, especially the poorest, in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner”.

FAO's mandate includes normative work, development assistance and emergency support to governments. Its work covers seven broad core functions, which include (i) normative and standard-setting work, (ii) collection, analysis and sharing of data and information, (iii) support and promotion of policy dialogue at global, regional and country levels, (iv) capacity building, (v) encouraging knowledge and technology uptake, (vi) facilitating partnerships and (vii) advocacy and communication. With operations in more than 130 countries, FAO's field programme involves development and emergency/rehabilitation programming. Since 2008, FAO has been engaged in a two-step series of wide-ranging and deep-rooted reforms, consisting of: 1) an Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) from 2009 to 2012 building on the findings and recommendations of the 2007 Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO, and 2) the “transformative changes” introduced by the Director-General. Together, these reforms have touched upon almost all aspects of FAO's work and have included: the introduction of results-based management across the organisation; increased decentralisation and empowerment of regional, sub-regional and country offices; reinforced institutional capacities in support of a new organisational structure; strengthened partnerships with civil society, the private sector and research and development organisations; increased support for South-South co-operation; a heightened focus on results, particularly at the country level; the integration of FAO's emergency and development work; and a range of reforms related to human resource management, including substantial changes in the leadership of FAO's country offices. A new Strategic Framework was agreed in 2013, based on five strategic objectives (reduced from 11 previously). This was accompanied by a corresponding results framework that includes indicators for both broader development outcomes in countries and FAO results, and the introduction of several practices and systems across the organisation to support its implementation. As the new strategic framework and results framework were introduced in early 2014, it was too early for the MOPAN assessment to examine the effects of these new approaches on FAO impact, results, or overall organisational effectiveness.

MOPAN assessment

In 2014, MOPAN assessed FAO based on information collected through a survey of key stakeholders, document review, and interviews with FAO staff. The survey respondents included FAO's direct partners and peer organisations, as well as MOPAN donors based in-country and at headquarters. Six countries were included in the MOPAN survey of FAO: Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Kenya and Tanzania. A total of 300 respondents participated in the survey (52 MOPAN donors based at headquarters, 23 MOPAN donors based in-country, 175 direct partners, and 50 representatives of peer organisations). The document review examined 425 documents including publicly available corporate documents and internal country programming and reporting documents from all six countries.

The assessment team interviewed 65 FAO staff members (48 at FAO headquarters, 12 Representatives / Assistant Representatives in country offices, 2 sub-regional coordinators, and 3 Assistant Directors-General/Regional Representatives).

As a specialised agency, FAO has an important normative mandate. While this mandate was considered throughout the assessment to the extent possible, the MOPAN methodology is more focused on operations at the country level and the indicators are not all well-suited to assess FAO's normative role. This is noted as a limitation of the assignment. Since the MOPAN assessment of FAO in 2011, the organisation has been in a very dynamic period of ongoing reform; these changes are noted wherever possible in the main findings of the institutional assessment of FAO which are summarised below.

Key Findings

Strategic management

MOPAN established five key performance indicators to assess the extent to which an organisation's leadership and strategy helps the organisation manage for results.

FAO has taken concrete measures and demonstrated strong executive leadership to instil a results-oriented culture at both the organisational and country level. Since the 2011 MOPAN assessment, FAO has sharpened its strategic focus in the reviewed Strategic Framework (2010-2019) by reducing the number of strategic objectives and organisational results and closely aligning them with its core mandate and comparative advantage. It has adopted gender equality and governance as cross-cutting themes to be mainstreamed across all five strategic objectives and has integrated environmental practices and human rights-based approaches in its programming. Moreover, FAO is the only specialised UN agency that has acted both to align its planning cycle with the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) and report on QCPR to its Governing Bodies. FAO is completing the transition from the former National Medium-Term Priority Frameworks (NMTPF) to results-based Country Programming Frameworks (CPF) and FAO staff and partners find this useful for setting country-level priorities.

Notwithstanding FAO's leadership in instituting results-based management across the organisation, this is still a work-in-progress. The assessment team found that there are still weaknesses in RBM and that staff knowledge of RBM varies at both decentralised offices and headquarters. More training is needed to increase staff understanding of results, especially at outcome and impact levels. FAO is currently identifying gaps in RBM capacities through a stock-taking exercise and will address them through training, guidelines and support. In 2014, FAO has worked to sharpen corporate indicators, methodologies for reporting on results, and quality assurance mechanisms.

Operational management

MOPAN established eight key performance indicators to determine if an organisation manages operations in a way that is performance-oriented, thus ensuring organisational accountability for resources and results.

FAO has refined the criteria for allocating assessed contributions that flow through the Technical Cooperation Programme and processes to attribute voluntary contributions to strategic priorities, though such criteria may still be unknown to external stakeholders.

FAO's shift to results-based management is beginning to affect budgeting and reporting on expenditures.

While progress on results-based budgeting has been made, the corporate budgets and reports presented to the Governing Bodies do not yet provide a complete picture of how resources are used to achieve organisational outputs and outcomes.

FAO has sound practices and systems in place at corporate level for financial accountability. In line with FAO's Financial Regulations, external financial audits that meet International Standards on Auditing (ISA) are performed every two years by the appointed External Auditor. Beginning in 2014, FAO's annual financial statements are in compliance with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS), the agreed standard for all UN organisations. Decentralisation has led to increased administrative and financial management responsibilities in decentralised offices, where there are some internal control weaknesses, especially in smaller offices with more limited capacities. It is expected that the roll-out of FAO's new Global Resource Management System (GRMS) in 2012-13, accompanied by extensive in-country training, will have a positive impact on financial management across the organisation, and will ensure more integrated, comprehensive and timely financial resources management.

FAO systematically uses evaluation findings to revise corporate-level policies and strategies, and tracks the implementation of evaluation recommendations reported to the Governing Bodies. There are clear procedures in place for incorporating performance information in new project design and for monitoring during project implementation. There is less evidence that performance information is used to plan country-level programming or for dealing proactively with poorly performing initiatives.

In terms of human resources management, FAO has made significant improvements overall, which has notably led to strengthened leadership of FAO Representatives across the organisation, and it is currently addressing the shortcomings identified in a 2014 informal internal review of its Performance Evaluation and Management System (PEMS). In 2015, FAO will start implementing a revised performance management policy framework, in addition to new rebuttal procedures and policies for promotions and rewards.

To increase management effectiveness, more authority has been delegated to country offices for procurement, hiring, and approval of projects financed by Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) resources.

Since the 2011 MOPAN assessment, responsibility for the management of most emergency operations has been fully entrusted to country offices – the only exception being regional and corporate “Level 3” emergencies. FAO's capacity to work in emergencies was perceived to be strong overall by both document review and survey respondents. Decentralisation of emergency operations has led to strengthened country leadership for work in emergencies, and Deputy FAORs with longstanding experience in emergencies have been appointed to support the FAOR in country offices with large emergency operations. Since the adoption of the reviewed Strategic Framework, FAO started to implement its new resilience agenda and also strengthened its practices and systems for emergency preparedness and response, including for a Level 3 emergency.

Relationship management

MOPAN established six key performance indicators to assess how an organisation is working with others at the country level, and in ways that are aligned with the principles of ownership, alignment and harmonisation, in accordance with the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation and previous aid effectiveness commitments.

Since the 2011 MOPAN assessment FAO has made considerable progress in setting country level strategic objectives that are fully aligned with national development priorities and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). FAO is also taking into account local conditions and capacities in its administrative procedures, viewed as adequate overall by in-country survey respondents for their ease of use and FAO's operational flexibility to adjust to changing circumstances. In their written comments, respondents still noted administrative and operational efficiencies as an area for improvement. As part of its ongoing reforms, FAO is taking steps to streamline its procedures and enhance its software applications.

As a specialised agency that provides technical cooperation, FAO does not make extensive use of country systems for disbursements and operations but makes efforts to do so when possible. The new Country Programming Framework guidelines call for mutual progress assessments of country programming undertaken jointly by FAO and its partners and there is evidence that these have started to take place. In addition, FAO has a reputation for high quality and valued policy dialogue, particularly at the global and regional levels. FAO has been a champion of South-South dialogue and is acknowledged for its inclusive approach.

FAO's efforts to work with sister UN agencies are commendable; FAO participates in joint programming in areas of its mandate and conducts joint evaluations with peer organisations. FAO also subscribed to the UN Delivering as One, evidenced by its work in Tanzania where it plans and implements programming jointly with other agencies under the United Nations Development Assistance Plan (UNDAP). It has made efforts to harmonise procedures with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Since the 2011 MOPAN assessment, FAO has increased co-ordination with UN agencies and other humanitarian partners in emergency situations, including through its participation with other agencies in the Humanitarian Strategic Response Plan (formerly the Consolidated Appeals Process) to mobilise resources for emergency food security programming and through the creation in 2012 of the FAO/WFP co-led global Food Security Cluster. The cluster has had positive effects on country-level coordination, though continued improvements are needed in some management practices.

Knowledge management

FAO is a knowledge organisation with a mandate to disseminate information to a wide array of stakeholders. MOPAN established three key performance indicators to assess knowledge management: the performance evaluation function, performance reporting and dissemination of lessons learned.

FAO is recognised for having an evaluation function that is independent from technical and operational line management and used to inform decision taking. It also has the policies and systems in place for effective and high quality evaluation. While FAO has adequate evaluation coverage of its thematic and project work related to the strategic objective areas, the coverage provided through country programme evaluations is limited – something that is expected to increase with the organisation's new focus on country results.

FAO's performance reporting has improved in the last three years and it has put in place practices and systems to collect data at all levels of the organisation and enhance its ability to report on results, including at outcome level, in its Programme Implementation Report (PIR). This being said, however, the quality of corporate and country level reports between 2010 and 2013 was affected by weaknesses in the design of previous results frameworks and weaknesses in the data used for reporting. FAO's reviewed Strategic Framework and new methodological notes for monitoring indicators should bring about improvements in monitoring and reporting on results, though FAO's new measurement strategy still needs to be tested to ascertain its effectiveness.

Since 2011, FAO has made efforts to enhance knowledge sharing and dissemination through the implementation of a knowledge strategy and through a more cohesive way of working between technical departments across all strategic objectives; it is however too early to assess the effectiveness of these reforms. Significant improvements in the level and quality of Internet connectivity in FAO's decentralised offices have helped enhance knowledge sharing, information flow and communication in general across the organisation.

Evidence of FAO relevance and development results

MOPAN established four key performance indicators to assess evidence of an organisation's relevance, of its progress toward organisational results and country-level results, and of its contributions to national goals and priorities in the countries that participated in the MOPAN assessment.

The MOPAN assessment rated FAO strong overall on relevance. Survey data and documents reviewed provide evidence that FAO is pursuing results relevant to its mandate, and that these are aligned with global development trends and priorities, respond to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries, and are adapted to changing country circumstances. The documentation supporting revisions to the Strategic Framework and subsequent work to improve the results framework is evidence of a more cohesive approach to addressing its mandate. Recent evaluations specifically highlighted the relevance of FAO's global roles and specialised humanitarian assistance roles.

In assessing evidence of FAO's progress towards organisational results, the MOPAN assessment examined the 2010-2013 period. As such, KPI B does not capture the more recent events of FAO's strategic thinking process, its reviewed Strategic Framework, its re-organisation or new processes, many of which were put into place to rectify the issues discussed here. For the 2010-2013 period, FAO was rated inadequate overall for the evidence it had provided of its progress towards organisation-wide results, the quality of documented evidence on contributions to results, and the absence of theories of change underlying the results framework. The Programme Implementation Reports (PIRs) for the period reviewed did not provide an accurate picture of progress due to weaknesses in the design of the Strategic Framework 2010-2019 and indicators used. Strategic and thematic evaluations provided a mixed picture; many noted that a lack of theories of change and data on outcome-level progress impeded the documentation of evidence of results. Evaluations noted achievements in FAO's normative work, particularly in support of global policies and conventions, but a 2012 policy evaluation found considerable scope to increase uptake of FAO policy guidance at the country level. FAO has introduced wide-ranging changes in the way policy work is organised, including the creation of a number of policy posts in decentralised offices, which are designed, in part, to increase the uptake of policy-relevant guidance and information. Surveyed stakeholders assessed FAO's contributions to results as adequate overall. They rated it strong for progress towards its strategic objective related to preparedness and response to emergencies and inadequate for its progress towards its objective related to public and private investments in agriculture and rural development.

In terms of progress toward FAO's stated country-level results, survey respondents in the six countries that participated in the MOPAN assessment viewed FAO's contributions to results as adequate overall. Evidence from documents indicates that, during the period under review, FAO's projects were generally effective in delivering planned activities and outputs, but that FAO did not report adequately on its contributions at the country programme level and did not provide conclusive evidence of the extent to which it had contributed to its stated country level development priorities. FAO is implementing new practices and systems for country programme monitoring and reporting. As FAO is still making the transition from project to country programming, more time is needed for these systems to be fully functioning. Evaluation coverage of country programming has been limited and there were no recent country programme evaluations available for any of the six countries assessed this year by MOPAN.

FAO was rated adequate for demonstrating its contributions to national goals and priorities, including relevant millennium development goals (MDGs). While FAO does not provide evidence of the extent to which it has contributed to the national goals and priorities or to relevant MDGs in each country, its explicit focus on MDG1 on food security and its clear alignment with national priorities are recognised. Overall, surveyed stakeholders rated FAO as adequate in this area.

Conclusions

FAO is a relevant organisation that has an important contribution to make to improve global, regional and country level food security and agricultural systems.

The reviewed Strategic Framework strongly reflects FAO's mandate, comparative advantages, and core functions. FAO's recent efforts to refocus its work and reorganise around a more results-focused approach emphasise the relevance of FAO's mandate and programme, and are reinforced by more cohesive programming and better co-ordination across technical departments.

FAO has undertaken organisational reforms for more effective management and operations in order to implement its reviewed Strategic Framework. These have included changes in human resources management, enhanced leadership of country representatives, increased decentralisation, and the integration of development and emergency programming.

In recent years, FAO has made significant progress in results-based management, putting in place the new results framework and accompanying measurement strategy, which has been a work-in-progress throughout 2014. Work is ongoing to sharpen indicators, strengthen quality assurance mechanisms and continue staff training in RBM at all levels of the organisation.

Evidence provided a mixed picture of FAO's progress toward the achievement of organisation-wide strategic objectives for the period 2010-13. For this period there were issues with overly complex results frameworks and weaknesses in reporting at all levels of the organisation. This made it difficult for FAO to provide a consistent picture of progress toward the achievement of strategic objectives for the period under review. Many of these inadequacies are being addressed through the reform process.

FAO is a knowledge organisation and its role in knowledge sharing is an important part of its comparative advantage. It has made progress in sharing knowledge internally and externally since it started implementing its Knowledge Strategy in 2011. Strong, continued support to implementing the reviewed Strategic Framework and making fully functional the new technical networks will be important to institute change and demonstrate FAO's effectiveness in this area.

In summary, FAO is in the process of making deep and wide-ranging reforms across the organisation, aimed at improving systems and practices which were problematic in the past and specifically to become a more transparent and result-oriented organisation. It has strengthened its collaboration with other UN agencies and stakeholders to more effectively address global, regional and country-level issues. FAO's efforts to work more strategically in countries and its decentralisation efforts are fundamental to improving the relevance and effectiveness of its programming. Many of these efforts are ongoing and, as such, must be considered a work-in-progress. Subsequent MOPAN assessments would expect to see these reforms supporting better results-reporting and results achievement.

Overall MOPAN ratings of FAO

The two charts below show the ratings on the key performance indicators that MOPAN used to assess FAO in 2014. The first chart shows the ratings on 22 indicators designed to measure organisational effectiveness (practices and systems), and the second shows ratings on the four indicators designed to assess FAO's relevance, evidence of progress towards organisational and country-level results, and contributions to national goals and priorities.

Organisational effectiveness– overall ratings

Strategic management		Survey respondents	Document review
KPI-1	Providing direction for results	3.95	5
KPI-2	Corporate strategy based on clear mandate	4.52	6
KPI-3	Corporate focus on results	N/A	5
KPI-4	Focus on cross-cutting priorities	4.35	5
KPI-5	Country focus on results	4.68	4
Operational management			5
KPI-6	Transparent and predictable funding	3.96	4
KPI-7	Results-based budgeting	3.46	4
KPI-8	Financial accountability	4.32	5
KPI-9	Using performance information	3.93	5
KPI-10	Managing human resources	2.96	4
KPI-11	Performance-oriented programming	N/A	4
KPI-12	Delegating authority	3.78	4
KPI-13	Work in emergencies	4.54	5
Relationship management			
KPI-14	Supporting national plans	4.63	6
KPI-15	Adjusting procedures	4.09	N/A
KPI-16	Using country systems	4.31	N/A
KPI-17	Contributing to policy dialogue	4.51	N/A
KPI-18	Harmonising procedures	4.34	5
KPI-19	Cluster management	4.49	4
Knowledge management			
KPI-20	Evaluating results	4.37	5
KPI-21	Presenting performance information	3.97	4
KPI-22	Disseminating lessons learned	4.21	4

Legend

Strong or above	4.50–6.00
Adequate	3.50–4.49
Inadequate or below	1.00–1.49
Document review data unavailable	◆
Not assessed	N/A

Relevance and evidence of progress towards results – overall ratings

Relevance and results

KPI A: Evidence of FAO's relevance

Assessment Rating

Strong

KPI B: Evidence of progress towards organisation-wide results

Inadequate

KPI C: Evidence of progress towards FAO's stated country-level results

Inadequate

KPI D: Evidence of contribution to national goals and priorities, including Millennium Development Goals

Adequate

 Weak
  Inadequate
  Adequate
  Strong