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Facilitating progress towards SDG2: Zero Hunger

Proposed reforms to leadership,
governance and coordination
in the UN Rome-based agencies

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Summary

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- Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger (SDG2) stalled in the five years prior to the pandemic – as a result of climate change, ongoing conflict and economic declines – and is expected to worsen further due to the impact of COVID-19. A lack of coordinated political engagement and prioritization continues to exacerbate this trend.
 - While domestic strategies are the most important tool for achieving SDG2, the global institutional architecture plays a crucial role. The fragmentation of multilateral institutions, initiatives and partnerships in the food and agricultural space is prompting debate over the need for reform.
 - The three UN Rome-based agencies (RBAs) – the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – play critical and complementary roles in food and agriculture, but limited leadership, governance and coordination are inhibiting their capacity to contribute to achieving SDG2.
 - A review of the literature and interviews with key individuals linked to the RBAs suggest that there is potential to: (i) further improve the leadership selection of RBA principals; (ii) streamline the numerous RBA meetings and events and raise the level of dialogue in those meetings; and (iii) enhance collaboration at the regional, country and global levels, as well as in thematic knowledge areas and corporate services.
 - Lessons can be drawn from comparable institutions in global development financing (International Monetary Fund and World Bank Group) and across the global health architecture (World Health Organization and selected partner institutions) to facilitate improved leadership, governance and coordination of the RBAs:
 - Member states should support an evolution towards greater formalization in RBA leadership selection, including improvements in the overall transparency and the introduction of a code of conduct for the selection process.
 - RBA leadership candidates should hold public events to discuss issues and answer questions from key stakeholders (such as civil society, the private sector and research institutes).

Facilitating progress towards SDG2: Zero Hunger

Proposed reforms to leadership, governance and coordination in the UN Rome-based agencies

- The establishment of a Food and Agriculture Group (FA Group), similar to the World Bank Group, would increase institutional efficiency and facilitate coordination and collaboration.
- Organizing a single annual meeting focused on SDG2, along the lines of the IMF–WBG annual meeting, could expand participation and provide an opportunity for high-level policy dialogue and strategic discussions among member states, RBA management and staff, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders.
- The RBAs and member states should consider creating a Global Food and Agricultural Development Committee, which meets during the proposed annual meeting, as a high-level political forum to discuss strategic issues or to debate big initiatives of the RBAs.

01

Introduction

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, limitations of leadership, governance and coordination are inhibiting the ability of the UN Rome-based agencies to facilitate progress towards ending hunger.

Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger (SDG2) had already stalled prior to the impact of COVID-19 and efforts to reduce hunger are likely to endure further disruption. According to the latest annual *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* report, efforts to achieve SDG2 floundered before the pandemic, with food insecurity stagnant from 2015 to 2019 due to climate change impacts, conflicts and economic slowdowns. In the context of COVID-19, undernourishment is expected to increase, with 768 million people estimated to have faced malnutrition in 2020, 118 million more than in 2019. This figure of 768 million amounts to nearly one in 10 people on the planet (9.9 per cent).¹ A lack of coordinated political engagement and prioritization has contributed to these trends.

While country-led domestic strategies are the most important and effective way of ending hunger, the global institutional architecture in the food and agricultural space can help or hinder these strategies.² This space is comprised of many actors including multilateral institutions, bilateral organizations, civil society and the private sector. Yet, there is a general consensus that this architecture is fragmented due to the sheer number of actors, overlapping mandates, competition for scarce

¹ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2021), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020: Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets*, Rome: FAO, <https://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/online/ca9692en.html>.

² Gertz, G. and Kharas, H. (2019), *Toward Strategies for Ending Rural Hunger*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Ending_Rural_Hunger_2019_Update_20191211.pdf.

resources, and poor coordination.³ Furthermore, there is some concern over the incoherence of donor policies for agriculture that claim to target small-scale producers and empower women – specifically related to SDG2.3 – but appear to focus more on promoting commercialization and exports.⁴ Fragmentation and policy concerns have led to longstanding debates over the reform of multilateral institutions, initiatives and partnerships in the food and agricultural space.⁵

Among the plethora of actors working towards SDG2, the three UN Rome-based agencies (RBAs) – the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – play critical and complementary roles. There is clearly the potential for the RBAs to facilitate progress towards SDG2, yet leadership, governance and coordination limitations are inhibiting their ability to do so. The objective of this paper is to analyse these key aspects of the three RBAs and to recommend specific actions that can enhance their capacity to contribute to SDG2.

This paper proposes important reforms, which are derived from an extensive review of the literature as well as 25 semi-structured interviews with individuals that represent member states in Rome, members of RBA management, civil society, the private sector and research agencies. This was complemented by a further 18 interviews with people linked to development finance institutions – International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Group (WBG) – and seven interviews with individuals from institutions across the global health architecture including the World Health Organization (WHO) and selected WHO partners. The 25 interviews from other institutions were used to draw lessons for the RBAs. In selecting the 50 informants, efforts were made to ensure diversity by country of origin, gender and institutional affiliation.

The findings fit with the evolution of thinking among member states of the RBAs, which have pushed for changes in RBA management over the last decade. As a result, some progress has been made in the areas of leadership, governance and coordination. In many ways, the proposed reforms presented in this paper seek to solidify and consolidate the existing thinking of member states and those engaged with the RBAs.

³ Rampa, F., Dekeyser, K., Alders, R. and Dar, O. (2019), *The global institutional landscape of food and agriculture: How to achieve SDG2*, Maastricht: European Center for Development Policy Management and Chatham House, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Global-Institutional-Landscape-Food-Agriculture-How-To-Achieve-SDG2-ECDDP-Discussion-Paper-265-With-Chatham-House.pdf>; Aubert, P.-M., Matthieu, B. and Treyer, S. (2016), *Recent trends in the global governance of food and nutrition security: Policy implications for the EU*, IDDRI Policy Brief, 07, Paris: Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales, <https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/policy-brief/recent-trends-global-governance-food-and-nutrition-security>.

⁴ Cohen, M. J. (2019), 'Let them Eat Promises: Global Policy Incoherence, Unmet Pledges, and Misplaced Priorities Undercut Progress on SDG 2', *Food Ethics*, 4(2): pp. 175–187, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41055-019-00048-2>.

⁵ Gertz, G., Zoubek, S., Daly, J. and Hlavaty, H. (2020), *Prospects for Accelerating Progress Toward SDG2*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/high-level-commissions-and-global-policy-making-prospects-for-accelerating-progress-toward-sdg2>.

02 SDG2 global architecture and the RBAs

Among the plethora of actors that can support SDG2, the RBAs have the potential to lead by recognizing their complementarity and building synergies. However, they have been reluctant to embrace this role.

The global institutional landscape for food and agriculture is made up of a broad range of actors including those at the global, regional and national levels as well as actors from multilateral agencies, bilateral donors, research, the private sector and civil society. Fragmentation in the space is both horizontal, between themes and sectors, and vertical, in terms of crossover between different levels. This creates overlapping mandates and competition for scarce resources.⁶

There are seven global multilateral actors linked to agriculture and food that are critical to achieving SDG2.⁷ The three RBAs form the core of the multilateral actors in food and agriculture. The addition of the World Bank – more specifically the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA) – and the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) make up the ‘big five’. Meanwhile,

⁶ Rampa, Dekeyser, Alders, and Dar (2019), *The global institutional landscape of food and agriculture: How to achieve SDG2*, p. 2, Figure 1: Summary of key actors in the food and agriculture global institutional landscape.
⁷ Lele, U. and Goswami, S. (2019), ‘Governance of the “Big Five” International Organizations Concerned with Food Security and Nutrition’, in Blandford, D. and Hassapoyannes, K. (eds) (2019), *Global Challenges For Future Food And Agricultural Policies: Volume 1*, Singapore: World Scientific; Rampa, Dekeyser, Alders and Dar (2019), *The global institutional landscape of food and agriculture: How to achieve SDG2*.

the ‘big seven’ also includes the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Global Agricultural Food Security Program (GAFSP) – their inclusion emphasizes where progress towards SDG2 is most needed.

Within this global architecture, the RBAs are generally seen as the logical leaders due to their sole focus on the agricultural and food sector and the complementary nature of their mandates. FAO provides data and analysis as well as evidence-based policy and technical advice, it supports dialogue and partnership-building based on country needs, and develops treaties, standards and normative instruments in the food and agricultural space. IFAD is a specialized UN agency and an international financial institution (IFI) that provides investments in the form of loans and grants to governments dedicated to small-scale producers for inclusive rural transformation. WFP is a humanitarian organization dedicated to saving and changing lives, delivering food assistance in emergencies and working with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience.⁸

The RBAs have the potential to lead on achieving SDG2, even though they themselves have not definitively put SDG2 at the centre of their agendas.

Although covering multiple areas beyond food and agriculture, the World Bank and AfDB are key players because of the substantial finance they provide to the sector. For low- and middle-income countries, the World Bank (through the IDA) is the largest financial contributor to the food and agricultural sector (\$1.8 billion disbursement in 2018), followed by IFAD (\$642 million in 2018), and the AfDB (\$231 million in 2018) through the African Development Fund.⁹ The CGIAR is also crucial, since, through its 15 international agricultural research centres and strong relationships with national agricultural research systems, it identifies and promotes agricultural innovations. Meanwhile, GAFSP is a financing vehicle in the food and agricultural space that has provided \$1.9 billion since its inception in 2008. It provides grant financing, encourages strong ownership of projects by recipient countries and aligns with member states’ national priorities.

The RBAs have the potential to lead on achieving SDG2, even though they themselves have not definitively put SDG2 at the centre of their agendas and there is some overlap in their activities and concerns of mission creep across the agencies.¹⁰ Recognition of RBA complementarity and potential synergies between their activities has fostered interest in collaboration and led to regular attempts

⁸ FAO (2020), *Progress Report on Rome-based Agencies collaboration*, Rome: FAO, <http://www.fao.org/3/ne051en/ne051en.pdf>.

⁹ Bharali, I., Zoubek, S., Kennedy McDade, K., Martinez, S., Brizzi, A., Yamey, G., Brownell, K. and Schäferhoff, M. (2020), *The Financing Landscape for Agricultural Development: An Assessment of External Financing Flows to Low- and Middle-Income Countries and of the Global Aid Architecture*, Durham: Duke World Food Policy Center, Duke Center for Policy Impact in Global Health and Open Consultants, <https://wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/reports/financing-landscape-agricultural-development-assessment-external-financing-flows-low-and>.

¹⁰ Wilson, M. (2017), *Ending Rural Hunger: Issues for consideration by the Rome-based agencies*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, https://assets.ctfassets.net/5faekfvmlu40/1jUJGww25qMSUOkkCGWiEI/47999023104d8229783145a74fbbe4fa/ERH_Rome-based_Agencies_Case_Study.pdf; Rampa, Dekeyser, Alders and Dar (2019), *The global institutional landscape of food and agriculture: How to achieve SDG2*; Lele and Goswami (2019), ‘Governance of the “Big Five” International Organizations Concerned with Food Security and Nutrition’.

to integrate their activities through greater coordination and integration.¹¹ However, no wholesale reforms have occurred to enhance leadership, governance and coordination. As found in the key research interviews for this paper, member states have generally focused on improving these elements incrementally by gradually introducing reforms over time.

Any proposed changes to facilitate leadership, strong governance and adequate coordination to achieve SDG2 requires consideration of the current factors that are preventing the RBAs from playing a central role.

¹¹ Ibid.; Axworthy, L. (2015), *Reforming International Governance of Food Security*, Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-journal-of-ideas/reforming-international-governance-food-security>.

03

RBA leadership, coordination and governance

While progress has been made in RBA leadership, coordination and governance, there are significant limitations in terms of leadership selection, member state management and collaboration among the agencies.

The structures and rules that govern the three RBAs are heavily influenced by the mandates and history of each agency. Established in 1945, FAO is the oldest of the three. While WFP was created as a programme in 1961 as an experiment to provide food aid through the UN system, and its governance structure is connected to the secretary-general of the UN, the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC) and FAO. IFAD is both a specialist UN agency and an IFI, it was established in 1977 following a global food crisis.

Similarities can be found in the governance structures of FAO and IFAD, as both of their highest governing bodies – the FAO conference and the IFAD governing council – comprise all the respective member states of the organizations. These bodies are responsible for the selection of the organizations' leaders and for the election of smaller executive bodies, the FAO council and the IFAD executive board, respectively. These two smaller bodies represent all members of their organization through the distribution of seats along established lists or regions. The FAO council and IFAD executive board elect committees that deal with different areas that are relevant to the organization, such as financial and technical issues, evaluation of the organization's work and other ad hoc committees.

WFP's structure reflects the history of the organization as a programme of the UN and FAO. WFP's highest governing body is the executive board. The WFP executive board does not include all member states. It is elected by ECOSOC and FAO from the WFP member states, and includes countries from five regionally based electoral lists. WFP has not established as many committees as the other two RBAs, and for specific issues, its executive board is advised by FAO's finance committee and the UN General Assembly's Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

The process for selecting the leadership in the three RBAs is influenced by the nature and mandate of each organization.

Another important governance aspect is voting rights in the three RBAs, which also reflect the different nature of the organizations. In FAO and WFP, each member state casts one vote. In IFAD, following the model of other IFIs, voting rights depend both on membership and on the financial contributions of each country to the organization. Each member state's percentage of the total vote can then vary over time depending on aggregate financial support to IFAD.

This section explores the issues related to leadership and governance – particularly the management of member states, annual meetings and calendars – as well as collaboration of the RBAs.

Leadership selection

Interviews of key informants from RBAs and comparable institutions highlighted the importance of leadership in advancing institutional agendas and coordination. Examples from the RBAs as well as the IMF and WBG indicated that when leaders did not get along or did not prioritize coordination, they failed to progress their agenda. Similarly, reform agendas or the uptake of new ideas depend largely on buy-in from institutional leaders. Thus, leadership and the selection of leaders is critical for the direction of the RBAs.

The process for selecting the leadership in the three RBAs is influenced by the nature and mandate of each organization. The processes of FAO and IFAD are somewhat similar, although with some key differences due to the way the two organizations operate. The candidates for FAO's director-general and IFAD's president are nominated by member states in the months preceding the session of the main governing bodies (the FAO conference and IFAD governing council) when the election will occur.

A significant difference between the FAO and IFAD leadership selection lies in the distribution of votes and the majority required. In FAO, each country has one vote and the election is based on a simple majority of the votes cast. As noted for IFAD, the distribution of votes follows both membership and contribution levels and appointment also requires a two-thirds majority.

Ahead of the elections at FAO and IFAD, candidates go through a campaign to support their case and reach out to member states to seek their votes. Over time, this has become a more involved and expensive process including significant financial outlay. This creates an advantage for candidates from member states able to finance a campaign. In the most recent FAO election the political and financial heavyweights were China and France (with European Union support). Referring to that election, one member state delegate said:¹²

Everybody knew, in the FAO context, that once China was going to put up a candidate, with all the resources that the candidate would have behind them, there was no chance for a candidate from any other country, unless they also had a combination of really strong political and financial backing from their government.

This, and the experience from previous election cycles, suggests that finance and politics, rather than leadership, management skills and technical ability, drive the RBA leadership selection processes. As a result, the attributes of the winning candidate may well be more political.

Overall, the processes of selection for FAO and IFAD principals have become more transparent following efforts by member states over the last decade. This reflects trends elsewhere within the UN to have more transparent and open processes.¹³

As part of this shift, there are now sessions in which candidates answer questions from member states – sessions that did not occur in the past. In the most recent cases at IFAD (in 2017 and 2021), all member states were invited to the event and allowed to ask follow-up questions, while at the most recent event at FAO (2019), questions to candidates were pre-agreed with the regional representatives and no follow-up questions were asked. The inability to ask follow-up questions was noted during the research interviews as a point of frustration among numerous member states with one key informant stating that the current process was ‘like being in a straitjacket’ and that ‘real interaction’ was something that needs to be worked on.

Another issue raised by RBA managers in the election process was that in the past, for the FAO director-general election at least, staff were allowed to listen in on candidate responses, but that this was not permitted in the most recent selection process. This reduced RBA staff awareness of key issues being discussed. Allowing staff to attend the discussion was considered an opportunity for them to understand member state concerns and the direction envisioned by candidates.

For the 2019 FAO director-general election, Chatham House and the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) conducted the first ever public-facing candidate forum for an RBA principal. This forum mirrored efforts for transparent processes elsewhere including at WHO and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Prior to the WHO election, a candidate forum similar in fashion to the FAO candidate event in Rome was held.¹⁴ For the WTO election,

¹² Quotes from the informal interviews are used under the condition of anonymity throughout the paper. They have been edited for language and clarity, but not content.

¹³ Clift, C. (2016), ‘The WHO’s New Electoral Format Could Be a Model for Other UN Agencies’, Chatham House Expert Comment, 7 November 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2016/11/whos-new-electoral-format-could-be-model-other-un-agencies>.

¹⁴ Chatham House (2016), ‘Question Time: Electing the next director-general of the World Health Organization – Candidate Statements’, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYVbw5eoW84&tab_channel=ChathamHouse.

each candidate had their own one-on-one public interview or ‘in conversation with ...’ event with a Chatham House representative. The objective was to better understand and put in the public domain each candidate’s stance on key challenges in world trade.¹⁵

The Rome-based FAO candidate forum opened the election process and the critically important work of FAO to a wider global audience with objectives to enhance transparency and stimulate public debate. At the time, four candidates from China, France, Georgia and India were running for the FAO director-general position, but only France and Georgia chose to participate in events. The reasons provided by interview respondents for China and India not participating were two-fold. First, there was some concern that the sponsoring institutes were Western based (UK and Italy) and that the questions would potentially be biased towards candidates from Western countries. Second, the event would have no influence on the election since it was a political process among member states and the candidates had nothing to gain from taking part – that is, participation in the event could only hurt the candidates and offered no advantage. This was noted in the following statement from a member state representative:

Frankly speaking, China was very smart to make sure that [its] candidate would not participate, because they couldn’t win anything with the participation in this event, they could only lose ... So, they didn’t need any Chatham House event or interview or lobbying for their candidate.

Chatham House sought to have a similar candidate event for the IFAD presidential election for IFAD’s governing council in February 2021. However, since incumbent IFAD President Gilbert Houngbo was the only candidate (no other nominations were received from member states), the event was instead organized as a broader meeting on building back better and equitable food systems in which the IFAD president provided an initial vision followed by a panel discussion and open questions from the audience.¹⁶ This provided an opportunity for the candidate to offer a vision for IFAD going forward, but also to be questioned in an open forum by other panel members and the attending audience.

Unlike the election processes at FAO and IFAD, WFP’s executive director is jointly appointed by the secretary-general of the UN and the director-general of FAO, after formally consulting with the WFP executive board. This significantly different leadership selection method is due to the nature of WFP itself, which was established as a UN programme in 1961 with the aim to last ‘as long as multilateral food aid is found feasible and desirable’.¹⁷

For recent appointments (since 1992), US candidates have repeatedly been named as WFP executive director. It is usually someone connected to the incumbent US administration, recognizing that the US has been the largest contributor by a significant margin and relations with the US government are

¹⁵ As an example, see: Chatham House (2020), ‘In conversation with Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala: Candidate for director-general of the World Trade Organization’, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/events/all/members-event/conversation-dr-ngozi-okonjo-iweala-candidate-director-general-world-trade>.

¹⁶ Chatham House (2021), ‘A global redesign? Building back better and equitable food systems’, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/events/all/members-event/global-redesign-building-back-better-and-equitable-food-systems>.

¹⁷ WFP (2021), ‘History’, Rome: WFP, <https://www.wfp.org/history>.

critical. While the appointment of the executive director is carried out in consultation with the WFP executive board, the mechanism by which this should occur is not clearly defined or open to external scrutiny.

While the appointment of the executive director is carried out in consultation with the WFP executive board, the mechanism by which this should occur is not clearly defined or open to external scrutiny.

In the most recent case, the consultation was simply an announcement of the candidate made by the previous director-general of FAO to member states without discussion. While potentially consistent with a ‘consultation’, this was not well received by the member states since it did not include the opportunity for feedback or discussion (even though member states were quick to point out their appreciation for the current WFP executive director). There was general recognition among member states that as a UN programme appointing the WFP executive director in this manner was acceptable. Furthermore, there was even some understanding of why a US citizen would be appointed. However, a number of member states voiced concerns over the process. As one member state commented:

Okay, we understood the process. We knew how it’s going to be announced. But when you come and announce something and leave the plenary in two to three minutes, rather than sit a little bit and then ask and answer questions ... with member states, explaining the process, that would be completely different.

In discussion of the RBA selection of principals, the general consensus among research interviewees was that the processes have been improving, but that there is more to be done. There are currently efforts by FAO member states to address some of the concerns raised in the most recent FAO election. According to those interviewed, these include:

1. An amendment to the code of conduct to establish clear rules for the voting process, for instance to ensure anonymity in voting and the prevention of mobile phones being used inside the voting booth. There is an ongoing and sensitive discussion on whether sanctions should be introduced for countries that do not abide by the rules or whether the code of conduct should be voluntary.
2. Following the example of IFAD, FAO is taking measures to ensure that countries that have presented a candidate recuse themselves from sitting on specific committees that might influence the voting process and even avoid asking questions at the hearings.
3. A rule preventing permanent representatives or people in their teams from getting jobs at the organization for a set amount of time after they leave their previous jobs, as is already the case for IFAD.
4. A possible limit on campaign budgets or at least the introduction of criteria on transparency for the funding of the campaign.

The interview responses indicate an ongoing dialogue designed to improve future FAO director-general selection processes.

When asked about repeating a public and open event for the selection of the RBA principals similar to those held for FAO and IFAD, interview responses varied: some thought such an event was quite useful, while others said it provided limited value due to the political nature of the process. None of the respondents, from member states, RBA management, civil society or the private sector, saw any downside of an event if managed properly – that is, in theory, it could be helpful. Given the political nature of the process, few saw it as influencing the outcome of the election, especially for FAO and WFP, although a few thought it could play a role at IFAD where votes are concentrated among fewer member states and the organization is relatively small.

The main advantage of an event is that it could be an opportunity for candidates to provide a vision for an organization and to be questioned about it, and for the public and member states to raise key issues. In this context, the public event is seen less as a means to win the election and more as a way of communicating information from candidates to key constituencies and vice versa. While in theory such an event could happen after an election, the perception of members and other stakeholders is that having an event during the election period can ensure that it actually happens (if required or recommended as part of the election process) and puts candidates on record prior to being elected when they have a stronger incentive to consider external views. As one member of civil society noted:

At that time, it was possible to have this [event] in person, so it was very good to have this interaction with the different delegations, because you can't directly vote, but at least you can talk with the [candidates] and understand what is the agenda behind the official presentation ... Also, because they have to [over]see an organization that is not country based, that's responsible for international policies, it's important to have lots of the different views and opinions from a wide range of stakeholders.

A number of member states and RBA representatives held a similar view that such an event was valuable for those not able to vote as it provided an opportunity to interact with candidates.

There was even a view that when there is one candidate – which is generally the case at WFP and also regularly occurs at IFAD and FAO when an incumbent is running – it would be useful to have this type of public event. As noted by a member state:

There should be interaction, and ... a Chatham House event could be helpful ... The secretary-general has said that there is no other UN organization that is so much involved with other actors, with private sector, with NGOs, with civil society. So, it would be normal if someone who may lead WFP in the next five years should interact with the different stakeholder groups.

An event mirroring the one undertaken at IFAD for the 2021 election, where there was only one candidate, may provide a template. While the consensus across all categories of respondents saw value in a public event for candidates for RBA principals, two important caveats emerged.

First, the events should be coordinated with member states as part of the process of candidate selection. There was generally a view that the 2019 public event for the FAO director-general was insufficiently coordinated with member states and, more generally, poorly communicated to key constituencies – too few key stakeholders knew about it and it was organized too late. There were some member states who thought the public event could be hosted by the member states themselves while others saw no issue with an external party managing the event and saw an advantage in doing this. But across the board, coordination was seen as key.

There was generally a view that the 2019 public event for the FAO director-general was insufficiently coordinated with member states and, more generally, poorly communicated to key constituencies.

Second, a few member states were concerned about the potential bias of having Western institutions manage a public event for candidates. However, some just saw this issue as an excuse for non-participation. While there was not agreement on this point, there was a clear consensus that this is easily solved by having a broader set of global institutions manage a public event. This would mean co-sponsorship of any public event by a number of institutions from a range of countries.

Member state management, annual meetings and calendar

Within the three RBAs there are numerous meetings and events, including those linked to governing bodies, boards and committees. Most events require a significant number of documents be reviewed. Member state delegations designate representatives to participate in RBA meetings. While country delegations to Rome vary, it is not uncommon that the same small group of people, or even one person, is responsible for following and participating in all RBA activities. Given the high volume of responsibilities from various executive bodies and committees as well as side events, there needs to be significant coordination in the RBA calendars not only to allow for participation in the different events, but to prepare for the events.

An overview of the RBA calendar shows that there is at least one important governing body meeting every month, with the exception of August and occasionally January. In addition, there are a significant number of other events and repetition of discussion topics across the agencies.¹⁸

¹⁸ As an illustration, the full calendar of RBA meetings in 2019 (the last full year before the COVID-19 pandemic) can be found here: http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/common/RBA_Calendar/Common_Calendar.htm.

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was frequently mentioned in interviews in regard to events and collaboration, although views of its merits greatly differed. The CFS is a multi-stakeholder platform open to member states as well as civil society, the private sector, international organizations and research institutions. Its remit includes coordination at the global level, policy convergence, and support and advice to countries and regions. It is considered the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental body for stakeholders working towards the elimination of hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all.

Generally, among interviewees, there was recognition of the value of the CFS and its meetings as a key opportunity for dialogue between a broad range of stakeholders. Private sector and civil society representatives in particular highlighted its value, as did RBA representatives and a number of member states. However, some viewed it as inefficient in coming to agreements since these are all negotiated, which is particularly difficult due to the highly politicized nature of agriculture. This can be seen in the quotes from different parties.

A representative from civil society highlighted both the potential value and current problems:

We strongly believed in and put a lot of energy into the CFS reform because we really wanted to have the CFS as the global platform dealing with food security. So, the problem is not in the machine. The problem is the political will to get this machine working and driving ... We are struggling a lot to keep the CFS at the level it should be.

However, a private-sector representative saw it as valuable for dialogue:

The last one that happened in person had 200 people in the private-sector delegation. Very rich, very diverse group, about a quarter were from Africa. We had farmers, fishers, SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises], as well as some of the world's biggest food companies. And we have been able to use the fact that those people are in Rome as an opportunity to have meetings with senior leadership.

A member state representative talked about the differing opinions on CFS:

One of the things that we have discussed in our group, and many of us have different opinions on, is the participation of the private sector and civil society in governmental bodies. But I think that in food security, you have a value added in having the private sector involved ... It's important to have them close by and to listen to what they have to say. But in general, many countries do not feel very comfortable having the private sector and civil society together in the same group. But in my view, it's possible.

Regarding the ideological nature of the CFS, a representative of another member state commented:

The premise [of the CFS] is a good one, because the agenda is completely flexible. This year they could deal with biofuels or something like that, and next year they will deal with another different thing. But the discussion there is a bit terrible. They're very pedestrian and you have a nice paper prepared by the scientists, that is destroyed by the politics – by the negotiators.

A similar view was expressed by an RBA staff representative:

I think there was a period of time in which they let this structure be too biased towards one group, which has created a lot of transaction costs. I am perfectly okay bringing in civil society. I support the idea. I think sometimes they provide very good comments. But the problem right now is there is too much control of the situation, which makes it very difficult to move things and to be more evidence-based. But, saying that, it has improved substantially.

A representative from an international research institute said:

We have a seat at the table, we make recommendations ... we exchange and draw into their negotiations. But it's a super political process and, sort of, tedious and time-consuming and oftentimes, I think missing the opportunity – it's stuck in a process of negotiation ... I see the CFS as an interesting space for us to engage, but not necessarily the value of the outcomes of what it's actually producing.

Overall, even with the lack of agreement on the value of the CFS, it clearly plays a key role in dialogue among a range of stakeholders on key strategic issues linked to the RBA agenda as well as RBA collaboration.

Collaboration among the RBAs

In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's calls for closer coordination of the UN system, RBA collaboration has gained traction and is increasingly being institutionalized. At the request of member states, a joint paper outlining the agencies' collaboration was presented in 2016.¹⁹ The principles set out in the 2016 paper have been reinforced by a memorandum of understanding signed in 2018 by the three RBA leaders.

One of the main messages of the 2016 paper is that SDG2 is at the heart of the mandates of the three agencies and, thus, provides an opportunity to improve collaboration among the three around this goal. The paper also identified the complementarities among the three agencies' mandates, expertise and comparative advantages. Building on previous work, the paper identifies four main pillars of RBA collaboration:

1. Collaboration at the regional and country level;
2. Collaboration at the global level;
3. Collaboration on thematic areas; and
4. Joint corporate services.

These four pillars are used as the framework for annual reporting on RBA collaboration to their governing bodies.²⁰

¹⁹ FAO, IFAD and WFP (2016), *Collaboration among the United Nations Rome-based Agencies: Delivering on the 2030 Agenda*, Rome: FAO, IFAD and WFP, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mr918rev1e.pdf>.

²⁰ For a list of the reports see: World Food Programme (undated), 'Rome-based agencies governing bodies', <https://executiveboard.wfp.org/rome-based-agencies-governing-bodies>.

Using this framework as a basis, the evaluation offices of FAO, IFAD and WFP released an independent joint evaluation of RBA collaboration at the end of 2021. The evaluation had mixed findings with evidence of a strong collaborative spirit in some areas – for example, in thematic and advocacy work – but little to no collaboration in others. Collaboration mainly takes place where there is a clear advantage and where it can overcome misunderstandings over mandates and avoid competition for funds. The evaluation noted that the current formal global structure and processes for RBA coordination do not significantly strengthen overall collaboration. Furthermore, although joint corporate services offer clear practical benefits, coordination of these services has not been strengthened.²¹ The evaluation points to the need for improved leadership, coordination and governance, and offers some specific recommendations.

The evaluation noted that the current formal global structure and processes for RBA coordination do not significantly strengthen overall collaboration.

There are some in senior management at the RBAs who see this direction in a positive light and would like a stronger push from member states as evidenced in the following statement:

[Member states] are not keeping us accountable in the way they should. For example, they'll allow things to pass which are massive ... It's not necessarily the individual members, it's the kind of governance we have ... we're using public funds, there should be better, more robust systems of accountability. We should have KPIs [key performance indicators], we should ... strengthen systems.

As a key coordination mechanism at the headquarter level, the RBA principals and the RBA senior consultative group regularly convene to identify shared priorities requiring collective efforts.²² The importance of this level of coordination was considered critical in interviews. Member states, in particular, viewed leadership at the highest levels – between the principals as well as senior management – as critical for RBA collaboration and coordination. If there is no commitment at this level, RBA collaboration will simply not happen. As stated by one member state:

An important issue is the personality of the leaders ... You need to have a political decision that everyone has to accept that it's necessary to coordinate some actions, but coordination is not only to participate in a side event or in a seminar. The question is how the agencies can coordinate their actions on the ground ... It's not possible to get success if you don't have a political decision from the top.

²¹ FAO, IFAD and WFP (2021), *Joint evaluation of collaboration among the United Nations Rome-Based Agencies*, Rome: FAO, IFAD and WFP, <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7289en>.

²² Ibid.

As part of coordination efforts, since 2017, the FAO council, IFAD executive board and WFP executive board have informally met on an annual basis in September or October for a discussion on broad and long-term RBA collaboration.²³ This has generally been seen as a positive development and a few member states noted that the 2020 document provided for the meeting was regarded as a particular step forward since it included analysis for the first time. As one RBA representative noted:

In the past, we used to have this very, very long descriptive thing [listing] the different kinds of things we do together. This time, it's completely different... It's much more evidence-based, analytical.

Although enhanced RBA collaboration is broadly seen as positive, there is also recognition from all stakeholders that the RBAs have different mandates and governance structures, and these need to be considered in any effort to enhance coordination and collaboration. This was echoed by both member states and senior managers as represented by the following quotes, the first one being from a member state representative:

I think gradually we are moving towards something, which could be operational, where I think it will be still very difficult, because every organization has its mandate and you cannot merge the mandates of the three organizations and then put them in one. It will be difficult, unless you really identify specific areas of collaboration among the group.

The second one from a senior RBA staff representative:

I think one of the things that we push quite a bit for... was the evaluation on RBA collaboration. And, frankly, that could be something that this joint [RBA] meeting uses as a road map, so to speak, in terms of what are the areas where we see the [need for] greater collaboration. Because, right now, it really has just become this issue of we want more RBA collaboration, and then, that's it.

²³ FAO, IFAD, WFP (2017), 'Informal Note for the Record of the Joint Informal Meeting of the FAO Council, IFAD Executive Board and WFP Executive Board', Rome: FAO, IFAD and WFP, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/811d3aea-6f45-49e3-a3db-ae2bbd85c375/download>.

04

Lessons from comparable institutions

There are five specific lessons that can be drawn from comparable institutions to improve RBA leadership, coordination and governance and these should form the basis for reform.

This section presents the lessons drawn from comparable institutions in global finance and development (IMF and WBG) and from across the global health architecture (WHO and selected partner institutions) to facilitate improved leadership, governance and coordination of the RBAs.

IMF and WBG in Washington

The assessment of the global finance and development institutions for this paper included the IMF as well as the distinct institutions that form the WBG, including the IBRD, IDA, International Finance Corporation (IFC), Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) and International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID). The analysis of the IMF and WBG provides insights into the coordination across the two broader institutions, but also among the entities within the WBG where concerns about coordination have been raised, including in interviews conducted as part of this research.

While the IMF and WBG have distinct mandates, there is important overlap between the two. A recent evaluation report described the collaboration across the two entities as expansive yet uneven in coverage. It called for (i) concrete frameworks to ensure collaboration; (ii) greater internal incentives for collaboration to overcome a cultural reluctance to engagement; (iii) identification, prioritization and implementation of practical steps to ensure information and knowledge is exchanged; and (iv) that the executive board strengthen its leverage to boost collaboration.²⁴ As seen in the earlier discussion, many of the issues mirror those of the RBAs.

The IMF and WBG use spring and annual meetings to create awareness and promote participation on key topics and issues. These meetings include discussions at the Development Committee, which is a ministerial-level forum made up of 25 members that represent the membership of the IMF and WBG. The Development Committee was designed for intergovernmental consensus-building on development issues and it usually produces a series of communiqués on topics discussed. Because of the senior level of the meetings, there are also numerous bilateral meetings between delegations and IMF and WBG officials. Furthermore, there are numerous forums for high-level discussions of development issues that in the last two decades have included non-governmental organizations. The meetings are a key means of interaction between the IMF, WBG, member states and civil society.

While the IMF and WBG have distinct mandates, there is important overlap between the two. A recent evaluation report describes the collaboration across the two entities as expansive yet uneven in coverage.

The entities within the WBG were formed as part of the group at different times – IBRD (1994), IDA (1960), IFC (1956), ICSID (1965) and MIGA (1988) – and they have varied mandates and governance structures. It was only in 2013 that the WBG launched its integrated service to bring together support functions (budgeting, human resources and information technology) and to create its united approach, which encourages collaborative management of joint projects. Around the same time, the WBG presented an engagement model aimed to help meet country-level goals in coordination with other development partners, which included frameworks designed to increase collaboration across WBG institutions.²⁵ It is this recent experience at facilitating interaction that has potential implications for the RBAs.

²⁴ International Monetary Fund Independent Evaluation Office (2020), *IMF collaboration with the World Bank on macro-structural issues*, Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, <https://ieo.imf.org/en/our-work/Evaluations/Completed/2020-1124-imf-collaboration-with-the-world-bank>.

²⁵ World Bank Group (2014), *A Stronger, Connected, Solutions World Bank Group: An Overview of the World Bank Group Strategy*, Washington, DC: World Bank, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/16093/32813_ebook.pdf?sequence=5&disAllowed=y.

Against this background, discussions for this paper with key informants, and analysis of the global finance and development institutions, focused on three areas: broader strategic vision and leadership at the global level, country-level coordination and collaboration, and internal coordination of back-office functions. The key lessons are summarized below.

1. Coordination across the IMF and WBG is not guaranteed and is dependent on leadership.

The overall leadership and guidance provided by the IMF executive director, the WBG president and the executive vice-presidents of each institution – as well as leadership from regional and thematic vice-presidents and country directors – determines the level of coordination between the IMF and the WBG, and also among the institutions within the WBG. At certain points in history, when the leadership was not there, collaboration was limited.

The culture of the different entities within the WBG creates challenges in working together. The IBRD and IDA are *de facto* the same entity, but the IFC is focused on the private sector and has adopted a private-sector culture, which tends to be quick and efficient. IBRD and IDA are slower since they work with the public sector and focus more on development objectives. Efforts to have joint country strategies across the WBG has facilitated coordination, but the building of synergies across operations is often limited. While the WBG umbrella makes sense, it is not a panacea for collaboration and requires significant effort and the right incentives. One respondent said:

I think that for the presidents, that became increasingly important to them, that their institution began to act as a whole. It was more or less mandated that there be more joint projects.

2. The IMF–WBG annual and spring meetings are considered highly valuable for discussing issues and coordinating efforts, but the perception of their specific value differs.

Respondents noted three types of activities at the annual and spring meetings: (i) formal meetings of the Development Committee, the International Monetary and Financial Committee, the G10 and the G24; (ii) bilateral meetings held by attendees; and (iii) various seminars and events surrounding the meetings.

Respondents tended to note that the bilateral meetings were the most important for cooperation, particularly for government delegations to meet with WBG and IMF staff as well as each other. A significant level of business was done and issues resolved at these bilateral meetings. This was highlighted as particularly key for smaller countries who are unlikely to get a visit from a high-level IMF or WBG official. As one respondent noted:

I think there's a lot that's going on that countries view as high value, particularly developing countries. I mean, it's just hugely important for ministers and their delegations to be able to meet the range of counterparts that they can meet by being in one place, certainly ... those annual meetings' days are just jam-packed with bilateral meetings.

Civil society representatives interviewed also mentioned the value of bilateral meetings with delegations. While some noted that the various seminars and events were excessive, they also acknowledged that these provided a good opportunity for discussion on larger development issues and a chance for transparent discussions between IMF and WBG officials, governments and civil society. It opened the door for future discussions between officials and civil society. As one civil society respondent noted:

The meetings have become today a collection of concentric circles. At the heart of that is really the business of the [WBG] that's been done with the ministerial delegations that are in town ... Now around that the [WBG] is opening itself up to broader discussions with civil society actors, the private sector, all sorts of different investor groups ... What goes on around that is a whole set of events that are, to some degree, blended in the sense that the [WBG] will host events and invite people from these stakeholder groups to participate in them. And then, the outer circle beyond that is one in which there is the possibility for any and all of these groups to host panels of one sort or another, on issues that are of relevance to them, and invite [WBG] officials to join those panels, which the [WBG] officials generally do. The meeting is kind of a jamboree ...

For many of these civil society delegates coming in from all around the world, this may be the only big moment for them. They don't get access to a lot of these situations, unless they're going to the panels on the periphery, and so it's their moment to actually voice their issues.

There were a few respondents who questioned the need for two meetings a year, but all agreed at least one joint meeting was useful for the reasons noted. When asked about the possibility of not having annual meetings at all, none of the respondents thought this was a good idea.

3. The Development Committee is necessary for political purposes, but the perception of its value for providing a strong and coordinated strategic vision varies and its value from year to year depends on the global context at the time of the meeting.

Most respondents highlighted that the Development Committee itself was political theatre and it was rare that anything interesting happened at the meeting, but that the preparation and discussions leading up to the meetings were useful and that the communication resulting from the meeting could be important. The value of the meeting depended on whether there were emerging global issues (e.g. debt crisis, COVID-19) that needed to be addressed. At those times, the Development Committee, or the discussions around it, could help resolve issues. A number of those interviewed noted that its value in a given year might be low, but it could be critical when key issues emerged. A respondent put it as:

When a president wants to formulate a new strategic direction, a new mission statement for the [WBG], you would pass it through the Development Committee and the Development Committee would comment on it. Or during crisis situations, when you want to push more lending out ... The Development Committee will [focus] on those sorts of big issues, it will weigh in and will be a forum for exchange, like all these high-level fora.

While the value of the Development Committee was questioned, all respondents thought it should still meet, but that the expectations of the meetings should be limited.

4. Putting the IBRD, IDA, IFC, MIGA and ICSID collectively under the WBG results in efficiency gains and enhances the potential for collaboration.

The institutions within the WBG are separate legal entities and have slightly different shareholders and governance structures, but they are connected through the WBG and many of the representatives on governing bodies are the same. All respondents agreed that the efforts to merge back-office functions made sense and led to efficiency gains.

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There was also general agreement that this created opportunities to collaborate at the country level, in thematic areas (energy, infrastructure, climate) and in setting the broad development agenda. No one thought that having completely separate entities made any sense and, if anything, the coordination should increase. This was put succinctly by a representative from one of the smaller WBG institutions:

It's good that they're sharing all these services on boring stuff like HR, and physical stuff, the buildings and the information technology aspects. To carry all that on your own would be crazy, when you can just use the resources of the World Bank [Group]. So, on those kinds of infrastructure things that help the agency, it makes sense... I think it makes sense to have a World Bank Group... there are so many trappings of being a multilateral that you need the resources and the credibility – that's the umbrella, the big bank provides.

5. The lessons learned from the Washington-based institutions have implications for the RBAs.

When asked, all respondents thought that a single meeting of the RBAs would be highly valuable and improve attendance, raise visibility, address key issues and allow for key bilateral discussions. As one former World Bank manager noted:

I can see that there are arguments [for] pulling it together, [for] trying to raise the level of engagement to ministerial level. For some member countries, perhaps even beyond that to even higher and to then find a way to focus it around major advocacy goals in this space. Just like the UN does... Think about the UN annual meetings and how they are being used, particularly around sorts of issues [that impact] women, climate change, and so on... While you may have lots of criticism of the UN and fragmentation [regarding] these annual events, my sense is actually, it's not so much that they have immediate impact on the agenda of the individual agencies. But they may have impact back in the capitals, in terms of helping establish a common agenda that otherwise would not [happen].

Even with the limitations of the Development Committee, there was a general view that it might be useful to have a Global Food and Agricultural Development Committee, jointly managed by the three RBA principals and member states, to highlight key issues and to create focus for a meeting.

A number of interviewees saw the value of creating an entity similar to the WBG in the food and agricultural space, but cautioned that it was no panacea for coordination. Concerns were also raised about the practicality of doing this given the governance structures of the organizations and participants said it should be thought through carefully. All agreed that at minimum there would be efficiency gains from having single back-office support for all three agencies. As noted in one interview:

If you could overcome the political obstacles, and I think it is basically political obstacles, to fundamentally restructure the Rome-based agencies, putting them under one leadership – call them whatever you call them, CEO/president with deputies or number twos that run each agency with integrated back office, with one governing body, [and] very importantly, one set of annual meetings for that governing body – there'd be great advantages ... some of the current structural tensions between the individual organizations [could] begin to be seriously addressed rather than papered over and things going on and competition being pushed one way or another – but again, my lesson from the World Bank Group experience is that it'll only go that far.

WHO and selected partner global health institutions

The analysis of global health institutions in this paper focused on WHO and considered a selection of other partner institutions across the broader global health architecture. This included other UN organizations and specialized agencies, such as the UN Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF); the Joint UN Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS); the UN Population Fund (UNFPA); and the UN Development Programme (UNDP); funding bodies such as the Global Fund and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and organizations such as the Stop TB Partnership. This section of the paper provides insights into the coordination across these global health institutions, the director-general election process of WHO, and aims to provide lessons for the RBAs.

The term 'global health' encompasses a broad range of actors, institutions and programmes that seek to influence international health concerns.²⁶

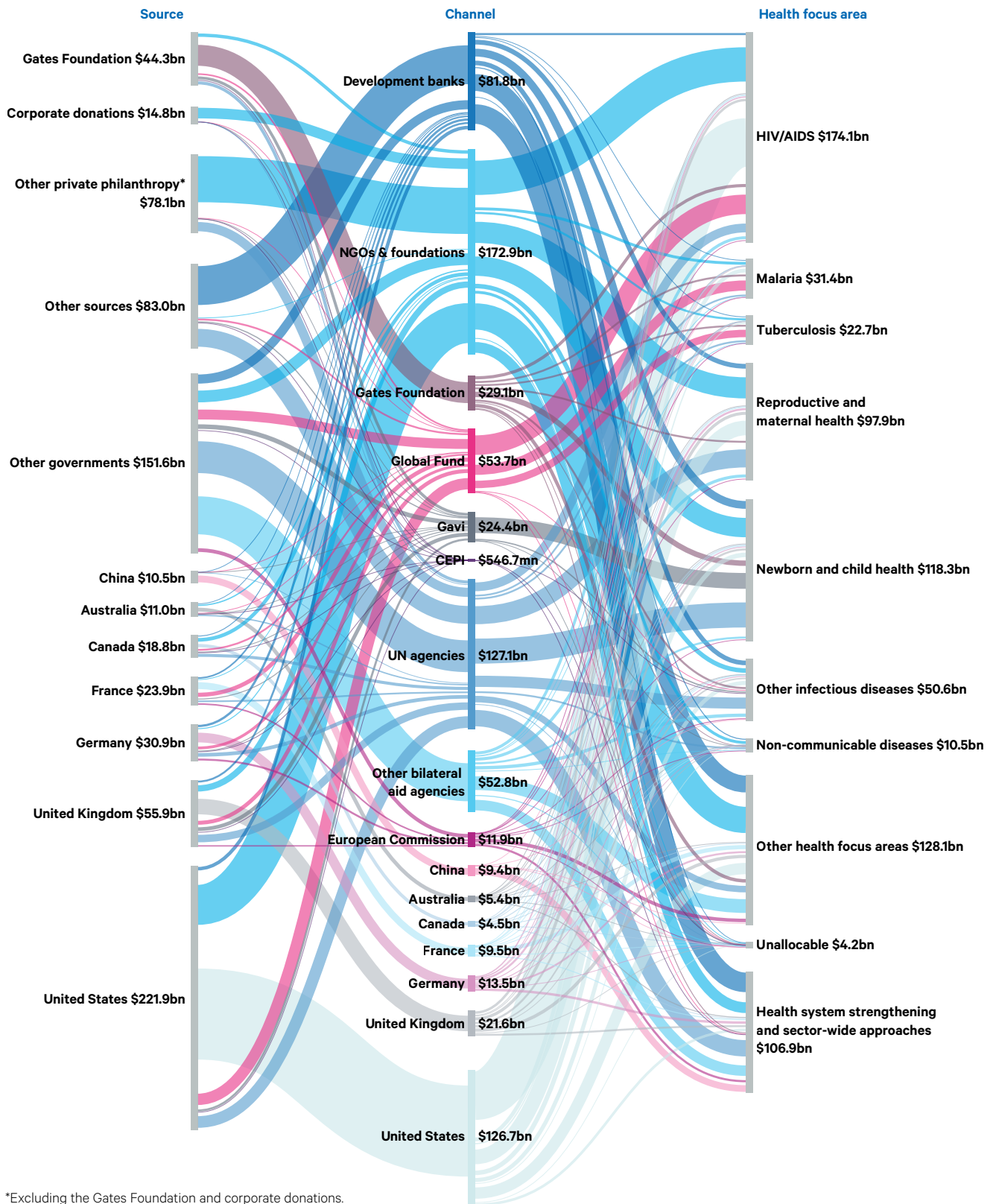
Figure 1 shows how funding flows through the global health network; showing the source of funding (donor organization), the channel of funding (organization managing funds), and the targeted focus area. The figure highlights the large number and range of actors, encompassing bilateral, multilateral, NGOs and development banks. The fragmentation creates overlapping mandates and competition for resources.

²⁶ McInnes, C., Lee, K. and Youde, D. (eds) (2020), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Health Politics*, Oxford University Press.

Facilitating progress towards SDG2: Zero Hunger

Proposed reforms to leadership, governance and coordination in the UN Rome-based agencies

Figure 1. Flows of development assistance for health from source to channel to health focus area, 1990–2020



Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) (2021), *Development Assistance for Health Database 1990-2020*, Seattle, United States of America: IHME, <http://ghdx.healthdata.org/record/ihme-data/development-assistance-health-database-1990-2020>.

WHO is a specialized UN agency and a central and long-standing actor in this space. In many ways it is similar to FAO, in that it provides evidence-based policy and technical advice, supports dialogue and partnership-building based on member state needs, and develops treaties, standards and normative instruments to support global public health. However, since its establishment in 1948, many new actors in global health have emerged, with a complex array of initiatives and programmes, competing and overlapping governance structures, and complicated lines of responsibility.²⁷ Other major Geneva-based agencies include the Global Fund, focused on funding HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. However, within the broader UN portfolio, health programmes are also delivered by UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP. In addition, the World Bank and regional development banks are active global health actors.

With so many global health stakeholders, actors now interact more pluralistically than hierarchically in an environment described as either vibrant or chaotic and lacking authority.²⁸ Contestation over policy definitions, priorities and strategies can lead to the fragmentation of actor networks and limit the effectiveness of advancing policies.²⁹ Given the multiplicity of actors, discussion about governance between global health agencies is therefore a key theme in global health research. As confirmed in interviews for this paper, WHO faces multiple challenges to its mandate, structure and funding.³⁰

The 2017 WHO director-general election was the first to be conducted under a new process, incorporating a code of conduct for candidates and a greater number of forums for candidates to interact with member states.³¹ The process occurred in two main stages: first the submission of candidates and campaign activities (April–December 2016); and from January to May 2017, nomination of candidates by the executive board, selection and appointment processes.³²

Leadership elections are an opportunity for candidates to articulate their vision and strategy for WHO in the global health environment. New communication and consultation mechanisms mean that candidates in recent elections have had an unprecedented opportunity to deliver their vision to a worldwide audience. The 2017 process had a visible public record that supported perceptions of an open and transparent election. This public record is considered an important aspect of the election process, creating a permanent summary and complementing social media activities.

²⁷ Youde, J. (2013), *Global Health Governance*, Oxford: Polity Press.

²⁸ Frenk, J. and Moon, S. (2013), 'Governance Challenges in Global Health', *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 368(10): pp. 936–942, <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmra1109339>; Harman S. and Rushton S. (2014), 'Analysing leadership in Global Health Governance', *Global Health Governance*, 7(2): pp. 1–19, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30697949.pdf>.

²⁹ Smith, S. and Schiffman, J. (2020), 'Politics of Global Health agenda Setting', in McInnes, Lee and Youde (eds) (2020), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Health Politics*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom.

³⁰ Khazatzadeh-Mahani, A., Ruckert, A. and Labonté, R. (2020), 'Global Health Diplomacy', in McInnes, Lee and Youde (eds) (2020), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Health Politics*.

³¹ World Health Organization (2021), 'Election Process Documentation – FAQs regarding the election process of the WHO director-general', https://apps.who.int/gb/ep/e/e_ep-faqs.html.

³² World Health Organization (2017), 'Process for the election of the director-general', https://apps.who.int/gb/ep/pdf/Handbook_on_DG_election_process-Jan-2017-TOC-en.pdf.

In the global health institutional architecture, respondents pointed to a number of key lessons learned over the lengthy reforms of the WHO election process as well as from the expansion of global health actors and institutions over recent decades. These are summarized below.

1. Election procedural changes take time and long-term planning.

WHO director-general election procedures have been reformed in recent years, with election rules formalized and terms for directors-general limited in the 1990s. A second round of reform was instituted from 2011 onwards, overseen by the World Health Assembly (WHA) executive board, and enacted for the first time in the 2017 election process. Reforms of election processes require long-term planning, especially where they are stewarded through formal member state processes. This aspect is important not only for robust election processes but also for the full engagement and buy-in of member states in their development.

2. Codes of conduct, although not legally binding, are important for creating greater transparency and accountability for election campaigns.

The code of conduct is a political understanding reached by member states, recommending desirable behaviour standards for member states and candidates with regard to the election of the director-general. It focuses on increasing fairness, credibility, openness and transparency, including around campaign funding and establishing greater legitimacy and acceptance of election outcomes.³³

The introduction of the code of conduct as part of the new WHO election processes was viewed favourably by candidates and representatives of member states interviewed for this paper – even though interviewees raised questions about adherence to the code, given it is not legally binding.³⁴ The code is crucial to the perception of the UN and WHO as ‘honest brokers’, as highlighted in the following quote from one expert in the area:

To be truly United Nations, transparency is a must. The UN must be an honest broker, investing in a transparent and accountable process.

Despite its lack of legal standing, however, the code can be seen as an instrument that approximates an enforceable procedure and should be retained as an important demonstration of transparency and accountability.

3. Election processes establish the crucial technical and political skills of candidates, but could also focus on more strategic skills and experience such as coordination and partnership.

The 2017 election took place against a more complex institutional backdrop than previous elections, in which the leadership of WHO and WHA had been contested and constrained by other global health actors, leaving fewer opportunities to shape the future of global health initiatives. In this space, the director-general of WHO must coordinate across a vast, competitive and evolving global health environment. As such, to be a WHO director-general requires a technical background and

³³ World Health Organization (2013), *Sixty-Sixth World Health Assembly Resolutions and Decisions, Annex I – Code of conduct for the election of the director-general of the World Health Organization*, Geneva: World Health Organization, https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA66-REC1/A66_REC1-en.pdf#page=57.

³⁴ Ibid.

organizational management skills, as noted in the selection criteria. However, the director-general also requires diplomatic, coordination and partnership skills and experience. One respondent noted:

[S]hould [diplomatic and collaborative skills] be something that's important when they're appointing these people? Maybe, as a [director-general of a] multilateral agency, proven collaboration and goodwill with other agencies, or being able to work in a team ... and also lead a team ... may be something that they should put in the forefront.

As shown during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to coordinate closely with other global health agencies, for example to create COVAX, has been crucial to the global health response. This leads to a broader discussion about strategic global health coordination and the ongoing role of WHO and its director-general. Most experts interviewed for this paper agreed that global health was a complex and highly fragmented space. There are now a variety of UN agencies incorporating health within their mandates; and a proliferation of organizations – state and non-state – that shape global health agenda-setting. As a consequence, global health policy has been described as incoherent, with gaps, overlaps and competing agendas. One expert put this succinctly:

From a country perspective, there are so many agencies ... Some countries have taken action to coordinate development partners at a country level. Some countries, however, have very little idea about what donors and development partners are doing in their countries... Aid bureaucracy is not benign...[and] creates a situation where government is not responsible for its own funding for the health system.

Donor financing was mentioned as a source of competition among global health agencies. Figure 1 shows how 'flows' of development funds are channelled through a wide range of global health and development agencies. Many experts identified that, from a country perspective, these various global health actors were highly uncoordinated, and it took significant effort for countries to harness the variety of actors and activities needed to achieve strategic gains for country health systems. Another respondent said:

It is very fragmented [and] agencies have different remits. Sometimes they work well together, sometimes they don't. It often comes down to personalities and it comes down to funding and ... a competitive funding arena; if they're competing versus working together.

4. Overall strategy, clarity of purpose and cooperation among agencies is important to cohesion of the global agenda, but it is also important to each agency's ongoing viability in a contested environment.

It is no longer clear that WHO is the leading health agency, with many UN actors now taking on greater global health roles and other international agencies created or expanding to address particular gaps. As some experts identified, this was because WHO was regarded as having failed in parts of its mandate, despite being created as the premier representative agency for member states on international health issues. Some experts identified that WHO did not know if it was an agency created to generate health norms and standards, or a delivery agency at the country level. Others noted that the creation of new global health agencies

has undermined WHO's global role; and, as a result, there were now ambiguous relationships between global health agencies, with many representing themselves on various boards and partnerships. One interviewee articulated the issue as:

With WHO it's a huge amount of work to bring them back to their mandate, to their initial mandate, to their core business. [There has been] restructuring and reorganization, but I don't know how much that changed.

The global health domain could therefore usefully be evaluated at this juncture for strategy and coordination, as well as for operation. For example, WHO's role could include greater strategic prioritization and coordination of global health goals agreed through the WHA and regional committees, with other global agencies accountable for their specific technical responses within a strategic framework. Roles and responsibilities of the various agencies could be reviewed and made clear within this strategic context, with competition reduced and collaboration emphasized. 'Scope creep' and duplication of activities between agencies should be identified and resolved.

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Some experts suggested that board mechanisms across the various global health agencies could be evaluated for strengths and perceived weaknesses related to global health coordination. With many of the same agencies represented on different boards, greater cross-board governance on issues such as universal health coverage (UHC) could help to create a more coherent strategy to achieve UHC. Furthermore, from the perspective of transparency and accountability, some global health agencies – having both a decision-making role on boards and also receiving funding from that same organization – create a perceived conflict of interest. One interviewee stated:

If you look at the structure [of global health boards], probably 60 per cent of the board members are the same: in Gavi, in Unitaid, in Stop TB, in RBM (Roll Back Malaria), in UNAIDS, and in Global Fund ... and WHO.

Maybe there is a way [to have] a joint conversation about all [of] these structures ... I think we have a lot of common issues ... [The way] to get more alignment and coordination is looking at your client, and trying to make the client's life easier, rather than complicating it with many structures overlapping. At the global level, looking at the governance mechanisms and mandates, and trying to use the decision-makers and the boards to coordinate this action.

05 Proposals for action

Better transparency and public events are crucial for improved RBA leadership selection. Furthermore, the creation of a Food and Agriculture Group as well as a single, joint annual meeting could boost efficiency and enhance the dialogue around achieving SDG2.

Drawing on the analysis of the RBAs as well as lessons from comparable institutions, this paper proposes specific actions to enhance key aspects of leadership, governance and coordination among the three RBAs with the ultimate objective of improving their capacity to contribute to SDG2. As part of the interviews, these proposals were discussed with key informants associated with the RBAs to get feedback. This has been incorporated in the discussion and noted below.

1. Member states should continue to support an evolution towards greater transparency in leadership selection and greater formalization of that process.

Significant progress has been made to improve the transparency of the RBA leadership selection process over the last decade, yet more needs to be done. As seen in the changes that have occurred at WHO, this is a long-term process and requires continued investment and prioritization. It is driven by member states and there is a real possibility of continued improvements, in two areas in particular.

The first is around the overall transparency of the process. This should consider improvements to the internal questioning by member states to allow more flexible and less programmed discourse. The lack of ability to ask follow-up questions in current formats across the agencies is potentially limiting. A public event (highlighted in action point two below) should also be considered.

Second, there should be a code of conduct for the election process. While such a code might remain voluntary, as is the case at WHO, it can be important for candidates as well as member states in terms of clarifying acceptable behaviour and expectations in selection processes.

The objective of these actions is to facilitate an election process that produces the best candidate, ensures that candidates' commitments are documented in the public record for longer-term accountability, and provides member states and the public with the assurance that election processes have been fair and free. Such a process will ensure faith in RBA leadership and facilitate the achievement of RBA goals.

2. RBAs should hold public events for leadership candidates to discuss issues and answer questions to allow key stakeholders (civil society, private sector, research institutes, etc.) to convey their concerns and for the candidates to respond and provide their vision for the future.

While the selection of RBA principals is and will remain a highly political process, there was general agreement on the value of a public event, as seen at WTO, with a question and answer session, even when there was only one candidate. The value of such events is less about identifying the best candidate, although it can play this role, and more about the opportunity for candidates to articulate a vision and for member states, civil society, the private sector and other interested parties to highlight issues of importance. It also provides a means for all stakeholders to hold prospective candidates to account, by having a set of stated promises and priorities at the outset of a new leader's tenure that can be used to gauge their success or failure.

Any such process should be done with the active engagement of member states, and organized carefully to ensure a fair process for candidates from all parts of the world. For the former, this means fitting the event into the principal selection process in a manner that adds value and facilitates member state participation. The latter suggests that either a broader range of global institutes from different regions are tasked with organizing the event or it is done by member states themselves. This would avoid any real or perceived bias in the organization of an event. As noted in the previous action, this provides greater faith in RBA leadership.

3. A Food and Agriculture Group (FA Group), similar to the WBG, should be created to increase institutional efficiency and facilitate coordination and collaboration.

At the request of member states, there is already a movement among the RBAs to merge or coordinate back-office functions. For example, there have been recent efforts around coordinating procurement processes across the RBAs. While these are making important advances, it represents an ad hoc approach across a range of areas rather than a systematic effort to broadly enhance institutional efficiency. Creating an FA Group would systematize these efforts and clearly define the areas where back-office functions could be merged. The recent experience at WBG shows gains in efficiency and was viewed by all entities as positive.

There is also an argument that the creation of an FA Group could enhance transparency and lead to greater professionalization of the functions. For example, at present, because of a number of RBA HR policies and practices, there is a perception that staff without adequate skills are often put in positions where they do not have sufficient expertise. A broader FA Group that professionalized roles and created larger staffing pools might avoid this. It could lead to less interference in processes, such as the hiring of staff.

While there was general agreement on the advantage of creating an FA Group in principle, there were significant concerns about how this might be done and if it would truly enhance efficiency. Some expressed concern it could lead to even greater bureaucracy and inefficiencies. For example, WFP was widely viewed as the most efficient RBA in terms of institutional management. If WFP were to manage joint activities this might lead to overall improvement, but that might not be the case. Clearly, a move to create an FA Group would need to be very carefully considered and implemented in a manner that facilitated efficiency gains.

An annual event that combines governing body meetings and CFS into a single meeting could bring a higher-level delegation than those that currently attend separate FAO and IFAD governing body meetings and, if managed well, could expand visibility in the space.

The objective of creating an FA Group is clearly to enhance efficiency and foster collaboration and coordination. Based on the WBG experience, while the creation of an FA Group is unlikely to guarantee collaboration at the country level, it will help facilitate it. The WBG has increasingly emphasized the importance of joint country-level strategies and coordination, but with mixed success linked to leadership and personalities involved. However, this approach does appear to increase the chance of country-level collaboration.

4. The RBAs should consider holding an annual meeting similar to that held by the IMF and WBG, which combines the key RBA governance meetings as well as the CFS into a single event.

The calendar of meetings and activities at the RBAs is clearly fragmented and offers limited opportunity for high-level policy dialogue and strategic discussions among member states and RBA management. It also restricts engagement with civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders. While formally IMF–WBG annual meetings bring together the governing bodies of the institutions, in actuality the IMF–WBG annual meetings offer a significant opportunity for dialogue on global and country-level strategic issues through bilateral meetings and side events. The events create greater visibility for the agencies.

While the RBAs may not be able to aspire to that level, an annual event that combines governing body meetings and CFS into a single meeting could bring a higher-level delegation than those that currently attend separate FAO and IFAD governing body meetings and, if managed well, could expand visibility in the

space. It might also help move discussions to a higher political and strategic level. The objective of an annual meeting is then to raise the profile of the RBAs through greater engagement and to enhance strategic dialogue among member states as well as civil society and the private sector.

A food and agriculture annual meeting would need to be carried out in a manner that respects differences in governance structures. The IMF and the WBG have shown that it is possible to host a general meeting while preserving differences in individual governance across the two entities as well as within the WBG. The IMF and WBG annual meeting has also shown that such an event provides space and tremendous opportunities for civil society and the private sector to engage with the RBAs and member states. The proposed food and agriculture annual meeting should be seen as building on CFS and providing even more opportunities for engagement by civil society and the private sector.

One complication for the RBAs is that in a number of cases various government departments of a member state act as representatives in different agencies. For example, representatives in foreign affairs or agriculture might manage relations with FAO, while a finance or treasury department might represent their government with IFAD. Of course, this would not add any additional issues of coordination to those that already exist and may even facilitate coordination of member state activities in the food and agricultural space.

5. Create a Global Food and Agricultural Development Committee similar to the Development Committee of the IMF and World Bank, which meets during an annual meeting.

The views of the Development Committee at the IMF–WBG meetings highlight that the primary value is to provide a forum for high-level political engagement and discussion on strategic issues at times of crisis or to respond to big initiatives of the agencies. A Global Food and Agricultural Development Committee (or something with a similar name) could potentially play that role and replace the current joint meeting of RBA member states. The objective would be to limit replication of discussions across the three RBA executive board meetings and facilitate high-level coordination in a manner that helps the RBAs achieve their objectives. Alongside an annual meeting with the engagement of civil society and the private sector, such an event could facilitate the work of participants. It may be difficult to organize given the differences in governance structure in the RBAs, but the IMF–WBG have similar differences and still manage.

06 Conclusion

Through this set of concrete reforms member states can solidify their vision for the RBAs to enhance leadership, coordination and governance.

With progress towards SDG2 stalled and COVID-19 estimated to have made millions of people food insecure in 2021, there is a need for the RBAs to provide leadership and to coordinate activities to achieve SDG2. This paper offers five specific proposals around RBA leadership, governance and coordination that could play a part in an overall set of actions to facilitate progress towards SDG2.

These are aligned with the direction member states have requested in recent years and offer specific proposals consistent with the recommendations of the joint evaluation report on collaboration among the RBAs.³⁵ They reflect the emerging views articulated in the interviews conducted for this paper. The proposals seek to build on these perspectives and to solidify this direction through concrete actions.

Promoting these reforms will not be easy because of different governance structures, voting systems and member state representation among the RBAs. There is also the possibility of reluctance from the RBA leadership, members and vested interests. These challenges can only be overcome if there is strong and sustained commitment to improved leadership and coordination across all member states and stakeholders, and if member states, in particular, provide the necessary leadership for change. Among the member states, there are those that have a critical formal role through governing bodies and those that have influence as a result of their economic and geopolitical position in the world. Leadership from these key member states is crucial.

While this paper offers five specific proposals, implementing them requires careful planning to avoid potential pitfalls. For example, institutional reform could increase inefficiency rather than lead to efficiency gains if not executed properly. Some of the proposals relate to outside entities and their engagement in the specifics of any actions would be critical. Yet given the necessity for progress on SDG2 and the urgency to address rising food insecurity due to COVID-19, reforms are needed sooner rather than later.

³⁵ FAO, IFAD and WFP (2021), *Joint evaluation of collaboration among the United Nations Rome-Based Agencies*, Rome: FAO, IFAD and WFP, <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7289en>.

Glossary

AfDB	African Development Bank
CEPI	Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations
CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the UN
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FA Group	Food and Agriculture Group
GAFFSP	Global Agriculture Food Security Program
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IDA	International Development Association
ICSID	International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISPI	Italian Institute for International Political Studies
MIGA	Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
RBA	Rome-based agencies
RBM	Roll Back Malaria
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDG2	Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger
UHC	Universal health coverage
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	UN Children's Emergency Fund
WBG	World Bank Group
WFP	World Food Programme
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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