

CONCEPT NOTE

Fifth Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture of Central Asia on **Integrated Natural Resource Management to Enhance the Sustainability of Agriculture in Central Asia**

Date: 1 March 2022

Venue: Virtual

Background and rationale

The development of agriculture is critical if the countries of Central Asia are to reduce poverty and achieve food and nutrition security. However, agricultural development is dependent on the natural resource base, i.e. soil, water, forests and biodiversity. Unfortunately, soil erosion and degradation, water depletion, desertification of rangeland caused by excessive animal grazing, biodiversity loss and decreased carbon sequestration potential are serious and growing problems in Central Asia, caused by the development of agriculture.

The key feature of agriculture as practiced today is that the natural resource base is treated as infinite. It follows that if the further development of the agri-food sector is to be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable, it is necessary to find solutions for protecting the natural resource base. The success of the existing model of farming in helping to feed the world is undeniable. However, it remains an open question whether this model can be sustained over the long-run.

Alternative methods of farming, e.g. agroecology, which emphasize integrated natural resource management (INRM), do exist. INRM balances productivity enhancement, environmental protection and social well-being and includes an element of learning involving multiple stakeholders and participatory processes.

Although they show promise, it is by no means clear that these alternative models are capable of providing enough food to feed the growing population, as they have not been tried out on a large enough scale globally. The population of Central Asia is growing at almost 2.5 percent per year, implying that food production must also grow at roughly the same rate if the needs of the growing population are to be met.

This means that the question of sustainability is not an easy one to answer. On the one hand, it appears that the existing system of farming is not environmentally sustainable. On the other hand, alternative approaches may be environmentally sustainable but perhaps not economically and socially sustainable, particularly at the task of feeding the world.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand better how to reconcile integrated natural resource management, as implemented through, e.g. agroecology, with the development of the agri-food sector. It would be irresponsible to advocate a complete switchover from existing models of farming to those that respect environmental limits and incorporate INRM. However, it is eminently responsible to understand which elements of each approach can be combined to produce a better system, one that enables higher agri-food production while respecting the natural resource base through integrated management of natural resources.

A better understanding is required for developing better public policies, programmes, regulatory frameworks and investment plans to make the development of the region's agri-food sector environmentally, economically and socially sustainable.

In this context, the fifth virtual Meeting of the Agricultural Ministers of the Central Asian countries will be organized on 1 March 2022 involving FAO officers, representatives of other UN agencies, and representatives of International Financial Institutions.

Objectives

This meeting aims to help FAO member states in Central Asia understand better, how to enhance the sustainability of the agri-food sector through integrated natural resource management. It is hoped that the meeting will allow Ministers to:

- achieve a shared understanding of the concept of integrated natural resource management;
- better understand FAO initiatives such as Land Degradation Neutrality, Sustainable Land Management, Integrated Water Management, Integrated Pest Management, etc., as implemented in the region through projects such as CACILM2, CADI, etc.
- share examples of good practices in the countries of the region and identify win-win options for people, economy and the environment in order to enable more sustainable use of global natural resources across countries and;
- make suggestions and recommendations for public policies to promote sustainability of agriculture through integrated natural resource management.

Participants

The meeting will be co-organized by the Ministry of Agriculture of Turkmenistan and FAO. The other participants will include (regional) representatives of other UN agencies and IFIs such as, IFAD, WB, ADB, EDB, EBRD, IDB and possibly others.

Working languages: The working language of the Online Conference will be Russian with simultaneous translation into English

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The zoom link will be sent by email one day prior to the meeting.