



## Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia Budapest, 29-30 May 2017 Minutes<sup>1</sup> by the FAO REU Secretariat

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### Introduction

The Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia was organized – at the invitation of the Government of Hungary – by the Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) of the United Nations Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) in Budapest on 29-30 May 2017. The Consultation Programme and Timetable, List of Participants and introductory technical notes are available at the event’s website: <http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/en/c/877206/>.

The Consultation discussions and presentations focused on three main areas:

- (i) Implementation of FAO’s work in the region in 2016-17 with a focus on the Regional Initiatives
- (ii) Review of the priorities for the Region for the 2018-19 biennium alignment with SDGs, Climate Change Agreement and ICN2 and future scope of the Regional Initiatives
- (iii) Proposed agenda items for the forthcoming 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) and the 31<sup>st</sup> FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC).

The meeting was opened by the Minister of Agriculture of Hungary, Mr Sandor Fazekas, who highlighted the commitment of the Government of Hungary to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly in the area of hunger eradication and food security. Mr Fazekas expressed the Government’s recognition of FAO as the most effective actor to achieve these goals, including for its coordinated action with the Member States of the region in delivering assistance to the countries. He emphasized the importance of the Informal Consultations in this context.

FAO Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia, Mr Vladimir Rakhmanin expressed his gratitude to the Government of Hungary for the continuous collaboration in organizing the Informal Consultations since their inception in 2010. Mr Rakhmanin noted that these Consultations had become already a tradition and an important tool widely accepted by the programme and donor countries in the region. He stressed that the informal character of the event was one of FAO’s particular efforts in adjusting its working modalities for an integrated, horizontal approach, with a strong focus on the country level. Mr Rakhmanin expressed his expectation of a fruitful discussion and encouraged the participants to view the pressing challenges outlined by the agenda not as a burden but an opportunity for a positive change.

The Vice-Chair of the European Regional Group, Mr Aleksandar Drljevic welcomed the Regional Consultation as an excellent platform for member countries’ interaction on the

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: These Minutes and Notes have been prepared by the FAO REU Secretariat and reflect the main points of Informal Consultation debates, as presented and discussed during the sessions. They are intended as aide memoire and do not intend to be considered as conclusions or decisions taking the informal character of the meeting into consideration. They are not in any way formal statements or programme recommendations and are intended only as pro memoria record of the Consultation.

priorities and challenges in the region. He noted the Consultation's revised format for the greater level of informality and possibly more intense dialogue, particularly in the context of FAO's limited presence in the countries of the region. Mr Drljevic highlighted FAO's efforts to promote a transparent approach in showing results and lessons learnt from the implementation of the Regional Initiatives and to ensure the consistent linkage to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The introduction was concluded by the representative of civil society, Ms Elene Shatberashvili, Advocacy Officer, Biological Farming Association Elkana, who expressed her appreciation for the more space CSOs were given through FAO-CSO consultation modalities and highlighted her expectation that this collaboration would eventually have been even more beneficial for small holders and would have become a valuable contribution to civil society initiatives across the region.

## **Session 2 - Implementation of FAO's work in the region in 2016-17 with a focus on the Regional Initiatives**

The participants appreciated the informal nature of the meeting and the presence of the technical officers to discuss FAO's work in the region. They welcomed the overview of the results achieved in the first year of the biennium and particularly:

- Emphasised the need to refer to fishery and forestry in context of sustainable agriculture production,
- Appreciated the focus on control of animal and plant pests and diseases, as well as on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in line with the conclusions of the 30<sup>th</sup> Session of ERC in 2016, and the work on soils in the Central Asia sub-region;
- Noted the relevance of rural poverty and related issues among the priorities, such as access to markets and migration, and the increasing role of appropriate rural development policies to address these challenges,
- Noted the relevance of cross-cutting fields of gender, nutrition and social protection, and the role of the Regional Initiatives in promoting these fields;
- Appreciated the high-level conference on "*Promoting socially inclusive rural development in Europe and Central Asia: Action for the 2030 Agenda*", which reviewed best practices in gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development and agreed on the Joint Call for Action with recommendations to FAO and countries in the region;
- Noted the increasing role of statistics in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly for the indicators where FAO is the custodian agency;
- Noted the results in the field of resource mobilization.

## **Session 3 - Review of the priorities for the Region for the 2018-19 biennium and their alignment with SDGs, Climate Change Agreement and ICN2**

### **A) Effective policies for sustainable and inclusive growth for farmers and the rural population with emphasis on smallholders and family farms**

The Secretariat introduced the challenges that the smallholders face, the work carried out under the Regional Initiative 1 on "Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms for Improved Rural



Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction” (RI1) in 2016-17, and also the planned technical work for 2018-19. The participants discussed country specific experiences and particularly:

- Highlighted the role of agro-ecological element in agricultural production, as well as the importance of the community-based approach and its linkage with the national policy processes;
- Underlined the importance of vocational education, extension services, and capacity development of farmers;
- Noted that the form of agricultural cooperative was the most common instrument to organize smallholders together, which also started to have a positive echo in many countries;
- Welcomed the RI1 regional project implemented in the seven focus countries entitled “Support to the Implementation of the Regional Initiative on Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms”, within the framework of which country studies are conducted on smallholders and family farms and awareness raising activities are provided through training workshops and conferences.
- Highlighted the importance of building partnerships;
- Discussed the following proposals:
  - Strengthen interaction between the RIs in the CPFs (in light of also SDGs);
  - Develop more country specific RI work programme based on knowledge platform with inputs from seven ongoing country studies on smallholders and family farms;
  - Better integrate work on supporting development of cooperatives;
  - Further enhance the promotion and implementation of community development planning, as a tool to achieve a more programmatic and integrated local approach;
  - Continue to work on strengthening extension services and advisory services;
  - Further support the awareness raising and implementation of the VGGT;
  - Improve the visibility of the main results of RI1.

## **B) Enhance the reach towards new markets through alignment of trade, food safety and Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) policies to meet WTO commitments and international food safety and quality requirements**

The Secretariat presented FAO priorities and external challenges in 2018-2019, and introduced the work carried out under the Regional Initiative 2 on “Improving Agrifood Trade and Market Integration” (RI2) in 2016-17. The participants discussed country specific experiences and particularly:

- Noted the relevance of RI2 and the increased focus on enabling more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems, as well as strengthening key areas of its work in 2018-2019 (capacity development in trade agreements, global food safety standards, Value Chain (VC) development and export promotion);
- Highlighted the necessity to strengthen the RI’s three main components by addressing cross-cutting issues, meeting member-country priorities, and fully contributing to SDGs 2, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15 and 17;
- Underlined the importance of strengthening the work on value chain development, food losses and waste (FLW) reduction, geographical indications, organic and regional



products development, to be reflected in the RI2 Component 3 on “Supporting domestic markets and export diversification and promotion in view of developing more inclusive and efficient agri-food systems”.

- Indicated the high demand on government capacity development in trade agreements and global standards through organization of workshops and online trainings on WTO provisions, both at regional and national level.
- Discussed the following proposals:
  - strengthen the cooperation with RII on work with smallholders and family farms and promote the development of agro-ecological farming;
  - further develop partnerships with farmers’ cooperatives, producer groups and civil society organizations in addition to the already established partnerships with international organizations, academic institutions, IFI’s, think tanks and research centers, private companies, associations and within the Agricultural Trade Expert Network in Europe and Central Asia (ATEN)
  - incorporate the area of inland commercial fisheries and aquaculture in the framework of RI2; further enhance exchange and sharing of knowledge among countries, both from a prospective of technical assistance needs and collaboration opportunities, in order to address common challenges as well as share results and experiences gained under the RI.

### **C) Sustainable natural resource management, combating land degradation and desertification, including mitigation and adaptation to climate change**

Challenges in sustainable natural resources management and land degradation, as well as the newly proposed Regional Initiative 3 on “Sustainable Natural Resource Management under a changing climate” (RI3) and its main components were presented by the Secretariat. The participants welcomed the new regional initiative set out in a timely and appropriate manner, reflecting the global context where countries are intensifying their efforts into climate mitigation and adaptation. During the discussion, the participants particularly raised the following points:

- Small scale fishery, aquaculture and healthy production should be included into comprehensive arms of RI3;
- FAO’s analysis has mainly focused on three crops so far (Save and Grow), but there are several others to be addressed in order to improve healthy diet, promote and mainstream sustainable food systems and agriculture;
- It would be appreciated if FAO could elaborate policy alignment and advice for member countries both at global and regional levels and also provide technical knowledge to international financial institutions (IFIs) and national development banks (NDBs) for better understanding of the gaps and needs of the sector for effective assistance;
- Besides timely provision of data, RI3 components should focus on improving policy environment and capacity building in member countries at different areas (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, agro-ecology, etc.);
- Improve and modernize livestock production systems, involving methodologies to conserve animal genetic resources and to improve efficiency of water, feed and land use as well as biosecurity practices.
- Developing FAO’s network with sub/regional institutions, as well as strengthening synergies and coordination within FAO under the RI3 are also of crucial importance;



Key partners, such as civil society, consumers, indigenous people, academia, private sector, global and sub-regional soil partnerships, UNFCCC, UNECE, IFIs and NDBs should be involved in the regional priorities of work.

#### **D) Addressing food insecurity and reduction of all forms of malnutrition: what are the major challenges in the medium and long term?**

An overview of the status of food security and malnutrition in the region was presented by the Secretariat, stressing the increasing concern for the rising level of overweight and obesity in population of all ages. It has been emphasized that food systems had a central role to play in the ultimate goal to ensure good health and adequate nutrition of all population. The main priorities for the region as proposed by the participants were the followings:

- Make nutrition a national priority embedded into SDGs by establishing internal cooperation and accountability mechanisms. Improving nutrition should be a responsibility of governments with a cross-sectoral and cross-country involvement;
- Develop food based dietary guidelines (FBDG) that consider sustainability and health, promote healthy dietary patterns respectful for environmental limits and consumers' education, and serve as basis for food and agriculture policies;
- Ensure by adequate policies that nutrient-rich foods are available and affordable for all, reaching the most vulnerable groups both in urban and rural settings;
- Devote efforts to make agriculture nutrition-sensitive and apply agroecological approach along the entire food chain;
- Enhance nutritional education and promote healthy diets choices starting with pre-school aged children and target children, youth and mothers. Raise awareness on the health consequences of malnutrition;
- Provide national budget and promote procurement of local, organic and sustainably produced foods from small-scale farms for schools and other public establishments.
- Develop national food losses and waste reduction action plans and promote their implementation, as this problem currently isn't addressed in a systematic, strategic, and comprehensive way;
- Raise awareness on the multiple benefits of crops diversification, on healthy diets and environmental impact of various foods' production;
- Support data revolution and evidence-based governance for nutrition with good statistics on healthy diets and nutritional status and support the dissemination of these data to a wide audience;
- Collect good practices from countries across the region for experience sharing on national initiatives, events, meetings, consultations, dialogues, discussions related to healthy diets promotion, monitoring the proposals from the civil society;
- As a cross-sectoral issue, nutrition should be discussed at a government level involving all relevant ministries - Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Education, Social Protection, Economic Development, and Environment - in planning and promotion of nutrition-sensitive interventions and allocating adequate resources;
- Retail sector has an important influence on consumers' choice, therefore it has to be involved in partnerships for food presentation/display, availability and desirability, marketing.

## **Session 5 - Regional Technical Commissions' contribution to the Regional Priorities**

Chairs and Secretaries of ECA, EIFAAC, GFCM, CACFISH and EFC introduced the main priorities of work of the Commissions for 2018-19, the linkage between the Strategic Programmes and the priorities, and their contribution to the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Members shared their proposals on how to enhance collaboration between the Executive Committees of the various Commissions, and the way forward to facilitate exchanges between Commissions in order to better coordinate the inputs to the ERC. The main proposals of the participants were the following:

- Alignment of commissions' work to SDGs and FAO Strategic Objectives was a good starting point for joint work, considering that SDGs served as an overarching common ground (e.g. ECA and EIFAAC dedicate their next sessions to topics related to climate change);
- Organize joint side events at ERC, and invite more participants from countries to IC and ERC, not only from the field of agriculture, but fishery and forestry, in order to increase the cooperation and get more inputs from countries;
- Organize technical joint sessions and use expertise available within the Commissions by setting up joint expertise groups in order to address overarching issues in technical and scientific areas;
- Increase cooperation among commissions by sharing information on goals and activities, inviting representatives of other Commissions to the sessions;
- Reorganize the REU webpage to reflect the work of all the technical commissions and to provide more information and raise awareness among countries;
- Elaborate on the report of the commissions to find the right format to report to the Conference in order to meet country demands, provide better technical inputs to the Conference and further enhance awareness of the work in the Commissions.

## **Session 6 - Future Scope of Regional Initiatives**

The Secretariat organized a panel discussion with the participation of six countries - Austria, Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Georgia, Republic of Belarus, Kyrgyzstan - to share their experience and views related to the future scope of the Regional Initiatives, as programmatic umbrellas. During the panel discussion, the Participants also shared the main challenges they face related to the three regional initiatives, and highlighted the areas where FAO could further enhance its technical assistance, and in particular:

- Highlighted the importance of understanding the current situation in the different countries to identify entry points for the Regional Initiatives;
- Introduced already existing good examples for the implementation of the Regional Initiatives and highlighted that FAO support should be based on these previous experiences.
- Presented the main challenges related to RI1 at country level, such as fragmentation of small farms, low competitiveness due to the lack of knowledge, rare application of modern technologies, and limited access to financial resources.
- Underlined FAO's role in developing the extension services and systems, strengthening knowledge sharing, supporting young farmers, and managing the decrease in cultivating areas under RI1;



- Highlighted the importance of the development of legal framework with emphasis on the food security and safety to increase the standards of the food production, as well as the priorities and challenges of export promotion and value chain development related to RI2;
- Reflected the significance of harmonization of the legislation of countries with the European rules and regulations;
- Stressed the necessity of enhancing analytical and technical capacities of countries to design and implement the surveillance and control of priority livestock and plant pests and diseases based on risk analysis;
- Underlined FAO's role in the development of the National Programs and capacity development of the countries on the more efficient, risk-based prevention and control of pests and diseases, climate change mitigation and food safety issues related to RI3.

### **Session 7 - Draft Annotated Agenda for the 40<sup>th</sup> ECA and the 31<sup>st</sup> ERC**

The Secretariat informed the participants about the proposed draft agendas and technical themes for the forthcoming 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the ECA to be held in Budapest, Hungary on 27-28 September 2017. The participants welcomed the strengthened technical focus of the next ECA Session and agreed to focus agenda on the effect of climate change on transboundary animal diseases (TADs). The Members highlighted the following points during the discussion:

- The invitation of technical experts would strengthen the expert character of the discussions in relation to livestock diseases. At the same time, as this will be a transitional ECA session, the nomination of political level representatives to discuss a number of issues including the assessment and the future orientation of ECA is also important.
- The participation of partners (e.g. OIE, WHO) and research institutes should be encouraged.
- The Session should be concluded with recommendations on concrete actions that FAO would follow up on.
- Civil society representatives stressed the importance of stronger CSO and private sector participation in the discussions.

The Secretariat presented the proposed draft agenda for the 31<sup>st</sup> Session of Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) to be held in Voronezh, Russian Federation, in May 2018. Members provided the following inputs and proposals on the ERC:

- The theme of Ministerial Roundtable might be dedicated to climate change, including agroecology, Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS), transboundary diseases, smallholders, fisheries and forests.
- It should be considered to present the reports from the regional technical commissions to the Ministerial Roundtable, which would attract Ministers' attention.
- The discussion topic about stocktaking on the status of implementation of the SDGs should be also considered, including the role of agro-ecology and sustainable food-systems as sub-topic.
- Involvement of civil societies and private sector should be further strengthened.



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## **Attachments**

The Informal Consultation Programme and Timetable, List of Participants and Introductory Technical Notes by the REU Secretariat are available at:

<http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/en/c/877206/>.