REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE REU WORK PROGRAMME 2020-2021

RI3: MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

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Introduction

Intensive use of land and waterways is considered among the main threats to biodiversity in the Europe and Central Asia region (ECA region). Narrowing of the genetic resource base affects the conservation and use of genetic resources for food and agriculture, even if the trend towards the use of a limited number of livestock breeds and crop varieties seems to have levelled off in recent years. Human activities are causing significant damage to marine and freshwater habitats and species, both through the discharge and runoff of nutrients and other chemicals and through direct physical contact or disturbance. Climate change and the proliferation of invasive alien species are also considered among the main threats to biodiversity in the region for food and agriculture[1].

To address the increasing challenges of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the ECA-region, it is important to build a bridge between the environment and agriculture sectors to enhance collaboration and establish or strengthen relevant research, education, capacity-building and multi-stakeholder cooperation programmes at national, regional and international levels.

In Europe and Central Asia, FAO Regional Initiative 3: "Managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity in a changing climate" is the programmatic umbrella for translating global instruments and specific regional challenges into actions at the country level, linking support to policy processes in the region to better answer climate change and biodiversity loss, as these are two major environmental threats of the twenty-first century.

Activities undertaken

FAO has developed a number of different instruments, guidelines and tools to address biodiversity concerns in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its protocols, including for example the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA). In December 2019, the 163rd session of the FAO Council, adopted the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture[2]. A regional synthesis is being prepared for Europe and Central Asia for the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture[3]. Furthermore, the FAO Council[4] adopted the Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors, which aims to mainstream biodiversity across agricultural sectors at national, regional and international levels in a structured and coherent manner, taking into account national priorities, needs, regulations and policies, as well as Country Programming Frameworks.

[1] http://www.fao.org/3/nc238en/nc238en.pdf
[2] http://www.fao.org/3/CA3129EN/CA3129EN.pdf
[3] http://www.fao.org/3/ca6995en/ca6995en.pdf
[4] http://www.fao.org/3/nb349en/nb349en.pdf

FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) provides the following support activities for countries, accelerating their capacities for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and sharing best practices among countries:

- Generating the required analytic evidence on the status of biodiversity and enabling the environment to mainstream biodiversity across agricultural sectors at national and regional levels in a structured and coherent manner including in the planning and decision-making processes in the countries. In this context a draft report on monitoring schemes and data collection on biodiversity linked to food systems in Eastern Europe and Central Asia has been developed, to be published by March 2021; data collection methodology to measure and evaluate the resilience indicators in Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) has been developed in collaboration with the Universidad de Malaga; data collection on the performance of the agroecological system in the region (using Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation , TAPE) in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Turkey, Moldova, Italy, and Hungary has been conducted. In Serbia, the second National Forest Inventory (NFI) has been designed to not only collect basic information about forest resources, but also to collect information specific to biodiversity (ground vegetation, deadwood, lichens, bird breeding trees, etc.) in order to expand biodiversity information available to enable informed decision making in forest development and forest management planning. Three biodiversity manuals have been developed: "*Nature Value Assessment of forest plots. Biodiversity indicators and field guides for the NFI in Serbia"*, "*Nature Value Assessment of forest stands. Biodiversity indicators and field guides for the FMP in Serbia"* and *"Biodiversity guidelines to the FMP guidelines of forest management types".*
- Promoting and scaling up nature-based solutions for enhancing sustainable use of natural resources, agricultural production, and preserving biodiversity and ecosystem services in the context of climate change. In 2020, a study "Hand in Hand with nature: How can agriculture and food systems drive the delivery of Nature-Based Solutions?" has been elaborated and the Regional Webinar: Hand in Hand with Nature: Understanding nature-based solutions in agriculture through GIAHS has been conducted.
- Enhancing country capacities on sustainable management and conservation of genetic resources, agroecology and resilient seed systems. National seed system assessments started in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, and Tajikistan. A regional webinar "Seed system during COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities for ECA region organized to raise awareness on the status of the seed systems in the region" and an online training and knowledge transfer Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE) in ECA countries was conducted.
- In six countries, land degradation neutrality projects have been approved and the implementation of three of them is started, which among others aims to safeguard nature and biodiversity of soil and ecosystem services through healthy soils. In Central Asia countries, sustainable agricultural practices, integrated pest management and other measures are implemented to decrease the use of Highly Hazardous Pesticides to protect biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Work ahead

- Mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem services in the agriculture sector, conducting cross-sectoral and policy dialogues, preparing regional priority actions for the development of the Action Plan for the implementation of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors.
- Promoting the sustainable management of plant genetic resources and resilient seed systems in the region, developing a regional strategy and roadmap for seed systems.

- Providing a regional mechanism to improve the capacities of Members with regard to biodiversity-friendly practices and approaches, nature-based solutions and GIAHS.
- Strengthening multi-stakeholder national platforms for networking, alliances and partnerships on mainstreaming biodiversity. In particular, FAO Country Offices may act as facilitators for national mainstreaming biodiversity dialogues across agricultural sectors, including crops and livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, and other sectors such as environment, private sector (including finance), education, or culture, among others.
- Promoting strong regional collaboration and knowledge sharing among policy-makers, producer organizations, academia, the private sector, civil society organizations and local communities in an effort to transform the current status of biodiversity in the region for the achievement of sustainable food systems.