

Article after-Dialogue

The opening remarks were given by Tania Santivañez, **Agricultural Officer and Delivery manager of the Regional Initiative 3**, and **FAO GIAHS Focal point for the ECA Region**, who highlighted GIAHS on its link with nature, describing them as living laboratories of agricultural and climate resilience and reservoirs of nature-based solutions. She described the richness of the Europe and Central Asia agri-food systems and the potentiality of the agricultural heritage that resides in the region to be recognised, promoted, and preserved.

Tania referred to the 1st Regional Dialogue on GIAHS that took place in July 2019 in Batumi, Georgia, and to the fact that this 2nd Dialogue is built on the advances that have taken place throughout these years. Moreover, the 2nd Dialogue aims to respond to the need expressed by the countries gathered in Batumi of building a regional roadmap that could support their national processes to become GIAHS sites. Furthermore, FAO aims to support and catalyse the candidacy of at least 3 countries in ECA to the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) in 2021.

Session 1: GIAHS and Agri-food sustainability

Yoshihide Endo, **Coordinator of the FAO GIAHS Programme**, started the session by explaining the core elements of the programme. Thus, he summarized the designation process and described the action plan implementation so as the main elements of the proposal document. For this purpose, he gave specific examples of activities and measures to achieve the dynamic conservation such as: agriculture technology improvement and innovation, sustainable tourism for incomes generation, products labelling to improve visibility, ensure quality and market access, promotion of local and traditional culture.

Alessandra Priante, **Director for Europe at World Tourism Organization, UNWTO**, initiated her presentation mentioning the MoU signed between FAO and UNWTO last year in which GIAHS are one of the main objectives. She explains that the pandemic situation has triggered rural tourism destinations and presented the UNWTO Rural Tourism Development Programme, explaining how rural tourism allows to pursue many SDGs. Among the benefits of rural tourism, she mentioned: socio-economic growth, mitigation of risks of concentration, promotion of local resources and increased resilience. “When we talk about tourism for rural development and we mix it with the vision of GIAHS we have something very clear in mind and is that: we have to preserve the community”, she said. This way, tourism becomes one of the elements of rural areas ecosystem, being a positive force of biodiversity, natural resources, and landscape preservation. She mentioned the Alula Framework for inclusive community development through tourism¹, and the relevance of innovation, digital transformation, and technology towards a sustainable rural tourism.

Professor José Damian Sinoga, and José Antonio Sillero, Phd candidate, from the **University of Málaga**, presented the final results of the scientific project implemented between this university and **FAO REU under the framework of Regional Initiative 3**. This study has analysed the resilience and vulnerability of agricultural heritage systems to climate change, through a case study pioneer in receiving the GIAHS recognition in Europe: “The Málaga Raisin production system of La Axarquía”, in Spain. The study confirmed the expected future climate change scenarios presented by the IPCC for this area: decrease in annual precipitation, increased in the

¹ <https://www.developmentaid.org/api/frontend/cms/file/2020/10/9789284422159.pdf>

annual maximum temperature, increase in aggressive rainfall and the consequent soil erosivity, among others. However, the vulnerability of the system resides mainly in the demographic and socio-economic factors such as aging of population and lack of incomes coming from vineyard production.

The study revealed that the vineyard variety is deeply rooted in this climatic zone, being a rainfed crop very resilient to irregular conditions and can withstand even extended periods of summer. It stressed that vine cultivation on the steep slopes of La Axarquía helps limit soil erosion. In addition, traditional nature-based techniques called agüareas (agri-spillways) reduce runoff processes by tilling rills in the down-slope direction to canalize water and sediments. In the same way, dry-stone walls and staggered planting supporting the crops, preventing land degradation. The strong cultural identity and social organization are additional pillars of the resilient grape production system. Local entrepreneurs in Malaga are playing a fundamental role, too, through innovation and economic diversification.

Introducing the issue of Geographical Indication, Dmitry Zvyagintsev, **Policy Officer in FAO REU**, presented the recent work done by FAO Regional Office in this regard. A research was conducted in Albania in 2020 together with SlowFood, and a publication was prepared on 60 potential products with Geographical Indications. Following consultations with various associations 50-60 potential products were identified for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Mr Zvyagintsev also provided advices for GIs experts and producers, highlighting that institutional cooperation, knowledge sharing and dialogue among stakeholders are particularly important for the promotion of GIs. As an example, he presented a postage stamp illustrating a Polish cheese, which was a popular way of promotion of agricultural products. Protected GIs and GIAHS also play an important role in the promotion of tourism and rural development. Mr Zvyagintsev presented a map with GI products in Poland, suggesting that GIAHS could be included in such maps. He explained that GIAHS could be incorporated into the agricultural policy related to rural development and the policy direction of quality schemes, which has a firm and clear certification system. Mr Zvyagintsev suggested that in the promotion of GIAHS take into consideration the quality schemes component and the establishment of instruments for institutionalization, through which the government agencies and institutions can guarantee the sustainability of the agricultural systems.

Slow Food International participated in the dialogue by the hand of Federico Mattei, **Slow Food Representative of Global Project Development and International Relations**. Federico started his presentation introducing the role of SlowFood International as an implementing partner in many projects with UN Agencies. This organization is present in 160 countries, and it started with the objective of counteracting fast food and fast life and promote local sustainable food. It works through three main topics: i) producer and value chain actor; ii) awareness raising and consumers; iii) advocacy and decision makers. Presidia works through three categories of products on its link with: species or varieties, link to traditional techniques, and ecosystem. He explains that it's in this last category were it mainly link with GIAHS, on the relationship between an ecosystem or landscape and food, shaping each other.

Session 2: Advances in the region and building upon the opportunities of GIAHS recognition

Esperanza Perea Acosta, **Technical Counsellor of Andalusia Regional Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Sustainable Development** - Andalusia Government, Spain – explains the VALSIPAM project coordinated by this Regional Ministry and funded by the EU SUDOE Programme. The VALSIPAM is a project of cooperation between European countries, aiming to

create a network of GIAHS territories and unique and singular agricultural areas at European level, in order to improve their management and valorisation methods. This project will design and validate a transnational model for sustainable tourism, and a platform for marketing and networking support, to protect the heritage and promote the socio-economic development of GIAHS. It aims to promote an alternative tourism offer of unique experiences closely linked to the biodiversity, landscape, agricultural and forestry practices, and the cultural and anthropological heritage of GIAHS. The VALSIPAM is composed of 9 partners and 14 associated partners from Portugal, Spain, France, and Italy.

Advances in GIAHS identification and promotion in Azerbaijan were presented by Parviz Aliyev, **National Coordinator for GIAHS and country GIAHS focal point in Azerbaijan**, through the project funded by the EU: “Development of sustainable and inclusive local agri-food systems in north-west region of Azerbaijan”. Through this project it has been carried out an assessment report on regulatory policies that could cover GIAHS conservation in the target region, and consequent recommendations were developed based on the results. An identification survey on the rayons of Gakh, Zagtala and Palakan, collected information on the main products produced in the area (mainly hazelnut, persimmon and honey), the type of production, existing traditions associations, landscape patterns, etc. Moreover, a National GIAHS Working group has already been created and the first meeting of the group took place in mid-April.

Oleg Guchgeldiyev, **FAO Representative in Tajikistan**, presented the advances on GIAHS identification and promotion in Tajikistan, in which the Hissar Valley has been identified by FAO Tajikistan as an agricultural landscape with potentialities to be recognized as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System. This valley is nestled in the southern slopes of Hissar range and has a long and rich history being part of the Silk Road and hosting large medieval settlements. The Hissar complex has also being nominated for UNESCO. The FAO office in Tajikistan has identified a very rich agrobiodiversity—Hissar seep breed, local varieties of apricots, grapes, etc.—and traditional knowledge and techniques such as the apricots and grapes-storage drying. Furthermore, Oleg explains the strong interest and vision on GIAHS coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Oleg Kobiakov, **FAO Liaison Office with the Russian Federation**, explained that Russia has just started to set up the road into the GIAHS Program. This country has a longstanding experience with UNESCO with ten Natural Heritage sites. Now, an initial group of partners has been conformed to work on GIAHS objectives. This group counts with the Moscow University and the Russian Geographical society, and also representatives of CSO such as original people from the north of Russia. Currently they are working in a preliminary scoping of potential objects of GIAHS dominations, that will be shared with Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Afterwards, Oleg gives the floor to Alexey Naumov, **Head of Department of Social and Economic Geography of Foreign Countries at the Moscow State University & Head of Department for Rural Development Studies, of the National Research University HSE**. Alexey exalt the importance for Russia to get into the GIAHS list, due to its geographical variety, the diversity of agri-food systems that have been developed for centuries, and the threats to which they are exposed. He mentioned one potential object of GIAHS recognition in Yakutia—Eurasia—where for centuries cattle ranching and horse breeding takes place despite the harsh conditions, being the latest practice outdoors were temperatures can reach minus 50 degrees Celsius.

The transboundary site of Brda/Collio/Cuel, was introduced by Tina Novak Samec, **General Manager of the Institute for Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport Brda** (in the Community of

Brda), and **responsible for the GIAHS project of Brda / Collio**, and later on detailed by Denis Rusjan, **Associate Professor at the Biotechnical Faculty of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia**, and Francesco Marangon, **Professor and Rector's Delegate for the Sustainability Sector of the University of Udine, Italy**. This territory has been so-called the “land of thousands of terraces”. It is a transboundary system shared between Slovenia and Italy, being nestled in the western region of Slovenia and the Eastern Italy. It has 50000 inhabitants distributed in 9 communities, that speak three languages. It is characterized by a multifunctional agriculture carried out through terraces management been the only possible management for food production in this harsh conditions and steep slopes. Francesco Marangon, highlights: “this is an example of a successful and traditional transnational sustainable Agri-community system”.

Aimilia Drougas, **Biologist, Geologist-Oceanographer, PhD, Ministry of Rural Development and Food, Greece**, presents the Soufli sericulture in Evros, in the Northern Eastern part of Greece, very close to Alexandropolis. This is a traditional village of 4000 people, mainly farmers. She explains that sericulture is a family tradition and business where cocoon production is based on the use of oak tree branches that the farmers use to allow the silkworms to spin their cocoons in them. This way, farmers clear up the forest preventing the occurrence of wildfires. *Koukoulospita* buildings are especially genuine being the silkworm rearing buildings in Soufli.

Dialogue

Esperanza Perea Acosta, in addition to be the **coordinator of the VALSIPAM European Project**, she participated in the GIAHS proposal submission to FAO of the Malaga Raisin Production System in La Axarquía. Therefore, she described the challenges faced in the GIAHS site in La Axarquía, and highlighted the preservation of the landscape and the environment, and its ancestral knowledge, which is the tangible and intangible heritage. For this reason, the priorities are: to preserve these techniques and its transference, and to stimulate the local economy, increasing social and economic opportunities. GIAHS recognition has brought visibility, and global networking. An advice from Spain, as a country that has received several GIAHS recognition, is to preserve the social networking and the participatory approach to ensure the dynamic conservation.

Denis Rusjan and Francisco Marangon, explain that in Brda/Collio/Cuei one main challenge is to maintain the sustainable production without losing ecological and socio-economic resilience, moreover in the new situation of global pandemic COVID-19. The prevalence of small farmers is a challenge but also an opportunity, they are the ones preserving the traditional landscape and its biodiversity and defending it against monoculture. Furthermore, the organization on social cooperatives supports the survival of the system in the global market. There is a strong commitment to stabilize the transboundary coexistence of agricultural systems on one side and dynamic economics for sustainable development.

Parviz Aliyev presents the challenges, opportunities, and priorities of GIAHS designation in the North-West region of Azerbaijan. COVID-19 has been a big challenge in the process of identification due to the restrictions and risk of infection. The small size of the target region and the homogeneity were also challenging. As opportunities he stressed that the region is a famous tourism destination, and the GIAHS recognition would enhance it. Government also support the activities taking place in the area. Moreover, the traditional activities of agricultural production are quite unique as for instance the drying of persimmons, or the production of dried meats,

called *Gakhaj*. One main priority it is to improve the sales problems of local products, which reduces the market access out of the region where it is produced.

Closing remarks

Zsuzsanna Keresztes, **Deputy Delivery Manager of Regional Initiative 3, FAO-REU**, closed the event remarking that GIAHS recognition can be a great contribution to the Europe and Central Asia region to safeguard the unique landscapes and agricultural systems while also safeguarding natural resources. She pointed out rural and sustainable tourism, Geographical Indication (GIs) and the connection between SlowFood and GIAHS, on the crucial role that they can play supporting the sustainable development of these local specific areas while preserving the agricultural heritage. She concluded calling to three priorities: i) the communication among stakeholders and GIAHS sites; ii) understand the priorities, challenges, and opportunities of these local agricultural systems; iii) the inclusiveness, building the future on the community.