The partnership between Azerbaijan and FAO has grown over the past 20 years, resulting in the establishment of a Partnership and Liaison Office in Baku, where the new Head/FAO Representative took up duties in April 2016. Assistance has been delivered through a range of interventions focused on increasing agricultural productivity and the successful implementation of Azerbaijan’s agrarian reforms. Recent cooperation has included technical and policy support across the food and agriculture sector as well as emergency assistance for transboundary animal disease and pest control.

Strengthened country focus

An agreement launching the FAO-Azerbaijan Partnership Programme was signed in Baku in May 2015 during the Director-General’s visit to the country, and a US$10 million cooperation framework set up for 2016-2020. The agreement was later ratified by the Government of Azerbaijan and entered into force in the end of 2015. These important developments expected to strengthen cooperation for the implementation of technical and policy assistance not only in Azerbaijan but also in and beyond the region under FAO’s South-South Cooperation framework.

In the light of Azerbaijan’s significant economic growth, the new Partnership Programme marks a move away from predominantly development-based cooperation towards a knowledge-intensive partnership, based on the country’s increased capacities and synergies with the national planning process. The Government and FAO-Azerbaijan will collaborate with national stakeholders committed to promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development, building on key national plans and strategies such as “Azerbaijan Vision 2020: outlook for the future”.

The Government is also assuming the role of resource partner, aiming to fund FAO projects in Azerbaijan as well as regional and global interventions.

Matching FAO’s expertise to Azerbaijan’s development priorities

FAO’s partnership with Azerbaijan is shaped by the 2016-2020 Country Programming Framework (CPF), currently under review, which sets out six priority areas:

- Animal health and plant protection, including transboundary animal and plant disease control
- Supporting investments in agriculture, food security and rural development
- Capacity development, including agricultural education, research and extension
- Strengthening the policy and institutional framework for agriculture and rural development
- Improved crop, fisheries and livestock production
- Sustainable, equitable and efficient forestry, land and water resource management

The promotion of women’s representation in rural organizations as well as income-generating activities for rural women is a cross-cutting issue throughout the CPF. Jointly developed with the Government, the CPF reflects relevant national development plans and strategies at the same time as supporting FAO’s Strategic Objectives and regional priorities. It is also fully aligned with the UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework (UNAPF).

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Strengthening fisheries and aquaculture policy

FAO assisted the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources in revising and formulating a new national Fisheries Law. The revised law, which includes provisions for the aquaculture sector, was approved by Parliament in June 2014. The Government plans to establish a fund for developing and protecting living aquatic resources — another issue that is reflected in the new law.

FAO is currently supporting the Ministry in developing the national Fisheries Strategy for 2015 to 2020. This will be a key instrument for modernization of the sector, with the chief aims being increased competitiveness, higher fisheries production and productivity, and sustainable growth of the aquaculture industry.

Strengthening dairy farming through producer organizations

Significant achievements have resulted from an FAO project aimed at developing and improving the productivity of cattle and dairy farming. The project entailed the establishment of district-based cattle producers associations (CPAs) as well as the organization of milk producers into dairy marketing associations. The main purpose of the CPAs is to provide training and service delivery, including access to improved feed supplies, and to promote modern livestock husbandry and management practices such as preventive healthcare and milk sanitation.

One cattle producers association established under the project was in Imishli District. This CPA includes about 80 registered farmers, who received training in husbandry, management, forage production and feed practices both before and after establishment of the association. Training activities were supported by model farms and forage demonstration plots, including maize silage production. Farmers who received training had already begun applying their new skills by the end of the project in 2014.

The project supplied milk collection and cooling tanks as well as milk quality analysers, which are also managed by the CPA. Milk is collected through the established milk collection scheme, while the establishment of links between the producers and a local dairy company has strengthened marketing activities. During the opening ceremony of the milk collection and cooling centre — attended by local authorities — a contract was signed between the CPA and a dairy company, which is now purchasing about 1,000 kg of milk on a daily basis.

The CPAs are ideal starting points for implementation of livestock policies, including for improved breeding, forage production and animal disease control plans. They are also vital for the dissemination of information to farmers. As one of the main reasons for establishing the CPAs was to provide training centres, the district associations will continue to deliver training and demonstration sessions to their members and as well as other farmers.

Sustainable development of grain production

Grain production is a central pillar of agriculture in Azerbaijan. Yet domestic production currently falls short of demand, so the gap is filled with imported grain. This is a situation the Government is aiming to change.

In 2011, FAO began introducing elements of Conservation Agriculture, including cultivation of crops on raised beds, zero tillage, crop diversification and other techniques, in pilot areas located in the Tartar and Barda Districts of Azerbaijan. FAO assisted 40 farmers in Azerbaijan, staging field training days and courses on the principles and practices of Conservation Agriculture for achieving sustainable land and water management. Project trials of winter wheat in Tartar District increased yields from 3.5 to 4.3 tonnes per hectare. In Barda District, yield increases were even more striking: rising from 4.0 to 5.5 tonnes per hectare.

There are multiple advantages of Conservation Agriculture: it contributes significantly to water efficiency, for example, as it eliminates flood irrigation techniques. Reducing irrigation water use by 25-30 percent, bed planting also decreases soil erosion as well as diseases and pests. The application of Conservation Agriculture is particularly valuable in Azerbaijan, where smallholder farming is prevalent.

The Organization continues to support countries in the region in the formulation and implementation of national policies and strategies including the adoption of Conservation Agriculture — a high-priority approach for the Government of Azerbaijan.

Carried out under the FAO-Turkey Partnership Programme, in addition to Azerbaijan, this multi-country project targeted irrigated areas in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

“The world needs a paradigm shift to more sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems.”

José Graziano da Silva
FAO Director-General

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