

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia

16–17 May 2019

Budapest, Hungary

Background Note

Session 3

Review of the FAO programmatic framework for 2020–2021 for Europe and Central Asia

1. Introduction

In preparation to the new biennial period 2020–21, second within the current Medium Term Plan 2018–2021, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has undertaken an internal review of its programmatic framework. The review seeks to assess the relevance and adequacy of the framework to address the region's priorities in the next two years in light of the evolving trends and challenges, lessons learned from the ongoing implementation of the 2018–2019 workplan, and requests for assistance received from programme countries.

Guiding FAO's technical work, the programmatic framework is focused on three Regional Initiatives, aligned with the Organization's priorities in Europe and Central Asia, as discussed and endorsed by the member states in May 2016¹ and subsequently revisited and reconfirmed in May 2018.² It comprises Regional Initiative 1 on Empowering smallholders and family farms for improved rural livelihoods and poverty reduction, Regional Initiative 2 on Improving agrifood trade and market integration, and Regional Initiative 3 on Sustainable natural resource management under a changing climate, as well as the overarching priority on food security and nutrition embedded in the framework along with other cross-cutting themes, including gender, governance, climate change and statistics. The Regional Initiatives are conceptualized as an umbrella of programmes, methodologies and approaches underpinning FAO's five corporate Strategic Objectives³ and aligned with the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),⁴ the Paris Agreement,⁵ and the Rome Declaration at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) and its Framework for Action.⁶

The purpose of this note is to present the direction and focus of FAO's work programme in Europe and Central Asia for the next biennium, with emphasis on the three Regional Initiatives, tailored to the region's priorities. It further reviews the cross-cutting areas of FAO's work, outlining key adjustments for 2020–21. The note revisits FAO's contribution to the SDGs, including areas for increased policy support to countries and the evolving role of partnerships in increasing the development impact.

The document is organized in three sections. The first section outlines the three Regional Initiatives, drawing on the current concept and outlining adjustments for the next biennium. The second section reviews

¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mp179e.pdf>

² <http://www.fao.org/3/mw908en/mw908en.pdf>

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/I8580EN/i8580en.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

⁵ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

⁶ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm215e.pdf>



areas for emphasis under the cross-cutting themes, along with policy support for SDGs and partnerships. The third section draws succinct conclusions.

The delegates to the Informal Consultation are invited to review the main technical scope of FAO's work during Session 3 of the Informal Consultation and provide their opinion and recommendations in respect to the proposed adjustments to the scope and emphasis of the FAO's programmatic framework for Europe and Central Asia.

1. Main Programmatic Focus of FAO's Work in the Region

i. Regional Initiative on Empowering smallholders and family farms for improved rural livelihoods and poverty reduction (RI-1)

Maintaining a strong people-centric approach, Regional Initiative 1 (RI-1) addresses the needs of smallholders and family farmers, women and men, in rural areas of Europe and Central Asia. Its programmatic framework guides the formulation and delivery of FAO's specialized support, enhancing the competitiveness of smallholders and family farmers, improving rural livelihoods, and resulting in rural poverty reduction across the region. Aligned with the 2030 Agenda, these tailored interventions implemented at policy and community level contribute to the countries' progress towards ending rural poverty and hunger as well as reducing food security and malnutrition in all its forms under SDG 1, SDG 2, and SDG 3. They advance the achievement of SDG 5 and SDG 10 by promoting gender equality and reducing inequalities. Furthermore, in line SDG 4 and SDG 8 they support increased rural access to quality education and decent employment for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Current concept and programmatic focus to remain for 2020–21

The conceptual umbrella of RI-1 reflects its multi-disciplinary perspective, underpinned by the thematic scope, methodologies and approaches of Strategic Programmes 2 and 3, aimed at reducing poverty and increasing the productivity and sustainability of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. It also incorporates the relevant technical elements of Strategic Programmes 1 and 4, including for school food and nutrition, value chain development and access to market for smallholders, among others. It informs FAO's holistic and integrated response to the needs and constraints faced by rural communities, particularly smallholders and family farmers, delivering on the two key components of the Regional Initiative.

First, FAO supports the development of competitive and commercial smallholders and family farms through **enabling policies and innovative practices for increased sustainable agricultural production in the region**, including plant, livestock and fish production and sustainable forest management. Drawing on FAO's principles for sustainable food and agriculture,⁷ RI-1 facilitates the promotion and dissemination of climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies for integrated pest management, organic production and conservation of plant and animal genetic resources. It focuses on strengthening farmers' capacities through pilot projects, farmer field schools and extension services.

Second, FAO promotes inclusive growth across the region by **improving rural livelihoods and enhancing access to natural resources**, including land, water and forests, for smallholders and family farmers. In this regard, RI-1 delivers its expert assistance on land consolidation, agricultural land market development and regulation, state land management, and the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible

⁷ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3940e.pdf>



Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT).⁸ It supports integrated community development through multi-sectoral rural development policies, strategies and programmes, and it assists in transforming rural institutions, enhancing participatory extension and e-services and enabling the improved and equal access of farmers to natural resources as well as other economic assets and (short) value chains.

Placing emphasis on the three dimensions of sustainable development underpinning the 2030 Agenda and its pledge to leave no one behind, RI-1 ensures adequate consideration of **cross-cutting themes** in its policy and community-based interventions. The Regional Initiative promotes gender mainstreaming in policies, women's economic empowerment, food security and nutrition, inclusive and nutrition-sensitive social protection for rural populations, climate change adaptation, rural-urban migration and reduction of forced migration, and decent rural employment for all, and especially for young women and men and vulnerable groups. Policy and analytical support constitute an integral part of the assistance provided to enable an environment for sustainable rural development and agricultural production, contributing to the implementation of the SDGs at national level.

Support to innovation and e-agriculture networks, technology and knowledge dissemination, capacity development and the promotion of equitable economic participation in farmers' communities are among areas where the Regional Initiative is strengthening its **strategic partnerships**. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation is established with regional institutions, including the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group of South Eastern Europe (SWG), as well as with the European Commission, Austria, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Russian Federation, and other United Nations and international development agencies, such as UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADA), and others. RI-1 increasingly cooperates with civil society organizations and academia and continues exploring new opportunities to expand its effective partnerships with rural institutions and the private sector.

Areas of emphasis in the next biennium

In 2020–21, responding to the growing number of requests for support of smallholders and family farms, Regional Initiative 1 will continue consolidating integrated programming approaches for policy and community-based assistance, in line with the current technical scope as outlined above and the following adjustments.

- RI-1 will expand its support to farmers in **sustainable production and consumption, with a focus on nutrition-sensitive agricultural practices** (in collaboration with RI-2). By promoting sustainable food systems and agroecological and nutrition-sensitive approaches, RI-1 seeks to strengthen economic inclusion and the competitiveness of smallholders and to improve food security and accessibility in rural areas. This includes increased assistance in developing short value chains, regulation and control of the use of pesticides and antibiotics, support to farmers' producer organizations and cooperatives, and strengthening farmers' entrepreneurial skills and access to markets, finance, e-agriculture and digital technologies.
- RI-1 will increase its focus on **enhancing the resilience of rural livelihoods, particularly for vulnerable populations, through promoting agroecological approaches and social protection** (in collaboration with RI-3). This aims at increasing farmers' access to weather and climate information as well as strengthening their capacities on climate change adaptation and mitigation

⁸ <http://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>



and sustainable natural resources management practices, including soil and water management and irrigation, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and diversification of agroecosystems through reforestation, among others. Social protection measures will be mainstreamed across interventions, as relevant, and further efforts will be made to unlock the synergies of social protection and natural resources management as well as to support youth participation in climate action.

- RI-1 will increase its **analytical and statistical support to countries for the formulation of integrated cross-sectoral and gender-responsive rural development policies and programmes** (in collaboration with RI-2 and RI-3). In this respect, RI-1 will assist in strengthening the evidence base and analytical capacity for cross-sectoral poverty analysis at national level, spanning the interlinked issues of food security and nutrition, rural–urban migration, social protection, decent rural employment, and economic diversification. Statistical support will incorporate the Agricultural Integrated Surveys (AGRIS), the main source of data on household level and the core vehicle for producing the SDG indicators.⁹ Enhanced formulation and implementation of the national poverty reduction policies will accelerate countries’ progress towards achievement of the SDGs.
- Linking its programme of work with the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028 and embracing opportunities arising with the Decade’s global launch, RI-1 will increase its efforts to **create an enabling environment and promote joint actions for smallholders and family farmers’ development**, including through promoting investment programs. In this regard, expanding partnerships, particularly with private sector and producer organizations, as well as mobilizing resources across the region for innovative and technology-based solutions for farmers, will be emphasized among objectives for the next biennium.

ii. **Regional Initiative on Improving agrifood trade and market integration (RI-2)**

Regional Initiative 2 (RI-2) is a programmatic framework aimed to support Member States in enhancing the agrifood trade policy environment for small and medium-sized agricultural and food producers, as well as developing more inclusive and sustainable food systems. It supports countries across the region in fulfilling their commitments under the 2030 Agenda. This includes RI-2’s contribution to SDG2.b.2 through its focus on analysing the role of trade policies in achieving the SDGs, supporting the development of national strategies to reduce food losses and waste, and reducing food losses along production and supply chains in line with SDG target 12.3. Furthermore, RI-2 contributes to the SDGs by promoting organic agriculture, geographic indications, and other quality labels under SDG target 2.4, as well as contributing to SDG 1 on poverty reduction, SDG 5 on gender, and SDG target 17.11 on partnerships for increasing the exports of developing countries, particularly with a view to doubling the least developed countries’ share of global exports.

Current concept and programmatic focus to remain for 2020–21

The tailored assistance provided by RI-2 draws on the thematic scope and toolset of FAO’s Strategic Programme 4 for developing more sustainable and inclusive agrifood systems and of the relevant technical elements of the Strategic Programmes 1, 2 and 3. Such an integrated and complementary approach allows RI-2 to fulfil its objectives to implement trade agreements and rules of trading partners for increased market

⁹ For example, SDG indicators 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 (on labor productivity and the incomes of small-scale farmers), SDG indicator 2.4.1 (on sustainable and productive agriculture), and SDG indicator 5.a.1 (on ownership of agricultural land disaggregated by sex).



access, to enhance standards and control measures assuring safe food, and to address animal and plant pests and diseases, creating an enabling policy environment for export diversification and sustainable value chain development. Relevant aspects of food security and nutrition are also integrated.

The first component of RI-2 provides **capacity development on World Trade Organization (WTO) trade agreements and effective use of WTO procedures**, tailored to the needs of countries negotiating WTO accession and those which, having acceded, are implementing their commitments. RI-2 encompasses the institutional and policy aspects of global trade regulation, promotion and facilitation. Strongly focused on the policy environment, RI-2 assists in analytical support for policymakers on the issues related to agrifood trade as well as food and agriculture policies, through capacity development, evidence generation, and the promotion of dialogue on trade policies and strategies across the region.

The second component of RI-2 supports the **implementation of global food quality and safety standards, including addressing animal health and phytosanitary plant health issues**. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, policymakers, scientists, agricultural producers, value chain operators and academics, RI-2 provides capacity development on phytosanitary and International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)¹⁰ issues, sanitary and veterinary control – taking account of the standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) – and food safety and quality standards aligned with Codex Alimentarius.¹¹ This includes addressing antimicrobial resistance, transboundary animal diseases and zoonosis as well as promoting sustainable agrifood production.

Under its third component, RI-2 **supports domestic markets and export diversification and promotion, in view of developing more inclusive, sustainable and efficient agrifood systems**. This includes the provision of support to countries on the development of domestic markets and increased access, trade competitiveness and diversification, and export promotion for sectoral investment plans, sustainable production and market access and agribusiness development. Increased support is provided for sustainable agrifood production through more efficient and inclusive value chains, such as organic production and geographical indications. The Regional Initiative promotes food loss and waste reduction, assisting countries in developing national food loss and waste reduction strategies and plans and setting up a regional platform for food loss and waste reduction and partnerships.

Response to the **cross-cutting issues** constitutes an integral part of RI-2 support in the framework of the SDGs, addressing nutrition, gender, policy, statistics and climate change. RI-2 strengthens the capacity of governments and stakeholders to use available resources to address food insecurity and malnutrition by promoting the availability, stability and diversity of food and access to healthy diets through its support for sustainable value chain development, food loss and waste reduction, and assuring food safety and preventing the loss of nutrients, as well as on trade, marketing, and food price policies. RI-2 ensures that gender issues relevant to the context are considered in formulating and implementing assistance, and it aims to support income-diversification components that target grass-roots rural women in remote areas, to enhance their access to markets and improve the trade potential of their products while sharing good practices and guidance for gender-sensitive interventions. Furthermore, RI-2 increasingly focuses on statistical and analytical assistance to inform policy actions and instruments, contributing to equitable economic growth, sustainable production and consumption, and multi-dimensional poverty reduction.

RI-2 continues enhancing its **country level and regional multi-stakeholder partnerships**, which already include actors from governments, academia and research institutions, regional networks, resource partners,

¹⁰ https://www.ippc.int/static/media/files/publications/en/2013/06/06/1329129099_ippc_2011-12-01_reformatted.pdf

¹¹ <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/en/>



civil service organizations, community-based organizations, the private sector, municipalities, and local actors. RI-2 is consistently strengthening its cooperation with International Financial Institutions, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Collaboration is ongoing with the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Black Sea Biotechnology Association (BSBA) on agrifood trade development and biosafety, respectively, as well as with a wider scope of partners, including for reduction of food losses and waste through FAO's SAVE FOOD initiative, in collaboration with Messe Düsseldorf. Within a One Health context, there is close collaboration with the World Health Organization and the World Organisation for Animal Health on priority issues. RI-2 also supports the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Europe (CCEURO) and the Agricultural Trade Expert Network in Europe and Central Asia (ATEN), and it collaborates with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) on e-learning platforms.

Areas of emphasis in the next biennium

Maintaining the direction and current technical scope as presented above for its programme of work in 2020–21, RI-2 will increase emphasis on the following thematic and programmatic aspects, in light of the ongoing implementation experience and the countries' requests for support.

- RI-2 will enhance its **tailored approaches for formulation and implementation of the trade- and market-oriented interventions based on country-specific trade relations, processes and priorities and the relevant knowledge generated across the region** (in cooperation with RI-1). It includes the Regional Initiative's support in promoting domestic markets for agrifood produce, access to regional markets, and import substitution strategies, complementary to the ongoing assistance on export promotion, addressing the countries' priorities and portfolios. In this respect, opportunities to increase engagement with relevant strategic partners, including the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union and China, will be further explored. RI-2 will develop and promote short food supply chains and territorial markets, focusing on assisting farmers and small and medium-sized food processors in accessing market information, extension services, and innovation and digital solutions.
- RI-2 will increase its **support for sustainable, nutrition-sensitive value chain development, drawing on the holistic approaches and corporate programmatic solutions** (in cooperation with RI-1). Emphasis will be made on developing inclusive, pro-poor and gender-sensitive value chains in line with the Sustainable Food Systems approach and on developing rural–urban linkages, contributing to FAO's Urban Food Agenda.¹² RI-2 will enhance its assistance on issues related to food safety, antimicrobial resistance, transboundary animal diseases, and endemic and emerging animal diseases, in line with the One Health approach,¹³ as well as on food loss and waste reduction in the context of climate-resilient food systems, which have a significant impact on trade and the livelihoods of smallholders.
- RI-2 will **strengthen its analytical framework for evidence-based, cross-sectoral policy decisions on trade and agriculture, in line with the SDGs** (in cooperation with RI-1 and RI-3). Further actions will be sought to improve statistical data collection and economic analysis at country level on market price monitoring, early warning systems (including price shocks), consumption patterns, dietary diversity and food loss and waste. The produced evidence will support national and regional policy choices to better address the needs of the most vulnerable

¹² <http://www.fao.org/3/ca3151en/CA3151EN.pdf>

¹³ <http://www.fao.org/3/al868e/al868e00.pdf>



groups, considering identified root issues and trade-offs, and will facilitate countries' progress towards the SDGs achievement by leaving no one behind. Moreover, increased awareness on the interconnectedness of climate change and food systems and increasing the integration of food security concerns into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)¹⁴ could be further promoted.

- RI-2 aims to enhance the scope and modality of its **partnerships**, moving from funding to financing, developing new forms of collaboration, and fostering investments. RI-2 will explore further opportunities to enhance partnerships with International Financial Institutions and the private sector, including in the context of public–private partnerships, as well as with other regional organizations to exchange experience, expertise and data in line with the countries' needs.

iii. **Regional Initiative on Sustainable natural resource management under a changing climate (RI-3)**

Under implementation since January 2018, Regional Initiative 3 (RI-3) draws conclusions and lessons from its experience of the past year. Relying on its programmatic framework, RI-3 supports Member States in strengthening their capacities for achieving sustainable natural resource management, including adaptation and mitigation to climate change and disaster risk reduction in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Through the provided cross-sectorial assistance, RI-3 contributes to SDG implementation processes across the region. Thus, by promoting prevention and mitigation practices and increasing the resilience of the poor and vulnerable, the Regional Initiative facilitates countries' achievement of SDG target 1.5, by supporting disaster risk reduction, integrated policies and improved education and awareness on climate change and climate resilience, it steers forward national commitments to SDG 13 on taking action to combat climate change. Furthermore, RI-3 contributes to SDG target 2.4 by enabling more productive and sustainable agriculture, SDG 12 by promoting sustainable consumption and production, as well as SDG target 6.4 on increasing water-use efficiency, SDG 14 on oceans and seas, and SDG 15 on life on land.

Current concept and programmatic focus to remain for 2020–21

In line with its key objective, RI-3 intends to provide a mechanism to support member countries in addressing the interlinked challenges of climate change and sustainable natural resource management through transitioning to more climate-resilient and sustainable food systems. In formulating its technical assistance, RI-3 draws on the methodology and approaches of Strategic Programmes 2 and 5, aiming at making agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable and increasing the resilience of livelihoods to disasters. Furthermore, the RI-3 toolset is complemented with relevant thematic elements of Strategic Programmes 1, 3 and 4 related to the nexus between climate change, food security, food systems, and rural poverty.

Under its first component, RI-3 provides comprehensive support for **improved policy alignment, coordination and cooperation for sustainable use of natural resources, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk reduction**. Its programme of work contributes to the increased policy coherence and integration of climate change into national rural development, agricultural and environmental governance frameworks and legislation through cross-sectorial dialogues and capacity development on risk and crisis management, sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. It supports countries' capacity for enhancing synergies amongst social protection, nutrition, agriculture and natural resource management, and it facilitates national, regional and international coordination and cooperation, including on risk reduction and crisis management.

¹⁴ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf



Second, the Regional Initiative supports the **effective provision and collection of data, tools and services for informed decision-making on addressing natural resource management**. Drawing on the gaps in data availability and quality at country and regional level, RI-3 places a strong focus on strengthening countries' capacities in statistics and analysis for implementation and monitoring of the SDG indicators under FAO custodianship. It assists in improving agro-meteorology services, early warning, hazard mapping, and climate change modeling, supporting countries' progress towards achieving their targets under Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs),¹⁵ the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),¹⁶ and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.¹⁷ The provided expertise on data collection, analysis and reporting supports countries in developing evidence-based policy decisions and tools for the identification and monitoring of threats and shocks, risk assessments, food security early warning and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions for the agricultural sector.

The third component of the Regional Initiative is designed to promote **capacity development for sustainable natural resource management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk reduction**. It includes support required to enhance the formulation and implementation of policies, strategies and regulatory frameworks for sustainable natural resource management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk reduction, spanning issues of sustainable water and land management and climate-resilient and sustainable food systems. In this respect, RI-3 also assists countries in accessing climate and environmental financing (including the Green Climate Fund¹⁸ and Global Environment Facility¹⁹), based on the regional mechanisms it provides. Furthermore, FAO supports countries in improving their national capacity for emergency preparedness to reduce the impact of disasters and crises.

With thematic scope of RI-3 cutting across the three dimensions (social, economic and environmental) of sustainable development, **cross-cutting themes** are closely integrated in the Regional Initiative's programming and policy support. RI-3 focuses on developing and improving comprehensive and gender-equitable agro-environmental policies and programmes, sustainably addressing the interconnected issues of production, climate change and environmental degradation. RI-3 supports countries in redesigning approaches for the effective integration of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in international governance mechanisms related to the 2030 Agenda, climate change, biodiversity, environmental agendas and international agreements. It promotes higher profiling of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change on food security and nutrition in national policy and financing decisions.

RI-3 cooperates with a wide range of partners, including specialized technical organizations, international development organizations, United Nations agencies, and research institutions, such as the World Meteorological Organization, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), the International Water Management Institute, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and others. RI-3 is continuously increasing its strategic partnership with GCF and GEF across the region, as well as exploring opportunities for expanding cooperation with civil society organizations.

¹⁵ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

¹⁶ https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveng.pdf

¹⁷ https://www.unisdr.org/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.greenclimate.fund/>

¹⁹ <https://www.thegef.org/>



Areas of emphasis in the next biennium

In 2020–21, RI-3 will continue delivering its support to countries in close collaboration with RI-1 and RI-2, guided by its current technical scope and the following adjustments based on the countries' requests.

- RI-3 will increase its **emphasis on promoting and scaling up sustainable and nature-based agricultural solutions such as agroecology in the region** through enabling holistic, cross-sectorial practices and policies (in cooperation with RI-1 and RI-2). Interconnectedness and synergies between nature-based solutions and climate change adaptation and mitigation will be explored.
- RI-3 seeks to further **explore the water-soil-food-energy nexus, the climate change-poverty-livelihoods nexus, climate variability, and food systems**. In this respect, it seeks to further collect data for evidence-based decision-making for quantifying the impacts of the climate change-induced shocks on populations, migration, markets, animal and plant health, and food hazards to inform the agenda setting in the region. This is particularly important in the framework of the support for monitoring the implementation of NDCs and strengthening the early warning systems to enable an enhanced and gender-sensitive response. Technical assistance will include capacity development for an enhanced transparency framework (ETF)²⁰ for improved tracking of climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Recognising the increasing opportunities for multi-stakeholder collaboration, RI-3 aims at **expanding its partnerships** with academia, research institutes, private sector, international development organizations and other UN agencies, including UN Environment. It will increase its efforts in steering for coherent action on issues related to climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, food security and nutrition, and promotion of digitalization and e-agriculture, among others, for an increased impact at country level. In this respect, emphasis will be made on exploring opportunities for joint investment or co-financing with different organizations, attracting complementary funds and climate finance mechanisms, particularly in the framework of its strategies for enhanced engagement with GCF and GEF-7 in the region.

2. Areas for emphasis under cross-cutting themes and partnerships

The FAO Regional Initiatives emphasize the key role of the cross-cutting areas of work in enhancing the coherency, sustainability and impact of its interventions. Gender equality, food security and nutrition, and climate change, along with other cross-cutting themes, are mainstreamed within the Regional Initiatives as well as considered as technical areas of work on their own that help to better reach FAO's objectives and increase impact. This section summarizes the direction and emphasis undertaken in respect to the key cross-cutting themes for the next biennial period, 2020–21, in light of the ongoing implementation experience, lessons learned, and countries' requests for support.

²⁰ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i8145e.pdf>

- Increased focus on the issues of **food security and nutrition** as an overarching priority for FAO's work in the region will be made across all Regional Initiatives' interventions to address the rising prevalence of obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases in the region. Specific requests for assistance include the development of national food security and nutrition programmes and relevant policy support, including school food and nutrition programmes as already taking place in several countries. In addition, assistance in developing food-based dietary guidelines and food and nutrition education, strengthening national food security and nutrition monitoring systems, and institution development on food security and nutrition at country level, will be considered. Further efforts will be made to provide increased evidence regarding the potential effects of different policy options throughout the food systems and particularly in respect to obesity and non-communicable diseases. FAO will continue promoting advocacy and policy dialogue, including through the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform in Central Asia and the Caucasus established jointly with UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme and eight member states of Central Asia and the Caucasus.
- **Gender mainstreaming** requires ensuring that the needs of both women and men are identified and addressed in any single intervention. For this, it is essential to improve further analytical work, raising awareness among stakeholders and increasing capacities to collect sex-disaggregated data and to ensure that interventions are always developed and implemented based on this data.
- **Social protection**, as an important contributor to SDG targets 1.3, 3.8 and 8.b, requires further emphasis to promote and enhance support to the extreme poor in rural areas, including women, youth and the elderly, to increase their access to food, production opportunities, necessary technologies and, subsequently, to the market. This requires further efforts to promote social protection as an integral tool at country level, for example through interventions on support for smallholders and family farms, on women's economic empowerment, on youth integration, and on decent rural ageing.
- The growing challenges imposed by the adverse impacts of **climate change** require increasing efforts for expanding and strengthening strategic partnerships with the organizations and institutions actively engaged in these themes, such as the World Bank. The key need that remains is to improve the availability of data on climate and weather and to make it accessible at country and regional level.
- Support on **innovation and digitalization** requires further focus on identification, documentation and dissemination of good practices – those related to e-agriculture, for example – and represents another key potential area for partnerships.
- The assistance on **statistics** needs to be further enhanced, with a specific focus on the collection of gender-disaggregated data under the three Regional Initiatives, including on issues of forestry statistics, food security statistics, water resources, market prices and others.
- The support to the national processes on **SDG implementation and monitoring** will be further oriented towards the existing concrete and comprehensive approaches and integrated policies and programmes, such as the FAO guide "Transforming Food and Agriculture to Achieve the SDGs."²¹

²¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/I9900EN/i9900en.pdf>



- In respect to **partnerships**, increasing emphasis will be made for steering engagement with partners from funding to financing and for exploring opportunities to collaborate with the private sector and to strengthen approaches promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships.

3. Conclusions

The document outlines the main direction of FAO's work in the region for the future biennium, considering the internal and external policy processes. The presented conceptual framework aims at the increased impact of the delivered results to support and accelerate countries' progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and implementation of the Paris Agreement and the ICN2 Framework for Action, contributing to the joint efforts for equitable and sustainable development in the region. In this respect, the Regional Initiatives provide a programmatic platform and toolset facilitating the cross-sectoral work of the Organization, based on FAO's Strategic Objectives and in light of the external policy processes, to ensure a holistic approach in the fight against food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty across the region. The universality of the Sustainable Development Goals makes such a holistic approach key and calls for increased focus and investment in food security and agriculture through gender-sensitive policies and practices, involving interventions that promote income diversification and inclusive value chains linked to sustainable agriculture.