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Leaving no one behind: challenges and opportunities for mainstreaming gender concerns in FAO's work

Executive summary

This paper provides a brief update on the status of the progress made by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in advancing gender equality in the region, as part of its mandate and commitment under the Corporate Policy on Gender Equality and the Regional Gender Equality Strategy adopted in January 2016.

In particular, the paper aims to inform members of the ECA on progress achieved in implementing the gender and social protection network approach and other activities. FAO REU has been actively working on promoting gender equality in the region by addressing it as a cross-cutting issue within all areas of its technical mandate; building knowledge on gender and agricultural issues in the region and building partnerships and strengthening capacities of its own staff and national partners to better understand how the issues related to gender inequalities, social exclusion and deprivation can affect agricultural and rural development. This paper provides an overview of the key results achieved so far, and shares ideas on future steps and actions that would form the core of the next phase of the REU Regional Gender Strategy for 2018-2022.

Guidance sought

The ECA is invited to:

- 1) Review REU's work on gender equality in Europe and Central Asia, as presented in the Background note and as outlined in paragraphs 9-25;
- 2) Provide feedback on and suggestions for FAO's work in advancing gender equality in the region for future years as outlined in the Background note, paragraphs 26-29;
- 3) Endorse policy recommendations for Member States that are based on findings from country gender assessments and formulated in the Joint call for action,¹ as outlined in paragraph 30.

¹ www.fao.org/3/a-i7020e.pdf



I. Introduction

1. In 2006, the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) endorsed the UN System-Wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women,² the UN-SWAP³ (UN Women, 2012). The UN-SWAP is binding to all UN agencies, and since 2012, the entire UN system reports annually on the UN-SWAP to the ECOSOC.
2. Like other UN agencies, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations adopted the FAO Policy on Gender Equality⁴ in 2012, framed by the UN-SWAP. The policy guides FAO's Strategic Framework and its five Strategic Objectives (SOs) and one Technical Objective (TO6), which explicitly integrates gender across all the Objectives and in particular Outcome 6.3⁵ of the 2016-17 Programme of Work and Budget.⁶ To ensure that the gender perspective is fully mainstreamed in its normative and project work, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (FAO REU) developed and adopted, in 2016-2017, its first regional gender equality strategy,⁷ which outlines the measures to promote gender in agriculture and rural development in the region in a more practical and cost-effective way, as recommended by the 38th Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA, 2014),⁸ and endorsed by the 29th European Regional Conference (ERC, 2014, Bucharest). These recommendations also included decisions to abolish the Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development.
3. Therefore, the purpose of this background paper is to provide an update on progress made by FAO in the European and Central Asia region in mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in the work of the Organization and solicit recommendations and comments from member countries for the next steps and expected results for 2018-2022.

II. Context: gender inequalities in Europe and Central Asia

4. The Gender Inequality Index in Europe and Central Asia is 0.279, whereby 0 represents total equality and 1 total inequality (UNDP, 2015). Although this indicator is the most advanced globally, gender-based discrimination still persists in the region. The situation varies from country to country. However, what is common is that women living in rural and remote areas are more likely to suffer from discrimination and poverty, as FAO has demonstrated through research and studies conducted in recent years at country and regional levels.⁹ Women from minority groups, women with children,

² www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/promoting-un-accountability

³ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/promoting-un-accountability>

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/i3205e/i3205e.pdf>

⁵ "Quality services and coherent approaches to work on gender equality and women's empowerment that result in strengthened country capacity to formulate, implement and monitor policies and programmes that provide equal opportunities for men and women".

⁶ The Director-General's Medium Term Plan 2014-17 (reviewed) and Programme of Work and Budget 2016-17 <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm710e.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5501e.pdf>

⁸ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Europe/documents/Events_2014/ECA2014/ECA_38_14_5_en.pdf

⁹ More details can be found in FAO REU publications released throughout 2016-2017: [National Gender Profile of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods: Kyrgyzstan. Country gender assessment series](#) (available also in [Russian](#)); [National Gender Profile of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods: Republic of Tajikistan. Country gender assessment series](#) (also available in [Russian](#)); [National Gender Profile of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods: Turkey. Country gender assessment series](#) (also available in [Turkish](#)); [Gender, agriculture and rural development in Albania. Country gender assessment series](#) (also available in [Albanian](#)); [Gender, agriculture and rural development in Armenia. Country gender assessment series](#) (also available in [Armenian](#)); [Gender and Rural Development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Key Issues](#) (also available in [Russian](#)) – a brief overview of key gender issues relevant to the region of Eastern Europe, the Balkans, South Caucasus and Central Asia; [Gender equality, social protection and rural development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Insights from the Region](#) (also available in [Russian](#)). In April 2017 this publication was re-printed by the International agriculture

elderly women, women with disabilities and those with lower levels of education usually find themselves in even more disadvantaged situations. All gender inequalities have a common root in the socially constructed societal norms and practices that entail certain kinds of behaviour for women and men and assign a lower status to females compared to males. This is fed and reinforced by the ideological, economic, political, legal and institutional systems, public attitudes and stereotypes on gender roles that grant less visibility to women's actual contribution to agriculture, fisheries and forestry.

5. Despite significant advances in gender statistics and qualitative research in countries of the region, many forms of gender inequality are still invisible or difficult to track: for example, rural women's work on family farms as unpaid family workers; and/or rural women's access to and ability to exercise control over productive resources and assets such as land, credit, training, agricultural inputs, etc. FAO has contributed to the generation of evidence of gender inequality in agricultural and rural livelihoods with country gender assessments¹⁰ conducted in the region. The main conclusion is that despite high economic activity rates of rural women in the region, who comprise, on average, half of those working in agriculture, they are overrepresented in manual labour as informal, unpaid and family workers, and are rarely registered, nor do they identify themselves as managers or co-managers of agricultural holdings and farms. In some countries, where national gender assessments were conducted, between 60 and 87 percent of those women working in agriculture do so as informal or family workers, while only between 6.5 and 31 percent of agricultural holdings are managed by women.

6. While data are scarce, some available indicators demonstrate that rural women's access to resources and assets, be it land, water, pastures, livestock, credit, subsidies, rural advisory services or decision-making, is also limited. For example, the percentage of women beneficiaries of rural advisory services can be as low as 10 percent of total beneficiaries, and the percentage of women as owners of agricultural machinery can be as low as 5 percent of all owners. A bias in inheritance practices for male children and patrilocal marriages are some of the reasons behind women's limited access to land. Even when women legally own land, registration practices (which tend to be made in the name of a male family member) limit women's de facto enjoyment of their rights over land. The status of rural women is exacerbated by a double and triple burden of domestic and reproductive¹¹ work which overwhelmingly falls on women's shoulders. The inferior levels of infrastructure and technology in rural households has a direct impact on rural women's household workload, taking up twice as much time compared to their urban counterparts, and up to six times more time compared to rural men, significantly limiting their opportunities for engaging in paid economic activities.

7. As in other parts of the world, rural women in the region have reduced access to information communications technology (ICT) and innovative agricultural practices when compared to that of men and women residing in urban areas. This further contributes to the gender pay gap: women earning between 60-85 percent of a man's salary and lower access to decent jobs and off-farm employment, thus increasing women's risks of falling into poverty, especially in older age groups. In the context of current regional challenges and trends, including climate change, natural disasters and migration, women's – and especially young women's – access to resources and economic opportunities becomes even more critical.

magazine based in Moscow: <http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/razvitie-selskih-territoriy-rossii-sotsialnye-i-gendernye-problemy>;

¹⁰ As listed under the previous footnote

¹¹ Reproductive, or unpaid care work is a term that is assigned to the work, usually at household level, which includes provision of care to family members, from child-rearing to looking after the sick and the elderly. This is closely linked with domestic work, as is cleaning, cooking, and so on. Usually this work in most of the societies is performed by women and is seen as an extension of their 'natural' role. In gender and development theory this term calls attention to how women in particular are assigned to the domestic sphere where the reproductive work is uncompensated and unrecognized.

III. Implementation of the FAO Regional Gender Equality Strategy (2016-2017)

8. FAO is fully committed to closing the gender gaps in agriculture and empowering rural women to achieve greater effectiveness and consequently a more profound impact of its development interventions and technical assistance provided to member countries in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda. In its work to address gender inequality in the region, FAO is guided by its first Regional Gender Equality Strategy for Europe and Central Asia 2016-2017 (FAO, 2016f).¹² Based on this strategy, the main areas of FAO's work on gender equality for the region for the period 2016-2017 have been identified as:

A. Capacity development and awareness raising of FAO technical staff and national partners, through knowledge generation, advocacy and support to the generation of gender statistics for the formulation and implementation of evidence-based agricultural policies and strategies;

B. The economic empowerment of rural women through income generation, diversification and improved access to markets; and

C. Gender-sensitive FAO technical assistance, by mainstreaming gender equality, human rights and social inclusion within agricultural strategies, country programme frameworks (CPFs), technical cooperation projects (TCPs) and other programmes and trust fund projects, including the Global Environment Fund (GEF) (FAO, 2016f, p.3).

A. Capacity development and awareness raising

9. Capacity development and awareness raising have been at the core of the REU gender team work over the past two years. This work targeted primarily FAO technical staff, FAO gender focal points located in the REU, SEC and country offices, and national partners, from ministries of agriculture, national statistical offices and other government and non-governmental organizations.

10. Based on the recommendations of ERC and ECA to strengthen national and regional capacities in Europe and Central Asia to address gender equality, social inclusion and rural development issues, FAO REU has been working on establishing and strengthening a regional expert network, to monitor and provide policy-relevant, evidence-based analysis for policy-makers in the Eastern Europe and Central Asian region. This network has been considered as a direct follow-up to the ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (ECA WPW) which was abolished by the ECA and the ERC in 2014.¹³ The reformulation of gender outreach activities for the region towards an expert network rather than a government representative meeting has been in line with intentions to produce more policy-relevant, evidence-based analysis.

11. The first meeting of the regional network, convened in Minsk in February 2016, brought together policy analysts to review and analyse the issues that are at the intersection of gender equality, social protection and rural development in the region. Overall, there is a lack of a multidisciplinary approach in research, documented knowledge and public discourse for an in-depth and rigorous understanding of these intersecting issues in the context of the region. By convening the regional experts' meeting, FAO aimed at drawing attention and raising greater awareness among all stakeholders to these issues as critical for socio-economic development of the region. In addition, the

¹² <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5501e.pdf>

¹³ See 38th Session of the ECA Report

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Europe/documents/Events_2014/ECA2014/Report_r1_en.pdf (para. 17b)

meeting allowed the secretariat to judge how useful such a network could be and how to proceed in the future. The workshop demonstrated that the best use of the regional network is to commission targeted analytical reports on selected topics of specific interest to FAO's member countries. Such products would be the most useful in producing policy-relevant and evidence-based analysis for the region. The Minsk workshop produced a publication on Gender Equality, Social Protection and Rural Development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia¹⁴ (available in English and Russian languages), which was launched in February 2017 at the Central Scientific Agricultural Library of the Russian Federation, through a webinar watched also from other parts of the region.¹⁵

12. Based on the need to address different issues or achieve certain gender-related objectives and results, FAO can hold annual meetings of the gender and social protection network, provided that participation varies according to the theme of the meeting. Such meetings will provide a platform to generate and stimulate dialogue in gender, social protection, agriculture and rural development issues in support of policies that are responsive to the needs of disadvantaged groups.

13. A high-level conference *Promoting socially inclusive rural development in Europe and Central Asia: Action for the 2030 Agenda*,¹⁶ was organized and hosted by REU in close partnership with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) from 30 January-1 February 2017 in Vilnius, Lithuania, as part of a capacity-building strategy and follow-up to the high-level event, Step It Up Together for Rural Women to End Hunger and Poverty,¹⁷ convened on 16 December 2016 in Rome, Italy, by FAO, the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) and the European Commission, in close collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Women.

14. The Vilnius conference provided a platform for policy dialogue and exchange of best practices in integrating gender equality issues into rural development. It strengthened the capacities of national stakeholders and reinforced commitments towards socially inclusive agricultural and rural development in the region. The conference was attended by more than 60 participants from over 20 countries of the region, including high-level representatives from ministries of agriculture and related ministries, parliamentarians, representatives from civil society, the private sector and academia, FAO staff from Headquarters, country offices of the region as well as the regional and subregional office. The main output of the conference was a Joint Call for Action¹⁸ on promoting socially inclusive rural development in Europe and Central Asia that reaffirmed the commitment of Member States and FAO to work towards gender equality. The Joint Call for Action provides a concrete pathway for effective gender-responsive implementation of the SDGs - 2030 Agenda in the areas of FAO's mandate, and it consists of a set of detailed recommendations for FAO, national governments and representatives from civil society and the private sector (FAO, 2017).

15. Along with these major areas of work, REU attaches equal attention to the day-to-day capacity development of its technical officers, based in regional, subregional and country-level offices, by providing face-to-face and online training, briefing sessions, and individual consultations, including support to field-based gender focal points, project staff and national actors involved in the implementation of FAO projects. Region-specific tools, such as the "Gender mainstreaming and human rights-based approach (HRBA) guidelines"¹⁹ for technical officers, were developed and made available to FAO staff and national partners in English and Russian languages in January 2017. The introduction and dissemination of this tool was accompanied by several briefing and training sessions throughout 2016 and 2017, targeting FAO technical officers and project staff, at regional, subregional

¹⁴ <http://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/4f81a152-615a-45df-8be9-2fd722cbcca1/>

¹⁵ <http://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail-news/en/c/470650/>

¹⁶ <http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/en/c/461793/>

¹⁷ <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/rural-women-end-hunger/en/>

¹⁸ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7020e.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6808e.pdf>

and country offices. Since last year, more than 100 FAO staff and key stakeholders have received training in gender mainstreaming.

16. Currently, REU is conducting a gender-stocktaking exercise, with the key objectives to:

- Show achievements, as well as gaps and challenges related to the promotion of gender equality in the work of regional and subregional offices in Budapest and Ankara;
- Identify capacity-development needs for gender mainstreaming and make recommendations on how to address them;
- Provide a baseline to measure progress on the achievement of the relevant minimum standards of the FAO Policy on Gender Equality.

17. The methodological approach relied primarily on qualitative sources (in-person and online interviews, online questionnaires), cross-checked with quantitative sources in the form of desk reviews of sample country programming frameworks and supporting project documentation. The positive findings of the exercise confirm that progress has been made but its effects have been uneven. While there is greater awareness among key technical staff of FAO's gender mandate and guidelines, there is still work that needs to be done towards improving understanding of the specific meaning of gender mainstreaming and its systematic practice to achieving full implementation of FAO's Gender Equality Policy in the Europe and Central Asia region.

B. The economic empowerment of rural women

18. The focus of FAO's work in the region to empower rural women economically places particular emphasis on Central Asian countries, which struggle with similar development challenges such as rural poverty, malnutrition, rapid population growth and pressures on natural resources. Agriculture cannot absorb a growing rural population, forcing women and men to migrate in search of jobs and income. Labour-force migration from these countries is mostly directed towards Russia and Kazakhstan, and over the past decade, compared to the last decades, has reached an unprecedented scale, demonstrating, among other things, clear gender patterns, as it is mostly men who migrate from Central Asian countries while women generally stay behind, and take responsibility for children, the elderly and work on farms. The remittance flow in the region does not always translate into direct rural investment and improved social livelihoods of rural communities. In fact, there is increased evidence of labour migration having a dual effect on local development and left-behind families in rural areas. In this regard, diversifying income through off-farm activities, for example, improved production of rural crafts, and overcoming barriers for their trade within and outside Central Asia can be effective development strategies in creating a significant and sustainable source of (primary or additional) income for rural communities in several countries of the subregion through low investments and high returns.

19. The work carried out in this area so far can be categorized as follows:

Building knowledge of the situation

20. The FAO REU gender team, during 2016–2017 supported research and studies that reviewed the current value-chain status and development potential of handicrafts that use raw materials produced in the agricultural sector as a source of job creation and income diversification for communities in rural areas of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Reports produced by these studies highlight challenges in the development of rural handicrafts at national and regional levels; analyse existing and potential markets for rural craft products, identify the opportunities and main barriers and provide recommendations for creating jobs, sustaining rural livelihoods and preventing migration from rural areas. The main recommendations point out that while some crafts in the region, over the last decades, have turned into profitable sectors, producing items for sale locally, nationally and abroad, there are still areas (such as wool processing, basket-making and silk dyeing, for example) that represent employment opportunities for rural communities and, with small

investment, have high potential for income generation and entrepreneurial activities. The findings and recommendations of the reports were validated at the International Conference on Foreign Investments, Modern Technologies and Innovation for Development held in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, from 26-28 May 2016.²⁰

Creating an enabling environment to support rural women

21. Based on the recommendations of the above reports, two pilot training sessions were conducted in Kulundu (Batken province, Kyrgyzstan) and Baysoon (Surkhandarya province, Uzbekistan) in March and May 2017 respectively, targeting rural women engaged in the production of rural crafts. Altogether, up to 50 women were trained in both countries. The results of these training sessions were presented at two round tables held in Bishkek and Tashkent respectively in June-July 2017, with the objective of reaching policy-makers and discussing rural crafts as a source of job creation and income generation and improving their marketability and trade potential.

22. The FAO REU gender team is keen to pursue the work on improving quality and marketability of ethnic rural handmade products. As rural women are usually in a position to control the income they earn in producing and selling these items (and FAO encourages their production from agricultural raw materials and residues), these interventions benefit them directly. At the same time, it is critical to use this work as an entry point for strategic change and continue targeting at policy level for promoting an enabling environment to ensure rural women's improved access to various productive resources.

23. It is also worth mentioning that this work complements the ongoing UN Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress toward the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women, implemented jointly by FAO, IFAD, WFP and UN Women in Kyrgyzstan.

C. Gender mainstreaming of FAO technical assistance

24. All FAO projects have attributed a gender marker that measures the contribution of each technical intervention to the gender equality goals, which are to be classified in four categories such as “Gender neutral (G0)”, “Gender mainstreamed (G1)”, “Gender affirmative action (G2a)” and “Gender equality focus (G2b)”.²¹

25. In Europe and Central Asia, there are, overall, at least 70 operationally active FAO projects, each with a value above USD 100 000, as can be seen in the Table 1 below. Of these, only 8.5 percent

²⁰ These studies are: (1) *Review and analysis of export potential and marketing opportunities for rural off-farm activities in Central Asia* prepared by a public foundation – the Central Asian Crafts Support Association’s Resource Centre in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (CACSARC-kg); (2) *Assessment of the possibilities for income diversification through rural crafts development (in support of the small business and job creation for women and men in rural communities in the Republic of Uzbekistan)* prepared by the Central Asia and the Caucasus Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (CACAARI) at the regional office of the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas in Central Asia and the Caucasus (ICARDA-CAC); and (3) *Gender-sensitive analysis of sericulture in Azerbaijan* prepared by *Inkishaf* Research Centre in Baku, Azerbaijan

²¹G0 - Gender neutral. Projects marked as gender neutral are those that have no potential to advance the cause of gender equality.

G1 – Gender mainstreamed. Projects marked as gender mainstreamed are those for which considerations towards gender equality are partly relevant. Only some activities address gender equality in the project and some human and financial resources are devoted towards gender equality.

G2a – Gender affirmative action. For projects falling under this category, gender concerns are fully relevant, and gender is integrated in all relevant dimensions, although gender equality is not the main focus of the project.

G2b – Gender equality focus. For projects falling under this category, gender equality is one of the main objectives, so the projects specifically target gender equality and/or women’s empowerment FAO Technical Cooperation Programme manual (TCP) (2015), Rome

are considered as gender neutral; the remainder address gender issues in some way or another in the project document which is a rate of 91.5 percent; the REU gender team provides support to at least 45.7 percent.

Table 1. Operationally active FAO projects in Europe and Central Asia (above USD 100 000), by gender markers

Gender marker	G0 - Gender neutral	G1 - Gender mainstreamed	G2a - Gender affirmative action	G2b - Gender equality	Total
Number of operationally active projects	6	24	37	3	70
Percentage over the total of projects operationally active	8.5	34.2	53	4.3	100

IV. Next steps and expected results for 2018-2022

26. The next steps and expected results during 2018-2022 will be guided by FAO's minimum standards for gender mainstreaming and framed by the SDGs and the SDGs indicators under FAO custodianship, for example those related to women's access to land. They will be framed also by the UN Human Rights Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).²² Interventions will also be targeted around the ERC 2016 defined priorities for 2018-2021 which emphasize support to: smallholder empowerment; trade facilitation and market integration; the fight against land degradation and climate change mitigation and adaptation; food security and fighting transboundary animal diseases.

27. The work will focus on:

- Supporting countries' capacities for inclusive food security and nutrition policies and agricultural and rural development programmes, by targeting FAO technical staff and national partners including the ministries of agriculture and rural sectors, forestry, fishery, labour and social protection, and equipping them with the skills to formulate evidence-based policies, programmes and projects that are responsive to the needs of disadvantaged groups, and enable the creation of equal opportunities for women and men.
- Generating knowledge and enhancing a policy dialogue, providing country-level policy support to promote rural women's economic empowerment by increasing access to productive

²² CEDAW - an international human rights convention, also called the "bill of rights of women" as the only international human rights instrument focusing exclusively on women's rights. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force on 3 September 1981. It defines discrimination against women and establishes a programme for national interventions aimed at ending discrimination and fostering equality between women and men. Article 14 of CEDAW specifically calls on states to respect and enforce the rights of rural women as they relate to their productive capacity. These include the right to access agricultural extension services, economic opportunities, productive assets, improved technologies, financial services, and the right to participate in agriculture and rural development planning. The states that ratify CEDAW commit themselves to take into account the particular issues that rural women face and the significant roles that they play in the economic and social development of their families. States have to take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from agricultural and rural development. All countries of the Europe and Central Asia region ratified CEDAW without reservations.

resources, services, technologies, decent work and social protection. The areas that will be under close attention for specific research over the next years include gender dimensions of food security and nutrition; forestry; livestock; fisheries; access to e-agriculture; and access to rural advisory services.

- Supporting countries in developing inclusive and gender-sensitive value chains and promoting women's entrepreneurship through market and value chain analysis and the provision of continuous and direct support for rural women to generate sustainable incomes through alternative and green jobs.
- Providing technical guidance and support to countries for collection and use of sex disaggregated data to monitor progress in closing gender gaps in key areas of FAO's mandate and ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all country programme frameworks and regional initiatives in achieving sustainable agriculture and food systems.

28. Over the coming months, the FAO REU gender team will be leading the process of developing the regional gender equality strategy for the next years (2018-2022), which will be presented for endorsement to the ERC in May 2018. The overarching objective of the regional strategy will be to contribute to FAO's efforts to assist member countries in the region to achieve the development goals as framed by the SDGs. Persistent capacity development for better integration of gender concerns in formulation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of its development interventions will be at the centre of FAO's work, following recommendations made by the recent stocktaking exercise. FAO technical staff and national partners from the ministries of agriculture, forestry and fisheries will be primary target groups in this work.

29. In this context, efforts will be made to develop a regional project proposal, which should further support the work at regional and country levels in strengthening capacities of national stakeholders (from relevant ministries, academia and rural community organizations) to support gender mainstreaming. Particular focus will be placed on creating an enabling environment for the economic empowerment of rural women and men, including through expanding their opportunities to generate income from farm and off-farm activities and improving quality and marketability of their products. Members are invited to provide support both in terms of extra budgetary funds as well as strengthening existing and building new partnerships with experienced institutions at national level.

V. Policy recommendations

30. Members are invited to endorse the policy recommendations presented and agreed upon in the Joint Call for Action issued by the Vilnius conference, and which summarize the conclusions and recommendations from the gender assessments conducted by FAO in countries of the region. The objective is to reinforce the member governments' commitments to support women in agriculture and rural development as part of the SDGs 2030 Agenda:

- 1) **Formulate** national policies and strategies for agriculture and rural development, as well as food security and nutrition, that are inclusive and gender responsive, and comply with article 14 of CEDAW on the rights of rural women; and introduce accountability mechanisms to ensure that they are implemented;
- 2) **Establish and strengthen** inclusive governance mechanisms and enhance women's capacities for their increased representation and leadership in governing institutions at all levels, including in processes related to agricultural and rural development and food security and nutrition policy-making and programming so that they can meaningfully participate in decision-making and in shaping laws, policies and programmes;

- 3) **Formulate and implement** policies and programmes on equal opportunities to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, targeting particularly rural women, and ensure that adequate financial resources are available for implementation of these programmes;
- 4) **Support** programmes aimed at rural women's economic empowerment, by improving their entrepreneurship skills, access to financing and markets, agricultural knowledge and education (including tertiary education), creating decent jobs, and overcoming the existing pay gap between women and men;
- 5) **Design and implement** transformative social protection policies and measures, and invest in rural infrastructure that specifically targets rural women, including policies and programmes to ensure that unpaid care work is recognized, reduced and reorganized through investment in both rural physical infrastructure and the social infrastructure of care;
- 6) **Modify** legal and institutional frameworks to address the underlying structural causes of gender inequality and ensure that national budgets are gender-responsive;
- 7) **Support** the collection and dissemination of information on good practices that advance gender equality in agriculture and rural development, food security and nutrition and the empowerment of rural women.

31. Representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector are invited to support member countries in the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations. The following, which was also presented and as agreed in the Joint Call for Action issued by the Vilnius conference, is suggested to CSOs and the private sector for their support:

- 1) Specifically target rural women and young women from disadvantaged groups to engage in economic activities;
- 2) Ensure decent working conditions for women, and equal pay for equal work;
- 3) Assist rural women in gaining access to a range of resources and agricultural inputs, including material (land, water, finance, equipment, seeds) and non-material resources (ICT, knowledge, technology, skills);
- 4) Ensure women and girls are de facto engaged in training and other learning activities which result in their economic empowerment;
- 5) Develop specific programmes for young women and men to ensure their access to income generation opportunities in rural areas;
- 6) Facilitate rural women's access to social protection benefits;
- 7) Raise gender awareness among policy- and decision-makers to increase their commitment to gender-responsive policies and investments;
- 8) Work with men to overcome stereotypes and balance the gender division of labour.

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