

# **Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia Budapest, 18-19 May 2015 Minutes<sup>1</sup> by the FAO REU Secretariat**

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## **Introduction**

The Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia was organized at the invitation of the Government of Hungary by the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) of the United Nations Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) in Budapest on 18 and 19 May 2015. The Consultation Programme and Timetable, List of Participants and introductory technical notes by the REU Secretariat are available at:

<http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/en/c/279715/>

The Consultation discussions and presentations focused on three main areas:

- (i) Trends and challenges in agriculture and rural areas in the Europe and Central Asia Region, especially those affecting food security at all levels, as background for FAO work in the Region.
- (ii) Priorities and areas of work by FAO and REU in the Region for the 2016-2017 biennium, discussed against a background of past and on-going work, including experience and proposed approaches for enhancing work and cooperation with non-state actors.
- (iii) Proposed agenda items for the forthcoming 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) and the 20<sup>th</sup> FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC).

The participants expressed their gratitude to the Government of Hungary for the invitation and to the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia for the preparation of the Consultation. The importance of the Informal Consultation was acknowledged.

Mr Vladimir Rakhmanin, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia thanked the Consultation participants for their inputs to review and programming of FAO's work in the Region. He invited the Members to the forthcoming 30<sup>th</sup> European Regional Conference (ERC) and 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), accenting the importance of participation by non-state actors, (academia, farmers and rural organization, NGOs and representatives of civil society). It was noted that due to limited FAO presence at country level, the Informal Consultations were an important modality for communicating and exchanging views on FAO work.

## **Ongoing work and results achieved in 2014**

The participants welcomed the overview of the results achieved in the first year of the biennium and particularly highlighted that:

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: These Minutes and Notes have been prepared by the FAO REU Secretariat and reflect the main points of Informal Consultation debates, as presented and discussed during the sessions. They are intended as aide memoire and do not intend to be considered as conclusions or decisions taking the informal character of the meeting into consideration. They are not in any way formal or informal statements or programme recommendations and are intended only as pro memoria record of the Consultation.

- Reference should be also made to Objective 6 to better understand results achieved related to cross cutting issues and technical quality control;
- Linkages to the global instruments (e.g. Voluntary Guidelines for Good Governance of Tenure of Land) should be emphasised;
- The important results achieved in responding to emergencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Ukraine should be highlighted;
- Further information should be provided regarding work on land tenure in the Region and particularly in which country such work is done;
- The work with the AMIS secretariat in the Region should be clarified;
- The linkage between aquaculture support and the approach to support small scale farmers needs to be clarified;
- More information would be appreciated regarding FAO's work on adaptation to climate change and what the scope of the work is;
- Clearer understanding should be provided on how the work in the region is linked to the Medium Term Plan and how the modalities between the Decentralized Offices and HQ work.

### **Trends and challenges in agriculture and rural development with focus on food security**

The Consultation provided an appreciated forum for reviewing trends challenges in the Region that indicate areas for work and challenges for FAO support to member countries. The participants specifically highlighted:

- Progressive regional integration, including the growing need for market diversification, encompassing both agricultural and food product trade but also standard setting, to offset increased risks to food safety and animal health, as part of World Trade Organization (WTO) membership and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and, in a number of countries, alignment of policies and regulations with those of the European Union (EU);
- Changing consumption patterns resulting from market economy transition as well as land tenure change from collective to individual, and ensuing institutional changes;
- Climate change and its impacts for farming and rural areas, and ensuing programme approaches and projects for adaptation and mitigation of carbon dioxide emissions from agricultural sector activities, as part of a sustainable approach to the management of natural resources and increased resilience of farms and rural people;
- Cross-cutting issues such as statistics for policy making and mainstreaming gender into development work, including growing unemployment of youth in the agricultural sector and the impact of migration to and from rural areas.

The Secretariat presentation of linkages between Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs), Regional Initiatives as a way of organizing and focusing work in the Region and communication tool, in order to contribute to implementation of the FAO Strategic Objectives, as well as crosscutting themes<sup>2</sup> were much appreciated. During the debate the participants raised the following points:

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<sup>2</sup> Strategic Objectives:

- CPFs were welcomed as a continuation of programming FAO work at country level. Firstly, to identify priorities for technical assistance; secondly, to align with UN Country Teams work and thirdly, to make best use of available FAO expertise at HQ and Regional levels.
- CPFs were recognized as valuable programming experience, but that should be complemented by a monitoring and evaluation component.

**The Consultation debates confirmed and clarified some additional elements of the four priorities proposed for FAO's work in the Region in the 2016-2017 biennium; namely:**

- Effective policies in support of enhanced sustainable and inclusive growth for small-scale farmers;
- Enhanced policies and institutions in support of regional and global trade integration;
- Sustainable natural resource management including adaptation to climate change;
- Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition.

More specifically the participants

- Expressed support for continuation of FAO work on regional trade and economic integration, thus building national capacities for policy work and related analyses and enhancing work on standard setting for food safety in trade, including sanitary and phytosanitary trade measures for transit countries, based on FAO/WHO *Codex Alimentarius*, and promoting the use of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) - based food safety management systems.
- Supported FAO to continue building national capacities needed for Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas in those countries that participate in this trade approach.
- Harmonization of biosafety regulations under WTO could be added to future work.
- Food security and food safety nexus are important and it was stressed that the integrated concept of Food Security and Nutrition should be used, noting the growing importance of nutritional challenges in the Region, including obesity.
- Reference was made to the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security*<sup>3</sup> as the benchmark for FAO work in this field and the LANDNET Conference and informal network addressing land tenure issues as a principal technical instrument.

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1. Contribute to eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition;
  2. Increase provision of goods from agriculture in a sustainable manner;
  3. Reduce rural poverty;
  4. Enable inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems;
  5. Increase resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises, and
  6. Technical quality, knowledge and services

**Cross-cutting themes:**

1. Gender
2. Governance and
3. Nutrition (new for 2016-2017).

<sup>3</sup> Later - Voluntary Guidelines

- The Voluntary Guidelines will be a major FAO input to on-going work and policy debates on further stages of land reform in the Region, with a proposal to screen the selection of best partners for FAO work in this field, from farmers to sub-regional level bodies.
- Reference was made to an increased demand for work with smallholder farmers with the support of extension and advisory services.
- Fisheries are a major area of FAO work in the Region and the need to focus work on small-scale fishers, supported by FAO in aquaculture projects, was emphasized, as the latter provide incomes to rural populations through increased sales but also a more nutritious diet. *Voluntary Guidelines on Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries* was raised as an important reference in FAO activities.
- Impacts of climate change on farming and rural areas were indicated as an emerging regional priority for assistance. While it was noted that both adaptation and mitigation need to be mainstreamed into natural resources management practices (including land and water resources) to achieve the broader sustainability objectives, the latter requiring work at both national and community level, with a high level of involvement from farmers and rural populations. A strong emphasis was given to projects that build the resilience of farms and rural communities against natural disasters and crises (e.g. floods in the Western Balkans).
- Positive and negative impacts of outmigration from rural areas were noted as a future area for FAO attention and capacity building of national institutions, state and civil society to deal with these impacts, also in terms of assisting farmers to invest productively incoming transfers.
- Work in agricultural and rural statistics, including support to national agricultural censuses should be continued in the next biennium.

### **Cooperation with non-state actors**

FAO introduced its partnership approach in the collaboration with non-state actors both at global and at regional levels.

During the discussion the following issues were raised:

- to enhance cooperation with farmers' organizations (both in production and marketing), civil society at all levels, including formal and informal non-governmental organizations representing semi- and excluded population groups, pastoralists and trade unions as an important avenue of FAO work in the Region;
- FAO's role in supporting cooperation with non-state actors at sub- and regional level was indicated as important in the Region, where such cooperation remains weak (a legacy of the centrally planned economy);
- Work with non-state actors was recognized as a key link for FAO work with the emerging private sector, with FAO role as facilitator and support to creating an enabling environment for both farms and small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas but clearly based on a bottom-up approach;
- Cooperatives, both in marketing of inputs and products, were recognized as key institutions to provide farmers and producers with a better bargaining position and investment capacity;

- FAO should consider that various types of farmers' and rural population organizations and associations have been a major player in building social capital, as well as social protection and services projects also as an efficient way of involving rural youth and excluded population groups, and, not the least, gender mainstreaming.
- It is important that FAO's work helps to create an enabling environment for farmers and producers.
- Traditional advisory and extension services – both in the public and private sectors – which is a primary partner for FAO work with farmers, needs to focus more on working with farmers' groups for greater impact.

### **Gender mainstreaming in REU region**

The Secretariat provided an overview regarding the regional strategy for gender mainstreaming.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- The gender mainstreaming strategy was supported and it was indicated that women as a target were a highly diversified group and would require a tailored approach;
- Gender mainstreaming into projects and all FAO work was recognized and supported as a key approach to reducing social and economic inequalities among men and women in the Region;
- Women constitute a major part of the rural population and labour force. They are under-represented in management and discriminated against in access to resources, including land. This disparity and alleviating it should be reflected in project's design and implementation;
- Gender-specific initiatives to create jobs (particularly outside of agriculture) for income generation was considered essential;
- Further results of the establishment of the Gender Focal Points following the abolishing of the WPW should be provided;
- Focus on results was highlighted, taking into consideration that gender strategies were approved by the council in the 1980s, although the outcomes were very limited;
- Partnership with other organization in the implementation and the preparation of the strategy would be important and in this context cooperation with UN Women and UNDP projects was strongly supported;
- Gender issues are linked to programmes for rural youth and family and social care programmes, and these should be considered accordingly.

### **Agendas and themes for 30<sup>th</sup> ERC and 29<sup>th</sup> ECA**

The secretariat informed the participants on the proposed draft agendas and technical themes for the forthcoming 30<sup>th</sup> ERC and 29<sup>th</sup> ECA. These were supported as presented by the REU Secretariat, with requests for viable timing of sessions to allow discussion and work on policy and programme recommendations. The Consultation's main technical discussions on climate change, gender mainstreaming, collaboration with non-state actors in technical assistance, development of pro-small producers' fisheries and sustainable forestry were supported for the ERC technical papers and priority discussions for programme recommendations. Food safety, including food safety management along the food chain, was recognized as a major technical assistance and capacity building issue in the Region.

Nutrition was noted as an important part of food security and various technical programmes, thus, a round table discussion of trends on nutrition or particular crops, such as rye, as useful instrument for an improved diet, as well as importance of pulses in production and food and feed in the Region, was recommended. The inclusion of review of experience of market management and sustainable development goals were supported as technical themes, with repeated reference to Voluntary Guidelines as a major technical item for the ERC review, to be clearly referred to, where appropriate, as well as other normative work by FAO; e.g. on responsible investment and continuing support to family farming.

### **Attachments**

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