165th Session of the Council

Written Correspondence Procedure – inputs from Members – Original language

Item 7.1 - Report of the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Africa (26-28 October 2020)

Member Name	Comments
Dominican Republic – Member (Thursday 26/11/2020 17:18)	República Dominicana [a] agradece el documento presentado, [b] da su bienvenida a las recomendaciones específicas, y [c] felicita a la FAO y al gobierno hospedante por la organización del período de sesiones, que se desarrolló de manera virtual con éxito ante los obstáculos planteados por la pandemia.
Zimbabwe – Member (Thursday 26/11/20 18:47)	The 31st Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Africa was held virtually from 26 to 28 October 2020. This Regional Conference, as an opinion shared by all, was considered a historic moment for the Organization for the scale and quality of participation in light of the exceptional circumstance precipitated by the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic and associated public health concerns and constraints. The Session followed consultations by the FAO Director-General, Dr. QU Dongyu, and the Government of Zimbabwe as well as the Regional Group for Africa. Despite the constraints brought on by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Regional Conference was attended, virtually, by 874 delegates from 48 Member Countries. The delegates were constituted of 95 Ministers (including 12 Deputy Ministers and two Ministers of Foreign Affairs) of 44 countries, 20 Ambassadors, as well as other partner institutions or organizations that were represented at the highest level, such as the African Union Commission. In this regard, Zimbabwe appreciates the mutual assistance and effective partnership between FAO and Zimbabwe, in the preparations before and during the Regional Conference. Zimbabwe, as Chair of the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Africa, is pleased to confirm to the Members of the FAO Council that the adopted and presented Final Report clearly expresses the conclusions of the Regional Conference. The Report also presents a Ministerial Declaration on national, sub-regional and Regional Commitments for Food Systems Transformation, Innovation and Digitalization in African Agriculture. Members were given the opportunity to discuss the following and highlighted, *inter alia*: the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on agri-food systems, food security and nutrition in the African context; FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative as an innovative approach for the transformation of the agricultural sector to combat poverty and hunger; the need to build resilient food and agricultural systems in the context of multiple crises such as climate change, transboundary pests and diseases, conflict and economic downturns; and the need to address the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in Africa. The Regional Conference also reviewed: the progress made on FAO's Regional Programme for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as well as towards the development of an Action Programme to address food security and nutrition challenges in Landlocked Countries in Africa; the possibility of transforming food systems through leveraging digital technology and other innovations in the context of the upcoming UN Food Systems

	Summit, scheduled for 2021; and the role of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) on Food Systems and Nutrition. Zimbabwe will present the recommendations from these exchanges at the next FAO Conference.
	Zimbabwe submits to the Council the main recommendations concerning the other relevant points from the Regional Conference. On the Priorities for FAO Activities in Africa, the Regional Conference reinforced the significance of the three Regional Initiatives, namely Ending Hunger by 2025; Sustainable Intensification of Production and Value Chain Development and Building Resilience in Africa's Drylands, in driving the priority areas for Africa. The Regional Conference further emphasized the need to refine regional priorities in line with new initiatives such as inclusive food systems transformation, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, digitalization and innovation, the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, as well as the UN Development System repositioning.
	The Regional Conference also noted the need to expand and strengthen a regional work programme to provide technical assistance to African FAO Members under the coordination of the responsible African Union institutions and Regional Economic Communities in the implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), including the strengthening of food safety standards, among others, and highlighted the important role that the AfCFTA could play in enhancing FAO's work in food security and nutrition, as well as food systems. The need for FAO to strengthen its work programme on climate change, biodiversity and sustainable natural resources management, through building on flagship programmes such as the Great Green Wall, Green Cities etc. was emphasized. Special emphasis was placed on the need to strengthen coherence in supporting Small Island Developing States (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs), and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), considering their vulnerability to unique and complex food security and nutrition challenges.
	The Regional Conference also noted the importance of knowledge sharing and recommended that knowledge-sharing and scaling-up of best practices should be promoted, along with technologies and innovative approaches, including data analytics, geo-spatial platforms and digital solutions that inform policies, and investments that accelerate agricultural transformation. Further, the Regional Conference recommended that policies must be integrated and coordinated to harness synergies at sectoral level and attain coherence at continental level, thus supporting countries to achieve food sovereignty and, ultimately, that FAO should support countries in scaling up evidence-based successful projects and programmes.
	With regard to FAO's Decentralized Offices Network, the Regional Conference recommended that FAO ensures the full implementation of all the recommendations made on this subject at the 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Africa held in Sudan and continue its efforts to strengthen its technical capacities and policy integration at regional and sub-regional levels. The Regional Conference tasked FAO to ensure leadership in the region across relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with special attention to addressing hunger and poverty in the most needy and vulnerable countries and to shift towards a full programmatic approach at decentralized level and set more tangible programmatic objectives to demonstrate better its valuable contributions to achieving the SDGs, in line with recommendations from the Evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework.

	The Regional Conference recommended that the Organization adjusts its Decentralized Offices business models, in the context of the UN Development System repositioning, in order to ensure greater flexibility and efficiency in the use of the Organization's existing limited financial and human resources, aiming to respond to Members' emerging needs and priorities in line with the SDGs. Further, the Organization was encouraged to evaluate, identify and seize emerging opportunities arising from the UN Development System repositioning at country and regional levels, building on lessons learned and successful experiences in collaborating with other partners. To ensure that the recently established Office for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and Land-locked Developing Countries (LLDCs) is effective in executing its responsibilities, the Regional Conference encouraged FAO to ensure that the office was adequately strengthened through the provision of technical expertise and, along with the Decentralized Offices, to strengthen the impact of programmes in the priority countries, as well as increased engagements with external actors and partners, including Members, the private sector and UN partners to mobilize resources and/or complement interventions in areas beyond the Organization's mandate or capacity, and to facilitate the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative in SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs; The Regional Conference highlighted the importance for the Organization to increase its visibility, presence and capacity in the region to demonstrate impact, influence relevant policy processes, dialogues and agendas from the country, sub-regional, regional and global levels. In that regard, it was recommended that the Organization reconsiders the skills and competency mix needed to improve programme delivery, and the collaboration, coordination and communication model between country, sub-regional, regional and headquarters offices to enable smoother synergies and linkages between them to deliver on the complex mandate of the Regional Office for Africa as well as to streamline and decentralize processes, especially for sourcing, deploying and managing talents and for procuring goods and services in a timely and effective manner. Finally, the Organization was encouraged to strengthen stakeholder engagement and partnership-building; improve resource mobilization, strategic communication, policy analysis and facilitation of policy development and reform, as well as to learn to manage diversity of backgrounds, disciplines, geographical and technical expertise, languages, areas of development and policy work for greater effectiveness. Regarding the next venue of the Regional Conference, it was agreed that the 32nd Session will be held in Equatorial Guinea in 2022. The exact date will be agreed upon jointly by the selected host country and the Secretariat of the Regional Conference. In conclusion, Zimbabwe would like to reiterate its firm commitment, as Chair of the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Africa, to regularly follow up on the responses to the recommendations and actions planned until the next Regional Conference.