

EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE
39/6 MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

01 March 2023

(Online meeting)

MEETING MINUTES**1. Opening of the meeting**

The Chairperson of the ECA (Mr Marios GEORGIADES) opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the Executive Committee (the ExCom) to the sixth meeting after the 42nd Session of the ECA. Mr GEORGIADES thanked the ECA Secretariat and Colleagues in REU for the preparation of the meeting documents, and noticed that it would be appreciated if the background documents be shared at least three working days prior to the meeting. He also called the attention of the Secretariat for the timely preparation of the meeting minutes and posting them on the ExCom's website, together with other meeting documents.

2. Adoption of the agenda¹

Mr GEORGIADES proposed an item under the AOB. He raised the issue of the certificate of recognition for the outgoing members of the ExCom. The meeting agenda was adopted with this additional item.

The adopted meeting agenda is presented in Annex 2.

3. Impact of the war in Ukraine on food security and related matters²

This item was presented by Mr Raimund JEHLE. In his presentation, Mr JEHLE updated the ExCom on the FAO response in Ukraine based on the Rapid Response Plan 2022 and outlined the elements of the Rapid Response Plan 2023 with its three pillars 1) Restoring food security and self-sufficiency in frontline communities; 2) Restoring critical agricultural production and value chains; 3) Restoring critical agri-food system services. Details are provided in the attached PPT.

In the discussion the following points were raised:

Mr JILEK asked about the features of the cooperation with the World Food Programme (WFP) on the spot and about the demining of fields that FAO is part of, as well.

Mr GEORGIADES raised a question related to the existence of reports that indicate the reduction of reserves of fertilizers and its effect on agricultural production; and also raised a technical issue - he asked about the material for the grain storage sleeves and the reuse or recycling of agricultural plastics.

Mr JEHLE confirmed that the silo sleeves are made of plastic material. In the design of the programme the recycling of the material has been considered. He also confirmed that access to fertilizers was still an issue but it was not yet possible to indicate in what way this would influence the production level for 2023.. He outlined that this would not only affects Ukraine, but other countries in the region, too.

¹ The draft agenda is available at:

² Background information for this agenda item is available at

To the question related to the features of cooperation between FAO and WFP, Mr JEHLE responded that there was a clear division of labour and work area between the organizations, and that WFP was involved in distribution and logistics of food items, but did not address issues of production. He also stressed that FAO's role in the demining activities would be supporting identification of the relevant plot and provision of advice, but not directly in demining activities.

ACTION: The Secretariat to circulate Mr JEHLE's presentation among the ExCom members.

4. Preparation of the 2023 Informal Consultation

Mr JEHLE informed the participants about the proposed dates for the Informal Consultation (IC), which is scheduled to be on 4-5 May 2023. The meeting is going to be held in Budapest with physical presence, and take half of either day. The IC is a good practice in order to facilitate the exchange between the Members, with special regard to the challenges and key priority areas in the region for the next biennium that will be endorsed by the Regional Conference for Europe in 2024.

Few members of the ExCom suggested that consideration of holding a hybrid meeting would be useful, especially because of overlaps with other meetings.

Relating to the draft agenda of the Informal Consultation, Mr JILEK suggested it would be important that Session 3: "Update on FAO Response to the multiple crisis in the Region" incorporate the war in Ukraine, soaring food prices, inflation, financial conditions, etc. that mostly affect the region these days.

Mr GEORGIADES suggested that it might be useful if REU dedicated a page on its website for the Informal Consultations.

The ExCom approved the dates and the in-person modality for the Informal Consultation in 2023, as proposed by the Regional Office.

5. Review and recommendations on the REU work programme 2022-2023 in a selected technical area

Accelerating the digital transformation of rural areas through the FAO 1000 Digital Village Initiative

In her presentation, Ms DiGIANANTONIO mentioned that in 2021 FAO launched its 1000 Digital Villages Initiative (DVI), aiming at transforming 1000 villages into digital hubs. It means "a digitally-enabled rural transformation to revitalize rural areas and empower rural communities through the uptake of ICTs and access to digital services". The initiative is based on three pillars: 1) agricultural production – improving the productivity by using ICTs and digital solutions; 2) farmers' access to digital services; 3) enhancement of the delivery of digital rural services. For better understanding the initiative, the following examples were given: Making greenhouses smarter in Uzbekistan; Digital information and advisory services to farmers in Kazakhstan; Income diversification, tourism, and digitalization in Albania.

REU developed a Digital Village readiness assessment tool that helps analyse and select villages that hold the best potential for DVI, through 17 criteria across 3 dimensions.

The possible prospects and challenges have also been mentioned in the presentation.

Ms POPANDONOVA asked about the number of villages in the region that have already been transformed and the main lesson learnt so far during the transformation process and the practice of the selection of countries where DVI could be started.

Mr KUSHNAZAROV suggested that more attention could be given to the market access of those rural areas that the project aims.

Mr JILEK was interested in the number of villages planned to be transformed into digital villages in the near future, in the means and methods of reaching that goal, in financing and in the difference with already existing services in those villages - the added value.

Mr GEORGIADES supported the work of FAO on building the digital capacities of current farmers and on promoting the necessary involvement of the younger generation in agriculture.

Ms DiGIANANTONIO commented on the issues raised:

- In recent years, the aim was the assessment of the current situation in relation to the utility and the need of this initiative.
- The selection of countries participating in the transformation is based on interactions with country offices and Government counterparts. However, for the future the aim is to move to a more sustainable model where the interest comes from the rural community itself.
- Regarding the finance, at the moment internal funds are mobilized to support the transformation of seven villages in the countries of the region.

Review and recommendations on the REU work programme 2022-2023 in a selected technical area: The Virtual Learning Center – focus on One Health trainings

Ms Gulzhan NURTAZINA (REU) gave a presentation on the Virtual Learning Center with a focus on One Health trainings. She explained that VLCs were virtual hubs established to develop and improve One Health capacities in all FAO regions. Their mission is to provide trainees with access to inclusive, engaging and high-quality training, using a variety of methodologies. Among the advantages of VLC courses, she mentioned the development of courses specifically to the regional needs; using different modalities; for broad variety of target audiences; flexibility and sustainability of the courses; development of assignments, assessments and issuing of certificates.

The main topics of the VLC courses have been animal health, agroecology and one health.

Training opportunities are communicated through training focal points in each country.

The main goal is to develop national capacities for the implementation of the One Health approach and to encourage interaction between people working in different areas.

Few ExCom members expressed their interest and support in the VLC activities that should be expanded and shared with others in order to reach out larger audience with learning topics under One Health approach and beyond.

ACTION: The Secretariat to circulate the two presentations among the ExCom members.

6. Preparation of the 43rd Session of ECA (26-28 Sep 2023)

Mr WŁODARCZYK presented the background document for this agenda item. Firstly, he mentioned the location (Budapest, Hungary) and the modality (physical) of the Session. Then he presented the draft agenda, which has been drafted by the Secretariat in close cooperation with REU technical officers.

As next step in the preparation for the 43rd Session of the ECA, the Secretariat mentioned the development of the technical background papers. In order to support timely preparation of the documents, the Secretariat developed a timetable for monitoring of the progress of the process.

Furthermore, he mentioned the amendment of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA. The Secretariat has sent the proposed amendment to the FAO Legal Counsel requesting legal opinion and guidance.

The ECA elections have also been raised. The call for nominations should start on the 28 April with a deadline for the end of June. The invitation for the elections, which will need to be dispatched to the ECA Members, was presented for the ExCom's consideration, along with the draft submission form developed by the Secretariat.

Mr JILEK suggested that the Secretariat include an item on FAO's response to the multiple crisis in the region (war in Ukraine, pandemic, inflation, etc.) in the draft agenda of the ECA Session, which is going to be discussed at the Informal Consultation as well.

Mr GEORGIADES noted that he has been in contact with the Chairperson of the Committee of Forestry (COFO) who suggested that the following items be incorporated in the draft agenda.

- 1) Agroforestry in Europe and Central Asia
- 2) The role of sustainable forest management regarding multiple forest functions for ecosystems, society, food security and nutrition
- 3) Forestry-agricultural linkages and best practices for the transformation to resilient and sustainable food systems in Europe and Central Asia

Ms HORVÁTH suggested that a side event on the forestry topics may be considered at the Session.

The ExCom confirmed the proposed location and the modality of the 43rd Session of the ECA, the draft invitation to the call for nominations of the ECA elections, the proposed submission form for the ECA elections, and the update of the ECA Information Document. Moreover, the ExCom requested the ECA Secretariat to make an effort to incorporate elements of the proposed COFO sub-items (where they are relevant) into the background documents of the sub-topics of the proposed ECA Agenda, and explore the possibility of including a relevant side event.

7. AOB

Under this agenda item, Mr GEORGIADES raised the issue of granting certificates of recognition for the outgoing members of the ExCom, similarly to granting them to the previous membership of the ExCom.

Mr JILEK proposed that in addition to the certificates, a certificate of recognition should be given to the Secretary of the Commission after his withdrawal and that a gavel and a sounding block be rewarded to the Chairperson of the Commission.

The suggestions were approved by the ExCom.

8. Closing of the meeting

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their participation and closed the meeting.

Annex 1

EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE**39/6 MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

1 March 2023

14.00-16.00 hrs (Rome time)

Online meeting

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

	Role	Country/Organization	Name	Present/Absent
1.	ECA Chairperson	Cyprus	Mr Marios GEORGIADIS	Present
2.	ECA Vice-Chairperson	North Macedonia	Ms Lidija POPANDONOVA	Present
3.	ECA Vice-Chairperson	Russian Federation	Mr Kirill ANTYUKHIN	Present
4.	ExCom Member	Czechia	Mr Jiří JÍLEK	Present
5.	ExCom Member	Greece	Mr Serkos A. CHAROUTOUNIAN	Present
6.	ExCom Member	Hungary	Ms Evelin LANTOS	Present
7.	ExCom Member	Serbia	Ms Vedrana ILIĆ	Absent
8.	ExCom Member	Slovakia	Ms Terézia KRAMOLIŠOVÁ	Present
9.	ExCom Member	Uzbekistan	Mr Nuriddin KUSHNAZAROV	Present
10.	Deputy Regional Representative	FAO REU	Mr Nabil GANGI	Present
11.	Regional Programme Leader	FAO REU	Mr Raimund JEHLE	Present
12.	Acting Secretary of ECA	FAO REU	Mr Piotr WŁODARCZYK	Present
13.	National Professional Officer	FAO REU	Ms Erzsebet ILLES	Present
14.	Digital Agriculture Team Leader	FAO REU	Ms Daniela DiGIANANTONIO	Present
15.	Technical Adviser	FAO REU	Mr Daniel BELTRAN ALCRUDO	Present
16.	REU Virtual Learning Center Coordinator	FAO REU	Ms Gulzhan NURTAZINA	Present
17.	Animal Health Preparedness Expert	FAO REU	Mr Mark HOVARI	Present
18.	Digital Agriculture Analyst	FAO REU	Ms Veronika SHEROVA	Present

	Role	Country/Organization	Name	Present/Absent
19.	Digital Agriculture Specialist	FAO REU	Ms Valentina JUG	Present
20.	Executive Programme Management Specialist	FAO REU	Ms Zsofia HORVÁTH	Present
21.	ERC-ECA Secretariat	FAO REU	Ms Eniko KOTI	Present

Annex 2

EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE**39/6 MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

01 March 2023

14:00-16:00

Online (Zoom)

AGENDA

No.	Agenda Item Title	Document No./Link	Presenter
	Opening of the meeting	-	CHAIRPERSON
1.	Adoption of the agenda	ECA_ExCom/39/6-1	EXCOM
2.	Impact of the war in Ukraine on food security and related matters	ECA_ExCom/39/6-2	REGIONAL PROGRAMME LEADER
3.	Preparation of the 2023 Informal Consultation	ECA_ExCom/39/6-3	REGIONAL PROGRAMME LEADER
4.	Review and recommendations on the REU work programme 2022-2023 in a selected technical area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Virtual Learning Center – focus on One Health trainings - Accelerating the digital transformation of rural areas through the FAO 1000 Digital Village Initiative 	ECA_ExCom/39/6-4a ECA_ExCom/39/6-4b	Gulzhan NURTAZINA (REU) Daniela DiGIANANTONIO (REU)
5.	Preparation of the 43rd Session of ECA (26-28 Sep 2023)	ECA_ExCom/39/6-5	ECA SECRETARY
6.	Any other business	-	PARTICIPANTS
	Close of the meeting	-	CHAIRPERSON