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Advancing gender equality in the region, providing support to rural women in income diversification

Executive summary

Based on the decision of the Thirty-sixth Session of the ECA[1], which required that the progress made in mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in the work of the Organization in the region should become a permanent standing item on the ECA agenda, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) has been reporting to the Members regularly to ECA to update on the progress made and get feedback and recommendations on next steps.

The main objective of this paper is to provide an update to the Members on the progress made by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in advancing rural gender equality in the region and, in particular, present the case of the pilot activities carried out to support rural women in income diversification, entrepreneurship and rural crafts. The activities were carried out within the framework of the Regional Initiative for strengthening agrifood trade and market integration (RI-2), contributing to FAO's Strategic Objective to build more inclusive and effective agrifood systems (SO-4), and demonstrated positive results.

[1] Paragraphs 38 and 46 of the Report of the 36th Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) in Yerevan, Armenia in 2010: http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/reu/europe/documents/ECA/ECA_36/en/ECA_36_10_REPORT_en.pdf

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Guidance sought

The ECA is invited to review, comment and endorse the recommendations presented in paragraphs 28 - 32 in this paper as a result of the REU work in advancing rural women's economic empowerment in Europe and Central Asia.

I. Introduction

1. The purpose of this background paper is to provide an update and reflect on the work performed by FAO in the Europe and Central Asia region in 2018–2019, particularly in the area of providing support to rural women's economic empowerment, income generation and diversification, as described in the section IV of this document. Based on the decision of the Thirty-sixth Session of the ECA (held in May 2010, Yerevan, Armenia), which, among other issues, required that the progress made in mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in the work of the Organization in the region should become a permanent standing item on the ECA agenda, this report is presented to the 41th Session of the ECA.

2. The paper is structured in three sections. The first section outlines the situation related to gender inequalities in the region of Europe and Central Asia and the latest trends in this context. The second section outlines the details of the gender strategy, and the third section outlines the results from REU supported research and studies that reviewed the current value chain status and development potential of rural crafts in the region, drawing conclusions for work areas in the region in the future.

II. Gender inequalities in agriculture and rural development in Europe and Central Asia

3. The Gender Inequality Index in Europe and Central Asia is the highest globally – 0.270 (where 0 is total equality and 1 is total inequality) (UNDP, 2017). Despite strong progress towards empowering rural women in the region, there is a need for transformative and holistic priority actions to tackle the deeply rooted structural barriers that perpetuate gender inequalities. To achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, areas for action to empower rural women should focus on redressing gender inequalities, as these hinder economic growth, sustainable agriculture development, food security and nutrition.

4. Within the region, rural women comprise the largest disadvantaged group in terms of achieving equality with men, and with women in urban areas. Rural women, especially from remote areas, are more likely to suffer from discrimination and poverty, and have less access to infrastructure, services and education than urban women, according to FAO research and studies conducted at country and regional level in recent years.[2] Women from ethnic minorities, women with children, elderly women,

[2] More details can be found in various FAO REU publications released throughout 2016 and 2019: (1) National Gender Profile of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods: Kyrgyzstan. Country gender assessment series (available

young women, women with disabilities and those with lower levels of education usually find themselves in an even more disadvantaged position. Generally, gender inequalities are rooted in socially constructed norms and practices that assign lower status to women than to men. This is reinforced by ideological, economic, political, legal and institutional systems, public attitudes and stereotypes on gender roles that give less visibility to women's crucial contributions to agriculture, fisheries and forestry.

5. Despite significant advances in gender statistics and qualitative research, many forms of gender inequalities remain invisible or difficult to track. Examples include rural women's work in family farms as unpaid family workers, and rural women's lack of access to and ability to exercise control over productive resources and assets such as land, credits and agricultural inputs. Productive resources may include information, knowledge and skills. FAO has contributed to the generation of evidence of gender inequalities in agricultural and rural livelihoods with country gender assessments[3] conducted in the countries of the region. The main conclusion is that, despite high economic activity rates of rural women in the region, they are overrepresented as informal, unpaid and family workers and rarely are registered or identify themselves as managers or co-managers of agricultural holdings and farms. Women's access to land is limited, with men owning up to 90 percent of the total agricultural land in some countries. Bias in inheritance practices and patrilocal marriages are among the reasons behind this. Due to the limited access to land and to the invisibility of women's work in family farming, their access to credit, subsidies, social protection and decision-making are hampered. Domestic and reproductive[4] work overwhelmingly falls on women's shoulders. The inferior levels of infrastructure and technology in rural households have a direct impact on women's domestic workload, which takes up to double the time of rural women's urban counterparts and up to six times the time devoted by their male partners, limiting opportunities for women to engage in paid economic activities.

6. Gender inequalities in rural areas are of particular concern in Central Asian countries, which struggle with similar development challenges such as rural poverty, malnutrition, rapid population growth and pressures on natural resources including those induced by climate change. Agriculture cannot absorb the growing rural population, which forces women and men to migrate in search of jobs and income. Labour force migration from these countries is mostly directed to Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, and over the past decade, it has reached, compared to previous decades, an unprecedented scale. This demonstrates clear gender patterns, among other things, as it is mostly men (up to 85 percent) who migrate from Central Asia, while women usually stay behind and take responsibility for children, the elderly and the farm work. The remittance flow in the region does not

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also in Russian); (2) National Gender Profile of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods: Republic of Tajikistan. Country gender assessment series (also available in Russian); (3) National Gender Profile of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods: Turkey. Country gender assessment series (also available in Turkish); (4) Gender, agriculture and rural development in Albania. Country gender assessment series (also available in Albanian); (5) Gender, agriculture and rural development in Armenia. Country gender assessment series (also available in Armenian); (6) Gender, agriculture and rural development in Uzbekistan. Country gender assessment series (2019); (7) Gender and Rural Development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Key Issues (also available in Russian); (8) Gender equality, social protection and rural development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Insights from the Region (also available in Russian).

[3] As listed in the previous footnote.

[4] "Reproductive work" is a term that is assigned to work, usually at household level, that includes the provision of care to family members, from child rearing to looking after the sick and the elderly. This is closely linked with domestic work such as cleaning, cooking, and so on. In most societies, this work is usually 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 reproductive work is uncompensated and unrecognized.

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 developments and left-behind families in rural areas. Migrating young men (and at less extent – women) may become prone to radical ideas and other threats to their security and security of their communities and countries. [5]

7. In this regard, support to rural women and men in generating income and diversifying their sources of income is of tremendous importance, through dedicated vocational training, improving business literacy, enabling access to investments, savings and insurance, including for the development of agribusiness/agro-tourism.

8. As in other parts of the world, rural women in the region have more limited access to information and communications technology (ICT) and innovative agricultural practices when compared to men, and the more the holding is commercialized, the less likely it is that women are involved in it. While data are scarce, some available indicators show that rural women's access to resources and assets, be they water, irrigation, cooperatives, pastures, extension services, mobility or decision-making bodies, is also limited. The gender pay gap and lower access to off-farm employment for women than for men leave women with limited income opportunities, which increases their risk of falling into poverty, especially in older ages. In the context of current migration trends, access to resources for women – and especially for young women – becomes even more critical.

9. FAO's work on gender in the region puts particular emphasis on rural women's economic empowerment. One area that is often under-estimated is the production of rural crafts that use locally available agricultural leftovers; this production requires low investments and may bring high returns over a short period of time. Improving the quality of these crafts and overcoming barriers for their trade within and outside Central Asia can be an effective development strategy in creating sustainable livelihoods for rural communities – contributing to the priorities identified by the Regional Initiatives, which emphasize support for smallholder empowerment, trade facilitation and market integration, sustainable management of natural resources, climate change mitigation, and food security and nutrition. A case illustrating an experience generated by FAO in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is presented here as a case of promising practice in paragraph 22-30 of this document.

III. New REU Gender Strategy for 2019–2022

10. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) adopted a new Regional Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan for 2019–2022[6] (hereinafter: the Strategy) that takes into consideration the recommendations of the Fortieth Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) (September 2017, Budapest, Hungary), the Thirtieth Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

[5] "Some 80 to 90 per cent of Isis fighters from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are radicalized and recruited while in Russia as migrant workers, according to estimates by Noah Tucker, author of a report on Central Asian involvement in the conflict in Syria and Iraq".- *Russia and radicalisation: Homegrown problem*, by Kathrin Hille, December 7, 2015 The Financial Times. The UN Security Council.2019. Twenty-fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, which points to hundreds of Central Asians among ISIS fighters, at: https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2019/570, pp.14 onwards

[6] Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/ca4521en/ca4521en.pdf

(May 2018, Voronezh, the Russian Federation) and feedback received at the 2019 Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia (May 2019, Budapest, Hungary).

11. The Strategy represents a common vision of what FAO intends to address over the next four years in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through its interventions in the region, and how FAO intends to achieve it. The strategy defines priorities, roles, and responsibilities of regional, sub-regional and country offices in gender mainstreaming, and it has an action plan with time-bound outcomes, outputs and activities. Important is that the strategy directions are fully integrated into three Regional Initiatives in the Region in order to ensure the mainstreaming into the respective programmes at national and regional level.

12. The overarching objective of the Regional Strategy for Gender Equality will be to contribute to FAO efforts to assist Members in the region in achieving the development goals as framed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The objectives of the Strategy are:

i. to contribute to FAO's efforts to assist Members in the region in achieving the SDGs and contributing to gender equality and women's empowerment, for eliminating hunger, reducing rural poverty, and achieving food security for all in the region in a systematic, holistic and sustainable manner; and
ii. to minimize gender-related risks and safeguard rural women's rights in all actions to achieve sustainable and equitable food systems and rural development.

13. FAO's Policy on Gender Equality[7] and its minimum standards for gender mainstreaming, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its key principle of leaving no one behind, guide the REU work on gender, as well as the priorities set by the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) for 2018–2021, defining the FAO interventions and Regional Initiatives in the region. [8]

14. The Strategy was presented to the participants at the Informal Consultation[9] in 2019 and was well received. In particular, participants pointed to the need of strengthening the ***gender-transformative approach*** in FAO's work in the region. This means that promoting gender equality and rural women's empowerment should be central to FAO's interventions. Also, in the context of agriculture, a gender-transformative approach entails not only improving women's access to key assets and sustainable livelihoods but also helping communities understand and challenge the social norms that perpetuate inequalities between men and women.

15. The gender equality strategy places particular focus on integrating gender concerns in provision of technical assistance across REU's three Regional Initiatives and other interventions to ensure that FAO work is responsive to the needs of the most disadvantaged groups and creates equal opportunities for women and men. This work can be roughly grouped around these three main directions:

[7] FAO Policy on Gender Equality. (2012). Rome. Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3205e.pdf
[8] FAO ERC/18/REP. (2018). Thirty-first Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe Report. Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/mw908en/mw908en.pdf
[9] Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia. Budapest, 16–17 May 2019. Minutes by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) Secretariat. Available at: http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/reu/europe/documents/events2019/IC2019/Minutes_en.pdf

1) Generating knowledge for evidence-based policy dialogue and support for rural women's economic empowerment by increasing women's access to productive resources, services, technologies, decent work and social protection;
2) Supporting countries in developing inclusive and gender-sensitive value chains, promoting women's entrepreneurship and supporting rural women to generate sustainable incomes;
3) Providing technical assistance to countries in accelerating progress in closing gender gaps in key areas of FAO's mandates, by ensuring that gender is mainstreamed across all Country Programming Frameworks and Regional Initiatives; and enhancing national capacities for better integration of gender concerns in the formulation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of development and humanitarian interventions.[10]

16. FAO REU continues to provide policy support based on *the Joint Call for Action for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* on promoting socially inclusive rural development in Europe and Central Asia, which reaffirmed the commitment of the Members and FAO to work towards gender equality. The Joint Call for Action[11], adopted at the FAO REU high-level conference "Promoting socially inclusive rural development in Europe and Central Asia"[12], held in Vilnius in 2017 in close partnership with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), provides detailed recommendations to FAO, national governments, civil society and the private sector for effective and gender-responsive implementation of the SDG agenda in the areas of the FAO mandate. The Joint Call for Action has been endorsed by the Fortieth Session of the ECA.[13]

17. Capacity development and awareness raising on issues related to gender equality, social protection, agriculture and rural development remain at the core of the REU work in the region. The focus is at both FAO and national partners, from the ministries of agriculture, forestry and fishery; national statistical offices; and other government and non-government agencies, which work in the areas of sustainable food systems, agriculture and natural resource management. Interventions, which provide assistance to the ministries of agriculture to ensure their policies are socially inclusive, are starting in Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Turkey.

18. To address the lack of documented and region-specific knowledge related to gender, agriculture and rural development, REU continues to collect case studies of promising practices across the region on how integration of gender equality concerns in agriculture (forestry, livestock, fishery and aquaculture) and rural development policies and practices can help to improve livelihoods. For this purpose, REU commissioned a study[14], which collected first-hand information from the ministries of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in selected countries of the European Union. The examples of promising practices include Austria, where women farmers and municipal decision makers are participating in training and management programmes with ongoing coaching and mentoring to increase and improve the representation of rural women in decision making; Spain, where rural women and women in fisheries formed networks that meet regularly with government representatives to ensure their

[10] For more details please check FAO Regional Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan for Europe and Central Asia 2019-2022, available at: http://www.fao.org/3/ca4521en/ca4521en.pdf
[11] Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7020e.pdf
[12] More details available at: http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/en/c/461793/
[13] FAO ECA/40/17/REPORT. Fortieth Session of the European Commission on Agriculture. Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/a-mv133e.pdf
[14] FAO REU. (2018). What gender mainstreaming means in practice: Cases from selected countries of the European Union. Budapest, Hungary. Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/I8958EN/i8958en.pdf

voices and needs influence policy-making; Slovenia, where the Association of Rural Women holds annual national workshop addressing women farmers' access to social protection and social services and organises educational programmes; Hungary where the Union of Hungarian Women is advocating for increased visibility of rural women by holding annually, in collaboration with the Ministry of agriculture, conferences to mark the International Day of Rural Women, bringing together national and international decision makers alongside rural women to share good practices on gender equality and rural development and visit local, women-led farms. Female farmers are also provided information and training on organic farming, English language and computer literacy, to expand their economic opportunities.

19. Examples of promising practices in the FAO supported interventions include trainings and on-the-job coaching for the extension services, to ensure they reach rural women working in family farms. In Azerbaijan and Turkey, rural women have access to targeted training programmes to become more organised around women's centres and cooperatives, with access to new markets. In Tajikistan and Moldova, migrant workers are investing remittances in the development of family farming, developing small- and medium-scale projects in agribusiness and the production of fruits, vegetables and livestock. In Kyrgyzstan, women are breaking into non-traditional areas such as conservation agriculture, integrated pest management and drip irrigation to ensure food security and diversify their incomes. Women's self-help groups have strengthened collaboration among women, and provide peer learning and sharing. Social transformation within rural households is occurring due to strong engagement with men and women.

20. In recognition of the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia knowledge-generating and practical work targeting rural women, the FAO, for the first time, is invited to lead the preparation of the one of the official documents of the Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting, taking place on 29–30 October 2019 for UNECE Member States to review progress and identify challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action on empowering rural women in the ECE region.

IV. Improving rural livelihoods through support to rural women in income diversification, entrepreneurship and rural crafts.

21. Through 2016 to 2018, the FAO REU supported research and studies that reviewed the development potential of rural crafts that use raw materials produced by agriculture, as a source of job creation and income diversification for communities in rural areas, with focus on Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Findings of these studies point out that rural crafts and cottage industries are directly related to agriculture and rural sector, represent an untapped potential as a source of sustainable employment for stable and secure incomes in rural communities, require small investment for developing entrepreneurial activities and can serve as a critical and essential element of national and regional economy. For centuries, the Central Asia region has been known for its hand-woven carpets, textiles, and many others thst once served as popular export commodities. In the twentieth century, with its focus on industrialization, machine-made goods and mass production, many of these crafts have disappeared. Over the past quarter of the century, governments, civil society and international organizations – including the United Nations – have made significant efforts to revive the region's rich cultural heritage, which resulted in many jobs created, specifically for rural women, providing livelihoods for hundreds and thousands of rural families.

22. However, the potential of rural crafts as a popular employment- and income-generation sector in the region is hampered by various problems, ranging from institutional barriers, lack of incentive policies and relevant statistics to low awareness of potential producers, poor quality and design of the products, and access to markets. The production of rural crafts is not subject of regular surveys, analysis and assessments, which would collect relevant information and address the related problems, leaving the sector' potential in the periphery of development without due attention.[15]

23. To test the recommendations of the studies, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia implemented a pilot project, jointly with the Central Asian Crafts Support Association's Resource Centre in Kyrgyzstan (CACSARC-kg), which targeted rural women living in remote areas, through four ten-day training courses. Training locations – the village of Kulundu (in Batken province, Kyrgyzstan) and the district centre Boysun (in Surkhandarya province Uzbekistan) - were selected in consultation with national partners, using the following criteria: presence of skilled women with the knowledge of traditional craft technologies, strong female leadership in craft communities, and support of local authorities. Kulundu is located in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan, bordering Tajikistan, and is famous for its ancient carpet-weaving traditions. Boysun is located in the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan, bordering Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

24. The training programme was based on the assessment, which took into account practical needs of local women and the skills available. In both locations (Kulundu and Boysun), as in many other parts of rural countryside, women are involved in the production of items for everyday practical use which includes but is not limited to clothing, carpet making, bed ware (blankets, pillows), and other items . Such products are made not only for the household use, but also for a sale, often using synthetic fabrics and outdated models. The training programme taught rural women how to produce competitive handmade products oriented and adjusted to different markets using fabrics made from natural fibre, that have agricultural origin (wool, silk and cotton), and are produced locally[16]. They have been also taught to produce smaller items for sale in touristic parts of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. With the help of qualified trainers, the participants created samples of hand-made products based on traditional technologies. They also studied the pricing and basics of marketing for the sale of their craft products, including the use of new technologies that contribute to the creation of profitable and sustainable rural

[15] These studies are: (1) *Review and analysis of export potential and marketing opportunities for rural off-farm activities in Central Asia*, prepared by the public foundation 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 Centre 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

[16] Traditional local technologies, some partially forgotten, were restored and used at the training workshops, including various types of weaving; embroidery; patchwork; beadwork and more. The raw materials used at the training were products of the agricultural activity of local residents, including hand-made yarn from sheep wool and Angora goat wool, cotton yarn, and raw silkworm yarn. Natural dyes from local plants also were used, including from onion peels, walnut shells, moraine roots, barberry, pomegranate peels and more.

craft production[17]. Altogether, 108 women of various age took part in the training throughout 2017 and 2018.[18]

25. In the process of preparing, organizing and conducting the trainings, the project implementers closely collaborated with the relevant local stakeholders, primarily, the district and regional administration, and the craft associations. In both countries, local authorities, being close to the needs of rural communities, helped to identify rural women in need, to involve them in the trainings. In-kind support such as provision of premises and services was also provided.

26. The positive – and immediate - outcomes of the project include an increase in the women's incomes due to the new products they started to make – the products, that are based on ethnic tradition, and have improved quality and marketability. Undoubtedly, these trainings improved rural women' ability to earn, and as women usually control the income they earn from the sales of craft items they produce, they contributed to rural women's empowerment. Important result was also in establishing contacts and building ties between the grass-roots women of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The trainings also contributed to awareness raising and greater knowledge of the local stakeholders.

27. This pilot is just a small portion of other ongoing projects and activities in FAO REU portfolio that aim to reach rural women and expand their economic opportunities, - including the flagship United Nations Joint Programme to Empower Rural Women in Kyrgyzstan. But the experience generated in its implementation, needs to be taken into account under the new Regional gender equality strategy, and further promoted though the gender-specific projects that are going to start in Albania, Azerbaijan, under FAO-Azerbaijan Partnership Programme, and Turkey, under FAO-Turkey Partnership Programme.

Conclusions and recommendations

28. Despite strong progress towards empowering rural women in the countries of the region, the challenges persist and manifest themselves, inter alia, in rural women's limited access to productive resources and economic opportunities, as decent employment and entrepreneurship. Rural women's contribution to agricultural productivity and sustainable food systems remains invisible and receives little or no recognition. Transformative and holistic approaches by multiple stakeholders, including governments, Civil Society Organization and the private sector supported by international organizations are needed at national level. The formulation of respective policies would tackle the deep-rooted, structural barriers that perpetuate gender inequalities in rural settings. The policy measures to empower

[17] FAO/CACSARC-kg (2019). Catalogue of rural handicrafts form local raw materials. Available at: http://www.fao.org/3/ca5011en/ca5011en.pdf. Training participants, under the guidance of trainers, created a collection of 188 samples from local raw materials that meet the market requirements for assortment and quality. Items produced by craftswomen based on the samples created during the training sessions are successfully marketed, including through Facebook and Instagram, and sold widely, including at the International Oimo Festival, held annually in Kyrgyzstan, contributing to rural women' income and sustainable livelihoods for their families. The catalogue of samples of products created at the trainings has just been published in the Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Russian and English languages for the use by rural artisans across Central Asia. It can serve as a tool to attract customers and as a guideline for other interested women to expand the range and improve the quality of their products.

[18] 49 women were trained in Kyrgyzstan, and 59 - in Uzbekistan. Nearly one-fifth of participants were widows or divorced women. All of the rural women were educated: 70 percent of the participants had secondary school education and about 30 percent had vocational education. The average number of children per family was four. The husbands and/or adult sons of many participants were in labour migration at the time of the training. On average, the training participants' income from handicrafts activities was up to 30 percent of the family budget.

rural women should focus on redressing gender inequalities and improving rural women's access to quality infrastructure and social protection services and measures.

29. Among these interventions, support to rural women by facilitating investment to enable production and promotion of rural crafts can be an effective strategy in generating incomes and improving their livelihoods. The evidence generated by the FAO pilot project in the Region demonstrated that investing in rural women can help to raise their incomes, contributing to improve their own and families livelihoods, respectively. Rural women acquired the practical knowledge and skills necessary to run a rural craft business, which serve as an avenue for strengthening their economic independence.

30. It is recommended to give more attention to rural crafts in local and national policies and programmes due to significant potential they have to contribute to rural economic growth as well the national economy. Rural crafts use locally available raw materials originating *inter alia* from agriculture, and employ locally available skills based on usually small investments but allowing to bring quick returns. This makes them an indispensable component in income diversification, jobs creation and entrepreneurship development interventions, especially in relation to specific crafts and tourism. Policy measures facilitating this approach should be included in the respective agriculture and rural development frameworks

31. To maximise the benefit of rural crafts development, the member countries, FAO and other stakeholders may engage in productive partnerships with rural women, through local organizations and governmental departments, creating a greater awareness at policy level and in rural communities of the value of this work, and considering specific initiatives, investment plans and interventions which women can access.

32. Implementation of this type of activities (such as trainings in practical knowledge of rural crafts, market orientation, entrepreneurship, the use of social media, etc.) under investment plans and rural development programmes can be effective way to address rural poverty, gender inequalities and social exclusion, and the ECA members are invited to endorse this area of work, to allow FAO to continue its efforts addressing rural women practical needs.

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