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Developments in *Fora* of Importance for the Mandate of FAO

Executive Summary

In keeping with established practice, the Council is informed of developments in other *fora* of importance for FAO's mandate:

- 1) 14th Conference of the Parties of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (2-13 September 2019), India;
- 2) The International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour - 2021;
- 3) Recent Developments in the intergovernmental processes for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) monitoring and reporting and outlook for FAO's work; and
- 4) The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019 addresses economic slowdowns and downturns impacting hunger.

Suggested action by the Council

The above topics are presented to the 163rd Session of the Council for information only.

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I. 14th Conference of the Parties of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (2-13 September 2019), India

1. The 14th Conference of the Parties (COP 14) of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was held in New Delhi, India, from 2 to 13 September 2019. The COP 14 agreed on 36 decisions to ramp up and elaborate further action on the ground to ensure that the UNCCD's goals for 2018-2030 were achieved. The meeting adopted the *New Delhi Declaration: Investing in Land and Unlocking Opportunities*¹ in which parties expressed commitment toward a range of issues, including gender and health, ecosystem restoration, drought preparedness, action on climate change, private sector engagement, youth engagement and the need to secure land rights.
2. The work of FAO was reflected in ten COP Decisions, five of which were from the Committee of the Whole (COW), three from the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) and two from the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC). The ten decisions pertaining to FAO cover issues related to land tenure, sand and dust storms, drought preparedness, ecosystem restoration and land degradation neutrality.
3. In particular, Decision ICCD/COP(14)/L.17 on Land Tenure “*encourages Parties to follow the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT)*” and “*requests the secretariat and invites the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and other relevant partners to collaborate to produce a technical guide on how to integrate the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security into the implementation of the Convention and land degradation neutrality*”. This Decision will be implemented in close collaboration with FAO, including through the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) from which the VGGT emanates.
4. The COP 14 also hosted the first public consultation on the upcoming UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, co-organized by FAO and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) as leading agencies to support the implementation of the Decade, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/73/284 in March 2019. The consultation was attended by over 100 representatives of Parties, partners and stakeholders who manifested interest in and provided inputs towards the development of an implementation strategy for the Decade. India, as host country of the COP 14, committed to raise its ambition for land restoration from 21 to 26 million hectares by 2030.
5. During the COP 14, FAO hosted five side events on: The Economics of Ecosystem Restoration (TEER) Initiative; FAO's Regional Initiative to counter land degradation in the Mediterranean, Near East and Eastern Europe (LANDMEDNET); Land Degradation Neutrality for Water Security and Drought; Monitoring and combating land degradation in pastoral areas; and the Impacts of land degradation and climate variability on food insecurity in mountain areas.

II. The International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour – 2021

6. This year, in July, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2021 to be the ‘International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour’. Not all tasks undertaken by children in agriculture are considered child labour or, in other words, harmful to children. Some tasks in agriculture can, on the contrary, help children learn useful agricultural and life skills. The definition of child labour is set by the two ILO child labour conventions (138 and 182) which are a few countries short of being universally ratified. 71% of child labour worldwide is found in agriculture, that is, 108 million children. More than two thirds of these girls and boys are unpaid family workers and many tasks they undertake in agriculture are hazardous. Child labour endangers the health and education of children and hampers their future ability as youth to secure decent livelihoods and employment. Child labour represents an obstacle to sustainable agricultural development and food security.
7. FAO has a longstanding collaboration with the ILO, with whom FAO cooperates at country, regional and global levels to eradicate child labour in agriculture. FAO is a leading member of the

¹ <https://www.unccd.int/news-events/new-delhi-declaration-investing-land-and-unlocking-opportunities>

International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture (IPCCLA). FAO also participates in the Global Coordinating Group of the Alliance 8.7, joining forces globally to end child labour and forced labour (SDG target 8.7).

8. FAO and other agricultural stakeholders have a decisive role in eliminating child labour in agriculture as they have particular capacities to reach out to rural areas, smallholder farmers and to help address one of the main drivers of child labour in agriculture – rural household poverty. There are ample, yet largely untapped opportunities, for agricultural stakeholders to help reduce child labour in agriculture through e.g. promoting safe agricultural practices, labour-saving technologies and practices, child labour sensitive investment programmes, sustainable value chain development, climate change resilience, agricultural policies and many more approaches that FAO is promoting.

9. FAO intends to publish a FAO Framework on Eliminating Child Labour in Agriculture in 2020, and to host a High-Level International Conference on Child Labour in Agriculture in 2021 in observance of the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, contributing to the subsequent V Global Conference on the Sustained Eradication of Child Labour.

III. Recent Developments in the intergovernmental processes for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) monitoring and reporting and outlook for FAO's work

10. 2019 has been a critical year for SDG monitoring and for the 2030 Agenda's follow-up and review mechanism more generally. The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) met both in July and September during its first quadrennial Heads of State and Government session. The HLPF benefitted from the most comprehensive SDG Progress Report to date, an early release of the *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* (SOFI) report, as well as FAO's first SDG Progress Report covering the 17 SDG indicators under its custodianship. Meanwhile, the ninth Meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDG), held in Beirut from 25 to 28 March 2019, approved the last remaining Tier III indicator under FAO custodianship. This is a pivotal moment for FAO's work on SDG indicators, signalling the closure of an initial phase of development and testing of new methodologies, and allowing greater focus on other methodological aspects such as data disaggregation, the integration of new data sources such as Earth Observation images, as well as the acceleration of capacity development initiatives.

11. Throughout the period between the ninth and tenth meeting of the IAEG-SDG (Addis Ababa, 21-24 October 2019), a number of electronic consultations have taken place to prepare the groundwork for the 2020 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework. These consultations allowed the IAEG-SDG Secretariat to pre-select a "long list" of potential changes to the current Global Indicator Framework (GIF), including indicator replacements, additions, deletions, revisions, and refinements, to be discussed and approved at the 10th meeting. The three key methodological revisions that FAO had proposed regarding SDG indicators 2.4.1, 2.5.2 and 5.a.2 were unanimously approved at the meeting. By contrast, the additional indicator "2.a.3" proposed by FAO to measure credit to agriculture was not approved based on the reasoning that it does not capture the totality of private sector investment in agriculture. The IAEG-SDG Secretariat also announced the reclassification of FAO-relevant SDG indicators 2.1.2, 6.4.1, 14.6.1, 14.b.1 to Tier I and of SDG indicator 2.5.2 to Tier II.

12. A side meeting was also convened with all the Agencies contributing to the preparation of The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020. Within this context, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) referred to the request from the Deputy Secretary-General for more timely data, which in many cases will require applying now-casting and forecasting techniques to SDG indicators. The meeting reviewed the first progress chart prepared in haste for the September HLPF, which combined two types of assessments for each SDG region: a colour coding progress assessment (using a traffic-light of four colours), as well as a status assessment summarized with a textual description. Given the numerous interrelated methodological issues concerning target setting, measuring progress and analysing trends, it was agreed to establish a dedicated working group that would guide the international statistical community in the preparation of subsequent years' reports, ensuring, to the extent possible, that all custodian Agencies are adopting the same methodology. In this regard, FAO, UNESCO, the OECD,

UNEP, and ESCAP volunteered to be part of this group, which would define its ToRs in November 2019 and produce a “reflection paper” by January 2019.

13. Council Members will also receive an update on FAO’s capacity development and resource mobilization efforts related to supporting countries in monitoring the SDG indicators.

IV. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2019 addresses economic slowdowns and downturns impacting hunger

14. The latest global economic prospects warn of further slowing and stalled economic growth in many countries. Should these prospects prevail, there would be implications for food security and nutrition in the world. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2019* provides evidence that hunger has been on the rise in many countries where the economy has slowed down or contracted. Using a sample of 77 countries, the SOFI Report shows that 65 of them (84 percent) suffered a rise in undernourishment at the same time that their economies slowed down or contracted between 2011 and 2017. Most of these countries are middle-income countries, and due to their heavy reliance on international trade of primary commodities, they are quite vulnerable to marked declines in commodity prices. For some countries, economic shocks are also found to be significant drivers that prolong and worsen the severity of food crises.

15. Food security and nutrition are affected through numerous channels. Economic slowdowns and downturns often lead to a rise in unemployment and a decline in wages and incomes, challenging access to food and essential social services for the poor. People’s access to high-quality, nutritious food can be affected, as can access to basic services such as health care. Adverse economic events will ultimately affect food security and nutrition, depending on extreme poverty levels and the extent to which the poor face exclusion due to different inequalities. The Report shows that the prevalence of severe food insecurity is almost three times higher in countries with high-income inequality (21 percent) compared with countries with low-income inequality (7 percent).

16. Grounded in this evidence, the Report provides policy recommendations. In the short term, countries need to protect incomes and purchasing power so as to counteract economic adversity. This can be achieved through social protection programmes including cash transfers and school feeding; public works programmes that help reduce unemployment; health sector policies that protect the poor against catastrophic out-of-pocket healthcare costs; and if needed, policies aimed at reducing excessive volatility of food prices.

17. In the longer term, countries need to invest to reduce economic vulnerabilities and inequalities; build capacity to withstand shocks; maintain health and other social expenditures; and use policy tools to create healthier food environments. This requires balancing a set of policies and investments to achieve an inclusive structural transformation that diversifies the economy away from commodity dependence, while also fostering poverty reduction and more egalitarian societies.

18. These short- to long-term measures and investments will require savings. It is important that countries strengthen their savings capacity when the economy is growing using available instruments (automatic fiscal stabilizers, stabilization funds, sovereign wealth funds, macro-prudential norms, and the like), and, it is of course critical that countries invest these savings wisely.