

165th Session of the Council

Item 7.2: Report of the 35th Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (1-4 September 2020) (C 2021/15)

Mr Chairperson,

Distinguished Members,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC), it is an honour and a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to address the Council regarding the outcome of the 35th Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific, which was held virtually from 1-4 September 2020.

The Regional Conference was attended by Representatives from 41 Member Nations. Representatives of 9 inter-governmental organizations and 34 international and non-governmental organizations attended as Observers. Representatives of 13 sister United Nations organizations and specialized agencies also attended as observers. The final Report includes a Summary of the Main Recommendations requiring the attention of the Council. This note briefly summarizes those recommendations.

The Royal Government of Bhutan, represented by Honorable Foreign Minister Lyonpo Dr. Tandi Dorji on behalf of His Excellency Honorable Prime Minister of Bhutan, expressed the great honour of hosting the Regional Conference and his confidence that the Conference would bring about actions that would increase the resiliency and prosperity of the region in the face of the current pandemic.

Results and Priorities for FAO in the Asia and the Pacific Region

The 35th Session of APRC welcomed the actions taken and the results achieved in 2018 and 2019 in addressing regional challenges, in particular through the five Regional Initiatives (RIs) supported by the 34th Session of APRC, namely, the Zero Hunger Challenge; Blue Growth; Climate Change; One Health; and the Interregional Initiative on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) – Pacific Component.

The APRC welcomed the programmatic approach adopted for activities in the region, and supported the 14 Programme Areas of Focus to support the implementation of the four consolidated and expanded RIs for 2020-21. It also emphasized the importance of Rome-based Agencies (RBA) collaboration and partnership and welcomed the progress FAO has made in forging alliances with other UN Agencies and regional institutions, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Pacific Community (SPC).

The APRC recommended FAO to ensure that the expanded RI on Climate Change and Enhancement of Sustainable Management and Use of Natural Resources includes a strong focus on human, social and economic aspects of water management, Blue Growth for fisheries and aquaculture, resilience of small-scale fisheries, forest conservation and climate change risk reduction, and to mobilize the extensive and rich capabilities and expertise in the region to achieve solutions to the various challenges, maximizing through mechanisms such as South-South and Triangular Cooperation and the Hand in Hand Initiative, promoting engagement with civil society, especially family farmers, and the private sector, as well as developing new partnerships.

The APRC also recommended FAO to update its technical expertise in accordance with the needs to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to re-profile its workforce in Regional Offices and Country Offices, in line with the approved Further Adjustments to the Programme of Work and Budget for 2020-21 by the 164th Session of the Council, and to ensure a participatory and transparent process for the development of the new Strategic Framework.

Decentralized Offices Network

The APRC welcomed FAO's continued engagement in the implementation of the United Nations Development System (UNDS) repositioning at regional and country levels, its efforts to identify and seize

emerging opportunities for better collaboration with other UN Agencies and respond to the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda. The APRC supported the effort to strengthen the policy and technical capacities to ensure FAO leadership in the region across relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including those under FAO's custodianship and to contribute effectively to the new UN Cooperation Frameworks and common country analysis and stressed the importance of FAO headquarters continuing its full support to the Decentralized Offices to ensure the Organization's impact at regional, sub-regional and country levels. The APRC also requested FAO continue to pursue the review and transformation of the Decentralized Offices and adjust the business models to ensure greater flexibility and efficiency in the use of the Organization's financial and human resources to better respond to Members' needs, in consultation with affected Member Nations.

Prioritization of Country and Regional Needs

The Ministers and delegates encouraged FAO to sustain collaboration with regional institutions such as ASEAN, SAARC and SPC in developing approaches that are more effectively implemented on a regional scale such as in policy coherence, statistics, research and development, control of zoonotic risks and trans-boundary pests and diseases and promoting innovative digital technologies.

Ministers and delegates highlighted the importance of promoting sustainable land, water, forestry and fisheries resources management. They also emphasised the need for robust biosecurity systems and improved food safety across the supply chain through a strengthened One Health approach to reduce the risk of zoonotic diseases and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), and prevent the risk of future pandemics across the region. They reinforced the need to address the threat to agriculture from trans-boundary plant pests and animal diseases such as Fall Armyworm, desert locust, African Swine Fever and coconut Rhinoceros beetle. Comprehensive measures to address these challenges are more important than ever in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Regional Conference affirmed that digitalization and innovation could contribute to improvements in agriculture productivity and sustainability. These are increasingly important, especially in areas where there are large areas to cover, extreme terrain and weather and inadequate infrastructure. Promoting innovative precision agriculture and smart farming could improve productivity, including for smallholders, family farmers and medium and large-scale producers.

The Ministers and delegates recognized the vital role of smallholders, family farmers and fisher folk, including women and youth, in achieving Agenda 2030 and called for comprehensive support in harnessing their full potential, notably in the context of the UN Decade of Family Farming (2019-2028). The Ministers and delegates also emphasized their efforts to invest in agriculture research, extension and education systems to meet the objectives of transforming agriculture and food systems through upgraded training and extension services. This is also needed to attract youth to agriculture, encourage agri-entrepreneurs and assist countries, especially with ageing farming populations.

Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2020-2023 for the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific

The Meeting endorsed the MYPOW for the 2020-2023 period to frame the work of the Regional Conference, encouraged regular and systematic review of the performance and efficiency of the Conference, and looked forward to receiving a full report at the next session.

Date and place of the thirty-sixth FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific

The Regional Conference recommended the acceptance of the gracious offer of the Government of Bangladesh to host the thirty-sixth Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific in 2022.

*The Honourable Lyonpo Yeshe Penjor,
Chairperson of the 35th Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific
Minister for Agriculture and Forests of the the Kingdom of Bhutan*