

165th Session of the Council

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

The 31st FAO Regional Conference for Africa (ARC) was held from 26 to 28 October 2020 in full virtual mode. Members agreed to hold the conference virtually due to health concerns and restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, and suspended all General Rules of the Organization that were incompatible with a virtual environment.

His Excellency Dr Emmerson D. Mnangagwa, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, opened the conference. In total, 874 delegates attended over the course of the 3-day conference. The delegates were comprised of 95 Ministers (including 12 deputy ministers and two ministers of foreign affairs) from 44 countries, 20 ambassadors, 12 private sector organizations, 28 civil society and/or non-governmental organizations, 10 inter-governmental organizations (including the African Union Commission, which was represented at the highest level), six United Nations (UN) organizations and four observer nations.

The Regional Conference highlighted the prevalence of undernourishment in sub-Saharan Africa, which has been on the rise for the past five years, reaching 22 percent in 2019. The rise of food insecurity is now widespread, with reports indicating climate variability and extremes, conflict, and economic slowdowns and downturns, as the main drivers. The worst desert locust outbreak in 25 years and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have further compounded the situation.

The Regional Conference recognized the importance of the technical paper presented by FAO on the development of an Action Programme to Address Food Security and Nutrition Challenges in Landlocked Countries in Africa. The paper highlighted the necessary actions in key areas, including increasing public and private sector investment in agriculture, proactively engaging landlocked countries in Regional Initiatives and sustaining efforts to improve their competitiveness and business regulatory environments. The Conference also highlighted that FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative could provide a holistic framework to support country-led and country-owned actions to respond to the needs of the highly vulnerable populations in landlocked African countries and consider effective responses to mitigate and overcome the effects of shocks that result in negative impacts on livelihoods, food security and nutrition.

Below are the recommendations that derived from the Programme and Budgetary matters:

Results and Priorities for FAO in the Africa Region

The Regional Conference recognized the importance of FAO's Strategic Framework in providing direction for FAO's technical work and took note of the arrangements regarding the proposed revision of the Strategic Framework to be submitted to the FAO Conference in July 2021. The Conference considered the document *Results and Priorities for FAO in the Africa Region*, covering achievements in 2018-19. The Report proposes to maintain in 2020-21 all current Regional Initiatives, which support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and relevant regional commitments, such as the 2014 Malabo Declaration.

The Regional Conference recommended that FAO reiterate the three Regional Initiatives: 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 Report also refines the regional priorities in the context of new initiatives such as inclusive food systems transformation, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, digitalization and innovation, the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Umbrella Programme and the UN Development System repositioning.

Recognizing that Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDSs) face similar challenges (e.g. vulnerability to climate shocks, reliance on imports), the Conference recommended FAO to strengthen its support to SIDS, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and LLDCs, noting their vulnerability to unique and complex food security and nutrition challenges.

Decentralized Offices Network

The Regional Conference considered the document on Decentralized Offices Network reporting on actions taken in 2018-19 and those planned for 2020-21 and expressed its satisfaction with the implementation of the decisions of the 30th ARC and the progress made in the decentralization of the FAO Country Office network.

The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:

- ensure full implementation of all the recommendations on the Decentralized Offices Network at the 30th ARC in Sudan and to continue efforts to strengthen its technical capacities and policy integration at regional and subregional levels;
- ensure leadership in the region across relevant SDGs, (including those under FAO's custodianship), with special attention to addressing hunger and poverty in the most needy and vulnerable countries; and
- pursue the adjustment of its decentralized offices business models, in particular in light of the UN Development System Reform, 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 the Member Nations emerging needs and priorities in line with the SDGs.

In collaboration with other partners, especially in the Rome-based Agencies (RBA) environment, the Regional Conference recommended FAO to evaluate, identify and seize emerging opportunities arising from UN Reform at country and regional levels, building on lessons learned and successful experiences.

Noting the recently established Office for SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs, the Conference recommended FAO to bring technical departments and divisions, technical experts and decentralized offices together to strengthen the impact of programmes in the priority countries and engage with external actors and partners. Such actors and partners would include 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.

Regarding the next venue of the Regional Conference, Members agreed to hold the 32nd Session in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea in 2022. The exact date will be agreed jointly by the selected host country and the Secretariat of the Regional Conference.

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