

165th Session of the Council

Item 7.3 - Report of the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (2-4 November 2020)

The 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) was held from 2 to 4 November 2020. In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health concerns, the Session was convened virtually on an exceptional basis, thus suspending the respective articles of the Rules of Procedure of the ERC requiring to hold a physical meeting.

The session recorded historic numbers of participation - 51 FAO Members, three Observer FAO Member Countries, 15 ministers and 16 vice ministers, over 300 delegates and observers, in addition to more than 1 500 following the proceedings on webcast and 15 000 impressions on Twitter. The conference was preceded by the Consultation of the Civil Society Organizations and, for the first time ever, a Consultation of the Private Sector, whose representatives delivered their views during the ERC sessions.

Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Matters

The Regional Conference global policy discussions focused on: i) **Sustainable food systems and healthy diets in Europe and Central Asia**, including discussions on the UN Food Systems Summit in late 2021 with the participation of Her Excellency Agnes Kalibata, UN Special Envoy; ii) **Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming**, and iii) **FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative**.

In relation to the item on sustainable food systems, the ERC requested FAO to support, through the Regional Initiatives, governments and non-state actors - in particular the private sector - the development, refinement and implementation of the transformative agenda on sustainable, resilient, inclusive and equitable food systems and healthy diets, taking into account the One Health approach while addressing specific impacts due to COVID-19. Upon the request by FAO Members, FAO should also work with regional and national coordinating mechanisms and bodies in developing a methodology to assess the sustainability of food systems and to analyze, at the country level, the status of current diets and food systems.

With regards to the second main topic of the Session, the Regional Conference requested FAO to continue assisting the countries in the region in the sustainable structural transformation of rural areas to expand the multidimensional nature of family farming and to leverage the livelihoods of family farmers, with emphasis on youth and women. Members also recommended that FAO take into consideration the CFS policy recommendations for promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems and include gender equality as a crosscutting topic under all proposed FAO solutions for youth, employment and development of rural areas. Furthermore, the Conference requested FAO to consider the organization of a youth forum in preparation for the UN Food Systems Summit 2021.

As for the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, it was recommended that FAO closely involve Members in the region in the shaping of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and its implications for FAO's programme of work and budget, and asked FAO to consider ways to enhance and extend the Hand-in-Hand Initiative approach to strengthen FAO country support to achieve other FAO priority objectives and, especially, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated impact.

Programme and Budget Matters

The **Decentralized Offices Network** item was considered through a written correspondence procedure, whereby based on the inputs received from the Members, FAO was requested to further pursue the adjustment of its Decentralized Offices business models in order to further align and create synergies with the single action plan under the responsibility of the Resident Coordinator. In line with the recommendations of the evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework, the ERC further requested FAO to shift towards a full programmatic approach at the decentralized level, and to continue its efforts to strengthen its technical capacities and policy integration at regional and subregional levels, in particular through further cooperation with the RBAs at regional and country level.

The ERC further appreciated the results achieved by FAO in 2018–2019 in the region under the Regional Initiatives (RIs) and other main areas of work, as well as FAO’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and endorsed the proposed regional priority areas and the revised Regional Initiatives as a programmatic framework approach for FAO’s action in 2020–2021, under the item of **Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region**. The Regional Conference also requested FAO to strengthen the work under respective priorities within the FAO mandate, in relation to FAO’s contribution to the UN Food Systems Summit, the integration of policy changes related to nutrition and healthy diets and transforming food systems based on the three dimensions of sustainable development, the integration of One Health approach, the promotion of equality and digital inclusion - stressing social protection and school food and nutrition programmes, and many other issues as outlined in the ERC Report. The importance of FAO’s Strategic Framework has been recognized by the Regional Conference in providing direction for FAO’s technical work and welcomed the efforts to anchor the revised Strategic Framework to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including to SDG 2 and SDG 1 as cornerstones for all FAO activities.

The Regional Conference appreciated the **Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014-2019 in Europe and Central Asia Region**, welcoming FAO management’s acceptance of the recommendations, to name a few: improving the existing accountability framework at regional and thematic level; implementing a consistent and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system at all levels; strengthening the capacities of regional and subregional offices to provide backstopping support to FAO country offices in project formulation and resource prospecting, etc. Finally a progress report on the implementation of the recommendations at the next ERC has been requested by the Members and to become a regular feature in future regional conferences under a similar agenda item.

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