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Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2020-2021 in the Europe and Central Asia region

Executive Summary

The FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) conducts evaluation and syntheses of evaluations to contribute to the Organization's learning and improvement. The objective of the 2022 Regional Synthesis of OED evaluations in the Europe and Central Asia region (ECA) is to identify lessons learned that may contribute to informed discussions on FAO's strategic position and contributions to results in the region. It also aims to enhance the usefulness and utilization of OED evaluations for the Organization and its Governing Bodies. This 2022 Regional Synthesis report for the Europe and Central Asia region follows on the synthesis completed in 2020 and responds to the request of the 32nd FAO Regional Conference for Europe held 2-4 November 2020.

The synthesis follows the broad themes of the ECA's three Regional Initiatives, with gender equality and empowerment of women as a cross cutting theme. It draws on a sample of OED evaluations completed between January 2020 and December 2021, inclusive. To enhance the usefulness of the Regional Synthesis, the OED used the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) to organize the findings of the synthesis.

FAO contributed to results in the Programme Priority Areas covered by the three Regional Initiatives. It contributed to strengthening capacities of small-scale producers, commercial family farms and pastoralists through a range of capacity building interventions, including access to technology to enhance innovative crop production, training, value chain development, improvement of research education and extension systems, and access to knowledge platforms.

FAO provided technical expertise to develop national policies and strategies to modernize and strengthen the region's food safety systems and align legislative frameworks with international requirements for the agrifood sector. Coordination at the national level on food security and nutrition and FAO's collaboration with other development partners are areas for improvement.

FAO strengthened capacities for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and climate change mitigation and adaptation. The practical application of DRR approaches and tools require longer-term support to achieve sustainable results. The high costs of inputs, the managerial complexities,

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

and the slow institutionalization of outcomes in national strategies and plans are key factors limiting the replication of interventions.

The critical role of data and statistics is evident in FAO's work in the region. FAO promoted several initiatives on digital technologies and information systems as powerful tools for supporting advanced analytics, policy-making, and reporting, and as well as inter-agency coordination.

Gender is mainstreamed into the design of several projects and programmes in the region. However, weak monitoring and enforcement of existing national legislative frameworks hamper progress.

The Regional Synthesis identified the need for initiatives that explicitly address youth as a distinct target group, as well as the need for more policies that promote inclusion of rural populations, in keeping with the agenda of leaving no one behind.

Most of FAO's interventions adopt a project modality rather than a programmatic approach. The region's efforts to develop a theory of change for the Regional Initiatives may assist in following a more programmatic approach. Ensuring the sustainability of results is a challenge, and financial and capacity constraints of national partners are the most commonly cited factors hindering sustainability.

The lean Country Office structures rely heavily on the support of the Regional Office and Subregional Office, as well support from technical divisions in headquarters. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the importance of strong decentralized technical capacities.

FAO is seen as a credible partner in the region, bringing a wealth of knowledge and technical skills, as well as financial resources, to the partnerships. New and emerging global and regional challenges call for more innovative partnerships, particularly with the private sector and civil society.

The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) has taken steps to strengthen monitoring and evaluation in the region, as recommended in the 2020 Regional Synthesis. This should contribute to strengthening the use of evaluative evidence for programme and project design, and improve knowledge management in the region.

The key lessons that emerged from the Regional Synthesis are:

- Strategic and inclusive partnerships are essential for achieving results.
- Credible data and data technology can accelerate results in the region.
- Assumptions about the political and institutional contexts should be made explicit in project designs.
- Single projects have greater prospects for sustainability if they are nested in a medium-to-long term programme for greater impact.
- Flexibility is essential during periods of crisis and uncertainty.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- Note the contents of the OED report.
- Encourage the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia to draw on the key lessons and pursue actions to respond to the emerging issues, constraints and gaps identified in the report.

Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:

ERC Secretariat

ERC-ECA-Secretariat@fao.org

I. Introduction

A. Background

1. The FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) conducts evaluation to provide accountability of the Organization to Members, giving them an assessment of the performance against the strategic objectives the Organization has set for itself as well as its organizational performance. OED evaluations play an important role in contributing to corporate learning and provide evidence to inform decisions on improvements to the Organization's projects and programmes. This report is the synthesis of evaluations of FAO's work in the Europe and Central Asia region, completed between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021. It follows on the previous synthesis completed in 2020, as requested by the 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe held on 2-4 November 2020.¹

B. Purpose, scope and objectives

2. The primary purpose of the synthesis is to contribute to the Organization's learning and improvement. The synthesis will inform the Programme Committee and the Regional Conference for Europe about the results and lessons learned from OED evaluations completed and managed between 2020 and 2021, while triangulating findings with the evidence presented in the 2020 Regional Synthesis. The FAO Regional, Subregional and Country Offices for Europe and Central Asia (ECA) can use the lessons learned to inform and improve their project formulations and programmes in the region. The secondary purpose of the synthesis is to enhance the utilization of OED evaluation reports at the regional level and create demand for regionally focused evaluations.

3. The Regional Synthesis covered all categories of evaluations that FAO completed and managed between 2020 and 2021. These evaluations included project evaluations at country, regional and global levels, country programme framework evaluations, and thematic or programme evaluations. Two mid-term evaluations were included in the analysis to expand the limited sample of evaluations available.

4. The objective of the synthesis is to identify lessons from evaluations that can contribute to an informed discussion on FAO's strategic positioning and contribution to results in the ECA region and provide reflections and suggestions for future work planning at the regional level. The preparation of the Regional Synthesis is part of a broader objective of enhancing the usefulness and utilization of evaluations by Members of the Governing Bodies, in particular, at the regional levels.

5. The Regional Synthesis aimed to answer the following key questions:

- i. **Results through FAO support to the region.** What are the main results, in the regional priorities/thematic areas that have been achieved through FAO support to the region and countries in the region?
- ii. **Emerging issues and gaps.** What issues and gaps emerge from the evaluations, which require attention/consideration by the FAO Regional Conference?
- iii. **Lessons to be learned.** What lessons can be learned from evaluations that can inform FAO's future programming/actions in the region?

¹ Report on the Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014–2019 in Europe and Central Asia Region, presented at the Thirty-second Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe, 2-4 November 2020, ERC/20/6

C. Methodology

6. The synthesis identified and mapped the results of FAO's operations under the three Regional Initiatives and their components in the Europe and Central Asia region, with an additional analysis of gender as a cross-cutting theme. OED collected all evaluations completed between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021 that referred to countries in the ECA region. These reports were reviewed to assess their relevance to the regional initiatives and priorities as confirmed in the Europe Regional Conference 2020. A total of 15 reports were selected as a sample for the analysis.

7. A second round of screening was done on the selected sample against the following criteria:
- i. Global or thematic evaluations must include examples of implementation in the ECA region.
 - ii. Project/programme content must demonstrate a direct relationship with the regional initiatives.

8. Following the selection of the evaluations, each report was read and coded using the Nvivo software for the qualitative analysis, an advanced data management tool, which allows queries and for the visualization of data in an efficient and organized manner. The coding structure was then used to analyse and synthesise the data, using the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) as the framework for organizing the findings. The methodology is described in more detail in *Appendix 1*. The list of reports in the final sample is contained in *Appendix 2*.

9. The synthesis endeavoured to be rigorous and improved the methodology based on the lessons learned from the 2020 synthesis. The following are the main limitations:

- i. The synthesis is based on evaluation reports and as such, it does not cover the full spectrum of FAO's activities in the Europe and Central Asia region. As evaluations are conducted retrospectively, several projects and programmes would have been completed prior to 2020. The synthesis therefore cannot capture information on projects and programmes that are still being implemented.
- ii. The findings are organized around the PPAs, and as the projects and programmes pre-date the PPA framework, which is still evolving. REU is aligning its work to the PPAs and may arrive at a different categorization to that used in the regional synthesis.
- iii. The results reported in the synthesis are in most instances country specific and cannot be generalized across the entire region. The number of reports used in the synthesis increased to 15, compared with the eight reports that were used in the previous synthesis. The sample size is, however, small and this also limits the extent to which generalizations can be made across the region.

D. Structure of report

10. Following the introduction, Section II provides a brief overview of the Regional Initiatives and components and how the findings from evaluations can be mapped under the PPAs from the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. Section III discusses the FAO's contribution to results in the region, Section IV discusses the enablers and constraints to results, Section V discusses the gaps and emerging issues, and Section VI presents the conclusions and lessons learned. The Nvivo codes have been used to reference the reports in the discussion of the results in Section III. *Appendix 2* contains the full titles of the reports and the countries covered in these reports.

II. Regional context

11. To ensure that the regional synthesis would be useful for the region and forward-looking, the synthesis used the Regional Initiatives², the Strategic Framework 2022-31 and PPAs as the framework for the synthesis.

² OED was informed that there has been some modification to three Regional Initiatives. For the purposes of the regional synthesis, OED has used the descriptions that were used in the previous synthesis, as these were the latest official descriptions available at the time of conducting the regional synthesis.

A. Regional Initiatives and priorities

12. The 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe, reiterated the importance of the Regional Initiatives (RIs) as the main programmatic instrument for aligning the Organization's work with the most crucial priorities in the region. Since 2014, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) has been enhancing an integrated programming approach through the Strategic Objectives (SOs), RIs and Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) for formulation and implementation of its assistance to the programme countries, contributing to the achievement of agreed outputs and outcomes of the Medium Term Plan and the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB). The RIs are the programmatic umbrella to improve the quality of the result chains by facilitating a cross-sectoral approach to the programme of work in the region to (i) address the main challenges faced by countries in the region; and (ii) monitor FAO's contribution to the SOs and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
13. The three Regional Initiatives are:
- i. RI 1: Empowering smallholders, family farms and youth, facilitating rural livelihoods and poverty reduction. This Regional Initiative uses a complex, multidisciplinary and area-based development approach, tailored to the Europe and Central Asia region. It takes into consideration the region's heterogeneity and the special challenges it faces. The overall goal is to address the key problems of rural people by empowering smallholders and family farms to improve their livelihoods. Regional Initiative 1 promotes achievement of SDG 1, 2, 5, 8 and 10.
 - ii. RI 2: Transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration. The primary goal of this Regional Initiative is to support Members in enhancing the agrifood trade policy environment for small- and medium-sized agricultural enterprises in pursuit of more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems. A better trade policy environment for modern agrifood markets requires the development of capacity for trade agreements and domestic, regional and international sanitary and phytosanitary rules. Regional Initiative 2 promotes achievement of SDG 2, 8, 12 and 17.
 - iii. RI 3: Managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity in a changing climate. Regional Initiative 3 provides a mechanism for support to FAO Members in building resilience to climate change and natural disasters for sustainable food systems. This promotes achievement of SDG 2, 12, 13 and 15. Specific interventions also address multiple objectives such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Paris Agreement commitments (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, or INDCs). The Initiative also creates the regional mechanisms to assist countries in accessing climate finance, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), sustainable land use, genetic resources, water management and climate-smart agriculture.
14. The 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe recommended that FAO also refine the Regional Initiatives within the context of new emerging trends and prioritization, for example; (i) adopting innovative approaches and using modern science and technologies, including digital solutions, to face new situations and challenges; (ii) focusing on food systems transformations that embody the dynamic links across sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food security, nutrition and resilience; (iii) emphasis on leaving no one behind and on organizational consolidation to accelerate support for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), with special emphasis on the LLDCs in Europe and Central Asia. Particular consideration has been given to the Hand-in-Hand Initiative by the Regional Conference, as a new approach for agricultural development that plays an important role in strengthening national ownership and capacities to accelerate progress, end poverty and hunger and promote rural development and economic growth.
15. The 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe underlined that the COVID-19 pandemic further threatened achievement of the SDGs, showing the importance of a resilient and sustainable food system that functions in all circumstances; acknowledged the role of smallholders and

family farms as key contributors to ensuring food security during the period of the pandemic; and confirmed support for the United Nations Secretary-General's call to build back better from COVID-19.

B. FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and regional synthesis framework

16. The FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 sets an agenda for the accelerated transformation of agrifood systems to contribute to achievement of SDG 2 and accelerate progress across several other goals and targets. The Strategic Framework sets out a strategic narrative of this transformative agenda, namely, "...MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind."³ These *four betters* describe FAO's longer-term development impacts. They are linked to the SDGs and represent the organizing principles for how FAO will contribute to SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities) and the broader SDG agenda.

17. The Strategic Framework elaborates 20 PPAs that guide FAO's programmes implemented under the *four betters*. These PPAs are issue-based technical themes and inter-disciplinary in nature. They represent FAO's comparative advantage and value-added of FAO's contribution to medium-term Outcomes and the relevant SDG targets. Although a PPA may be strongly anchored in one of the *four betters*, it can contribute to the remaining three betters. In addition to the PPAs, the Strategic Framework includes four accelerators representing means to accelerate progress and realize the *four betters*. These accelerators are technology; innovation; data; and complements (governance, human capital, and institutions). The Strategic Framework also identifies the cross-cutting themes of gender, youth and inclusion that must be taken into account in all of the Organization's programmatic work, in keeping with the United Nations programming principle of leaving no one behind.

18. Table 1 illustrates the Regional Initiatives and their components, categorized into the *four betters* and PPAs. The table reflects only those PPAs that are associated with the sample of evaluation reports used in the synthesis. The table represents OED's categorization for the purpose of the synthesis and does not represent an official categorization endorsed by Members and the Organization.

Table 1: Regional Initiatives, Components and associated Programme Priority Areas

Regional Initiative Component	Four betters	Programme Priority Areas
Regional Initiative 1: Empower smallholders and family farms for improved rural livelihoods and poverty reduction		
Support policy development and innovative practices for increased sustainable agricultural production	Better production	BP1: Innovation for Sustainable Agriculture Production BP2: Blue Transformation BP4: Small-scale producers' equitable access to resources
Support improvement of rural livelihood and enhanced access to natural resources	Better life	BL2: Inclusive rural transformation
Regional Initiative 2: Improve agrifood trade and market integration		
Supporting domestic food markets and food export diversification and promotion in view of developing more inclusive and efficient agrifood systems	Better nutrition	BN4: Reducing food loss and waste
Capacity development on WTO trade agreements and effective use of WTO procedures	Better nutrition	BN5: Transparent markets and trade

³ FAO. 2021. FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031, p.14.

Regional Initiative Component	Four betters	Programme Priority Areas
Implementation of global food quality and safety standards including addressing sanitary, animal health and phytosanitary issues.	Better nutrition Better production	BN3: Safe food for everyone BP3: One Health
Regional Initiative 3: Manage natural resources sustainably, under a changing climate		
Effective provision/collection of data, tools and services for effective decision-making on addressing natural resource management, climate change and disaster risk reduction.		Treated as part of cross-cutting data and statistics
Promoting sustainable natural resource management and facilitating resilience in agriculture, forestry and other land-use sectors, including mitigating and adapting to climate change.	Better environment	BE1: Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems BE3: Biodiversity and ecosystem services for food and agriculture
Gender equality and women's empowerment		
Cross-cutting theme	Better life	BL1: Gender equality and rural women's empowerment

19. It is important to note that this synthesis is not an evaluation of regional programmes, priorities or the Regional Initiatives. It is instead a synthesis of results, trends and lessons learned from a sample of evaluations conducted by OED in the ECA region. This is also the first OED exercise in mapping FAO's results in the region under the new PPAs, based on the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. The concept of PPAs is new and is evolving, and the OED categorization of results under the PPAs is based on the OED's interpretation of the PPAs. REU may arrive at a different categorization as it refines its alignment of its work to the Strategic Framework.

III. Results achieved through FAO's support

20. This section discusses the results achieved through FAO's support to the Europe and Central Asia region, under the Regional Initiatives. As was the case with the 2020 regional synthesis, the evaluations in the sample reflected diversity in the type and level of results reported. It should be noted that the discussion only reflects results reported in the sample of OED evaluations and does not reflect results generated by other FAO activities.

A. Regional Initiative 1: Empowering smallholders, family farms and youth, facilitating rural livelihoods and poverty reduction

<https://www.fao.org/europe/regional-initiatives/smallholders-family-farms/en/>

21. Regional Initiative 1 aims to eliminate rural poverty, improve the resilience of rural populations and especially smallholders, and achieve inclusive growth for rural economies through sustainable use of natural resources and development of commercial family farms. Results of the synthesis under RI:1 are organized around the following PPAs:

- i. BP1: Innovation for Sustainable Agriculture Production – opportunities inclusive of small-scale and vulnerable producers for sustainable crop, livestock and forestry production systems supported by innovation and technology.
- ii. BP2: Blue transformation – promoting inclusive and sustainable blue food systems through improved policies and programmes for integrated science-based management, technological innovation and private sector engagement.

- iii. BP4: Small-scale producers' equitable access to resources – access to economic and natural resources, markets, services, information, education and technologies.
- iv. BL2: Inclusive Rural Transformation - Inclusive transformation and revitalization of rural areas ensuring equal participation of and benefits to poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups accelerated through implementation of targeted policies, strategies and programmes.

Finding 1: FAO contributed to strengthening capacities of small-scale producers, commercial family farms and pastoralists through a range of capacity building interventions including access to technology to enhance innovative crop production, training, value chain development, improvement of research education and extension systems, and access to knowledge platforms. The synthesis also found examples of activities focusing on inclusion of vulnerable rural populations to improve their livelihoods. Cross-sectoral and people-centred approaches have contributed to ownership of the interventions by the diverse groups of stakeholders involved, especially at community level. Some interventions will require longer support and allocation of resources from governments to ensure sustainability.

Programme Priority Area BP4: Small-scale producers' equitable access to resources

22. The synthesis identified examples of support to enable small-scale producers' equitable access to resources through strengthening policies, strategies and data, as well as through direct services and capacity building to farmers and farmer organizations.

23. *Support to develop policies and strategies to benefit small-scale producers.* The European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD III), currently in its third phase of implementation, supports governments as well as end beneficiaries.⁴ In Georgia, ENPARD III supports the development of policy tools to enable the Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) to foster and support the development of value chains and sustainable competitiveness of agriculture. FAO, through the project *Improving Feed Supply and Enhancing Processing in the Armenian Dairy Sector* assisted with the formulation of an investment strategy and road map for the dairy sector, with a focus on livestock and feed supply productivity and a plan to attract local and foreign investments.⁵

24. ENPARD III also provides farmers, cooperatives and other rural stakeholders to access finance, inputs and services for achieving sustainable competitive value chains. Farmers received technical and material support tailored to their individual needs. The programme is in progress so end results are not yet discernible. The mid-term evaluation noted the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that has increased expenditures and the price of inputs, and the actions taken by FAO in redesigning aspects of the programme to mitigate the negative impacts.

25. *Enhanced access to knowledge and policy spaces for pastoralists.* FAO's Global Pastoralists Knowledge Hub (PKH) provides an institutional space for pastoralist civil society organizations to network, engage in policy processes, and access information and contribution to the knowledge base on pastoralism.⁶ Support from the PKH contributed to the expansion of the European Shepherds' Network. The PKH coordinated and financed a regional meeting that culminated in the creation of the Pastoralists Assembly of Central Asia. Community dialogues in Central Asia led to the creation of a new network of women pastoralists. Evaluation of the PKH found that it had increased pastoralist CSOs' access to knowledge through the knowledge repository, exchanges and discussions, studies, and the organization of training and research. The evaluation also found that the PKH had facilitated access for civil society representative organization to a range of high-level policy processes such as the Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock. The need for more relevant topics and analysis in knowledge repository, and the need for more systematic support for pastoralist CSOs to engage in policy processes especially at regional and national levels are among the improvements identified in the evaluation.

⁴ Report 5P

⁵ Report 2C

⁶ Report 3T

26. *Positive results from TCP projects.* Some FAO interventions linked to TCP projects in the region have generated positive results, for example, the improved value chains for several products in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan (grains, dairy fruits and vegetables, fish, livestock, camel meat and dairy, beekeeping, date palm, olives and non-wood forest products). This bodes well as TCP projects are increasingly being used to address value chain issues. Other examples of positive results from TCP projects are the policies and strategies that lead to investments in North Macedonia and Tajikistan.⁷

Programme Priority Area BP1: Innovation for sustainable agriculture production

27. *FAO promoted innovation and use of technology for sustainable production* in selected sectors, for example, grapes, berry production and livestock. FAO's support generated some positive results with prospects for sustainability. Full national commitment and ownership remain necessary conditions to establish institutional frameworks and operational support to sustain results achieved. The ensuing paragraphs highlight examples of FAO's contribution to results.

28. FAO introduced a combination of technical capacity with policy development and implementation of the *Grape Genetic Resources Conservation and Sustainable Use in Armenia* (GGRCU) project.⁸ This pioneering project was pivotal in improving national capacities for sustainable management of grape genetic resources. FAO contributed to the creation of grape collection vineyards, as well as establishment of a mother vineyard to assist in production of grape-planting materials and demonstration vineyards with modern grape-growing technologies. Improvement of the wine-making sector is now included in Armenia's Development Strategy. Building on the results of the GGRCU project, a subsequent project provided capacity building towards the introduction of a certification system for production of grape-planting material, and recommendations for improving legislation regulating the wine industry and plant protection.

29. ENPARD III introduced "No till farming" as an innovation in Georgia. FAO provided supervision, training and technical support.⁹ Another example of FAO's support to innovation in Georgia is the introduction of new crops and varieties in vegetable production through demonstration plots and Farmer Field Schools. FAO supported smallholder producers to adopt a new innovative approach to berry production in the Republic of Moldova. FAO provided technical advice and support in analysing data relevant to commercial production.¹⁰

30. FAO supported countries in the region in conservation and development of locally adapted breeds of livestock through the regional project *Conservation and development of dual-purpose cattle breeds in Eastern Europe*.¹¹ Armenia benefited from support for a breeding development plan, addressing the conservation and genetic development of the Caucasian brown cattle breed. Support and development of genetic resources contributed to the National Strategy for Use and Development of Farm Animal Genetic Resources. Access to Caucasian brown cattle breed, with better resistance to local environment and better quality, can significantly improve livelihood of smallholder livestock farmers and conserve the breed. However, similar interventions require longer support and allocation of resources, both from the Government and implementing agencies to achieve sustainable and catalytic results.

Programme Priority Area BP2: Blue Transformation

31. There are a few examples of FAO contributing to 'Blue transformation' in REU. These include strengthening national capacities to improve the governance and management of marine and fisheries resources, piloting electronic observation and data collection, and support for developing national strategies.

32. *Strengthened capacities for managing water resources.* FAO supported the Government of Armenia to develop a framework for the conservative use of scarce water resources in fish production.

⁷ Report 4T

⁸ Report 2C

⁹ Report 5P

¹⁰ Report 1C

¹¹ Report 2C

Implementation of the framework was effective, as fish farm production increased using new technology.¹² However, as the system is relatively energy-intensive, the rising cost of fish may jeopardize sustainability of the input. Partnerships with the private sector were also established for effective implementation of the alternative utilization of water resources in Armenia in the framework of the fish production project.

33. *Transitioning to the blue economy.* Within the framework of FAO's Blue Growth Initiative (BGI), the *Blue Hope Initiative Project* has the objective of strengthening the capacity of the Government, key institutions and stakeholders in Turkey.¹³ The Blue Hope Initiative Project is a combination of fishery, tourism and social inclusion, and is also a good example of aquaculture promotion. Although some of the activities of the project have not yet been implemented, the project is well known in the region and promising to be a best practice. One planned activity is to improve "Pesca Tourism" in the region – converging fishing and tourism. This planned activity is challenged by regulations that prohibit taking tourists out on fishing boats, the need for infrastructure investment and the difficulty coordinating the different public institutions involved. The project has the possibility of increasing the income of communities while decreasing the use of natural resources. Youth are also interested in the project because of the potential for diversified income generation.

Programme Priority Area BL2: Inclusive Rural Transformation

34. The synthesis identified examples of FAO's activities with a strong focus on equitable and integrated agricultural and rural development policies for improved rural livelihoods. FAO is addressing inequalities in the region by designing projects that aim to improve livelihoods and reduce poverty, and strengthen social inclusion, with a focus on vulnerable populations.

35. *Strengthened capacities for a community development approach to rural development.* The Regional Conference for Europe (2020) emphasized the need to address inequalities in food systems, foster a people-centred approach, and empower vulnerable and marginalized groups, in order to provide affordable, healthy diets for all. In Moldova, FAO's programme addressed aspects related to rural poverty, gender and vulnerable populations, including youth, where appropriate.¹⁴ FAO supported capacity building of local authorities to address needs of rural populations and engage with civil society. At the community level, FAO implemented three pilot projects aimed at improving livelihoods, reducing poverty and strengthening social inclusion, with a focus on vulnerable populations. Community Development Plans were prepared by the National Agency for Rural Development to be used by the Ministry to distribute to as many localities as possible. FAO supported communities on learning how to identify those projects, and how to consult civil society and the business sector for the benefit of all the localities from these areas. A new project with the European Union and Solidarity Fund regarding the creation of local action groups followed based on the strategies developed within the FAO project.

36. In Georgia under ENPARD III, FAO and UNDP work with local municipalities and Local Action Groups (LAGs) to implement local development initiatives, for example, value chains and agriculture development to maximize impact on employment, income and sustainable management of natural resources.¹⁵ LAGs are set up by NGOs and form part of the extended programme steering structure to facilitate synergy between local level actions and the national actions under the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia. FAO collaborates with LAGs and integrates them into the planning and implementation of the extension and matching grants component of ENPARD. ENPARD III is still in progress, but indications are that FAO's engagement with local municipalities and LAGs is an area that needs to be strengthened.

37. *Support to build resilience of vulnerable Internally Displaced Persons and refugee populations.* Georgia has a large number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in all regions of

¹² Report 2C

¹³ Report 5Tb

¹⁴ Report 1C

¹⁵ Report 5P

the country who are vulnerable due to their limited ownership of resources and low access to finance. Inclusion of IDPs in agriculture to reduce their vulnerability is therefore critical and FAO has been implementing European Union-funded IDP programmes since 2009.¹⁶ FAO supported extension service activities to IDPs continues, including during the period of COVID-19 lockdowns. FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture prepared protocols that can be used in future emergencies to protect the most vulnerable rural communities. In Turkey, FAO supported the Government to increase self-reliance and improve agricultural livelihoods through employment opportunities for Syrian refugees in the agriculture sector. The project provided vocational training in agriculture, food processing and livestock sectors, and the evaluation the project found was that it targeted the most vulnerable and excluded refugees. It further concluded that the project was a successful example of FAO's response to emergencies.

38. *FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative as a new inclusive approach to reach the most vulnerable.* In Moldova, partnerships were established and fostered for rural poverty reduction.¹⁷ For example, FAO contributed to the Moldovan Agricultural, Extension and Education Reform through the development of a conceptual framework on *Reforming the Agricultural Innovation System*. All reforms were concentrated on innovation knowledge, a programme bringing knowledge and involving diverse actors, including the private sector, while civil society focused more on farmers' demands. Within the framework of the project *Reforming the research, education and innovation system of the agrifood sector*, FAO participated in a working group with representatives of research, extension, education, farmer organizations and the National Agency for Rural Development (ACSA) European Union relevant projects in cooperation with the Czech Government and UNDP. The project developed an excellent cross-sectorial collaboration between government officials and the other stakeholders from the agricultural and educational sectors. It established professional networks of actors in the country. FAO provided advocacy support and developed an initial strategy where the main principle was to bring knowledge responding to farmers' needs. It contributed to ownership by all the diverse groups of stakeholders of the reform process, empowering them to evaluate its different components.

B. Regional Initiative 2: Transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration

<https://www.fao.org/europe/regional-initiatives/iatmi/en/>

39. Regional Initiative 2 aims to support Members in enhancing the agrifood trade policy environment for small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises, with a view to developing more inclusive and efficient agrifood systems. Results of the synthesis are organized around the following Programme Priority Areas:

- i. BN4: Reducing food loss and waste (FLW) – Clear, specific and contextualized roadmaps to prompt and enable all actors in the food supply chain, the food environment and at consumer level to reduce FLW put in place and implemented by governments and intergovernmental organizations.
- ii. BN3: Safe food for everyone – Integrated, multisectoral food safety policies and legislation across national agrifood systems adopted and implemented by governments, and capacities and awareness of value chain operators and consumers enhanced.
- iii. BP3: One Health – Strengthened and better performing national and international integrated One Health systems for human, animal, plant and environmental health achieved through improved pest and disease prevention, early warning and management of national and global health risks, including antimicrobial resistance (AMR).
- iv. BN5: Transparent markets and trade – Improved market transparency and equitable participation in markets, global value chains and international trade achieved through policy coordination and human and institutional capacities for evidence-based decision-making.

¹⁶ Report 5Ta

¹⁷ Report 1C

Finding 2: FAO has provided technical expertise to develop national policies and strategies to modernize and strengthen the region’s food safety system and align legislative frameworks with international requirements for the agrifood sector. FAO has contributed to the agrifood trade policy environment, created opportunities for trade diversification and supported the development of policies and frameworks addressing the competitiveness of the agrifood sector. Coordination at the national level on food security and nutrition and FAO’s collaboration with other development partners are areas for improvement.

Programme Priority Area BN4: Reducing food loss and waste

40. *Enhanced capacities for reducing and preventing food loss and waste.* Reduction and prevention of food loss and waste (FLW) is a priority in REU. FAO contributed to prevent FLW by raising awareness with training and support for national level strategies in Moldova under the framework of two complementary projects, *Strategies for Food Loss and Waste Reduction* (regional project), and *Sustainable, resilient and inclusive food systems development* (global level).¹⁸ FAO contributed to improving data collection and assessing impacts, and capacity development. FAO also delivered training for participants from the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment and the National Bureau of Statistics on Food Loss Waste measurements and reporting for SDG 12.3.¹⁹ The regional project developed a report on preventing and reducing food losses and waste with recommendation on priority interventions for countries including Moldova.²⁰

41. Armenia received support through the regional project with assistance from FAO to develop a national strategy for FLW tailored to the specific needs of the country and aligned with existing national policies on agricultural development, food security and climate change mitigation. FAO also supported the assessment of FLW in selected food supply chains to understand the causes and impacts of losses. The results of the study were used to inform the development of the national strategy which is yet to be adopted.

42. *Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction* project established the Save Food partner network. This enabled FAO to adopt a regional approach for countries to learn and share experiences and information on FLW. Among lessons learned is the Northern Macedonian experience with adoption of legislative changes, similar to the experience of Moldova. The global project created opportunities for private parties from the food processing and packaging industry to provide expertise, training and equipment, and receiving opportunities to engage their business.

Priority Programme Area BN3: Safe food for everyone

43. *Improved capacities for policies, legislation and programmes to ensure food safety.* FAO has a leading role in capacity development in Moldova to improve food safety systems, ensuring these are based on scientific principles and guidelines and addressing all food chain sectors. Its contributions included upgrading the legislative framework for food control, raising awareness of food safety issues, promoting the application of food safety risk analysis and best international practices in applying food safety management systems. At policy level, FAO provided legal expertise to develop national policies and strategies, and a legislative support roadmap to modernize and strengthen the country’s food safety system.²¹ FAO’s support aimed to develop a competitive agriculture and agrifood sector aligned with European Union and international requirements. Implementation of FAO’s support has been affected negatively by a series of changes of Ministers for Agriculture. In Armenia, FAO assisted

¹⁸ Report 1C

¹⁹ Report 1C

²⁰ OED notes that the REU is implementing a comprehensive food and loss and waste reduction programme in the region, supporting countries to develop FLW strategies, extensive awareness raising campaigns, regional guidance documents and education materials to support countries, and establishment of a regional Community of Practice on FLW. These activities are ongoing and are not included in the synthesis as they have not yet been evaluated.

²¹ Legislative regulations included National Food Safety Emergency Response Plan, the Strategy for response to transboundary animal diseases, and the National Codex structures. Legislative amendments include the Law on Establishing General Principles and Requirements of Food Safety Legislation; Animal Health and Safety Standards; and the Standards and the Law on Procedures for Notification and Registration of Whole Food Chain Units and Food Hygiene Requirements

with the development of the government's strategy for economic development of the agricultural sector and creating mechanisms for monitoring food security policy implementation.²²

44. *Strengthened capacities for integrating social protection into food security and nutrition programmes.* FAO supported select countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia to pilot an integrated approach to food security and nutrition and feed results into key policy processes at national, regional and global levels.²³ The most successful pilots were the *Strengthening Food Systems for Nutrition-Sensitive Social Protection (Cash Plus)* in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, and the *Matching Grants model* in Tajikistan, and these have good potential for scaling up and replication. The Cash Plus pilot combined cash transfers with agricultural activities, inputs, assets, training as well as extension and social support services. Internal assessments in the two pilot countries found improvement in dietary diversity and positive effects on resilience to the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The training of beneficiaries contributed to adoption of healthy cooking practices.

45. The pilot Matching Grants project in Tajikistan sought to assist migrants and their families to leverage remittances for small-scale investments in agriculture and agribusiness. The project was successful in demonstrating profitable and sustainable business processes through the use of remittances with equally matched project grant assistance. The potential for job opportunities and creation by the beneficiaries and their growth takes time to observe. A survey of beneficiaries in June 2020 indicated resilience to the problems of the COVID-19 pandemic and a less dramatic deterioration of the financial situation in households benefitting from the assistance, compared to those that did not receive the assistance.

46. The pilots on national school feeding programmes in Armenia and Tajikistan were the least successful. The projects sought to improve children's access to healthy diversified diets and integrating nutrition education in school curricula. Shifts in government priorities and selecting schools already supported by WFP were the two major challenges experienced by the pilot projects.

47. *Enabled peer-to-peer learning and sharing experiences within and across countries.* At the regional level, FAO compiled best practices and lessons learned for policy dialogue on food security and nutrition (FSN)-sensitive social protection and school feeding programmes drawing on case studies from the region. FAO supported the dissemination of methodological and communication materials, policy dialogues, and a South-South Cooperation study tour on Matching Grants.

Programme Priority Area BP3: One Health

48. *Strengthening One Health systems through integrated and harmonized regional platforms.* The 2020 REU Regional Synthesis commented that FAO's support to enhance capacities in phytosanitary issues was mainly in the form of training. FAO has adopted a more systematic approach in the project *Strengthening Capacities of the National Phytosanitary Control Services in four Eastern European countries*.²⁴ The project supported the revision of national policies on plant and seed production, the introduction of environmentally friendly practices, the development of a technical manual on implementing pest surveillance procedures for use by phytosanitary personnel and inspectors.

49. FAO's regional project *Strengthening pest control in Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine* implemented a framework to strengthen national phytosanitary control services, trained phytosanitary inspectors on international standards, and enhance capacities of national veterinary services for lumpy skin disease detection and prevention. Notwithstanding the good results, the Ministry of Agriculture in Moldova noted that more focus should be directed at the country level as regional projects were not sufficiently targeted to accommodate the differing priorities of countries.²⁵

50. FAO contributed to *reducing the advance of antimicrobial resistance (AMR)* in food and agriculture in six recipient countries in the region. FAO assisted Armenia to establish national capacities for risk assessment, management and communication in food safety that are in line with

²² Report 2C

²³ Report 2P

²⁴ Report 2C

²⁵ Report 1C

globally accepted best practices and principles, and with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) trading requirements. Surveillance capacity in the form of equipment and resources for AMR testing has improved and a new platform for the management and use of AMR data has been established. However, producers are reluctant to share AMR data because of the potential implications for trade, particularly if they are major food exporters or are looking at international trade opportunities. An alternative being explored is to allow countries to report national surveillance data confidentially to the AMR platform. The data will be aggregated into regional reports to preserve anonymity. FAO also helped to increase awareness of AMR among stakeholders. In Armenia and Ukraine, FAO and national authorities raised awareness of AMR among larger cooperatives of commercial producers but had relatively little engagement with smaller farmers. In Ukraine, assisted by FAO, larger poultry-farming cooperatives have begun to move to fewer or no antimicrobials to market their produce in the European Union.²⁶

51. *Sustainability of One Health platforms.* FAO's country-level AMR activities facilitated the creation of intersectoral One Health platforms, raised awareness and developed capacity, creating a strong basis for future collaboration and work on AMR. However, some national governments are reluctant or unable to invest in addressing AMR and have limited capacity to continue without FAO support. Competing public health risks such as COVID-19 has constrained national financial resources and pose a risk to the continuity of FAO's AMR work at country level. Interviews with stakeholders in Ukraine revealed that the government is unlikely to ensure adequate funding of AMR-related activities, without substantially more convincing evidence on AMR.

Programme Priority Area BN5: Transparent markets and trade

52. The synthesis found examples of FAO's contribution to improving market transparency and equitable participation in markets and international trade in Moldova and Georgia. In Moldova, FAO supported capacity building for the relevant ministries to articulate export promotion policies, policy measures and institutional support needed to improve food exports. FAO facilitated the development of Moldova's strategy for the promotion of agricultural products. In Georgia, FAO developed an innovative investment grant scheme that farmers are able to access on-demand. The long-term sustainability of the scheme is dependent on access to finance and the focus of the implementing partner taking over once FAO exits the project.

53. FAO supported the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture in Georgia to develop the Market Information System that references agricultural product prices for over 60 products in 59 municipalities. The system is able to collect weekly price data for most products. A data warehouse with its comprehensive repository of databases from multiple sources, provides data that can be analysed for use in policy-making.

C. Regional Initiative 3: Managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity in a changing climate

<https://www.fao.org/europe/regional-initiatives/natural-resources/en/>

54. Regional Initiative 3 focuses on strengthening the ability of countries to manage their natural resources sustainably and simultaneously managing the impacts of climate change and reducing the risk of disaster in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The results of the synthesis are organized around the following Programme Priority Areas:

- i. BE1: Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems –Transformation and resilience of agrifood systems to achieve sustainability and Paris Agreement goals enabled through the establishment and implementation of climate-smart agricultural practices, policies and programmes.
- ii. BE3: Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Food and Agriculture – Biodiversity for food and agriculture maintained and sustainable use, conservation and restoration of marine,

²⁶ Report 2C

terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, and their services promoted through adoption of targeted policies and practices.

Finding 3: FAO strengthened capacities for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and climate change mitigation and adaptation through reviews of DRR systems, training and needs assessment studies. Innovative practices in agro-forestry show promising signs of sustainability, while scaling up of sustainable land management practices requires more time and additional financing. The practical application of DRR approaches and tools require longer-term support to achieve sustainable results. The high costs of inputs, the managerial complexities, and the slow institutionalization of outcomes in national strategies and plans are key factors limiting the replication of interventions.

Programme Priority Area BE1: Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems

55. *Strengthened capacities for DRR.* FAO supported Moldova in preparedness for and management of responses to disasters and crises.²⁷ It supported Moldova to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the country's disaster risk reduction system for agriculture, drawing on FAO technical expertise and that of international DRR and climate change specialists. The analysis included policies, institutional frameworks, systems and services. The review served as the basis for strengthening the country's response to disasters. FAO also supported Moldova in assessing its existing anti-hail management system and identifying aspects of the system that should be modernized. This assessment is expected to serve as the basis for climate change adaptation and resilience strategies.

56. *Support for climate change adaptation.* In Armenia, climate change adaptation has been integrated in selected FAO programming interventions. For example, FAO supported pilot interventions promoting sustainable agriculture and food production processes in regions most affected by climate change. FAO also supported the development of a country-specific guideline and methodology for disaster needs assessment in the agriculture sector. Through a variety of training, practical demonstration fields, videos and comprehensive cultivation guidelines, FAO promoted good agricultural practices, climate change adaptation and mitigation and DRR management. The results achieved from demonstration plots served as the basis for the government's loan subsidy programme to encourage the application of drip irrigation systems and anti-hail nets. These interventions are highly relevant to Armenia. However, they are not easily replicable because of high input costs, complexities in institutional arrangements and the slow pace with which the Government is willing and able to institutionalize these interventions. At the level of beneficiary farmers, even though increased yields have been reported, they are unable to sustain adoption of climate change adaptation techniques due to high costs. Similarly, the practical utilization of DRR approaches and tools requires long-term support to achieve sustainable results.

Programme Priority Area BE3: Biodiversity and ecosystems services for food and agriculture

57. FAO contributed to *strengthening capacities for the sustainable use of forest resources* in Kyrgyzstan through the *Sustainable Management of Mountainous Forests and Land Resources under Climate Change Conditions project*.²⁸ The project supported a comprehensive assessment of forest and agriculture policies, and the results were used to inform amendments to these policies and legislation, and amendments to the Forest Code. The recommendations of assessments also informed the FAO TCP Forest Policy Project aimed at developing the Concept for Forest Development 2040 and the first National Action Plan 2018-2022 that the government approved in 2019. In partnership with GIZ, the concept of Joint Forestry Councils was introduced, and the idea of joint forestry management was incorporated in the Concept for Forest Development 2040.

58. *Promoted sustainable land and soil management.* FAO supported several initiatives to improve land and soil management in Kyrgyzstan.²⁹ This includes the integration of sustainable forest and land management principles into local land use plans; the first ever study in Kyrgyzstan on national carbon content coefficients for eight of the most common forest tree and shrub species; and

²⁷ Report 1C

²⁸ Report 1P

²⁹ Report 1P

the development of soil and pasture vegetation maps with recommendations on rehabilitation of degraded land and pastures to rural municipalities and local pasture committees. Kyrgyzstan is also a pilot country for the *Participatory Assessment of Land Degradation and Sustainable Land Management*.³⁰ Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, and Uzbekistan participated in the global project on decision support for mainstreaming and scaling up of sustainable land management.³¹

59. Not surprisingly, the results of FAO's support are mixed, given the different country contexts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is strong ownership and support for mainstreaming sustainable land management practices, and commitment from local municipalities to continue implementation using their own resources. Cantonal governments are financing land capability mapping for sustainable land management. In Kyrgyzstan, local municipalities did not use the soil and pasture maps in the land management plans, mainly because attention was directed to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and they received limited support from central government institutions that were undergoing changes. Government partners in Kyrgyzstan are reported to play a marginal role in the participatory assessment intervention, a situation that can be addressed through involving local municipalities in implementation. In Turkey and Uzbekistan, there are positive results reflected in the local level strategic land management investments, and good prospects for positive longer-term impact on land resources and their use. The evaluation concluded that scaling up and replication will require more time and financial resources, as would mainstreaming sustainable land management into policies, strategies, programmes and plans at all levels.

D. Use of statistics and data

Finding 4: The critical role of data and statistics is evident in FAO's work in the region. FAO promoted several initiatives on digital technologies and information systems as powerful tools for supporting advanced analytics, policy-making, and reporting, and as well as inter-agency coordination. To ensure progress on SDGs and agrifood systems transformation, FAO needs to promote innovative approaches, including the application of modern science and technologies, digital solutions and innovation of mindsets and cooperation models.³²

60. *Strengthening statistical capacities.* FAO supported the implementation of the Agricultural Integrated Survey (AGRIS) in Armenia, Georgia and Kazakhstan, with much of the implementation support driven from FAO headquarters with the involvement of the Regional Office, Subregional Office and relevant Country Offices. In Armenia, the agricultural census is seen as a “game changer” and the data has been used to develop the country's Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy 2019-2029. The evaluation of FAO's statistical work found that the dissemination of agricultural census data increased access to data, and the availability of data has led to a better understanding of crop production and increased dialogue between national statistics organizations and ministries of agriculture.³³

61. *Improving SDG monitoring.* FAO has supported countries in the region to align their national plans, monitoring and reporting with the SDG indicators. Armenia received support on the nationalization of SDG indicators, while Georgia received assistance on matching indicators to national plans, and monitoring and reporting on SDG indicators. In Moldova, FAO provided technical support to the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Bureau of Statistics to collect and process national and regional data, and calculate standard output coefficients and development of agriculture farm typology in line with European Union standards. FAO also supported the Ministry to raise awareness among stakeholders, of the SDGs implementation and monitoring, and so address the challenges faced in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.³⁴

³⁰ Report 3P

³¹ Report 4P

³² The 32nd Regional Conference for Europe (see <https://www.fao.org/3/ne289en/ne289en.pdf> page 5, q) iv.) requested that FAO support countries in determining appropriate policy measures and building needed capacities and knowledge, including through the provision of statistics and analytical tools and the sharing of best practices from inside and outside the region

³³ Report 6T

³⁴ Report 1C

62. *Data and evidence generation is essential for assessing food safety risks.* Collecting and analysing data on strengths and barriers to agrifood systems transformation is embedded in Regional Initiative 2. In Georgia, FAO's contribution to the application of digital technologies in agriculture was the establishment of the National Animal Identification and Traceability System (NAITS). The NAITS software has been completed and was introduced for the national use in December 2019.³⁵ The Government has developed and adopted new legislation for animal identification, registration and traceability. FAO continues to provide technical assistance to the re-organization of the National Food Agency field activities, in order to ensure maximum output from the NAITS. Prior to NAITS, animal health-related information was managed in an Excel database, which limited storage, data reliability, data analytics and access. The NAITS aims to correct these shortcomings.

63. *Data for evidence-based policy-making.* In Georgia, FAO has implemented a cluster of data-related activities for evidence-based agricultural policy-making. Under the ENPARD Programme, FAO has provided support enabling the National Statistical Agency (GEOSTAT) to improve the current quarterly survey of agricultural holdings and monitor agriculture-related SDG indicators. FAO supported the development of an online repository of most of the extension materials produced by the Ministry and other partners. The materials are collected and undergo a technical revision before being uploaded to the online extension library (elibrary.mepa.gov.ge), where they can be filtered and downloaded.³⁶

E. Gender equality and empowerment of women

Finding 5. Gender is mainstreamed into the design of several projects and programmes in the region. Constructive partnerships with civil society organizations have led to increased awareness and advocacy on gender issues in some ECA countries. However, the lack of attention to normative values, and weak monitoring and enforcement of existing national legislative frameworks, hampers progress. As indicated in the 2020 Regional Synthesis, insufficient attention is given to gender analysis in the design phase of projects, and there remains a lack of sex-disaggregated data.

64. FAO's contribution to gender equality in the ECA region ranges from the preparation of country gender assessments in Georgia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan to capacity development on gender mainstreaming delivered to nearly 200 FAO technical staff from Regional, Subregional and Country Offices and national partners from 18 countries. The synthesis found examples of a growing role in raising awareness and advocating for gender issues, such as women's access to land, IT services, economic empowerment of vulnerable women in farmer and producer organizations, in Georgia, Turkey and the Kyrgyz Republic.

65. The Republic of Moldova has made progress in promoting gender equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women by improving the national legislative frameworks and developing important policies in gender equality. However, enforcement and monitoring of these laws and policies remain a challenge. FAO's programme in the country follows UN norms and values, and has several positive examples of effective gender mainstreaming, considering specific women and girls' needs, priorities, and experiences. The FAO Country Office made efforts to ensure that men and women have equitable access to and control over productive resources and services and capacity building opportunities. The project *Technical support for gender-responsive and socially inclusive policies and interventions* built upon the contribution of UN Women in developing the capacities of gender working/coordination groups in the Ministries of the Republic of Moldova (FAO, 2019f). Under the global project *Sustainable, resilient and inclusive food systems development*, the data on project participants at various capacity building events was disaggregated based on sex, age and type of stakeholder.

66. The three-tier model project *Developing capacity for strengthening food security and nutrition in selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia* was designed as mostly gender neutral, with the exception of the Matching Grants pilot. In the Matching Grants scheme pilot, women and youth

³⁵ Report 5Ta

³⁶ Report 5Ta

are the main target group of this intervention. Female grant recipients (Matching Grants) mainly included mothers-in-law, who were traditionally major decision-makers in Tajik households and not wives or daughters of migrants. The evaluation noted that gender was only partially included in the project objectives and results. The lack of a comprehensive gender-role study was noted in the Cash Plus pilots, which would have been better adapted to local contexts with better assessment of pilot impacts and limit the risk of harm (such as increased burden with additional agricultural works on regular family responsibilities of women versus productive impacts.)

67. Sex-disaggregated data is not yet systematically collected in the region. In Armenia, FAO's programme addressed aspects related to rural poverty, gender and vulnerable populations including youth, where appropriate. Yet, effects of these interventions in addressing normative values were not well documented. FAO has taken into account United Nations normative values and principles, addressing issues of equity and needs of vulnerable communities and localities and has implemented targeted interventions, which were based on needs assessments and focused on the needs of the most vulnerable (e.g. communities with the highest need of support). While detailed gender analysis was often not undertaken, in most cases this was due to the fact that gender issues were not inherent in selected interventions. The Country Programme in Kyrgyzstan has highlighted how the collection of sex-disaggregated data is still evolving and is not systematic across FAO activities.

68. Within the project *Decision Support for Mainstreaming and Scaling Up of Sustainable Land Management*,³⁷ Bosnia and Herzegovina was an exception, addressing gender and vulnerable groups with a mainstreaming strategy drafted. It is important to underline that the project was not only about technical tools, but also aimed at decision support for mainstreaming (to policies, strategies, investment frameworks) and up-scaling of sustainable land management (SLM), and potentially have significant impacts on the rights, roles and responsibilities of women and men. When land management practices are changed, the change process can have significant impacts, either positive or negative, on different land user groups. Decision-makers need to be made aware of such potential changes, and the decision support systems need to be able to track and measure these changes.

IV. Enablers and constraints

Finding 6: The quality of FAO's technical expertise is a well-recognized comparative advantage and a key enabler of results in the region. Partnerships have been encouraged and have generated multiple instances of successful collaboration across national boundaries. The main constraints are linked to limited financial resources in governments, changes in the political context, lack of national ownership of commitments, and the lack of synergies amongst projects.

Enabling factors

69. *FAO's technical expertise.* The comparative advantage and relevance of FAO's technical expertise in agricultural and rural development are well recognized in the region. FAO has a niche and leading role in the region in providing advice on policy development and piloting and implementing programmatic interventions in technical areas requiring specialized technical capacities and knowledge. In Moldova, for example, FAO is viewed as a long-standing partner to governments and promotes innovation for sustainable agriculture production, builds capacity in the agricultural sector to meet regional and global standards, assists in the development of policies, and draws on international best practices. In Armenia, FAO played a significant role in policy advocacy and development of strategies, combined with its highly unique technical capacity. Pioneering projects in the field of grape genetic resources and grape phylloxera-resistant material production were pivotal for improving national capacity towards sustainable management of resources. In Georgia, FAO plays a leading role in supporting policy development in agriculture.

70. *Technology was an enabler* in a several projects, providing tools for surveillance, data collection, and improving production. The study conducted in Kyrgyzstan, implemented by the Climate Change Centre and the Forest Institute of the National Academy of Science, was the first one

³⁷ Report 4P

in the country to identify national carbon content coefficients for eight most common forest tree and shrub species.

71. *Partnerships for durable, inclusive solutions.* FAO's partnerships with CSOs, local-governance bodies, the private sector and international donors have played a significant role in the success of regional initiatives, in particular where FAO's role as coordinator was critical and there was a necessity to mobilize joint resources to assess needs and gaps in agrifood sectors as key requirements to ensure positive results. The Hand-In-Hand approach both at national and community levels has provided advocacy support and developed strategies where the main principle was to bring knowledge to respond to farmers' needs. In Armenia, the country programme promoted regional cooperation between and among countries in the region, through South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation (SSTC) initiatives. FAO's partnership, for example, with the Center for Agribusiness and Rural Development (CARD) has led to several research projects to assess the dairy sector and identify gaps in value chains in Armenia and Georgia, in collaboration with the Georgian Farmers' Association (GFA). FAO's interventions have developed partnerships and networks by collaborating with other projects and initiatives in the region.

72. NGO partners, such as Green Cross, Milieukontakt and the International HCH & Pesticides Association (IHPA) Forum were highly active in the region. All were partners to the FAO Global Environment Facility (GEF) project in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) countries and had a proven track record on mobilization of funds and implementation of activities. All partners brought in significant experience and co-finance budget to the programme along with an established network of partners at national level who supported programme implementation.

73. FAO partnered with other United Nations agencies in Armenia, particularly with UNDP in implementing joint GEF-funded projects, and in supporting the first agricultural census in 2014-2016. An example of successful partnership has been the *Enhancing Human Security and Building Resilient Society in Disadvantaged Communities of Armenia* project, which involved an unprecedented level of cooperation amongst United Nations agencies in the country as six United Nations agencies partnered together to realize this project. Other partnerships with organizations such as ACBA-Credit Agricole Bank were pursued in this project as well.³⁸

74. *Decentralized technical capacity development* has been a powerful enabler, despite the limited staff and resources available in REU. As highlighted in the 2020 regional synthesis, the countries in the region have already localized the SDG indicators. This 2022 synthesis confirms that REU has successfully strengthened data and statistics collection methods to enhance the region's results-based management culture for effective evaluation and results.³⁹ The Agriculture Integrated Survey (AGRIS) in Armenia, Georgia and Kazakhstan and the agricultural census in Armenia are examples of implementation driven by REU's headquarters with the involvement of the Regional and/or Country Offices and leading to the definition of countries' development strategies. Investing in national expertise increased the value-for-money created by projects and amplified results. For example, hiring national consultants contributed towards sustainability and strengthening of a national pool of professionals.

75. *Knowledge sharing* supported by an effective communication strategy has been adopted in some cases and generated increased awareness and dissemination of information on new technologies, both indispensable to foster replication and upscale project activities. Dissemination of educational and methodological materials in Russian and local languages has reached and benefited stakeholders at all levels. However, a more coordinated effort to share best practices and disseminate knowledge needs to be put in place, to capitalize on results and lessons learned, for a greater catalytic effect.

³⁸ Report 2C

³⁹ The 32nd Regional Conference for Europe explicitly stressed the need to invest in data collection for evidence- and science-based policy-making

Constraining factors

76. The constraining factors identified in this 2022 synthesis are similar to those identified in the 2020 regional synthesis. However, there are indications in the most recent evaluations that FAO's work in the region has focused on overcoming structural shortcomings.

77. The implementation of many projects remains challenging often due to governmental structural changes and funding constraints, as pointed out by the 2020 Regional Synthesis. Insufficient financial and human resources of counterpart institutions, lack of clarity in relation to the boundaries of their competencies, absorption capacity of the assistance received from different development partners are still hampering the effectiveness of FAO's support. However, it must be noted that the more recent evaluations have provided some successful examples of cross-sectoral and multiple tier approach models that have shown positive instances of coordination and versatility of design, as well as flexible project management to adapt to changing circumstances.

78. The already existing challenges have been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in disrupting supply chains, or in delaying the use of FFS in Armenia to provide training on responsible AMR and biosecurity, or the delayed adoption of regulation of emissions and sinks of greenhouse gases of the forestry in Kyrgyzstan. FAO has, however, shown flexibility in addressing these challenges to mitigate longer-term consequences and impacts on project results. In the Republic Moldova, for example, the Flexible Multi-partner Mechanism (FMM) allowed FAO to rapidly adjust to COVID-19 and redesign some activities.⁴⁰ In the case of Georgia, well-coordinated efforts of the Government allowed them to keep the consequences of COVID-19 restrictions to a minimum. FAO with the Ministry have prepared a plan of action for the case of a possible pandemic outbreak that will trigger another lockdown decision.⁴¹ The pilot on Matching Grants in Tajikistan showed that beneficiaries receiving the assistance expressed more optimism and resilience, as well as better outlook for their financial and job situation, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, than those not being targeted by the initiative.

79. Even in the case of interventions perceived as successful, full national commitment and ownership are still necessary to ensure the establishment of institutional frameworks and operational support to sustain the results achieved. REU has already taken strong measures (more than ten TCP Facility projects) to address this issue at country level and through programme integration into the three RIs. Other emerging issues such as urbanization, decentralization, migration, etc. were considered to deserve greater attention in the theory of change of the Strategic Objectives and at country level. Neither the export promotion nor the export diversification strategies were well defined yet but a sped-up process of identification of the modalities of support was expected soon.

80. The lean structure of Country Offices remains a constraint as pointed out by the 2020 Regional Synthesis.⁴² Country Offices rely heavily on REU and SEC for technical backstopping, even when these offices also face capacity and resource constraints, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the project *Developing capacity for strengthening food security and nutrition in selected countries of Caucasus and Central Asia* is a best practice on how to mobilize the needed expertise for project implementation from headquarters and effectively direct it to the regional and national level, hence contributing to building technical capacity of the Decentralized Offices. More

⁴⁰ For example, initially the Republic of Moldova was not included as a beneficiary country for the trade component of the "Sustainable, resilient and inclusive food systems development" project. Due to the pandemic, the trade component benefitted from a specific online training, namely the "Trade, Food security, and nutrition" provided by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) (UNITAR, n.d.). The online course was designed to assist representatives from Ministries of Agriculture and other government authorities in the formulation and implementation of trade, agricultural and food security policies and programmes in the post-Soviet countries, including the Republic of Moldova.

⁴¹ FAO with the Ministry of Agriculture in Georgia have prepared a plan of action for the case of possible pandemic outbreak that will trigger another lockdown decision. The plan includes already tested on-line coordination platform with all 46 local and regional extension service centres collaboration with the non-governmental farmer-based organizations operating in the field. The protocols of the actions in case of emergency to protect the most vulnerable groups (in agricultural rural areas) include rural-urban coordinated "permits system" to allow for coordinated and unrestricted movement of the agricultural produce to markets in cases of general lockdown. The major risks to be addressed include the import-dependend food items availability.

⁴² The REU Theory of Change identified the risk of FAO in the region spread too thinly.

work needs to be done in ensuring the retention of the developed capacity and providing additional support to the country teams where REU could play a more facilitating role.

V. Gaps and emerging issues

81. This section discusses the gaps and issues that emerge from the synthesis of the evaluation reports. As the regional synthesis is based on a sample of evaluation reports, it does not cover all the programmes and activities of FAO in the ECA region. The gaps identified in the regional synthesis might therefore not be real gaps, but a reflection of the sample of evaluation reports reviewed. Some of the issues discussed were highlighted in the 2020 regional synthesis.

Finding 7. FAO in the region collaborates with many partners and has built effective partnerships. It could utilize its comparative advantage more effectively in facilitating multistakeholder partnerships and dialogues. Engagement with the private sector appears limited.

82. FAO has built and nurtured effective partnerships in the region with the national government, key development partners, including United Nations agencies and non-state actors. The existing enabling environment, capacities and maturity level of partners in the region have impacted the effectiveness of these partnerships. The Organization could use its comparative advantage in facilitating policy discussions/multistakeholder dialogues among civil society, government and international partners on food security, nutrition and broad issues of sustainable agricultural development where FAO could offer its technical expertise.

83. The private sector should be given opportunities to contribute to results and their sustainability. For example, there is scope for involving the private sector in strengthening functional capacities of cooperatives and other local farmer organizations. It is however essential to involve the private sector during the design phase in order to lay the foundation for building co-ownership of results.

84. Although ministries of agriculture are FAO's primary partners in country, achievement of the SDGs, requires collaboration with other ministries, and FAO's engagement with these ministries is often not as strong as its partnership with ministries of agriculture. This challenge can be addressed by collaborating with other United Nations agencies that have partnerships with other ministries. Collaboration with other United Nations agencies is especially important in supporting countries in climate change adaptation and natural resources management and will be critical in light of the need for countries in the region to strengthen resilience to natural and human-induced disasters.

Finding 8. The lack of national ownership and limited institutional capacities in the region affect the speed and quality of project implementation. These factors also contribute to the fragility of sustainability of the results of FAO's interventions.

85. Full national commitment and ownership is necessary to ensure establishment of institutional frameworks and operational support to sustain the results achieved. Frequent changes in governments' development priorities are a recurring issue in the region, hampering the institutionalization and replication of project results. Designed roadmaps are not sufficiently promoted and owned by some governments, sometimes due to changes in the overall strategy and reprioritization of activities. The capacity and resource constraints of the Country Offices (mostly due to size and resources) as raised in paragraph 80, require further attention. Policy processes have been compromised by the insufficient high-level coordination and policy dialogue.

86. Ineffective coordination is an aspect that weakens implementation of projects. Changes in political and administrative leadership of government ministries sometimes lead to organizational changes and replacement of national project coordinators. This contributes to discontinuity and delays in implementation. There are also formal coordination structures, for example, FSN councils, that do not function effectively as platforms for high-level coordination and policy dialogue. Factors contributing to the low level of effectiveness of FSN councils include the constantly changing political environment; low political interest from some governments reflected in high staff turnover of key

personnel; lack of full-time advocacy capacities required for high-level policy dialogue; and a lack of a common understanding of FSN-related visions.

87. The sustainability of FAO's programmes has been affected by many factors, particularly the changes in the development context, and the lack of resources and capacities of national institutions to continue or replicate best practices and results achieved. In many cases, resources were not available to support continuation of activities and scaling up often depended on finding new donors. Structural changes in national governments and high rates of turnover and mobility of government staff in some countries have limited the potential for effective implementation of newly adopted policies and national plans, impeding sustainability of results achieved.

88. Other aspects hampering sustainability are related to limited replicability due to the cost of inputs, managerial complexities and slow institutionalization of outcomes in national strategies and plans. In Armenia, for example, practical utilization and application of disaster risk reduction approaches and tools remain a challenge and requires continued long-term support to achieve sustainable results. In Kyrgyzstan, the main risk to sustainability is the lack of or no access to affordable services by beneficiaries to sustain the achieved benefits.

89. Duration of many agricultural projects is usually up to three years, which is another impediment for sustainability. According to farmers, to achieve some tangible results and provide a good model for replication, longer support for dairy, livestock or horticulture value chains is required to achieve long-lasting sustainability. In particular, key success factors for TCP projects are linked to synergies with national initiatives and multistakeholders, including the private sector.

Finding 9. Monitoring and evaluation at country level remains a gap in the region

90. The 2020 Regional Synthesis suggested the need for a consistent and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system both at national and regional level. The issue was confirmed by the 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe.

91. The current synthesis identified positive examples that addressed this issue successfully. For example, through ENPARD, FAO supported the Ministry of Agriculture to develop a sound monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. In Kyrgyzstan, the M&E activities for the project *Sustainable Management of Mountainous Forest and Land Resources under Climate Change Conditions* were largely used to track performance and to foster learning from the application of innovative approaches. However, FAO needs to strengthen its monitoring of progress, impediments and risks to programme implementation in the region. In particular, FAO needs to establish a risk management system to systematically monitor development changes and identify potential risks and issues that may affect programme results. Monitoring results, combined with periodic review of development context, should be used systematically to address potential risks and constraints and inform timely adjustments to the programme management approaches.

92. A stronger M&E system would support the Organization to effectively use lessons learned and the knowledge generated for the continuous refinement of programmes in consultation with key partners towards effective and sustainable results. There are monitoring and reporting systems in place at country level and at regional level. However, these need to be strengthened to generate credible, evaluative evidence of outcomes and lasting results that can be attributed to FAO's work. OED notes the positive, concrete steps taken by REU to strengthen monitoring and evaluation at the regional and country levels. These include the deployment of regional evaluation specialists and actively promoting the use of evidence for project design.

Finding 10. Using theory of change approach in project design

93. The 2020 Regional Synthesis recommended improving the existing accountability framework at regional and thematic level by ensuring that all projects are based on a robust theory of change. This would allow better linkages among components within the Regional Initiatives as well as between Regional Initiatives. The document on Results and Priorities for the FAO region⁴³ presented

⁴³ ERC/20/5 Rev.1

at the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference has reiterated the importance of sharpening the theory of change for each Regional Initiative.

94. The synthesis has found examples of flexible projects designs, which have allowed FAO to redesign activities to overcome challenging political contexts and, in particular, the strenuous circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The three-tier model design, in the project for strengthening food security and nutrition in the Caucasus and Central Asia, was well suited to accommodate and reinforce the vertical and horizontal interactions between activities, as well as to introduce appropriate innovative approaches to influence FAO's work globally. However, a participatory theory of change exercise could have allowed for a better understanding of the different change pathways, as well as identify relevant assumptions, general and context specific risks and drivers.

It is worth mentioning that REU has recently undertaken the process of developing theories of change for each Regional Initiative. This could serve as a good basis for facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue and linking up with external processes, to enable a steady pace of delivery and avert discontinuities. Theories of change at project level should be nested in or linked to theories of change for the Regional Initiatives, where relevant.

Finding 12. Policies promoting rural inclusion in the region are lacking

95. The 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe emphasized to Members, in the context of social sustainability and leaving no one behind, the need to address inequalities in food systems, foster a more people-centred approach, and empower vulnerable and marginalized groups in order to provide affordable, healthy diets for all. The synthesis finds that rural inclusive policies are still lacking in the region.

Finding 13: Limited role of local municipalities

96. Local governments/municipalities are critical for the effective implementation of initiatives such as sustainable land use, supporting pastoralism, disaster risk reduction and building resilience to disasters and crises. Rural municipalities have a significant impact on the lives of rural populations but often lack the capacities (financial, human resources and authority) to play a key role in the reduction of rural poverty and promoting rural inclusion. From the sample of evaluations used in the regional synthesis, local municipalities appear to play a marginal role, or none at all, in FAO interventions.

Finding 14: Youth are largely invisible in interventions in the region

97. Regional Initiative 1 includes youth as a target group. However, the regional synthesis did not find any reference to youth in the evaluations covered by the synthesis, except in the case of interventions for transitioning to the blue economy. Not including youth and youth organizations is a missed opportunity to engage rural youth in *Digital Agriculture* and other opportunities, particularly opportunities in the 'Green Economy' that can improve their prospects for a better life. Young people are increasingly demanding that their voices be heard in decision-making on climate issues. FAO REU should be more deliberate in its inclusion of youth in all three Regional Initiatives. It should design interventions that focus on youth as a distinct category of beneficiaries and should create an enabling environment for the voices of youth to be heard in regional, national and local forums. Working with education institutions (vocational colleges, universities) is another vehicle for working with youth.

VI. Conclusions and lessons learned

Conclusions

98. **Conclusion 1.** FAO contributed to results in the Programme Priority Areas covered by the three Regional Initiatives of Europe and Central Asia. It has used its comparative advantages effectively, focusing on provision of specialized technical expertise and offering innovative approaches and solutions. FAO has contributed to strengthening capacities of government institutions, as well as capacities of farmers, farmer organizations and other civil society formations in the region. The evidence assessed in the Regional Synthesis indicates that FAO's work under Regional Initiative

3 that focuses on climate change and the sustainable management natural resources is gaining traction but slowly. This is not surprising as Regional Initiative 3 was adopted as recently as 2019. However, the 2021 United Nations Climate Conference reiterated the urgency for action on climate change, and it is essential that Regional Initiative 3 is given the requisite attention in the REU regional portfolio.

99. **Conclusion 2.** Although the Regional Initiatives do give some coherence to FAO's portfolio of work in the region, most of FAO's interventions adopt a project modality rather than a programmatic approach. The region's efforts to develop a theory of change for the Regional Initiatives may assist in following a more programmatic approach. The sustainability of results is fragile for many of FAO's interventions. FAO in the region supported several pilot projects that generated positive results, and in some cases, relatively strong prospects for sustainability in the form of scaling-up or replication. However, these are the exceptions. The difficulties surrounding the sustainability of results was a recurring theme in the Regional Synthesis. The lack of resources and capacities of national institutions were the most commonly cited factors impacting negatively on sustainability.⁴⁴ At community level, the high cost of inputs was frequently identified as a factor limiting the ability of farmers to implement new practices or approaches they had learned. Sustainability of results is also a reflection of underlying design problems, in particular, including sound exit strategies in the design of projects and testing their feasibility.

100. **Conclusion 3.** REU has played a critical role in providing strategic and technical leadership to Country Offices in the region. Country Offices have lean structures and rely heavily on the Regional Office, Subregional Office and relevant divisions in headquarters for technical backstopping. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of having strong technical capacity in FAO's Decentralized Offices at regional, subregional and national levels. It also demonstrated the value of complementing Country Office capacity with competent national consultants. The reality is that staffing levels in Decentralized Offices are unlikely to change in the immediate future. This calls for new ways of working and innovative project/programme designs.

101. **Conclusion 4.** Effective partnerships have been the hallmark of FAO in the region, and undoubtedly, FAO is seen as a credible partner that brings a wealth of knowledge and technical skills, as well as financial resources, to the partnerships. FAO has built partnerships with national government institutions, donors and funding partners, civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector. Partnerships with local municipalities have not been as effective as partnerships with FAO national counterparts. FAO has built productive partnerships with civil society, and to some extent, with the private sector. Broadly, FAO's partnerships can be categorized as conventional. New and emerging global and regional challenges call for more innovative partnerships, particularly with the private sector and civil society.

102. **Conclusion 5.** FAO has made notable progress on knowledge management in the region, and has provided valuable support to develop national statistical capacities, and made available an array of knowledge products to users at national and local levels. Evaluations in the synthesis sample lamented the lack of a knowledge management strategy to document results and good practices, and generate lessons to inform future programming. This lack of a knowledge management strategy is linked to weak monitoring and evaluation at country level, an issue raised in the 2020 Regional Synthesis. REU has taken steps to strengthen monitoring and evaluation, including the use of evaluative evidence in the design of projects and programmes.

Lessons learned

103. The synthesis identified a number of lessons for consideration in addressing the constraints, gaps and emerging issues, and for reinforcing effective practices.

Lesson 1: Strategic and inclusive partnerships are essential for achieving results

104. The results that FAO has achieved in the region has been through the strength of its partnerships with governments in the region, producer organizations, collaboration with other

⁴⁴ Feedback from REU suggested that project size and duration are key factors in sustainability. This may be a consideration although the evaluation reports in the synthesis did not identify these factors explicitly.

United Nations entities, primarily UNDP, and partnering with other development partners and development finance institutions. FAO is seen as a credible partner, with a high level of technical expertise. There is considerable scope for strategic partnerships with the private sector in the region. In the face of new and emerging global and regional challenges, multistakeholder approaches, strategic partnerships and joint implementation can be expected to assume greater significance than has been the case to date.

Lesson 2: Credible data and data technology can accelerate results in the region

105. The synthesis has highlighted the important role that data and data technology play in accelerating results in each of the three Regional Initiatives. Strengthening the quality of agricultural surveys, improvements to monitoring and reporting on SDG indicators, and the National Animal Identification and Traceability System are among the examples found in the evaluations reviewed. There is scope for greater use of data technologies for better data analytics, as well as making data easily accessible and intelligible to farmers, farmer organizations, and other civil society formations.

Lesson 3: Assumptions about the political and institutional contexts should be made explicit in project designs

106. FAO's projects are premised on relatively stable political contexts and assumptions about the will and capacities of partner institutions to continue and/or scale up successful interventions, or implementation the policies and legislation that have been developed with FAO's assistance. The regional synthesis has shown that changes in the political context delay or even derail implementation, and assumptions about the institutional capacities do not always hold true. Making these assumptions explicit in project design using a theory of change approach can assist FAO to anticipate and mitigate the risks. For example, FAO could design the project or intervention to align with larger initiatives that can attract future investment from other development partners.

Lesson 4: Single projects have greater prospects for sustainability if they are nested in a medium-to-long term programme for greater impact

107. The synthesis found that although there were projects, including pilot projects, that produced positive results, the sustainability of these results was an issue in many instances. These projects did not adequately plan for institutionalizing the interventions or projects within the relevant ministries or agencies of government, as they tended to be designed as stand-alone projects rather than as projects that form part of a larger medium- to long-term programme. There are instances where there are exit strategies identified in project documents, but projects are not institutionalized in the relevant ministry or beneficiary organization because of a lack of funding and other resources to assume responsibility for the project.

Lesson 5: Flexibility is essential during periods of crisis and uncertainty

108. The need for flexibility during periods of crisis and uncertainty was demonstrated clearly as the world continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts. The synthesis identified examples where FAO was able to adapt and change project activities to deal with the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Project designs should be flexible so that they can be adapted easily in times of crisis and disruption.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

The section briefly describes the methodology followed in conducting the regional synthesis.

Screening of evaluation documents

OED conducted a desk review of 15 evaluations completed between 2019 and 2021. The evaluations were selected because they provided evidence on results in the Europe and Central Asia region. The purpose of the screening was to select the most meaningful evidence that would be used in the synthesis. Each report was screened against the following criteria and the screening results were captured in Excel:

- The year of project/programme completion should not be older than 2016.
- Global or thematic evaluations must include examples of implementation in the Europe region.
- Project/programme content must demonstrate direct relationship with the regional initiatives.
- Mid-term evaluations were included to increase the sample size and complement the analysis.

Projects implemented in the region and Country Programme Evaluations were automatically included in the sample for the analysis. Programme and Thematic/Strategic Evaluations were considered for the analysis only when some reference to REU was found. The 2020 Regional Synthesis covered only Regional Initiatives 1 and 2, plus Gender as a cross-cutting theme.

The table below shows the number of evaluations that have contributed to analysis results on the three Regional Initiatives.

Category	Number of completed evaluations
Regional Initiative 1	6
Regional Initiative 2	4
Regional Initiative 3	4
Gender (Cross-cutting theme)	15

Coding the data

A coding framework was developed using the key questions illustrated below:

Key questions	Indicators/criteria/what to look for in analysis
1. What are the main results, in the regional priorities/thematic areas, that have been achieved through FAO support to the region and countries in the region?	Evidence of FAO contribution to outcomes relevant to themes and priorities of the region. Factors enabling contribution to results. Factors hindering contribution to results. Sustainability of results.
2. What issues and gaps emerge from the evaluations, which require attention/consideration by the FAO Regional Conference?	Emerging issues that should be addressed to achieve results in the region and SDGs. Gaps in FAO response/programmes that should be addressed to achieve results in the region and SDGs.

3. What lessons can be learned from evaluations that can inform FAO's future programming /actions in the region?	Look for lessons that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are relevant to the regional context.• Are useful – likely to make a difference if applied.• Positive and negative lessons.• Are clearly documented and based on evidence.
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Each report in the sample was given a code and allocated to one of the three Regional Initiatives analysis in the synthesis. Nvivo software was used to extract data from each report using the coding framework that had been developed. The extracted data for each of the Regional Initiatives were then analysed to identify common issues or topics and map these against the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) of the Strategic Framework. As the development of projects and programmes preceded the PPAs, decisions had to be made about the best fit for a particular project or programme to one or more PPAs.

Appendix 2: Report codes

Report Nvivo Code	Report title	Countries
Country-level project evaluations		
1P	Sustainable management of mountainous forest and land resources under climate change conditions	Kyrgyzstan
2P	Developing capacity for strengthening food security and nutrition in selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia	Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan
3P	Participatory assessment of land degradation and sustainable land management in grassland and pastoral systems	Kyrgyzstan
4P	Decision support for mainstreaming and scaling up of sustainable land management	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Uzbekistan
5P	Mid-term evaluation of the project FAO support to Georgian agricultural sector under ENPARD III	Georgia
Global Projects		
1PR	Cluster evaluation of FAO's contribution to the Pastoralist Knowledge Hub	Kyrgyzstan
Other (Thematic, CPE)		
1C	Evaluation of FAO's contribution to the Republic of Moldova 2016-2019	The Republic of Moldova
2C	Evaluation of FAO's country programme in Armenia 2016-2020	Armenia
1T	Evaluation of FAO's support to climate action (SDG 13) and the implementation of the FAO Strategy on Climate Change (2017)	
2T	Evaluation of FAO's role and work on antimicrobial resistance (AMR)	Armenia, Ukraine
3T	Evaluation of the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations	Kyrgyzstan
4T	Evaluation of the FAO Technical Cooperation Programme	Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia,
5T	Evaluation of FAO's contributions to Sustainable Development Goal 2 – "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" (SDG2 evaluation)	Case Study Georgia, Case Study Turkey
6T	Evaluation of FAO's statistical work	Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan
7T	Evaluation of the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with the Private Sector	