

European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)

36/2 Meeting of the Executive Committee 15 June 2016

Agenda item 5 – Background note 1

Regional Initiative on Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms for improved Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction

1. Introduction

After the land reforms of the 1990s, many transition countries in Europe and Central Asia have dualistic farm structures characterized by a small number of large-scale corporate farms and a large number of small subsistence and semi-commercial family farms. Smallholders and family farms are important for regional food security. However, a large number of smallholders are not economically viable and – in most countries – rural people remain the most vulnerable section of the population. Getting family farming right is the key to enhanced food security and sustainable growth in rural areas, and to making inroads against rural poverty.

The overall **goal** of the initiative is to empower smallholders to strengthen their livelihoods, thereby reducing rural poverty, with particular emphasis on inclusiveness. The Initiative continues to focus on **seven countries**: Armenia, Albania, Georgia, Moldova, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

2. Main areas of work in 2016-17

The Regional Initiative continues to focus on empowering smallholders and family farms by strengthening their livelihoods and reducing rural poverty. Accordingly, the RI will be in line with the Strategic Program 3, particularly related to its outcome focusing on rural people's access to productive resources, services, organization and markets (3.1). In addition, it will partly also cover Strategic Program 2 related to innovative production practices and governance mechanisms of natural resources (2.1 and 2.2).

The Initiative tackles two main **focus areas**: (i) policy, institution and governance level, and (ii) farm and community level. Within these focus areas different priority actions are defined, which entail cross-cutting approaches and bring together multidisciplinary teams to work with rural communities.

Work on **innovative practices for sustainable agriculture production** will focus on promoting good agricultural practices such as integrated pest management, organic agriculture techniques, conservation of plant genetic resources and proactive drought risk

management. In addition work will be done on modern irrigation systems, sustainable forest management and fish production, including fish seed improvement, focusing on smallholders. Work related to **policies and other governance mechanisms** will focus on land related issues such as tenure and consolidation, extension services, rural development policies and various areas of natural resource management such as genetic resources, forest management and fisheries.

3. Examples of results achieved so far in 2016

Innovative practices for sustainable agricultural production

- An international conference on innovative practices for sustainable **livestock production** was organized in Ukraine.
- A sub-regional study and workshop on **sustainable forest management** standards for private forest smallholders is planned, and a letter of support between Regional Centre for Forestry and Rural Development (REFORD) and FAO has been signed for future cooperation. Field surveys for the assessment of national **wood fuel consumption** in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are ongoing. In addition, **soil management** practices have been promoted in Belarus through a national workshop, and at regional level the 3rd plenary meeting of the Eurasia Soil Partnership was conducted in Kyrgyzstan.
- In the field of **fisheries and aquaculture** a booklet on African catfish production has been published and the Russian version of the training manuals on the propagation of cyprinid species has been published.

Policy dialogue and capacity development to support agrarian reforms

- In Georgia the **Rural Development** Strategy for Georgia 2017-2020 was drafted and presented at a Rural Development Conference in Georgia. In the Ministry of Agriculture working group on rural development was created and trained, and inter-ministerial discussion has been initiated. Regarding the Western Balkan region, the partnership with the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) has been reinforced by drafting a TCP Facility for resource mobilization on **development of cross-border areas** in the Western Balkan region. A concept note on policy and technical support on **School Food and Nutrition** for Albania has been prepared.
- Regarding **statistics** the Regional Statistical Pocketbook has been prepared. In addition, the Agri-Gender Statistical Toolkit and three National Gender Profiles of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods: for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkey were published and validated at three national workshops in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkey, and at the Regional Concluding Workshop in Istanbul. A Strategic Plan for the Development of Agricultural, Environmental and Rural Statistics (SPAERS) was developed for Georgia. Assistance was provided to Armenia in conducting the Agricultural Census. Assistance was provided to Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration of Albania in building capacity of the Sector for Statistics.
- An EU funded project on Mainstreaming the National **Land Consolidation** Programme in the FYR Macedonia is being prepared, and is expected to start in September.

National workshops took place in the seven RI 1 focus countries to promote secure land tenure under VGGT.¹ As a follow-up, a training workshop was organized for the introduction of land consolidation for relevant stakeholders in Georgia.

- **Gender mainstreaming** of FAO work is being conducted in the Region. This includes: (1) production of the methodological tools such as the guidelines on gender mainstreaming (2) policy advice and support at country and regional level; A booklet on *Gender and Rural Development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Key Issues* has been published in English and Russian, as has the *FAO Regional Gender Equality Strategy for Europe and Central Asia* and its Action Plan. A regional network of experts on gender, rural development and social protection for Europe and Central Asia has been created. A book about the meeting is to be published by July 2016.

4. Highlights of expected results for 2016-17

Innovative practices for sustainable agricultural production

- Promotion of **good agricultural practices** will be implemented on integrated pest management, organic agriculture techniques and conservation of plant genetic resources in the region including Armenia, Moldova and Tajikistan.
- In Tajikistan a service-oriented management approach for enhanced **irrigation** system will be promoted, while in Moldova training programmes on best irrigation practices through Farmer Field School are planned to be adopted. In Kyrgyzstan strategies on proactive drought risk management will be formulated.
- Sustainable **forest management** and wood energy utilization will be promoted region-wide. In Georgia technical report will be prepared on the wildlife management system and national capacities for implementing wildlife resource assessment, management and monitoring will be strengthened.
- A model **fish production** farm in Armenia and fish seed improvement in Tajikistan will be supported.

Policy dialogue and capacity development to support agrarian reforms

- Support will be provided for regional policy dialogue and strategies for a stepwise approach for priority **transboundary disease prevention and control**. In the field of **plant production** in Georgia, a seed certification system will be established. In Armenia and Moldova support will take the form of a programme for plant genetic resources. **Climate-smart agriculture** will be introduced through agro-forestry in Kyrgyzstan, and support will be provided in Tajikistan.
- Capacity of the **extension services** and the Ministry will be increased to provide better extension and training services to rural stakeholders in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova.

¹ Vol. Guidelines on the Gov. of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry in the context of Nat Food Security

- In Albania, Armenia and Georgia development, review and implementation of **national agriculture and rural development strategies** will be conducted. In Tajikistan the introduction of inter-sectoral policies for sustainable rural development and poverty reduction will be supported. Furthermore, regional inter-ministerial dialogues are under preparation on the development of **School Nutrition Programmes**.
- Regarding land issues, regional policy and technical dialogue is organized annually for **land use and land tenure** through LandNet Conference. In FYR Macedonia support for the preparation of the national land consolidation programme is foreseen, while in Azerbaijan, Kosovo*, Georgia and Ukraine the introduction of land consolidation will be supported. Awareness of stakeholders in the Regional Initiative focus countries will be raised on the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security.
- A regional **social protection** report is being finalized and a regional meeting is to be organized. Regarding **gender issues**, good practices of gender mainstreaming in FAO work in the field will be collected and published. In Albania support will be provided to accelerate rural women's economic empowerment and rural development through income diversification. In Georgia the Rural women country gender assessment will be conducted. In Kosovo, Serbia and Uzbekistan studies of gender in forestry are to be conducted. In Kyrgyzstan economic empowerment of rural women will be implemented through trainings. In general, gender mainstreaming will be conducted in various technical fields, such as organic agriculture, seed production, policy advice and support, rural development, extension services, forestry, livestock and pastures, land management, and natural resources management. Additionally, gender impact assessments of FAO work in the region will be conducted for all regional initiative focus countries.

The overall objective of the Regional Initiative is to create synergies among the activities and establish a coherent work programme for the support of smallholders and family farms in order to achieve the greater impact at country level. Therefore, a regional project is under elaboration to support RI-1 work in the region with country studies, capacity building activities and by supporting the elaboration of action plans that could feed into 2018-19 work planning and Country programming Frameworks of RI focus countries.