

FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

33rd Session

CONCEPT NOTE

Fostering the digital transformation of agriculture through strategies: national and local perspectives

Friday, 13 May 2022, 09.00-10.00 hours

Background

Digital technologies are yielding new growth in the food and agriculture sector and in rural areas. Connectivity, mobile adoption, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies are opening doors to new opportunities, enhancing the performance of the sector and increasing working conditions. However, they also pose certain risks, such as of digital divides between regions or businesses and between urban and rural areas.

The digital technology dividends are not automatic. Some rural areas in Europe and Central Asia are still falling behind when it comes to the adoption of new technologies due to for instance bottlenecks in the broadband infrastructure, affordability, awareness, digital skills and regulatory issues.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) assists Members in unlocking the potential of technology to drive the sustainable and inclusive transformation of agrifood systems, in a way that ensures that no one is left behind in the digital age. In recent years, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has supported several Members, including Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey - in developing national digital agriculture strategies inclusive and focused on smallholder farmers and rural communities.

Following the FAO approach, country-wide digital agriculture strategies are a critical accelerant to agricultural and rural development. Those can set a vision and establish concrete objectives for improving the technology infrastructure needed to enable rural connectivity, to deliver meaningful services and fair data to people in rural areas, and to promote grassroots innovations and solutions.

While national strategies are essential, local development strategies can also emerge from the bottom-up. Smart Villages, as a community-based approach, and rural communities throughout the European Union and beyond, are becoming innovators in their own right.

In the field of digitalization, local communities can design pathways to address digital needs, priorities and capacities of rural inhabitants, and they can engage in the process of digital transformation at their own pace, moving from digital isolation to connection.

With the Digital Village Initiative (DVI), FAO has set a goal of transforming 1000 villages across the globe into digital village hubs. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia is implementing the programme with the vision of making every village and rural community in the region digitally connected and interconnected, building on local strengths to make a smart use of digital technologies, with full respect to the environment.

Objective

The objective of this special event is to provide a platform for FAO Members and other stakeholders to share their approaches and strategic standpoints related to digitalization in agriculture and rural development.

The session aims at discovering ways to address the challenges faced by rural communities and especially by farmers in adopting digital technologies and how national and local digital strategies for agricultural and rural development can serve as a bridge to close the rural divide.

It will invite participants to share their views on how relevant initiatives can be leveraged and to express their interest in working with partners to digitally transform villages and rural communities in their countries.

Guiding questions

- How can we foster strategies to ensure a smart and sustainable digital future for agriculture and rural areas across Europe and Central Asia?
- How can we link grass-root-level action with broader national and regional strategies for digitalization?

Key messages and expected outcomes

- Agrifood systems transformation requires that increased attention be paid to digitalization.
- The development of national digital agriculture strategies is a critical accelerant to closing the rural digital divide.
- Community-driven initiatives are emerging throughout Europe and Central Asia and beyond and they are demonstrated to be key drivers supporting the rural digital transformation.
- Local strategies can ensure that the digital needs, priorities and capacities of rural inhabitants are addressed. In addition, they help link grass-root-level action with broader national strategies for digitalization, and vice versa.
- With the Digital Village Initiative, FAO aims at fostering local and community led rural development accelerating the digital transformation of villages.

Details

- Date and time: Friday 2022, 13 May, 09.00–10.00 hours
- Format: Hybrid (virtual and in person attendance)
- Length: 60 minutes
- The event will be organized as a panel discussion. During the session the floor will be opened to the audience for questions

Panel members

- Her Excellency Vanja Avram, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina

On the experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina in developing a digital agriculture strategy with the support of FAO, bringing perspectives on how it serves to accelerate digital rural development.

- Dr Doris Marquardt, Programme Officer, European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development

On selected EU instruments in support of digitalization in rural areas and agriculture – national strategies and bottom-up approaches

- Ms Claire Jordan, Managing Director, European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL)

On concrete examples of Smart Village strategies, their effectiveness to support rural digital transformation, and on the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia's digital village approach

Moderator: Ms Daniela Di Gianantonio, Digital Agriculture Team Leader, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia

Agenda of the event

Time	Details
09.00 – 09.05	<i>Welcome remarks by the moderator</i> Ms Daniela Di Gianantonio, Digital Agriculture Team Leader, FAO
09.05 – 09.10	<i>Opening remarks</i> Mr Laurent Thomas, FAO Deputy Director-General
09.10 – 09.45	<i>Panel debate</i> Her Excellency Vanja Avram, Assistant Minister Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina Dr Doris Marquardt, Programme Officer, European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development Ms Claire Jordan, Managing Director, European Association for Information on Local Development (AEIDL)
09.45 – 09.55	Q&A
09.55 – 10.00	<i>Closing remarks</i> Mr Vladimir Olegovich Rakhmanin, Assistant Director-General, FAO Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia

Languages

Interpretation will be provided for the side event in English, Russian, French and Spanish.