

Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

32nd Session

CONCEPT NOTE

Innovation and Digitalization

SPECIAL EVENT - CONCEPT NOTE

Innovation and digitalization as catalyst to transform the food and agriculture systems

Wednesday, 4 November 2020, 10.30-11.30

In 2018, the *Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the Development of Sustainable and Inclusive Food Systems and Trade Integration*, was on the agenda of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was requested to continue assisting the countries in the region in transforming their agricultural sectors and leveraging the livelihoods of farmers, both women and men, through e-agriculture and fostering its responsible use through the three Regional Initiatives. Accordingly, FAO supported knowledge and experience sharing as well as policy dialogues on digital agriculture at different high-level events and policy dialogues throughout the biennium. Key events included the High-Level Forum on E-Agriculture organized jointly with Bulgarian European Union Presidency in 2018, the High Level Panel on “*Utilising the power of digital innovations for youth and family farms*” at the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) in 2019, with a proposal for a Digital Council for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) in 2020. Several sessions were jointly organized with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) on digital agricultural strategies, Digitalization and SDGs at the International Telecommunication Union’s (ITU) Telecom World 2019. In 2020, together with ITU, FAO launched the publication on the Status of Digital Agriculture in 18 countries of Europe and Central Asia. In addition, several countries received FAO’s support for developing their national digital strategies such as Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Moldova and Turkey. Other projects capitalize on good digital agriculture practices, such as in Kazakhstan, and more countries requested FAO’s support to develop a national framework for the digital transformation of agriculture, which is the case of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Background

FAO assists Members in unlocking the potential of innovation to drive socio-economic growth, ensure food and nutrition security, alleviate poverty and improve resilience to climate change, thereby helping to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Innovation in agriculture cuts across all dimensions of the production cycle and along the entire value chain, from crop, forestry, fishery or livestock production to the management of inputs to market access. Innovation is more than technology, going beyond apps, drones or farm machinery, innovation in agriculture involves different social, organizational or institutional processes, ranging from access to markets, credit or extension services to marketing produce in a new way.

FAO is part of the United Nations Group on the Information Society (UNGIS) and has been the custodian of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Action Line on E-Agriculture with the support of ITU. Since then, FAO has integrated innovation and digitalization in its approaches in ending hunger and malnutrition. In the UNGIS Dialogue on the Role of Digitalization in the Decade of

Action, FAO's goal is to drive sustainable digital solutions and innovation, while making space in the agriculture and food sector for rural communities and empowering the youth.

The sustainable nutrition sensitive agriculture value chains from farm to fork require equal access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) for all stakeholders. However, in Europe and Central Asia, the adoption of new technologies is lagging behind for smallholder farmers. The reasons for this rural digital divide are often related to availability and quality of access, connectivity costs, appropriate and adapted content that can be activated. The solutions reside in participatory processes, involving all actors working in partnerships using traditional and new technologies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a wakeup call and has accelerated the use of digital technologies in order to keep working and stay connected. It also revealed the divides that persist between those who have access and those who do not. Digital technology dividends are not automatic, and not everyone can benefit equally. Hence, there is a critical need for action at policy level to maximize benefits and minimize potential risks, and ensure government commitment to upscale new solutions and create a structured enabling environment for innovation development, support systems and capacity development, which are pertinent for generating a development change through ICTs in agriculture. In accordance with the core principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, governments in the Europe and Central Asia region shall take measures to leave no one behind and close digital, rural and gender divides, known as the triple divide. As mentioned in the UN Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation, more than ever we need to connect, respect and protect people in the digital age. People working in agriculture, forestry and fishery, living in remote and rural areas should not be left behind.

FAO aims at ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital age. For example, during the current COVID-19 pandemic, FAO has been offering policy support, digital solutions such as big data and crop calendars for its Members to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on food systems. FAO is also providing a range of tools and knowledge, which governments are using to fight the desert locust outbreak. These tools range from data collection that monitor the presence of locusts to geospatial systems that help predict where the crop-hungry pests will travel to next.

Purpose and Expected Outcomes

The objective of this special event is to provide a platform for countries and other stakeholders to exchange and showcase their innovations in agriculture. It will also invite the Members to share their views on digitalization in food and agriculture systems, and the measures that can be taken to maximize its potential in food and agriculture, considering also the ways for FAO to support global knowledge sharing and analysis in order to inform policy-makers and other food and agriculture stakeholders. FAO will also show the using of Geospatial data and its linkage to the Hand-in-Hand Initiative.¹

Main messages:

- Innovations and digitalization should address the specific needs of smallholder farmers and be validated in a participatory manner with the end users.
- Digital services should provide adapted and reliable content from trusted sources. These services should be accessible in remote areas and be affordable.
- Digitalization requires digital skills and digital literacy contribute to bridging the triple divide (digital, rural and gender). The capacity of the following actors should be developed: public

¹ See also the discussion under Agenda item 12 of this ERC on the Hand-in-Hand Initiative <http://www.fao.org/3/nc347en/nc347en.pdf>

administration, education, rural people and farmers to engage with ICTs, tailored to the needs of men and women, youth and elderly and the most vulnerable

- Digital cooperation and dialogue between all stakeholders, policymakers, farmers, the private sector, agri-businesses, and digital technology companies, civil society and academia, can help develop a common understanding on the potential of digital technologies' applications on agriculture and the related challenges.
- Youth should be seen as catalysts for transformation and innovation can inspire innovative approaches and novel thinking in all fields of FAO's work

Agenda of the Event

Duration: 60 minutes.

The moderator welcomes the audience, outlines the objectives of the event and invites the FAO Director-General and the Secretary-General of ITU to make brief remarks on Innovation and Digitalization.

This is followed by a brief presentation of the recent Digital agriculture status report in 18 countries of the region.

The moderator then introduces the panel. In the panel discussion, different stakeholders will share their perspectives and practices.

After the panel discussion, the floor will be opened to the audience for further questions and comments.

Before closing and next steps, the Chief Economist will explain how the region can benefit from its geospatial platform making also the linkage to the Hand-in-Hand Initiative discussion at this ERC. He will also inform on the International (digital council) platform for digital food and agriculture.

The results of the facilitated discussion will contribute the report of the Regional Conference.

Panelists

- H.E. Dr. Bekir Pakdemirli, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Minister of Agriculture of Turkey
- Ms Doris Marquardt – DG AGRI, European Commission
- Mr. Murod Khusanov – Private sector, Uzbekistan
- Mr. Andrea Ferrante, Civil Society
- Mr. Jannes Maes, European Young Farmers' organization (CEJA)

Run of Show

- 10:30 hours: Moderator welcomes audience, presents the objectives of the event and introduces the FAO Director-General
- 10:35 hours: Mr QU Dongyu, Director-General and Mr Houlin Zhao, ITU Secretary-General
- 10:40 hours: Status of digital agriculture in 18 countries of Europe and Central Asia
- 10:45 hours: Panel discussion
- 11:15 hours: Q&A
- 11:20 hours: Mr Máximo Torero, Chief Economist, Hand-in-Hand Initiative, Geospatial Platform and International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture
- 11:27 hours: Summary and conclusions

11:30 hours: Session ends

Languages

The special event will be interpreted in English, French, Spanish and Russian language