

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia 12-15 July 2021

Background Note

Session 1

FAO's new Strategic Framework and Regional Priority Areas

1. Introduction and background

The new FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31¹ has been developed in the context of major global and regional challenges in the areas of FAO's mandate, including the COVID-19 pandemic recovery, through an inclusive and transparent process involving extensive internal and external consultations, governing body meetings and informal consultations.²

The Regional Conference for Europe in 2020³ (ERC 2020) emphasized the focus of the Regional Initiatives on addressing the structural dominance of smallholders in most of the countries, the transformation of food systems, the increasing trend of digitalization, the increase in obesity and persistent malnutrition, the importance of striving for affordable and healthy diets, and the importance of defining responses to the impacts of climate change as priorities for the region in 2020–21.

In order to address the evolving challenges in the region, not least due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) initiated a review process of the priorities⁴ to identify special trends and drivers in the subregions and to revisit the areas of emphasis of the regional priorities and the Regional Initiatives under the aegis of the new FAO Strategic Framework. The review focused on the 2022–25 period and considered the country needs reflected in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and Country Programming Frameworks supporting the countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This background document provides a brief introduction of the main elements of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31 (Chapter 2) and focuses on summarizing the outcomes of the internal review process in REU – highlighting the shifts under the priority areas of work in the region (Chapter 3) – and the proposals for outcomes and relevant SDG targets under the Regional Initiatives (Chapter 4).

¹ FAO. 2021. *Strategic Framework 2022–31*. Forty-second Session of the FAO Conference, 14–18 June 2021. <http://www.fao.org/3/ne577en/ne577en.pdf>

² The Hundred and Sixty-sixth Session of the Council of FAO recommended that the Forty-second Session of the Conference review and consider endorsing the Strategic Framework 2022–31.

³ FAO. 2020a. *Report*. Thirty-second Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe. ERC/20/REP. 2–4 November 2020, Tashkent, Uzbekistan (virtual). <http://www.fao.org/3/ne289en/ne289en.pdf>

⁴ FAO. 2020b. *The future of food systems in Europe and Central Asia – 2022–25 and beyond*. Thirty-second Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe. ERC/20/5/WA7. <http://www.fao.org/3/ne075en/ne075en.pdf>

2. FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31

FAO’s new Strategic Framework seeks to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life*, leaving no one behind.

The “*four betters*” represent an organizing principle for how FAO intends to contribute directly to SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and to support the achievement of the broader SDG agenda, which is crucial for attaining FAO’s overall vision. The “*four betters*” reflect the interconnected economic, social and environmental dimensions of agrifood systems.⁵

Twenty Programme Priority Areas under the “*four betters*” will guide FAO on filling critical gaps and putting in place the conditions needed to drive the changes that will ultimately contribute to the achievement of the selected SDG targets.

The implementation will be facilitated by four cross-cutting/cross-sectional “accelerators” – such as technology, innovation, data and complements (governance, human capital and institutions) – to accelerate impacts while minimizing trade-offs and by such cross-cutting themes as gender, youth and inclusion.

3. Priorities for FAO in the region

In light of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31, based on the findings of the report on the trends and challenges in the region and the outcome of the internal review process, the formulation of the regional priority areas is as follows:

- I. Formulating effective policies, promoting digital innovation and facilitating rural livelihoods, with emphasis on smallholders, women and youth
- II. Food system transformation and support in exploring new markets through the alignment of trade, food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary policies to meet World Trade Organization commitments and promote value chain development and the One Health approach
- III. Promoting sustainable natural resource management and facilitating resilience in agriculture, forestry and other land-use sectors, including mitigating and adapting to climate change
- IV. Addressing food insecurity and reducing all forms of malnutrition

The FAO priorities in Europe and Central Asia for 2022–25 embody the renewed corporate emphasis on the leaving no one behind principle, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, promoting innovative approaches and modern science and technologies, and following a food systems transformation approach that links sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food security, nutrition and resilience.

⁵ The agrifood system covers the journey of food from farm to table, including when it is grown, fished, harvested, processed, packaged, transported, distributed, traded, bought, prepared, eaten and disposed of. It also encompasses non-food products that also constitute livelihoods and all the people, activities, investments and choices that play a part in getting us these food and agricultural products. In the FAO Constitution, the term “agriculture” and its derivatives include fisheries, marine products, forestry and primary forestry products. (FAO. 2021. *Report of the Council of FAO*. Hundred and Sixty-sixth Session of the Council of FAO. <http://www.fao.org/3/nf693en/nf693en.pdf>)

I. Formulating effective policies, promoting digital innovation and facilitating rural livelihoods, with emphasis on smallholders, women and youth

Demanded specifically by SDG 1, 2 and 5 targets, under the aegis of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028 (UNDFP), assistance focuses on smallholders and family farms, women and youth to increase access to markets, value chains and finance and to improve rural livelihoods in line with supporting territorial development and diversification of rural incomes, such as through agrotourism. Support must aim at income generation for smallholders and decent employment opportunities for women and youth, with special attention given to exploring and mitigating COVID-19 impacts. Key under this priority are facilitating policy dialogue to promote climate-smart agriculture, livestock development practices including forestry, and reducing land fragmentation and land abandonment. Increasing access to information and communications technology, particularly for vulnerable groups, also is key.

Addressing the priority through *accelerators* requires embarking on scalable green innovations (high-quality seeds, feeds, climate smart cropping, etc.) and digital solutions, based on innovative technology and an enabling environment, in order to support equal access for smallholders, women and youth to the benefits of innovations and to facilitate the collection, analysis and dissemination of data; the Hand-in-Hand Initiative geospatial platform; and FAO digital services and knowledge.

As *cross-cutting themes*, specific emphasis will be placed on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable rural population groups, including women and youth, by supporting their economic empowerment, establishing a better enabling environment, and improving access to resources.

FAO support under this regional priority area would mainly contribute to the following Programme Priority Areas of the new FAO Strategic Framework: Inclusive Rural Transformation (BL2); Small-Scale Producers' Equitable Access to Resources (BP4); Digital Agriculture (BP5); Green Innovation (BP1).

II. Food system transformation and support in exploring new markets through the alignment of trade, food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary policies to meet World Trade Organization commitments and promote value chain development and the One Health approach.

Demanded particularly by SDG 2, 3, 9, 10, 12 and 17 targets, the Organization's support in transforming food systems based on the three dimensions of sustainable development will continue in the region, along with assistance directed to agrifood trade policy development in compliance with international and regional trade agreements and global sanitary and phytosanitary standards. Special attention is given to promoting urban food systems, including urban/peri-urban agriculture and linking rural producers and urban consumers. FAO continues to facilitate institutional frameworks and capacities for food safety governance and controls, animal and plant health protection and transboundary pest issues. In this regard, emphasis is given to human–animal–plant interfaces under the One Health approach. FAO supports investing in developing inclusive value chains and providing agribusiness advisory services and marketing support aimed at linking smallholders to markets. Further assistance is provided in promoting food loss and waste reduction and prevention, supporting food product development according to geographical indication (GI) requirements, and promoting organic and local products.

Addressing the priority through *accelerators* requires improving collaboration with the private sector and partnerships with non-UN agencies and intergovernmental and intra-regional organizations; mainstreaming the use of green innovations and digital technologies and digital skills for farmers, as a core component of food systems transformation in the region; and using more effective data sharing and dissemination



channels for data on such key issues as market prices, market information, animal identification and traceability, antimicrobial use, food loss and waste, diet and nutrition.

As *cross-cutting themes*, specific emphasis will be placed on inclusion and the principle of leaving no one behind, with special attention to facilitating increases in economic opportunities for women and youth, including access to digitalization, as well as assessing and addressing their needs (e.g. through promoting women- and youth-led entrepreneurs, promoting responsible food marketing to children and youth, promoting innovative financial models for women and youth, advocating for policies that attract youth to farming, and advocating for leaving no one behind).

FAO support under the regional priority area would mainly contribute to the following Programme Priority Areas of FAO Strategic Framework: Achieving Sustainable Urban Food Systems (BL3); One Health (BP3); Safe Food for Everyone (BN3); Reducing Food Loss and Waste (BN4); Transparent Markets and Trade (BN5); Scaling up Investments (BL7)

III. Promoting sustainable natural resource management and facilitating resilience in agriculture, forestry and other land-use sectors, including mitigating and adapting to climate change

Specifically demanded by SDG 1, 12, 13, 14 and 15 targets, a key focus of FAO's work will be on maintaining and facilitating the preservation and restoration of biodiversity, including nature-based solutions (agroecology and ecosystem services) and Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS). Promoting sustainable natural resources management practices, including green production approaches – with special attention to the sustainable management of forest and pasture, water and soil – as well as increasing resilience support in agriculture, forestry and other land-use sectors, including fishery, are key in climate change adaptation and mitigation. This requires further enhancing the implementation of the FAO climate change strategy at the regional level, including mobilizing financial resources through the Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility and Adaptation Fund and promoting innovative and integrated approaches. Special emphasis is placed on the promotion of circularity and evidence-based policies facilitating a bioeconomy, as well as on the agro-environmental impacts of agricultural production.

Addressing the priority through *accelerators* requires emphasis on digital tools and innovations for climate and smart water use. A prudent country-specific evidence base is critical to many strategic processes taking place nationally, regionally or globally, including the monitoring of SDG indicators and nationally determined contributions (NDCs). A regional platform focusing on green agriculture is promoted for collaboration, knowledge sharing and knowledge management on innovation and technology.

As for the *cross-cutting themes*, specific focus is given to the inclusion and involvement of all stakeholders – with special attention to women, youth and other vulnerable groups – in capacity building, policy dialogue and decision-making and to ensuring equal access to planning, development and management of natural resources.

FAO support under the regional priority area would mainly contribute to the following Programme Priority Areas of FAO Strategic Framework: Climate Change Mitigating and Adapted Agri-Food Systems (BE1); Bioeconomy for Sustainable Food and Agriculture (BE2); Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Food and Agriculture (BE3); Green Innovation (BP1).

IV. Addressing food insecurity and reducing all forms of malnutrition

Demanded particularly by SDG 2, 3 and 12 targets, FAO adheres to its fundamental commitment to the overarching priority of food security and nutrition, which guides its programme of work and partnership engagement towards eliminating all forms of malnutrition and enhancing equitable access to safe and nutritious food and healthy diets for all. This requires a holistic approach and the mainstreaming of food security and nutrition across sectors and high-level decision-making bodies in order to increase investment in influencing consumers' desire for healthy food, improve agrifood production, and engage processing sectors to produce and market diverse, nutritious and safe food through shorter value chains and local food systems.

Addressing the priority through *accelerators*, the Committee on World Food Security Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition is a key reference document to address food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms within a food systems perspective. Increasing evidence and data on food supply, diet and nutrition and designing, developing and strengthening food security and monitoring systems are crucial to support timely decision-making, especially at the time of shocks and crises. Close collaboration with partner UN agencies and intra-regional organizations will be key to ensuring a holistic approach to tackling food insecurity and malnutrition.

As for the *cross-cutting themes*, focus is given to enhancing women's access to skills and knowledge around food and nutrition and continuing to target youth for food and nutrition education beyond school meal programmes. Further attention is given to supporting other population groups that are facing higher risk of being food insecure and malnourished, such as migrants and refugees.

FAO support under the regional priority area would mainly contribute to the following Programme Priority Areas of FAO Strategic Framework: Healthy diets for all (BN1); Nutrition for the most vulnerable (BN2); Safe food for everyone (BN3); Reducing food loss and waste (BN4); Green innovation (BP1); Achieving sustainable urban food systems (BL3); Scaling up Investment (BL7).

4. Theory of change of Regional Initiatives

In order to align the Organization's work with the regional priorities and to translate FAO's specialized expertise into integrated multidisciplinary interventions tailored to the regional, subregional and country context, the three Regional Initiatives have become the main programmatic instruments.

A theory of change statement is being developed under each RI, focusing on the medium-term goals (outcomes) for 2022–25 and the clear contribution to the SDG targets, in line with the corporate aspirations of FAO Strategic Framework and the regional priorities. Proposed outcomes for 2022–25 and relevant main SDG targets under each Regional Initiative are reflected in the tables below.

Regional Initiative 1 - Empowering smallholders, family farms and youth, facilitating rural livelihoods and poverty reduction

Proposed outcomes 2022–25	SDG targets
Smallholders and family farmers, including women, youth and vulnerable groups, are empowered to apply sustainable and resilient agricultural production practices and improve their livelihoods through enhanced access to natural resources, markets, finance, services, information, education, innovation and technologies.	1.4 2.3 2.4 5.a

Policymakers and decision makers have improved understanding and capacity to design and implement inclusive, equitable and integrated agricultural and rural development policies and programmes at national and local levels to reduce poverty, enhance food and nutrition security, and increase decent employment, entrepreneurship and alternative income-generation opportunities, contributing to rural transformation.	1.4 2.3 2.4 5.a
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Regional Initiative 2 - Transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration

Proposed outcomes 2022–25	SDG targets
Member Countries have formulated and implemented evidence-based trade policies – in compliance with the WTO Agreement and regional trade agreements – and other agrifood policies, which together lead to growth in safer and diversified trade at global, intra-regional, and regional levels and more sustainable, equitable, and inclusive agri-food systems.	2.b 10.a 17.11
Member States have strengthened the health of national agrifood systems through the effective implementation of policies and regulatory frameworks, based on global standards, that improve the management of plant and animal pests and diseases and food safety risks while considering environmental health, increased resilience to specific biosecurity threats and crises, and the use of One Health approaches.	2.1 3.d
Countries have developed resilient, economically viable and environmentally sustainable agrifood value chains that are inclusive of youth and women and that utilize partnerships, leading to better food consumption patterns, improved market opportunities, sustainable livelihoods and reduced food loss and waste in a changing climate and environment.	2.3 9.3 12.3

Regional Initiative 3 - Managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity in a changing climate

Proposed outcomes 2022–25	SDG targets
Member States have enhanced the sustainable management of natural resources and have maintained biodiversity, including adapting to and mitigating climate change for transforming agrifood systems, reducing multiple vulnerabilities and scaling up resilience in agriculture, fisheries and forestry through the design and implementation of ecosystem-based and socially inclusive practices, policies and programmes.	13.1 13.2 15.3
National stakeholders have increased technical capacities to implement nature-positive production in agriculture, fisheries and forestry while addressing climate change and disasters through natural capital investment, innovation and public–private partnerships, towards the attainment of the SDGs and leaving no one behind.	2.4 12.2 1.5
National stakeholders have reduced the environmental impacts of agricultural production – including greenhouse gas emissions, pollution and chemical and plastic wastes – through bioeconomy, socially inclusive and equitable approaches.	12.4 12.5 14.1