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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

## Thirty-second Session

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## Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region

### Executive Summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines the context in which the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its Members will be working towards accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and achieving country-specific targets. As food and agriculture hold the key to realizing the 2030 Agenda, FAO is well positioned to act as a facilitator to assist all countries in realizing the goals of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG 1 (eradicate poverty) and SDG 2 (end hunger and all forms of malnutrition) through food systems transformations that embody the dynamic links across sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food, nutrition and resilience.

The document “Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region” provides the 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) with the programme implementation results for 2018–2019 and the programme and planning for the biennium 2020–2021 as part of the governing process. The debate on this document will contribute to the review of the Strategic Framework and Medium-Term Plan (MTP) 2022–2025, to be submitted to the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference in July 2021.

This document lays out the information regarding the results achieved in 2018–2019 in the Europe and Central Asia region as a response to the priorities agreed at the 31st Session of the ERC held in 2018. It provides highlights achieved at the country, subregional and regional levels based on the programmatic framework of the three Regional Initiatives (RIs) (regarding smallholders, agrifood trade and climate change response) and maps out the lessons learned from the implementation of the programme.

In its second section, based on internal review and the informal consultations organized in the region, the emerging trends and prioritization of the Director-General, the document sets out the priorities for FAO’s work in the region during 2020–2021 and beyond. Key aspects include the structural dominance of smallholders in most of the countries, the transformation of food systems, the increasing trend of digitalization, the increased observation of obesity and malnutrition, the importance of striving for affordable and healthy diets, and the importance of defining responses to the impacts of climate change.

<sup>1</sup> Rescheduled from 5-7 May 2020, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

FAO's new Hand-in-Hand Initiative will support evidence-based, country-led and country-owned actions in the region to accelerate agriculture, transformation and sustainable rural development for the eradication of poverty (SDG 1) and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2). Other priorities include a renewed emphasis on leaving no one behind; organizational consolidation to accelerate support for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs); and strengthened partnerships with smallholder producers, food companies, procurers and consumers, among others.

Achieving the SDGs requires food systems transformation, as embodied in the new "transforming food systems to achieve the SDGs" approach of the region. To ensure progress on SDGs and food systems transformation, FAO will promote innovative approaches, including the application of modern science and technologies, digital solutions and the innovation of mindsets and cooperation models.

This document also refers to the importance of the 2030 Agenda and the strengthening of the United Nations (UN) through its repositioning at national and regional levels.

### **Suggested action by the Regional Conference**

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- Note the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative, through which FAO will support evidence-based, country-led and country-owned actions in the region to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development for the eradication of poverty (SDG 1) and hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2). These efforts also will contribute to the attainment of all other SDGs in the region.
- Note the importance of adopting innovative approaches and using modern science and technologies, including digital solutions, to face new situations and challenges.
- Note the renewed emphasis on leaving no one behind and on organizational consolidation to accelerate support for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs, with special emphasis on the LLDCs in Europe and Central Asia.
- Note the importance of strengthened partnerships, including with smallholder producers and food companies, procurers and consumers, as also highlighted in the 46th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).
- Take note that the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN) will be a key reference document to address food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms within a food systems perspective in the coming years.
- Note the importance of 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.
- Recognize the importance of FAO's Strategic Framework in providing direction for FAO's technical work and take note of the arrangements regarding the proposed revision of the Strategic Framework.
- Acknowledge the work completed through FAO Strategic Programmes as well as the achievements under the RIs and other main areas of work in responding to the main priorities identified at the 31st Session of the ERC.
- Endorse the proposed regional priority areas for FAO's action in 2020–2021 and beyond as outlined in paras. 41 – 46 and ask FAO to consider these regional priorities as it embarks on the revision of its Strategic Framework, to be submitted to the FAO Conference in July 2021

based on the COVID-19 response outlined in Web Annex 6 and the future of food systems presented in Web Annex 7.

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## I. Introduction

1. The FAO MTP 2018–2021 (reviewed) and Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2020–2021 were approved by the FAO Conference at its 41st session in June 2019. The MTP sets out the Strategic Objectives (SOs) and Outcomes for achievement by Members and the international community with support from FAO, in accordance with the reviewed Strategic Framework, approved by the FAO Conference in July 2017.<sup>2</sup> The Conference appreciated the close alignment of the FAO SOs with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and highlighted the importance of the contribution of FAO to the full implementation of the repositioning of the United Nations Development System (UNDS).<sup>3</sup>
2. Web Annex 1 provides an overview of the FAO Strategic Objective Programme, including its alignment with the SDGs.<sup>4</sup>
3. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines the context in which FAO and its Members will be working towards reaching the SDGs and achieving country-specific targets. As food and agriculture hold the key to realizing the 2030 Agenda, FAO is well positioned to act as a facilitator to assist all countries in realizing the goals of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG 1 (eradicate poverty) and SDG 2 (end hunger and all forms of malnutrition) through food systems transformations that embody the dynamic links across sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food, nutrition and resilience.
4. FAO has launched the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, an evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate agricultural, transformation and sustainable rural development to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2).<sup>5</sup> In so doing, it contributes to the attainment of all other SDGs. The initiative adopts a robust matchmaking approach that proactively brings together target countries with donors, the private sector, international financial institutions, academia and civil society to mobilize means of implementation that support accelerated actions. It prioritizes countries and territories within countries where poverty and hunger are most concentrated or where national capacities are most limited. It also introduces a framework for monitoring and analysing impacts.
5. In order to facilitate the adoption of innovative approaches and the use of modern science and technologies (including digital solutions), FAO has established a new Office for Innovation. The Office for Innovation will further consolidate and strengthen FAO's innovative spirit, including innovation of mindset, innovation of cooperation models and innovation of application by digitalization.
6. In consideration of vulnerability to unique and complex food security and nutrition challenges, FAO has established the Office for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs to ensure that the special needs of these vulnerable populations and countries are met.
7. Furthermore, following the 46th Session of the CFS held in October 2019, FAO will strive to facilitate partnerships between smallholder producers and food companies, procurers and consumers.

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<sup>2</sup> FAO. 2017. *Reviewed Strategic Framework*. 40th Session of the FAO Conference, 3–8 July 2017. C 2017/7 Rev. 1. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ms431e.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> FAO. 2019. *FAO Strategy for Agenda 2030 and UN development system repositioning*. CL 163/4, Information Note 2, November 2019. <http://www.fao.org/3/nb929en/nb929en.pdf>. This document provides further information on FAO's engagement with the United Nations development system repositioning.

<sup>4</sup> FAO. 2020. *Web Annex 1: Overview of FAO's Strategic Objectives Programme*. ERC/20/5/Web Annex 1. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc384en/nc384en.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> FAO. 2020. *FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: a New Approach*. ERC/20/12 Rev.1. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc347en/nc347en.pdf>.

8. The Strategic Framework is reviewed every four years.<sup>6</sup> As such, the review for the next Strategic Framework has started with the final document to be presented to the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference in 2021.<sup>7</sup> As Regional Conferences represent the first step in the schedule of Governing Body input and oversight, the 32nd Session of ERC is requested to provide guidance on areas of regional priority in 2020–2021 and beyond, with a view to guiding ongoing regional work and in the context of developing the new Strategic Framework. Web Annex 5 provides an update on the development of the Strategic Framework.

9. Areas of focus in reviewing the Strategic Framework will include aligning the results framework with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, strengthening strategic synergies and partnerships through mechanisms such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, and elaborating regional and global priority areas.

10. In addition, to align the new Strategic Framework with the 2030 Agenda, the results framework will need to better incorporate FAO country-level results – balancing Member-specific priorities and FAO corporate priorities, which are also set by Members through the Strategic Framework. It should be noted that, resulting from the repositioning of the UNDS, the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) needs to fully align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF),<sup>8</sup> the most important instrument for planning and implementation of UN development activities in each country. The CPFs ensure that FAO’s comparative advantage contributes to achieving the results of the UNSDCF and to achieving the SDGs at the national level (Web Annex 3 presents details on the UNSDCF and its relationship with FAO CPFs).<sup>9</sup>

11. The Regional Conference provides an opportunity for Members to advise on the results and priorities for FAO’s work in the region and on regional priorities to be considered in the reviewed Strategic Framework. The remainder of this document is organized as follows:

- a. Section II describes the achievements of the FAO programme in the region during 2018–2019, with a special focus on the RIs and other areas of work.
- b. Section III gives an overview of trends and developments in the region going forward, along with the regional priorities for FAO’s work and planned RIs.

## II. Achievements in the region

12. The 30th Session of ERC held in Turkey in 2016, endorsed priorities<sup>10</sup> for the medium-term period 2018–2021 within the corporate Medium Term Plan 2018–2021, as follows:

- formulating effective policies for sustainable and inclusive growth for farmers and the rural population;
- enhancing the reach towards new markets through the alignment of trade, food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary policies;

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<sup>6</sup> FAO. 2017. Implementation of the IPA regarding the reform of the programming, budgeting and results-based monitoring system. In *Basic texts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, Volume II, Section F, Paragraph 1.a. <http://www.fao.org/3/K8024E/K8024E.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> FAO. 2019. *Process for consultation on the development of the new Strategic Framework*. CL 163/4, Information Note 1, November 2019. <http://www.fao.org/3/nb920en/nb920en.pdf>. This document provides detail on the process for consultation on the development of the new Strategic Framework.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG). 2019. *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework: Internal guidance*. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-guidance>

<sup>9</sup> FAO. 2020. *Web Annex 3: FAO Country Planning and Programming in the context of repositioning the United Nations development system*. ERC/20/5/Web Annex 3. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc386e/nc386e.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> FAO. 2016. *Priorities for FAO’s work in the Europe and Central Asia Region*. 30th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe. 4–6 May 2016, Antalya, Turkey. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mp179e.pdf>.

- promoting sustainable natural resource management and combating land degradation and desertification; and
- addressing food insecurity and the reduction of all forms of malnutrition.

13. In the Europe and Central Asia region, the RIs have become the main programmatic instrument for aligning the Organization’s work with the most crucial priorities in the region, by facilitating the delivery of relevant products and services at regional and country levels and contributing to the achievement of agreed outputs and outcomes.<sup>11</sup> In order to increase the impact, the two ongoing RIs were revised, and a third one on *Sustainable natural resource management under a changing climate* was conceptualized for 2018–2019 and approved by Members at the 31st Session of ERC.<sup>12</sup> Food security and nutrition has been mainstreamed and embedded in the three RIs as a cross-cutting issue.

14. An overview and assessment of results in the region at the level of outputs is provided in Web Annex 2.<sup>13</sup> A description of the highlights of the achieved results in the region is provided below in the context of the RIs and on the cross-cutting issue of addressing food insecurity and the reduction of all forms of malnutrition.

15. Key results of the Corporate Outcome Assessment (COA) 2019 for the region are presented in Web Annex 4.<sup>14</sup>

### A. Presentation of results during 2018–2019

#### *Regional Initiative on Empowering smallholders and family farms for improved rural livelihoods and poverty reduction (RI-1)*

16. The key objectives of RI-1 are to (i) enhance the access of smallholders and family farmers to services (SO 3.1)<sup>15</sup> so that they can acquire good agricultural practices in areas such as forestry, fisheries and livestock production, resulting in increased adaptation and resilience to climate change (SO 2.1, SO 2.2); and (ii) ensure inclusive growth through improved rural livelihoods. The initiative supports multisectoral rural development policies that consider gender equality and economic empowerment. It facilitates the development of rural communities (SO 3.4), short value chains, statistics and the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), including addressing land fragmentation and land abandonment through land consolidation and land market development (SO 3.1).

17. In the context of the SDGs, family farming, given its multidimensional nature, is essential for achieving several of the SDGs, in particular SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 10 and SDG 17.

18. Highlights of achievements:

- innovative practices were promoted (SO 2.1) in the Republic of Moldova, where farmer field schools demonstrating innovative technologies were established for berry crops. In Tajikistan,

<sup>11</sup> FAO. 2020. *Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014–2019 in Europe and Central Asia Region*. ERC/20/6. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc230en/nc230en.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> FAO. 2018. *Report of the 31st Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe*. ERC/18/REP. <http://www.fao.org/3/mw908en/mw908en.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> FAO. 2020. Web Annex 2: Contribution of Results in the Europe and Central Asia Region to FAO Strategic Objectives in the 2018–19 Biennium. ERC/20/5/Web Annex 2. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc385en/nc385en.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> FAO. 2020. Web Annex 4: Corporate Outcome Assessment 2019 Europe and Central Asia Regional Results. ERC/20/5/Web Annex 4. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc387en/nc387en.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> The figures in parentheses refer to the respective outcome of the FAO Strategic Framework, available at <http://www.fao.org/3/my734en/my734en.pdf>. For example, the text “SO 3.1” refers to Outcome 3.1 of the Strategic Framework: “Rural poor and rural poor organizations empowered to access productive resources, services and markets.”

small-scale modern greenhouses were established. In Uzbekistan, farmers were trained to improve soil, water and crop management under conservation agriculture practices;

- governance frameworks were strengthened (SO 2.2) in Georgia, where recommendations for policy options were provided on sustainable wildlife management practices in light of international commitments. In Uzbekistan, seed and plant variety protection regulations were supported by providing related assessments and recommendations;
- policies and programmes were promoted to improve access to natural resources and digital technologies (SO 3.1); high-level events on digital agriculture were organized with the Bulgarian European Union Presidency<sup>16</sup> at the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA)<sup>17</sup> and the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Telecom World 2019 event. Regarding VGGT implementation, FAO conducted a study on European good practices on land consolidation legislation and prepared a Legal Guide on Land Consolidation.<sup>18</sup> Implementation of the National Land Consolidation Programme in North Macedonia has been scaled up with European Union support;
- cross-sectoral policy advice was provided for the development of gender-equitable and sustainable rural development (SO 3.4); FAO assisted in Armenia in the development of a national strategy for sustainable agricultural development through 2029, and provided policy advice on support programmes and land policy. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, FAO supported the elaboration of the strategy for agriculture and rural development in Canton 10 and entity of Brčko for 2019–2025. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Moldova, local community development plans were prepared in selected rural communities, and a small-scale investment component was implemented. At the regional level, a Technical Network on Community Development was established. In addition, country studies<sup>19</sup> and a Regional Synthesis Report on the constraints of smallholders and family farms were prepared. Food security and nutrition as a cross-cutting issue was embedded in the RI through the school food and nutrition programmes that were strengthened, among others, in Albania, with FAO's support.

19. RI-1 has enhanced its partnership with its key partners, such as the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in Southeast Europe, and collaboration with the European Commission in programme implementation in Georgia, North Macedonia and Tajikistan. Other key resource partners include Austria, Azerbaijan, Finland, the Russian Federation, Sweden and Turkey. Gender partnership with UN Women and the United Nations Rome-Based Agencies (RBAs) is pursued in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in other countries, under the UN Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment. At regional level, collaboration was strengthened through the UN Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality,<sup>20</sup> which resulted in greater visibility for FAO in events such as Beijing+25 and in the context of implementing the SDGs. The dialogue on the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDF) and VGGT implementation in the region was intensified with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

20. Gender equality is an important cross-cutting theme for the RI, which includes major gender-specific highlights ranging 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. One recent

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<sup>16</sup> For more information, see <http://www.agroinnovations.bg/prezentacii-ot-forum-na-visoko-ravnishche-za-cifrovoto-zemedelie-zaedno-za-silno-cifrovo-zemedelie>.

<sup>17</sup> For more information, see <https://www.gffa-berlin.de/en/programmuebersicht-gffa-2019/high-level-panels-2019/>.

<sup>18</sup> The guide was presented at the 12th international LANDNET workshop in Spain in 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Country studies were produced for Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Tajikistan.

<sup>20</sup> For more information, see <https://www.unece.org/runcwelcome/issue-based-coalitions/gender-equality.html>.

example includes a regional workshop on gender and livestock held in November 2019. This work is complemented by gender-specific pilot initiatives that promote rural women's economic empowerment (as reported to the 41st Session of the European Commission on Agriculture [ECA])<sup>21</sup> and are implemented as part of the FAO regional gender equality strategy 2019–2022.

*Regional Initiative on Improving agrifood trade and market integration (RI-2)*

21. The objective of RI-2 has further evolved in supporting Members in enhancing the agrifood trade policy environment. The three components focused on (i) strengthening capacity on World Trade Organization (WTO) trade agreements and effective use of WTO procedures (SO 4.1); (ii) strengthening capacity to implement global food safety and quality standards, including addressing sanitary, animal health and phytosanitary issues (SO 4.2); and (iii) supporting the diversification and promotion of domestic food markets and food exports, with a view to developing more inclusive and efficient agrifood systems (SO 4.3 and SO 4.4).

22. The main SDGs addressed by RI-2 focus on strengthening agrifood trade and support for integrated food systems by supporting safe, diverse and efficient value chains (SDG 2); encouraging economic growth through market access (SDG 8); helping prevent food loss and waste (SDG 12); and strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG 17).

23. Highlights of achievements:

- multistakeholder dialogues were promoted on trade-related agreements (SO 4.1) facilitated jointly by FAO and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), resulting in the discussion of challenges and the possible pathways to increase agrifood trade in the region. The Agricultural Trade Expert Network (ATEN) in Europe and Central Asia organized events to facilitate the exchange of knowledge related to agricultural trade and trade policy, including regional and multilateral trade agreements.<sup>22</sup> The latest ATEN regional workshop focused on WTO transparency in agriculture and fisheries in November 2019;<sup>23</sup>
- public- and private-sector institutions were supported in plant and animal health, food safety and quality domains (SO 4.2). In Azerbaijan, phytosanitary-related procedures and the management of import regulatory systems and export certification systems have been improved. The capacities of plant protection organizations regarding phytosanitary certification systems and plant pest surveillance systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia were strengthened. In Western Balkan countries, veterinary services capacity related to African Swine Fever outbreaks was enhanced;
- a regional conference on antimicrobial resistance, risk assessment and food safety was organized in 2019. National food safety capacities were strengthened, such as through a review of food law in Azerbaijan, risk assessment in Armenia, Codex capacities in North Macedonia and the development of a food safety strategy in Tajikistan;
- in the context of developing agribusinesses and agrifood chains (SO 4.3) and agrifood systems (SO 4.4), a horticulture value chain analysis was prepared to support investment opportunities in Tajikistan. A regional consultation in Budapest on geographical indications strengthened the institutional capacities of the ministries of agriculture in the region. In Turkey, technical assistance was provided through the development of demonstrative origin-based labels in the

<sup>21</sup> FAO. 2019. *Report: Forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture*. ECA/41/19/REPORT. 1–2 October 2019, Budapest, Hungary. <http://www.fao.org/3/nb770en/nb770en.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> For more information, see <http://www.fao.org/economic/est/international-trade/europe-and-central-asia/cismeetings/en/>.

<sup>23</sup> For more information, see <http://www.fao.org/economic/est/est-events-new/the-regional-workshop-on-wto-transparency-in-agriculture-and-fisheries/en/>.



Bursa region. In Ukraine, technical assistance was provided to improve the access of agribusiness products to new export markets;

- under the umbrella of the Global SAVE FOOD Initiative on Food Loss and Waste (FLW) reduction, technical assistance was provided to several countries, in collaboration with the public and private sectors, in the development of national strategies on the reduction of FLW. This included the development of legislation and food donation programmes (e.g. Georgia and Ukraine), carrying out research (e.g. North Macedonia and Ukraine), awareness-raising activities (e.g. Turkey) and educational programmes for children in schools (e.g. Albania). A regional Community of Practice on FLW reduction was established to improve the sharing of information and resources and to facilitate collaboration and partnerships in the region;
- the cross-cutting issue of food security and nutrition (SO 1.3) was embedded in the RI by carrying out a regional analysis to assess the impact of trade agreements on food security and nutrition outcomes in the region. Key findings are reflected in the report *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia 2019*.<sup>24</sup>

24. Enhanced collaboration included the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the World Health Organization (WHO), the BSEC, Slow Food, the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO). Collaboration was also enhanced with academia, for example, the National Institute for Economic Research of the Republic of Moldova, the Rural and Agricultural Policy and Development Institute (RAPDI) in Georgia, and IAMO, and the private sector, including the Ukrainian Fruits Association. Building capacity on value chains and providing subsectoral policy advice by collaborating with partners such as the Uzbek Association of Silk Producers, the Higher School of Economics in the Russian Federation, and the Galilee Institute in Israel. Addressing food safety, plant pest and health and animal health risks involved collaboration with the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

25. The RI addressed cross-cutting issues such as gender, governance, food security and nutrition. It ensured gender mainstreaming across its activities, including trainings and workshops.

*Regional Initiative on Sustainable natural resource management under a changing climate  
(RI-3)*

26. The main objective of RI-3 is to strengthen countries' capacities to achieve sustainable natural resource management including climate change adaptation and mitigation and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. It uses the components (i) improving policy alignment, coordination and cooperation for sustainable use of natural resources, climate change and DRR and related capacities including access to climate financing (SO 2.2, SO 2.3, SO 5.1); (ii) effective provision/collection of data, tools and services for effective decision-making on addressing natural resource management, climate change and DRR (SO 2.4, SO 5.2); and (iii) supporting capacity development for sustainable natural resource management, climate change adaptation and mitigation and DRR (SO 2.1, SO 5.2, SO 5.3) to respond to the demand in the region and the countries.

27. These areas of work focused on SDG 2,<sup>25</sup> ensuring sustainable and resilient production systems that increase production, maintain biodiversity and the ecosystem services, and strengthen climate change adaptation and mitigation by supporting good practices and access to climate financing

<sup>24</sup> FAO. 2019. *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia 2019*. Structural Transformations of Agriculture for Improved Food Security, Nutrition and Environment. Part 3, Structural transformations of agriculture, food systems and food policy in Europe and Central Asia. Budapest, FAO. 104 pp. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7153en/ca7153en.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 2 is to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

instruments. Other SDGs that are key for sustainable natural resources and climate change, in particular SDG 6, SDG 13<sup>26</sup> and SDG 15<sup>27</sup>, were also involved.

28. Highlights of results:

- policy alignment, coordination and cooperation for the sustainable use of natural resources, climate change and DRR and related capacities, including accessing climate financing, were improved (SO 2.2, SO 2.3). The Regional Strategy for Enhanced Engagement with the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Master Plan for Enhanced Engagement with the Global Environment Facility's Seventh Replenishment Fund (GEF-7) to support countries in accessing GCF and GEF resources<sup>28</sup> were formulated. FAO also supported specific countries in accessing different levels of GEF and GCF<sup>29</sup> resources, such as first and second readiness proposals as well as fully fledged proposals, for example, in Kyrgyzstan a funding proposal of USD 49.9 million was approved;
- a policy analysis paper of nationally determined contributions in Europe and Central Asia<sup>30</sup> was developed and launched at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP-24) related to providing and collecting data, tools and services for effective decision-making on addressing natural resource management, climate change and DRR (SO 2.4). In Azerbaijan and Serbia, capacities were strengthened to apply modern forest monitoring and assessment techniques to provide reliable and up-to-date information on forest resources. In Kyrgyzstan, capacities were improved for data gathering, interpretation and use for enhanced climate and DRR action to reduce poverty and increase food and nutrition security;
- innovative practices and integrated multisectoral approaches on climate change adaptation and mitigation, e.g. climate-smart agriculture (SO 2.1), were supported in Georgia and Ukraine to mitigate the impacts of climate change on agricultural production through piloting selected sets of Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and climate-smart agriculture practices during different stages of crop production. A status report of agroecology in the region was published;
- awareness-raising activities were conducted to promote Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) (SO 2.2) to strengthen climate resilience and safeguard agrobiodiversity in the region. In Uzbekistan, sustainable land management practices were improved in salt-affected and draught-prone agricultural landscapes through trainings in which advanced methods were disseminated through print, social media and television. In Ukraine, a National Soil Partnership was established with support from FAO;
- in the context of promoting the use of regular information and early warning systems (SO 5.2), FAO strengthened capacities on (i) FAO's methodology to assess direct loss attributed to disasters in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors under the Sendai and SDG monitoring frameworks; and (ii) on FAO's Open Foris Collect Earth tool and Agricultural Stress Index System (ASIS) for mapping and monitoring land degradation and drought, particularly involving Central Asian countries. In addition, capacities were strengthened on locust management and information systems, such as national early warning systems in Caucasus and

<sup>26</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 13 is to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

<sup>27</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 15 is to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

<sup>28</sup> For more information, see the 2019 Informal Consultation background note on FAO regional strategies for climate finance flow in Europe and Central Asia: GCF and GEF-7 at [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/reu/europe/documents/events2019/IC2019/IC\\_19\\_6\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/reu/europe/documents/events2019/IC2019/IC_19_6_en.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Support was provided for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Tajikistan.

<sup>30</sup> The *Policy analysis of nationally determined contribution in Europe and Central Asia* document is available at <http://www.fao.org/3/CA2684EN/ca2684en.pdf>.

Central Asian countries, and knowledge and capacity of the Forest Invasive Species Network for Europe and Central Asia (REUFIS) concerning forest invasive species were enhanced;

- FAO supported country preparedness for and management of effective responses to disasters and crises (SO 5.4) through a comprehensive review of the DRR systems (including legislation, policies, institutional frameworks, systems and services), carried out in ten countries,<sup>31</sup> and a regional consultation.

29. Various organizations were involved as partners in the work, depending on their technical areas. Key partners in supporting climate-smart agriculture included the global research partnership CGIAR, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), and members of the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture (GACSA). Cooperation has been strong related to the GCF proposals with other UN agencies, such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), development agencies such as Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), academia and the private sector (such as the Russian-Kyrgyz Development Fund in Kyrgyzstan). Strong collaboration with the CSOs included the promotion of agroecology and the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative<sup>32</sup> partnership, focused on supporting DRR in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

30. In the field of statistics, FAO supported capacity strengthening in the nationalization and monitoring of SDG indicators in member countries. Gender mainstreaming plays an important role both within the SDG nationalization and in the different climate-financing instruments and programming architectures, such as the GCF.

#### *Addressing food insecurity and reduction of all forms of malnutrition*

31. The priority on addressing food security and nutrition is mainstreamed in the different programmes<sup>33</sup> through support for the development of appropriate policies and programmes (SO 1.1), the building of evidence for informed decisions (SO 1.3), and the strengthening of capacities in implementing policies, strategies and programmes in the food security and nutrition domains (SO 1.4).

32. Efforts under this priority area focused mainly on SDG 2,<sup>34</sup> which calls for ending all forms of malnutrition. In this context, FAO also supported following up the implementation of the Rome Declaration on Nutrition, adopted at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN-2), and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

33. Highlights of results:

- support for the development of food security and nutrition policies, processes and programmes (SO 1.1) was provided through the activities implemented by the Forum on Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia<sup>35</sup> which carried out country-level online consultations and webinars on topics related to food security and nutrition, such as nutrition-sensitive food systems, social protection and school food and nutrition programmes;

<sup>31</sup> The ten countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

<sup>32</sup> For more information about the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative, please see <https://www.cadri.net/>.

<sup>33</sup> As also highlighted in the *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia 2019*, available online at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7153en/ca7153en.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 2 is to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

<sup>35</sup> For more information on the Forum on Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia, visit <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/eca>.

- evidence-based decisions (SO 1.3) were supported through the preparation of FAO's flagship regional publication, the *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2019*.<sup>36</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, the National Statistical Committee was supported in revising its methodology on food balance compilation to support monitoring SDG indicator 2.1.1 on the prevalence of malnutrition;
- with regard to food security and nutrition-related policy and programme implementation (SO 1.4), a new intergovernmental platform, the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform for Central Asia and Caucasus (RNPP) was developed<sup>37</sup> in collaboration with regional offices of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WHO and the World Food Programme (WFP). RNPP aims to strengthen the capacity of national governments. FAO promoted a better understanding of a food systems approach to nutrition and advocated a cross-sectoral approach to nutrition by organizing a symposium on Sustainable Food Systems and Nutrition Governance for Healthy Diets in Central Asia and the Caucasus, jointly with UNICEF and WHO.<sup>38</sup> FAO provided technical support to the Economic Cooperation Organization Regional Coordination Centre for Food Security (ECO-RCC).<sup>39</sup> In 2019, *Overview of Food Security in ECO Countries*, the first publication of the ECO-RCC, was produced with FAO's technical support.

34. FAO's work in this field supported the follow-up of ICN-2 through support provided to school food and nutrition programmes and education. Vulnerable rural families in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were trained on food security, better nutrition and culinary knowledge to improve their dietary behaviour. With regard to gender mainstreaming, the *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia 2018*<sup>40</sup> reported country-level prevalence of food insecurity among men and women for the first time in the region. This showed that a higher percentage of women in the Caucasus, Central Asia and European Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) were affected by food insecurity.

35. Key lessons learned<sup>41</sup> from the implementation of the work programme in the 2018–2019 biennium are:

- FAO's work in the region under its RIs responded to countries' development needs and national objectives related to rural poverty reduction, agrifood trade and market integration, natural resource management and climate change;
- the RIs have been a good basis for facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue and linking up with external processes. However, the Theory of Change for RIs would need to be further sharpened;
- RIs have served as a programmatic umbrella facilitating cross-sectoral SOs and holistic approaches and responding to regional priorities and achieving greater impact at the country level;

<sup>36</sup> The *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia 2019* is available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7153en/ca7153en.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> For more information on the launch of the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform, visit <https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/central-asia-and-caucasus-regional-nutrition-capacity-development-and-partnership>.

<sup>38</sup> For more information about this symposium, see <http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/ar/c/1191376/>.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the Economic Cooperation Organization Regional Coordination Centre for Food Security, visit the centre's website at <http://www.eco-rccfs.org/>.

<sup>40</sup> FAO. 2018. *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia 2018*. Budapest. 110 pp. <http://www.fao.org/3/CA2703EN/CA2703EN.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> FAO. 2020. *Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014–2019 in the Europe and Central Asia Region*. ERC/20/6. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc230en/nc230en.pdf>.

- larger impact was achieved when small projects were linked with major interventions (such as by creating the required knowledge and awareness to formulate larger programmes) or established networks;
- the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement and the increasing demand for support on climate change adaptation and mitigation and climate finance provide a strong foundation for the programme and results framework under RI-3;
- the repositioning of the UNDS has accelerated during the biennium, resulting in closer cooperation among UN agencies;
- the commitment of countries and UN organizations to respond to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development triggers strong demand for further support to the SDG nationalization processes in the region, as also discussed at the 2019 Informal Consultation.<sup>42</sup>

### III. Priority areas of work 2020–2021 and beyond

36. The implementation of the work programme in recent years, along with internal review processes<sup>43</sup> and the informal consultations<sup>44</sup> held with Members in 2019, have informed recommendations for revision of the priorities for the region. They have provided the basis for sharpening the conceptual approach of the RIs in order to increase the Organization's programmatic focus in Europe and Central Asia for 2020–2021.

37. The consultations acknowledged the positive developments towards enhanced rural livelihoods, economic growth and the resilience of agriculture-dependent communities, resulting from FAO's proactive role in delivering the expertise and mobilizing the resources needed to promote sustainable production and natural resource management while addressing the adverse impacts of climate change through efficient and viable mitigation and adaptation strategies.

38. Several external factors and trends in the region will continue to influence the transition to sustainable food and agriculture and food systems in the coming years:

- with nearly **one-third of its population residing in rural areas**, the region remains highly reliant on its food and agriculture sector to ensure food security and sustainable economic growth;
- **family farming and high land fragmentation** are the prevailing characteristics of the farm structures in most of the countries, dominating over corporate, large-scale farming. Low employment opportunities are among the driving factors for the rural–urban migration that is contributing to the steady decline of the skilled labour force, particularly youth,<sup>45</sup> in rural areas and to the overall ageing and feminization of the agriculture sector across the region;
- the region is witnessing an emerging trend towards **innovation and digitalization, public–private partnership and blended financing** within its food and agriculture landscape. Partnership-based solutions to the national development challenges are sought, with a view to addressing the marginalization of rural areas and the growing digital divide and to ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are not left behind. Digital technologies will play an increasing role, and information technology will expand. Digitalization in the agrifood system has the potential to play an important role in achieving food security;

<sup>42</sup> FAO. 2020. *Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014–2019 in the Europe and Central Asia Region*. ERC/20/6. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc230en/nc230en.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> FAO. 2020. *Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014–2019 in the Europe and Central Asia Region*. ERC/20/6. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc230en/nc230en.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> FAO. 2019. *Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia, Budapest, 16–17 May 2019, Minutes*. [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/reu/europe/documents/events2019/IC2019/Minutes\\_en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/reu/europe/documents/events2019/IC2019/Minutes_en.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> FAO. 2020. *Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming*. ERC/20/3. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc227e/nc227e.pdf>.

- the **climate-driven implications** for agricultural and rural development in the region are aggravating the state of agricultural production and environmental sustainability. Changing weather conditions resulting in extreme weather events, combined with pests and disease outbreaks, the degradation of the natural resources, unsustainable production practices and the reduction in biodiversity conservation and environmental restoration, are severely affecting the livelihoods and resilience of rural-based households;
- **food systems require structural transformation** to transition towards more sustainable models. This is a priority for the region that must be addressed through multidisciplinary approaches spanning issues related to nutrition, healthy diets and urban–rural linkages, among others, and through strengthened multi-stakeholder participation. Food systems are central to the sustainable development agenda;<sup>46</sup>
- the current food security situation across Europe and Central Asia is defined by the prevalence of **various forms of malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity**.<sup>47</sup> Unhealthy, non-nutritious diets are widespread among children and adults in the region, calling for transformative solutions in the agriculture, food systems and food policies aimed at promoting required behavioural change and shifts in food production and consumption patterns;
- **weak institutional framework and capacities** to regulate and address challenges related to food safety and quality as well as issues of animal and plant health and protection undermine food and agricultural productivity and hinder potential for agrifood trade development;
- as countries are focusing their efforts to **achieve the SDGs at national level, the ambition of the 2030 Agenda** is increasingly calling for integrated programming, policy coherence, cross-disciplinary synergy and multistakeholder coordination to maximize the impact of efforts and investment being geared towards sustainable development across the globe. The transformation of agriculture and food systems is key to support the achievement of multiple SDGs beyond SDG 2;
- the repositioning of the **United Nations development system** at national and regional levels, with the reinvigorated UN resident coordinator system and FAO’s value proposition at the regional level within the development system has helped to consolidate regional knowledge and technical capacity.<sup>48</sup>
- **COVID-19 pandemic** has generated a health and economic crisis across the globe. Issues of particular concerns to the region include socio-economic implications for the food systems in the region and risks for the food security and nutrition for the most vulnerable groups. Web Annex 6 presents the impact of COVID-19 on food and agriculture in Europe and Central Asia and FAO’s response.

39. The trends and drivers of change for 2022-25 and beyond were identified through a regional review conducted in 2020, which helped to revisit major FAO areas of action in the Europe and Central Asia region in the medium term. It provides an overview of the economic, social and environmental aspects, taking into account the heterogeneity of the Europe and Central Asia region, and a list of the main drivers of change, which will likely influence the medium-term prospects for the region.

40. Web Annex 7 presents a synthesis of the regional drivers of change and of the regional development context in which FAO will provide future support to countries.

<sup>46</sup> FAO. 2020. *Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia*. ERC/20/2. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc226en/nc226en.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> FAO. 2019. *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia 2019*. Structural Transformations of Agriculture for Improved Food Security, Nutrition and Environment. Part 3, Structural transformations of agriculture, food systems and food policy in Europe and Central Asia. Budapest, FAO. 104 pp. <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7153en/ca7153en.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> FAO. 2020. *Decentralized Offices Network*. ERC/20/4. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc228en/nc228en.pdf>.

### ***Priorities for FAO's work in the region***

41. In light of the challenges, trends and lessons learned, and considering the 2030 Agenda as the overall framework for action, the core mandate and functions of FAO, and the renewed emphasis on leaving no one behind, there are four key priorities of importance for FAO's work across Europe and Central Asia for 2020–2021 and beyond.

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

42. Support must aim at income generation for smallholders and employment opportunities for women and youth. It requires embarking on scalable innovations and digital solutions based on innovative technology and enabling environment to facilitate the dissemination of data and knowledge and to support equal access to benefits of innovations for smallholders.<sup>49</sup> Assistance focuses on small holders and family farms to increase market access and to improve rural livelihoods. Specific emphasis will be placed on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable rural population groups, including 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 WTO commitments and promote value chain development***

43. The Organization's support in developing and promoting sustainable and efficient food systems and nutrition-sensitive value chains will continue in the region, along with assistance directed to unlock and realize market potential in the local, regional and interregional domains, as well as to facilitate institutional frameworks and capacities for food safety, animal and plant health and protection in compliance with international trade agreements and global sanitary and phytosanitary standards. The CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition will be a key reference document to address food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms within a food systems perspective in the coming years.

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

44. A key focus of FAO's work will be on enhancing the implementation of the FAO climate change strategy at the regional level, including mobilizing financial resources through GCF/GEF and promoting innovative and integrated approaches, such as climate-smart agriculture, agroecology<sup>50</sup>, as well as sustainable models and good practices for maintaining biodiversity and strengthening FAO's work in GIAHS. Promoting sustainable natural resources management practices and increasing resilience support in agriculture, forestry and other land-use sectors are key in climate change adaptation and mitigation. In addition, 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 the review of the nationally determined contributions.

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<sup>49</sup> FAO. 2020. *Innovation and digitalization as catalyst to transform the food and agriculture systems (ERC Special Event)*.

<sup>50</sup> For more on agroecology, see *The 10 Elements of Agroecology Guiding the Transition to Sustainable Food and Agriculture* at <http://www.fao.org/3/I9037EN/i9037en.pdf>.

#### ***IV. Addressing food insecurity and reducing all forms of malnutrition***

45. 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. Reducing food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition requires a holistic approach and mainstreaming actions in the ongoing programmes of the region.

46. FAO priorities for the next biennium and beyond also embody the renewed corporate emphasis on such efforts as leaving no one behind, the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative, promoting innovative approaches and modern science and technologies (including digital solutions and strengthening partnerships), and following a food systems transformations approach that links sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food security, nutrition and resilience.

#### ***Programming and operationalization to address regional priorities***

47. To facilitate the region's response to the priorities, FAO continues to reinforce its programmatic framework and corporate results-based management mechanisms, bolstering and consolidating the Organization's technical assistance to Members in a focused and results-oriented manner aimed at enhanced delivery and tangible impact. FAO's current framework for Europe and Central Asia is underpinned by the three revised RIs, addressing the regional priorities and new challenges for 2020-2021 and beyond:

- Empowering smallholders, family farms and youth, facilitating rural livelihoods and poverty reduction (RI-1)
- Transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration (RI-2)
- Managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity in a changing climate (RI-3)

48. The RIs provide the programmatic framework and platform for concerned actors in the region to engage and contribute towards the common objectives by exploring and enabling innovative, high-impact solutions. The multidisciplinary toolset operated under each Initiative serves to design integrated programmes that target the complex interplay of the interconnected development challenges in the national and regional contexts. Strengthening the sharing of knowledge and evidence-based support, FAO developed the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, which aims to increase impact to achieve the SDGs. Emphasis will be made on strengthening multistakeholder partnerships, including with the private sector.

49. FAO will continue leveraging its three RIs in Europe and Central Asia with some adjustment in the areas of emphasis, as elaborated below, to guide its work in the region during the 2020–2021 biennium.

#### ***Areas of emphasis in 2020–2021***

##### ***Regional Initiative 1 on Empowering smallholders, family farms and youth, facilitating rural livelihoods and poverty reduction***

50. RI-1 will reinforce its support for smallholders, women and youth in rural areas of the region, increasingly leveraging a strong, people-centric approach in policy and community-level programmatic interventions. The Initiative acts to strengthen the capacities, competitiveness and livelihood resilience of farmers, in view of their pivotal role as change agents for economic and social transformation within the agriculture-dependent rural communities. Its contribution advances countries' progress on SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 10 and SDG 17.



51. The first component of the Initiative **supports policy development and innovative practices for increased sustainable agricultural production**. Planned results include:

- the competitiveness of smallholders and family farmers is increased through the promotion of integrated policies and innovative, holistic practices for the sustainable production of animals, fish and plants and the management of forests and forest products in rural areas (SO 2.1);
- support is accelerated to increase income generation and diversification opportunities on- and off- farm based on the sustainable food systems, nutrition-sensitive, and climate-smart approaches, and agroecology (SO 2.1);
- capacities are strengthened in biodiversity conservation, integrated pest management and the efficient use of genetic and natural resources (SO 2.1); and
- the uptake of adaptation and mitigation strategies and risk management practices tailored to the region's context is promoted to reduce farmers' vulnerability to climate-driven shocks (SO 5.1; SO 5.3).

52. Under its second component, the Initiative facilitates a holistic programmatic approach regarding integrated community development aimed at the **improvement of rural livelihoods and enhanced access to natural resources**. Planned results include:

- farmers' entrepreneurial skills and market participation are enhanced to foster local rural development initiatives towards inclusive growth and economic empowerment in rural areas (SO 3.4);
- sustainable and efficient production and market chains are developed, aimed at connecting farmers to producer associations and consumers through short value chains, school feeding programmes and other opportunities for local procurement and territorial market promotion (SO 4.3); and
- equitable access to natural resources is enhanced for farmers to address challenges posed by land fragmentation in the region. This is done through assistance in land consolidation, land banking and agricultural land market development management, in accordance with VGGT (SO 3.1).

53. Specific attention is given to the needs of rural women and youth, adhering to the leave no one behind principle (SO 3.1; SO 3.4). This will result in the inclusion in national policy dialogues of the steadily rising rural–urban migration trends and the ongoing feminization of the agriculture sector in the region. In addition, vulnerable population groups should have increased access to finance and productive assets, decent rural employment options and social protection measures, including Cash+, participatory guarantee schemes and community-supported agriculture (SO 3.1; SO 3.3).

54. The Initiative is increasingly engaging with rural institutions, including extension and rural advisory services and vocational schools, as well as with national authorities involved in the promotion of innovation and digitalization in the agriculture sector, resulting in upgrading and strengthening the available channels for the dissemination of knowledge and information to farmers, at the country level (SO 3.1). Aligned with the framework of the UNDF 2019–2028, the planned programme of work will accelerate engagement towards new partnerships, joint actions and tailored investments for the development of smallholders across the region.

### ***Regional Initiative 2 on Transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration***

55. RI-2 operates at policy level, with the objective of enhancing institutional capacities across Europe and Central Asia to maximize the potential of trade and markets, including through digital

solutions, and to increase the potential of small- and medium-scale agrifood producers by leveraging inclusive and sustainable food systems. Aligned with the 2030 Agenda, its programme of work directly contributes to SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 12 and SDG 17.

56. Under its first component, the Initiative aims at **strengthening the capacity of countries to understand and apply WTO trade agreements, agrifood trade policies, market access and integration**. Planned results include:

- increased alignment of domestic trade- and market-oriented policy interventions with global, regional and bilateral trade agreements is supported (SO 4.1);
- knowledge products are developed and disseminated, including macro- and microeconomic reviews of agricultural sectors; analysis of market trends, trade policy changes and market access requirements; and agricultural outlook and policy analysis (SO 4.4);
- consistent domestic, regional and global investment strategies and price and market information systems, supportive of sustainable food systems, are supported to facilitate entrepreneurship opportunities for smallholders, family farms and agrifood businesses (SO 4.4).

57. The Initiative's second component aims at enhancing national capacities for **increased compliance with global food safety and quality standards, including sanitary, phytosanitary, and animal health and welfare regulations**, as set out by the Codex Alimentarius, the IPPC, and OIE. Planned results include:

- increased involvement of countries in the revision and development of standards governing food safety, animal and plant health and the use of the standards, through regional expert networks is supported (SO 4.2);
- awareness is increased and regulatory frameworks and capacities are strengthened related to transboundary, endemic and emerging pests and diseases; food safety hazards; antimicrobial resistance, including prevention and protection measures; and enhanced laboratory diagnostics and surveillance systems, both by public institutions and value chain operators (SO 4.2); and
- thematic events and activities are organized for the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH), World Food Safety Day, World Antibiotic Awareness Week and other key occasions.

58. The third component supports the **promotion of inclusive and efficient agrifood value chains, increasing opportunities for access to more diverse domestic and export markets**, by enabling inclusive, efficient and sustainable food systems that are tailored to healthy diets, consumer preferences and rural ecosystems. Planned results include:

- nutrition-sensitive value chains (including short value chains), local and territorial markets, rural–urban linkages and regional and international markets are enhanced (SO 4.2);
- national capacities on food loss and waste reduction and prevention are strengthened through enhanced regulatory frameworks and awareness among government policy-makers, producers, manufacturers and consumers (SO 4.2); and
- effective strategies are promoted for the development of niche products, including geographical indications, organic products and local food products with local markets and export potential, with a view to expanding and diversifying market opportunities for small- and medium-scale agrifood producers (SO 4.2).

59. Paying due attention to addressing issues of malnutrition and diet-related non-communicable diseases in the region as a cross-cutting priority, the Initiative will contribute towards increasing knowledge within country-specific and regional contexts, including through the review and analysis of national food security and nutrition policies, dietary changes, food systems and the cost of diets. By addressing many of the integral elements of food systems, the Initiative will play a pivotal role in promoting a sustainable food systems lens and engagement with key stakeholders, including with the regional food security and nutrition bodies. The Initiative will also accelerate the development of

policies, interventions and investments that address the root causes of obesity and undernourishment and enable healthy and nutritious diets for all (SO 1.4).

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

60. RI-3 responds to sustainability challenges faced by the agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishery sectors across the region with a multidisciplinary and holistic programmatic framework. Its analytical, policy and capacity development assistance components aim at promoting the sustainable management of natural resources and climate-resilient food systems, ecosystems and rural livelihoods, and it contributes to countries' achievements under the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 6, SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 14 and SDG 15.

61. Under its first component, the Initiative continues **enhancing policy alignment, coordination and cooperation** through mainstreaming sustainable natural resource management, climate change resilience and DRR into national developmental strategies. Planned results include:

- consideration of the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability at all levels of decision-making in the Members is enhanced to leverage the potential of region-specific, nature-based solutions. This includes the provision of strategic and policy guidance for mainstreaming of the nature-based solutions in the agriculture sector, as well as biodiversity conservation, restoration and rural livelihood diversification to foster countries' transitions to sustainable agriculture and food systems (SO 2.4);
- agriculture, forestry, fisheries and climate change governance are enhanced, in line with international commitments (SO 2.3); and
- national agro-environmental regulations are improved to enhance the sustainability of agriculture-based production and minimize its carbon footprint (SO 2.2).

62. The Initiative's second component is designed to assist countries in **adopting methodologies, tools and services for effective evidence-based decision-making**. Planned results include:

- national capacities in statistics and data analysis to quantify and measure the occurring shifts and developments are strengthened, enabling countries to conduct policy monitoring and reporting under key multilateral governance processes, including the 2030 Agenda and SDGs; the Paris Agreement and nationally determined contributions; the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and its land degradation neutrality; the Sendai Framework on DRR and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (SO 2.4); and
- national agriculture census methodology, aligned with the SDG indicators and the collection of gender-disaggregated data across all sectors, is enhanced (SO 2.4).

63. Under its third component, the Initiative will increase its **support to develop countries' capacities on climate change adaptation and mitigation and the sustainable management of natural resources**, including forests, soil and water. Planned results include:

- the resilience of biodiversity in the region is enhanced through the leveraging of ecosystem-based approaches, including agroecology and GIAHS, as well as scientific and technological innovations. Countries will receive support on sustainable management and conservation of genetic resources, the development of resilient local seed systems, the promotion of agroforestry, the sustainable management of drylands, soil health improvement, integrated water resources management and effective restoration practices (SO 2.2); and
- preparedness, contingency planning and post-disaster response, in the context of natural hazards, climate change-induced shocks, drought risk and outbreaks of pests and diseases, are improved through technical advice and training on risk monitoring, early warning systems, agrometeorological services and damage and loss assessment (SO 5.1; SO 5.2; SO 5.4).

64. The Initiative dedicates substantial support to Members' efforts in mobilizing resources at the scale required to deliver on their national and global commitments. Since its endorsement, the Initiative has been working towards unlocking countries' access to climate financing windows such as GCF and GEF and other instruments for development finance. Responding to the growing demand, this support will be emphasized in the new biennium. Through increased engagement with the diverse scope of partners and facilitation of platforms for exchanges and collaboration, the Initiative aims to accelerate holistic dialogue, grasping the complex nexus of developmental issues and fostering multidimensional partnerships.

#### *Hand-in-Hand Initiative*

65. The RIs will utilize the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative to promote social and technical innovations among countries in the region and thus increase knowledge-sharing and investment in the agriculture sector in order to increase the impact at the national level in achieving SDG 1, SDG 2 and other SDGs. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative will use evidence-based support, benefiting from the experience of high-income countries related to data collection, analysis, policies, investment, advocacy and partnership.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> FAO. 2020. *FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: a New Approach*. ERC/20/12 Rev.1. <http://www.fao.org/3/nc347en/nc347en.pdf>.