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Organización
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Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

THIRTIETH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Gyeongju, Republic of Korea, 27 September – 1 October 2010

Agenda Item 8

STRENGTHENING THE LINKAGES BETWEEN TECHNICAL COMMISSIONS AND THE APRC

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I. Introduction

1. The FAO regional office in Bangkok serves as the secretariat of five Asia-Pacific Regional Technical Commissions (RTCs). These statutory bodies of the Organization deal with agricultural statistics, forestry, fisheries, animal production and health, and plant protection.

<p>Agricultural statistics Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (APCAS)</p>	<p>Established 1963. Membership currently comprises 25 countries. Members review recent developments in national agricultural statistical systems, standards and methodologies, and exchange ideas on the state of food and agricultural statistics in the region. Discussions result in recommendations for FAO and countries for follow-up actions</p>
<p>Forestry Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC)</p>	<p>Established 1949. Membership currently stands at 33 countries. Active participation of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector is encouraged.</p>
<p>Fisheries Asia-Pacific Fisheries Commission (APFIC)</p>	<p>Established 1949. Presently has a membership of 20 countries. The Commission actively networks with members, regional fisheries organizations and other stakeholders in fisheries in the region on key fisheries issues and regional aspects of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.</p>
<p>Animal production and health Animal Production and Health Commission for Asia and the Pacific (APHCA)</p>	<p>Established in 1975. Present membership stands at 18 countries. The Commission promotes the Asia Dairy Network and builds capacity in member countries in small-scale dairy and meat processing, animal breeding and genetics, animal traceability and animal health.</p>
<p>Plant protection Asia and Pacific Plant Protection Commission (APPPC)</p>	<p>Established 1956. Membership now comprises 24 countries. The Commission is actively participating in development of international and regional standards for phytosanitary measures. It also coordinates a regional response to plant protection issues (pest management, pesticides and transboundary pests). The Commission is active in the process of capacity building in the implementation of international and regional phytosanitary standards.</p>

2. These commissions have varying degrees of participation by observers comprising other related regional organizations, NGOs and the private sector. The commissions have a unique ability to synthesize the opinions and recommendations of member countries within the region and to consolidate opinions on issues of importance to the various sectors through their regular sessions and inter-sessional activities (e.g. workshops, studies, status reports, projects). Some of the achievements of the RTCs related to these functions over the past ten years are described below.

<p>APCAS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Harmonization of statistical methodologies and terms/concepts to improve the ability of countries to submit data that can be internationally compared - Regional assessment of data quality and availability - Capacity building to promote national food and agriculture statistics
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and meta-data - Initiation of a regional network for data exchange
APFC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formulation of the Code of Practice for Forest Harvesting in Asia-Pacific through a comprehensive, participatory process spanning more than two years - Regional forest policy studies on timely topics of concern in the region (e.g. impacts of logging bans, incentives for forest plantation development, removing constraints to private-sector investment in forestry, best practices in forest management) - Coordination of the Asia-Pacific Forest Sector Outlook Study (covering more than 25 countries, 15 thematic studies, synthesis reports, policy briefs and capacity-building workshops) - Establishment and operation of the Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network and the Asia-Pacific Forest Policy Think Tank
APFIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biennial reviews of status and trends, information dissemination and awareness raising of emerging regional issues in the sector - Capacity-building workshops in international codes and instruments, e.g. FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; Port State Measures; Combating Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported Fishing - Technical support to and liaison with inter-governmental regional fishery organizations and economic cooperation organizations in fisheries and aquaculture - Regional advocacy and provision of reliable information on the sector for the Asia-Pacific region
APHCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical capacity building at national and regional levels. Training courses and workshops have been organized as required and approved by the members. These include a series of WTO-SPS workshops, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and Other Prion Diseases workshops and working group meetings, Feed and Food Safety workshops, and Animal Disease Diagnosis and Control workshops (Brucellosis, Bluetongue, BSE/Prion Diseases) - Asia Dairy Network, small-scale dairy and meat processing, animal breeding and genetics, animal traceability, etc. are the activities on animal production that have been prioritized by member countries at the Commission's recent annual sessions - Technical Cooperation between Developing Countries facility, which allows the exchange of expertise amongst APHCA countries - APHCA emergency fund, which can be accessed by member countries in case of an emergency.
APPPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional standards for phytosanitary measures - Capacity building to promote the implementation of the international/regional standards for phytosanitary measures - Promotion of community-based Integrated Pest Management through the Farmer Field School approach - Coordination and collaboration in transboundary crop pest control - Promotion of pesticide risk reduction and implementation of "Code of conduct on the distribution and use of pesticides" and international treaties (e.g. Rotterdam Convention)

3. The 29th Asia-Pacific Regional Conference (APRC) requested FAO to strengthen the linkage between FAO RTCs and the APRC. This information paper is the Secretariat's response to this request.

II. Strengths of the RTCs in guiding the work of RAP, FAO and the APRC

4. RTCs provide a unique opportunity to put forward proposals that may contribute to the further development of sectoral work in the Asia-Pacific region. RTCs' recommendations guide the decisions on new programme initiatives and for setting priorities and directions for member countries and FAO's future actions.
5. RTCs are often able to do things that FAO (and the member countries on their own) would have difficulty doing (e.g. APFC has initiated the establishment and functioning of the Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network).
6. Due to the specific regional focus of the RTCs, endorsement lends greater legitimacy and "ownership" over such things as regional policy studies, outlook studies and development of codes of practice. An important strength of the RTCs is the strong linkage they provide to key government policy makers in the region. This provides the opportunity for effective two-way influence, both from members to FAO and from FAO to members through normative initiatives to policy making in the region.
7. The FAO RTCs have a regional and sub-sectoral focus. This means that the RTCs can convene member countries, particularly their technical officers, to build consensus on approaches to issues that are relevant to the context of the RAP region.
8. The RTCs are also in a unique position to mobilize regional inter-governmental organizations, many of which find coordination amongst themselves difficult to achieve, but relatively easy within the 'neutral forum' context of the RTC with a secretariat housed inside an FAO RAP. This enables the RTC to have an impact beyond what would normally be achieved by commissions working directly with members and in isolation from the other processes that are being initiated by other inter-governmental organizations that have a similar or overlapping membership.
9. The RTCs have a unique ability to provide technical sub-sectoral advice to economic cooperation (e.g. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations – ASEAN; and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation – SAARC). Being based around economic integration, these bodies and their technical working groups are often faced with strong national interests and priorities, which are difficult to harmonize at a regional level. FAO RTCs provide an effective advisory function to such bodies, offering neutral advice of a high technical quality to inform the decision making in working groups. This role is of increasing importance, following the FAO reform and the increased focus on FAO engagement with the regional economic cooperations.
10. In this respect, they are an integral part of FAO's knowledge network, making an important contribution to the work of FAO, and underpin its regional activities by providing direction on priorities and issues of concern. This then fulfils another important function of RTCs: reducing duplication and improving coordination in the sub-sectors for which they are competent.

III. Why the RTCs are representative of the region and their sub-sectors

11. The APRC might question whether the findings and recommendations of the RTCs are representative of the RAP region as a whole, because the membership varies between each of the five RTCs, as not all APRC members are members of each RTC. The implication of varying membership is that each session of an RTC represents the consensus of its membership, but not necessarily the consensus of all the member countries of the APRC.
12. It should be noted, however, that the RTCs have a sub-sectoral focus and membership is open to all members. Membership of a specific RTC generally indicates specific national

priorities or interests and the level of importance of the sub-sector to those particular member countries (e.g. APFIC membership represents >90 percent of aquaculture and >60 percent of global fishery production; APFC membership represents >99 percent of forest cover in the region). This indicates that both country and sub-sectoral coverage are comprehensive and can be considered representative of the regional priority.

13. A possible exception to this is that most of the RTCs have limited representation from Small Island Developing States (e.g. FAO Sub-Regional Office for the Pacific – SAPA sub-region as well as Maldives). Again, it can be noted that membership remains open: member countries with an interest in the sector may apply for membership. Some of the RTCs also have memberships of countries from outside the region, but even so, their membership in an RTC reflects their territories in the region. Where a large number of countries may not be represented within a geographical sub-region (e.g. the Pacific sub-region), then there may be justification for looking to a non-FAO sub-regional arrangement as being a competent body under an arrangement such as a Memorandum of Understanding.

14. In cases where member countries are not geographically represented in the region and/or have a record of non-participation in the Commission's work, a Commission might consider requesting their members to review their interest in membership. APFIC recently requested several members to reaffirm their membership after they had not participated in three consecutive sessions. Interestingly, the three members reaffirmed their desire to remain members. This indicates a reluctance to withdraw from RTC agreements, since membership without participation incurs no costs to non-participating members, and member countries may wish to renew their active participation at a later date.

IV. Challenges to the RTCs to adapt to FAO reform and changing demand for Regional FAO Commissions

15. Under the FAO reform, the APRC has been given an enhanced role in its ability to make decisions for the region and have these communicated to the FAO Conference. In this way, the decisions and recommendations of the APRC will become a more important decision-making tool in guiding the programme of work in the RAP region and particularly in guiding the work of the FAO regional and sub-regional offices.

16. The RTCs are continually challenged by financial resourcing for their work. This partially reflects the uncertainty that surrounds their function in the broader structure of FAO, the FAO regional conferences and the FAO Global Technical Committees. Despite this, several of the RTCs are able to demonstrate the relevance of their work to the region and this is recognized by FAO, donors and member countries in the form of financial or in-kind support to their activities. For example:

APCAS	Regional Data Exchange System was funded in the early and mid-2000s. Funding comes principally from FAO's regular programme and projects.
APFIC	2008-2009 cash and in-kind contributions for members and partner regional organizations totalled US\$482 000, principally related to co-financing of activities by member countries, projects or other partners, which recognize the relevance of the Commission's workshops to their own programmes. The FAO regular programme remains a core resource and is used to leverage additional cofinance.
APFC	US\$400 000 in cash contributions were made by non-FAO donors and partners to the Asia-Pacific Forestry Sector Outlook Study, with

	a similar level of in-kind contributions from APFC members and partners. Cash and in-kind contributions in support of activities and the functioning of the APFC's Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network during 2008-2009 totalled approximately US\$150 000
APHCA	Annual contribution (as membership fees) of US\$90 488 from the 18 member countries (year 2010) and support from the RAP regular programme are the main sources of funds. In addition, a large number of activities are co-funded in partnership with other agencies such as OIE and USAID
APPPC	US\$24 000 in cash contributions and about US\$30 000 in-kind annual contributions have been made by one member since 2007. A mandatory financial contribution mechanism will commence from 2010.

17. Therefore, there is clear evidence of “buy-in” to the work of the RAP RTCs, from a variety of sources, each reflecting the nature of the membership and work of the RTC. It must also be recognized that FAO provides considerable resourcing to the RTCs in the form of staff time supporting the secretariats, and a significant proportion of the operational costs. This remains a core requirement for the effective functioning of the RTCs (Articles VI and XIV) and without which the additional value-adding and co-financing could not be accessed.

18. Depending upon the type of RTC (Article XIV or Article VI), the members already have in-kind obligations (such as the coverage of costs of participation in a session, and in-kind costs associated with the convening of sessions, Executive Committee Meetings and technical workshops). In some cases, a member country may have difficulty in participating in the work of a Commission. On a case-by-case basis, and based on the principle of inclusivity, FAO tries to be flexible in its approach to such situations. The priority of the RTCs is to ensure that member countries are able to have their say as an important aspect of building regional consensus. For those Commissions that have requested feedback from their membership, the response so far has been that the work of that Commission is valued in the region.

19. Taking an overly inflexible line on the issue of resourcing to the RTC (e.g. through a mandatory members' contribution) is most likely to result in the closure or “hibernation” of that particular Commission. It is therefore important to consider the question of whether closure of a Commission would detract from the work of the FAO regional and sub-regional offices, or free up staff time and resources to be directed at issues identified directly by the APRC and the FAO Global Technical Committees. If this were judged to be the case, then the ability of the APRC to adequately cover the different sub-sectors of agriculture (e.g. crops, irrigation, livestock, forestry, fisheries, agricultural statistics) must also be questioned, since this would become the absolute vehicle for priority setting in the RAP region, a task the APRC would be unlikely to be able to perform, considering its already overloaded agenda.

20. Similarly, the Agendas of the FAO Global Technical Committees are rarely, if ever, able to address regional difference or specifics. Certainly there is a balancing out across the regions and this may sometimes be counter-productive to addressing an issue that is rather specific to a region. The RTCs provide a regional vehicle that is capable of such regional specificities.

V. Opportunities to link RTC to the work of the FAO Global Technical Committees

21. The RTCs offer an effective mechanism to address specific sub-sectoral technical matters, raise awareness, and build capacity and understanding. The RTCs also offer a means to mobilize

their membership to endorse or implement recommendations (e.g. of the FAO Global Technical Committees).

22. Unlike the APRC, the RTCs may have a specific link to an FAO Global Technical Committee, with clear reporting functions, or representation in steering committees (e.g. APFC regularly draws regional issues to the attention of the Committee on Forestry thereby shaping its agenda. APFC is also represented in the steering committee which is an important element of a successful two-way communication.) Some of the RTCs do not currently report to the FAO Technical Committees, and care is needed to avoid overlaps in decision making. The work of the Global Technical Committees is also directly translated into the considerations of the regional RTCs. The RTCs can therefore be considered as a bridge into the region regarding the recommendations and work of the FAO Global Technical Committees. There would need to be some distinction in function if this was to be pursued. The first consideration would be that the RTCs would focus more on awareness raising and capacity building, with their memberships based on the global context and considerations of the FAO global committees.

23. The feedback of some RTCs to the FAO Technical Committees is currently limited, but there is still direct contribution to the work of FAO headquarters technical departments by providing “local knowledge and considerations”, which informs programmes and planning. This has resulted in recognition of regional priorities and enhanced allocations, and underlines the importance of APRC’s endorsement of the work and recommendations of the RTCs.

24. The RTCs also have an excellent opportunity to convey their sub-sectoral regional work and members’ concerns in other intergovernmental fora (e.g. APFC reporting to the United Nations Forum on Forests; APFIC reporting to the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea). This is particularly the case where agriculture sectoral issues may be under-represented or require a stronger regional voice. Examples of this are: contribution to regional and international standards-setting, climate change fora, environmental and conservation fora, energy development, pollution, and water management. Although FAO is also able to do this on behalf of members, the scope of the APRC is such that in many cases it is unable to provide the technical details and background that can be mobilized by the regional technical commissions.

25. There is an opportunity to add value to this process through the APRC by considering recommendations of the RTCs as being broadly reflective of the issues of the region and therefore worthy of either: specific consideration of an issue by the APRC, or the APRC’s general endorsement of the finding and recommendations of a session of an RTC.

26. Equally however, under Article XIV and to a lesser extent Article VI mandates, the RTCs are also responsible for the review and tracking of regional issues, status and trends in their sub-sectors and galvanizing action with their memberships to address these.

27. Several of the RTCs also work directly with members in developing regional normative agreements (e.g. Code of Practice for Forest Harvesting in Asia-Pacific; regional standards for phytosanitary measures) where no global equivalent or consensus on such agreements exists.

28. A challenge will be to find a means to adequately incorporate the work of the RTC into the global agenda of the FAO Technical Committees. This could be achieved by an agreement to form “regional working groups” under the RTCs on issues identified by the FAO Technical Committees, and particularly if there were issues that were specific to a particular region or regions (e.g. the APPPC facilitates an annual expert consultation on the review of draft International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs), to provide regional inputs to the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Secretariat in the process of development of ISPMs).

29. Equally, the RTC’s may also broaden the scope their current work to better align with the work of FAO. For example, food safety and nutrition are not directly covered by any of the existing Regional Technical Commissions. APHCA and APPPC might consider broadening their

coverage to include food safety, particularly in view of the strong link between zoonoses and food safety on the one side and pesticide use and the safety of the residues in food on the other.

VI. Ways to strengthen the linkage of the RTCs to the APRC

30. The APRC has been given an enhanced mandate to communicate regional priorities to the FAO Conference. However, the current working of the APRC means that it tends to be confined to a relatively restricted agenda that typically emphasizes terrestrial crop and animal based agriculture. The broader dimensions of forestry, fisheries, statistics and the water sector are typically under-represented or have not been covered over the past decade.

31. There are also more detailed aspects of the agriculture sector (such as regional agreement on pesticide use or agricultural statistics) that may be of a level of detail that the APRC is unable to cover under the time and scope limitations of its agenda, but which are the specific mandate of an RTC. Although the APRC is now empowered to report to the FAO Conference, there remains a disconnection between the APRC and the FAO Global Technical Committees in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

32. Should the decision be that the mandate of the RTCs to inform the APRC be strengthened, then the mechanism for addressing this must be specifically developed. This could be achieved through some or all of the following mechanisms or reforms:

- Key recommendations of the biennial session of an RTC should be communicated to the APRC for its endorsement/concurrence.
- The APRC could recognize the competence of an RTC in a sub-sector and consider its recommendations to be regional priorities, informing the work and priorities of FAO field programmes in that sub-sector. The RTCs may not implement projects directly, but would inform FAO of the regional needs and how these might be best addressed through the field programme.
- The APRC would acknowledge the ability of the RTCs to report to the FAO Global Technical Committees on their sub-sectoral area of competence.
- Where an FAO member country is not a member of a Commission, yet has a specific interest in the work of a Commission, that member country may join in the activity (as full member, or observer). All the RTCs are able to accommodate observers and interested members under their existing agreements.
- There is the option for Commissions which have not done so to undertake a performance review to assess their function and relevance and to make recommendations on improved effectiveness and responsiveness, and proposed mechanisms to inform APRC and FAO headquarters Technical Committees. Several of the RTCs have already undertaken auto-evaluations (e.g. APFC) or initiated a review and reform of function (e.g. APFIC) and may also have a procedure for monitoring their work (e.g. through an Executive Committee).