



IDENTIFICATION OF THE TECHNICAL THEME OF THE FORTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE ECA

(prepared by the ECA Secretariat)

Background

At the 39/4 meeting of the Executive Committee (the ExCom) in September 2022, the ECA Secretariat presented a list of proposed technical themes for the Forty-third Session of the ECA, submitted by countries of Europe and Central Asia in response to the call.¹ The ExCom agreed that REU technical officers would review the proposals and on their basis develop three proposals, considering that proposals with similar contents could be merged and themes that were discussed at recent ERC or ECA sessions should be avoided. The resulting three proposals would be presented to the ExCom, accompanied by relevant background information.

REU's technical officers reviewed the submissions and developed three proposals for the technical theme for the ECA Session, along with related sub-topics. The proposals are presented in Annex 1.

The ExCom is invited to:

- review and discuss the proposed themes for the Forty-third Session of the ECA, and provide comments, as needed
- identify a recommended theme for the Session.

¹ https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/reu/europe/documents/Events_2022/excom39_4/43eca.pdf

Annex 1. REU's proposals for the technical theme of the Forty-third Session of the ECA**REU PROPOSAL 1**

Title of the proposed main theme: Trade diversification for inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems

Description/justification:

This decade, characterized by global crises caused by health (COVID-19), economic (financial crisis), social (war) and environmental (drought) causes, make food import-dependent countries reluctant to rely on foreign suppliers of food products and agricultural inputs to guarantee national food security. Countries and influential constituencies within many countries are increasingly advocating in favour of food self-sufficiency, food sovereignty, and trade protectionist policies. However, market diversification, including exports and imports, improves nutrition and health outcomes through expanding consumer choices of diverse, nutritious foods all year-round, and by offsetting seasonal and crises-related scarcity. The underlying theme of this proposal is that market diversification strengthens the resilience of agrifood systems to global crises.

- Creating opportunities for trade diversification and value addition is important element of Regional Priority 2, covered under Regional Initiative 2, as reflected in the ERC priority paper. In addition, Regional Initiative 1 inputs are required to analyse linkages of trade with vulnerable groups, and of Regional Initiative 3 for current (drought) and foreseen climate-change related shocks.
- BN5 - Transparent Markets and Traded

This proposal is related to the below proposal submitted by a member country:

Proposal 6. Sharing best practices on market diversification policies for exports and imports of agro-food products.

Sub-topics for the discussions of the Commission:

Title of the proposed subtopic 1: Food self-sufficiency and protectionism in times of crises

Description/justification:

In recent years, countries across the world have become reluctant to rely on food trade to safeguard national food security in times of crises. Countries are looking into food self-sufficiency and protectionism to provide the answers. However, an agrifood systems approach is called for that provides a holistic approach to exploring the negative consequences that these strategies may have for society, the environment and the economy at large. Issues that must be addressed include not only theoretical underpinnings, but also the existing domestic policy space that is available taking into consideration existing multilateral and bilateral trade and investment agreements and commitments. This paper is meant as a contribution for building trust and credibility on trade, notably through international cooperation. Recommendations will be made for fostering and keeping international trade in food and fertilizers open in times of crises.

Title of the proposed subtopic 2: Import diversification**Description/justification:**

Import diversification is key for healthy diets. However, many countries in the region are hampered not only by self-imposed border policies that constrain import diversification, but also by structural barriers. Horizontal (import sources) and vertical (product variety) policies that foster import diversification are explored, as well as existing capacities and needs for technical assistance, including digital solutions.

Title of the proposed subtopic 3: Export diversification**Description/justification:**

Institutional constraints to horizontal and vertical export diversification, both at home and abroad (including tariff and non-tariff barriers) hamper export diversification. Evidence-based public and private sector strategies, policies and market governance mechanisms that promote the diversification of exports are explored, including the development of sustainable value chains. The paper explores technical capacities in countries, their needs for technical assistance, and the role that the FAO can play in this regard.

REU PROPOSAL 2

Title of the proposed main theme: Land-water governance nexus

Description/justification:

The topic on the land-water governance nexus aims to explore in an integrated way all the challenges linked to the sustainable use of land and water resources in the region. Land degradation and water stress are among the main issues at the regional level and, although all countries in the region are members of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, in most of them the implementation of the convention still presents challenges. When it comes to water management, extreme events such as droughts and flash floods have become a reality in all countries, showing that proper water management and governance is a must, and it has to be done in an integrated way, together with sustainable land management and proper governance of land tenure. The innovative perspective is to connect these topics at a higher level.

A regional approach for policy guidance and governance structures for land and water is necessary to ensure sustainable use of these natural resources. It would also contribute to a more resilient food system in the region, allowing countries to strengthen their production in a sustainable way and share good practices, experiences and lessons learned.

This proposal is related to the below proposals submitted by member countries:

Proposal 1. Smart agriculture for sustainable food systems and inclusive rural development

Proposal 4. Addressing the challenge of increasing water shortages and scarcity in agriculture to transform agri-food systems in Europe and Central Asia.

Sub-topics for the discussions of the Commission

Title of the proposed subtopic 1: Integrated water resources management

Description/justification:

A number of countries in Europe and Central Asia are characterized as water stressed. Increasing pressure on limited water resources has diminished the availability of water for sustainable development of agri-food systems, leading to fierce competition for water among all sectors and affecting water, energy, and food security, as well as land use and tenure systems. Acknowledging their commitment to Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), all these countries have shifted their national water governance systems to the basin level and developed laws and regulations for establishing basin management structures.

However, the progress in the implementation of reformed policies in the agri-food sector has been varying among the countries, as they still struggle with challenges in identifying properly functioning legal and practical settings for inter-sectoral coordination and impacts of national water policies on such issues as land degradation. Analysing the performance of these policies and facilitating the development of improved water policies in the agri-food sector will lead to the enhancement of the sustainability of both land and water resources in the region.

Title of the proposed subtopic 2: Land tenure and natural resources degradation**Description/justification:**

Under this subtopic, the Commission should explore how these two processes should be implemented hand in hand and also how the integration of land governance is equally relevant and important to other large-scale interventions on the management of natural resources, climate change adaptation and mitigation, ecosystem restoration, biodiversity etc.

Title of the proposed subtopic 3: Land Degradation Neutrality in Europe and Central Asia**Description/justification:**

Driven by biophysical and socio-economic factors and exacerbated by impacts of climate change, the degradation of land and natural resources is one of the greatest challenges faced by several countries in the region. Restoring degraded land is vital for countries to achieve multiple national and international priorities on mitigating climate change, improving livelihoods, reducing desertification, restoring ecosystems, and conserving biodiversity. A strong system for monitoring the Land Degradation Neutrality in the region needs to be put in place, jointly with the strengthening of institutional capacities and designing an adequate policy framework.

Title of the proposed subtopic 4: Climate change, gender and biodiversity - the cross-cutting dimensions of land-water governance nexus**Description/justification:**

Proper land-water governance in place will also impact and be impacted by several cross-cutting dimensions. Proper governance can only be in place if the gender dimensions are properly considered and addressed, therefore the discussion should follow a gender lens to assure women's roles and needs are properly considered and addressed. Similar approach should be taken towards the inclusion of climate change adaptation and mitigation issues. Proper land-water governance will also assure biodiversity conservation in an integrated manner, promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity.

REU PROPOSAL 3

Title of the proposed main theme: One Health, a multisectoral approach to improve health

Description/justification:

One Health (OH) is defined as "*the collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary efforts of multiple disciplines working locally, nationally, and globally, to attain optimal health for people, animals and our environment*". One Health approaches aim to combine the expertise and resources of partners who do not often work together to control the problem at its source considering the complexity of all underlying risk factors. The OH approach engages different sectors, most importantly those in charge of public, animal and environmental health, to work together towards a common goal: better health. The main issues at this intersection are zoonoses (i.e. diseases transmitted between humans and animals), antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and food safety, as well as preventing the next human pandemic (i.e. emerging infectious diseases that often appear at this interface).

The sources of these threats are complex and include:

- continuous population growth (both humans and livestock);
- increased global travel and trade;
- shift in land use (deforestation, encroachment into wildlife habitat);
- intensification of agricultural practices;
- climate and environmental change;
- persistent poverty and inadequate public and animal health systems; and
- international expansion of food supply networks.

International agencies, aiming to lead with the issue, have come to work together and coordinate their work closer than ever before through the Quadripartite initiative, which combines the capacities of the main agencies dealing with livestock health (FAO and WOA), human health (WHO), environmental health (UNEP) and food safety (FAO).

There are important challenges for the implementation of One Health. Most importantly, there is a huge gap between theory and practice, i.e. while the OH concept has been around for a long time and is well-known to most, it is still not practically implemented at country level (or even at regional level). This may be due to inefficient advocacy at country level, limited funding available, uneven funding between sectors, low sustainability of development initiatives, and poor measurability of improvement (i.e. there is no specific SDG indicator on OH).

This proposal is related to the below proposals submitted by member countries:

Proposal 1. Smart agriculture for sustainable food systems and inclusive rural development

Sub-topics for the discussions of the Commission

Title of the proposed subtopic 1: Livestock development and ecosystem destruction and fragmentation and its link with emerging infectious diseases (EIDs)

Description/justification:

Livestock numbers and the geographical area dedicated to raise them grow at unprecedented speed in parallel with the human population. Combined with shifts in land use, deforestation, climate change, the

persistence of bushmeat and live animal markets, the intensification in commercial production, and natural disasters, all these often lead to the encroachment of wildlife habitats and closer contact and overlap of the livestock, human and wildlife interfaces. This is the perfect recipe for the jump of new emerging infectious diseases (EIDs) outside their natural reservoirs, like we have seen with COVID-19, SARS, MERS or Ebola in recent years. A better understanding of these interfaces and improved surveillance and detection capacity for new pathogens are critical to prevent the next pandemic.

Title of the proposed subtopic 2: Livestock development and tackling the threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

Description/justification:

The issue of AMR is predicted to grow exponentially over the coming years, with over ten million human deaths attributable to AMR per year by 2050. Still, data on the use of antimicrobials and the prevalence/distribution of AMR is scarce or inexistent in most countries. The use of antimicrobials without prescription or diagnosis, for growth promotion and not respecting the manufacturer's recommendations is common in Europe and Central Asia. There is a need to better understand its occurrence and to better train farmers and field veterinarians in the prudent use of antimicrobials.

Title of the proposed subtopic 3: Neglected zoonoses – the constant threat

Description/justification:

The highest disease priorities for veterinary services in many parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe are all zoonoses: brucellosis, echinococcosis, tuberculosis, anthrax or rabies. Despite being well-known to farmers and veterinary services alike, sometimes for centuries, and the fact that effective vaccines, treatments and control strategies exist for all of them for many years, these diseases continue to hinder production and affecting the health of millions of people in rural areas, thus the term neglected. A regional approach, with long-term technical support is needed for countries to control and eventually eradicate these diseases.