

Concept Note

Ministerial Roundtable on greener and better agrifood systems after COVID-19 36th Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC 36), Ministerial Session, 11 March 2022

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread disruptions to the economy, health, and agrifood systems almost everywhere. The latest Omicron variant temporarily slowed down the slow recovery from the onslaught of the Delta variant, but the trends are slowly moving toward a more stabilized situation where the rate of vaccination is accelerating, and the world is learning how to live with the pandemic. The socioeconomic impacts and the hardships generated by the pandemic on large segments of the populations are well documented, but the focus is now on response and recovery.

Most governments responded with a crisis mode in a forward-looking manner. Preventing a food crisis and minimizing the impacts of the pandemic on agrifood systems functioning were high on government priorities. Pro-active government interventions included a range of options from direct input, credit, and other incentives to the farming sector, to investing in alternative market channels, encouraging local or short value chains, including urban food production and more. Digitalization and investment in digital infrastructure and alternative market platforms have become an urgent investment priority for governments now and in the future. The private sector also responded with the fast growth of online marketing and distribution (e-commerce). However, innovative solutions are required to ensure inclusive digital transformation that benefits small-scale farmers, rural households, rural communities and marginal groups.

Social protection emerged as a crucial policy area requiring greater attention, planning and policy design to expand coverage and strengthen resilience to future crises. As governments grapple with the immediate and medium-term impacts of the pandemic, the impacts of climate change and the frequent disasters linked to it continue to compound the challenges faced by governments. A number of governments have incorporated green or climate-resilient strategies from clean energy to climate-smart agriculture, but much more can be done and learned from countries' experiences so far. The 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), and the country and regional dialogues leading up to it, traced the pathways for rebuilding greener, resilient, inclusive and better agrifood systems.

The 36th Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC 36) offers a unique opportunity for Members to exchange experiences, share lessons learned from their country programs, and expound on their priorities related to COVID-19 recovery. This Ministerial Roundtable on greener and better agrifood systems after COVID-19 is a unique opportunity to exchange experiences at a high level and enable FAO to produce more extraordinary results.

Scope of the Ministerial Roundtable

This Ministerial Roundtable invites Members to share their experiences, initiatives, and priorities related to the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind. In particular:

1. After two years under COVID-19, what are Members' priorities in targeting a greener and better recovery to get back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
2. What are examples of successful initiatives by the government that succeeded in reducing vulnerability to COVID-19?
3. How is digitalization contributing to rural transformation and more resilient agrifood systems?

4. How is the government promoting stronger social protection and social inclusion programs as part of COVID-19 recovery that reduces inequality?
5. What are the policy commitments required to ensure greener and climate-resilient initiatives are embedded within agrifood system transformation?
6. How can FAO support Members to fulfill their commitments for transforming agrifood systems following the UNFSS?

Proposed Agenda

Duration: 90 minutes from 11.00 - 12.30 (UTC/GMT +6)

Format: Hybrid. The participants already on site in Bangladesh attending APRC 36 will join the event physically, while others will join virtually.

Time	Item	Responsible
5 minutes	Opening remarks	Mr. Qu Dongyu Director-General, FAO
10 minutes	Introduction to the Roundtable agenda	Mr. Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, FAO
30 minutes	Ministerial panel: H.E. Laaulialemalietoa Leuatea Schmidt , Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Samoa H.E. William Dar , Secretary of Agriculture, the Philippines H.E. Arai Yutaka , Vice-Minister for International Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Japan H.E. Zeng Yande , Chief Agronomist, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, China	Moderated by the Chief Economist, FAO
40 minutes	Views from Members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country commitments under UNFSS • FAO support to implementation of UNFSS pathways • Regaining lost ground during the pandemic and getting back on track to achieve SDGs 	Moderated by the Chair of APRC 36
5 minutes	Summary and closing remarks	Ms. Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director-General, FAO