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**Report on Support to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the
Region**

Background and objectives

On 25 September 2015, the 193 Member Countries of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underpinned by 17 aspirational objectives, i.e. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to guide collaborative actions of governments, international agencies, civil society and other institutions for the next 15 years (2016–2030).

The 2030 Agenda sets forth a transformational and ambitious plan to guide the global approach to development through the united effort of all countries and all stakeholders, shifting the world to a sustainable path with no one left behind. The 17 SDGs and underlying 169 targets are universal, integrated and indivisible, duly capturing the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental). In this context, sustainable food and agriculture are critically important for the achievement of the SDGs by tackling the root causes of poverty and hunger, enabling an inclusive society that leaves no one behind, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged populations in rural communities, and promoting sustainable management of natural resources.

The 30th Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC), held in May 2016 in Turkey, discussed the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the context of the region.¹ The ERC called on FAO to support the Members of the Europe and Central Asia region by strengthening capacity and providing policy advice for achieving the underlying development objectives in line with the FAO Country Programming Framework and its strategic programmes. The ERC 2016 highlighted that “collaboration at the regional

¹ [The Sustainable Development Goals and their implications for agriculture and rural development in Europe and Central Asia region](#)

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level, for exchange of best practices, capacity-building, and for building partnerships to deal with shared priorities, can be crucial for translating goals and targets into effective policy guidelines.²

The objective of this information note is twofold (i) to inform Members regarding the main support provided by FAO in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; and (ii) to bring important issues forward for the consideration of member countries.

At the regional level, FAO was actively engaged with the Regional United Nations Development Group for Europe and Central Asia (R-UNDG) and supported regional awareness-raising events, which facilitated interministerial and cross-sectoral discussion on challenges and opportunities for the achievement of the SDGs in the region.

FAO's work in the region also encompassed national awareness-raising and support in the definition of national SDG targets and indicators, as well as contribution to the UN-led Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) missions in the countries of the region.

An outline of the roadmap for 2018 in the region to respond to countries' requests and support required includes activities which seek to capitalize on the SDG work conducted in the past biennium, to respond to new assistance requests for strengthening national capacities in policy formulation and statistics, to continue awareness raising among various national and non-state actors to facilitate partnership building, as well as to leverage on the expertise of regional institutions by promoting identification and exchange of best practices in European Union Member States and co-developing thematic trainings in cooperation with regional academic and research institutions.

The information note concludes with highlighting the key points for consideration of member countries, including (i) establishment of an additional Issue-Based Coalition on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture with partner organizations; (ii) partnership building with European Union Member States to facilitate the exchange of best practices on SDG implementation across the region; (iii) promotion of partnership with civil society, academia and the private sector to support countries in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda; and (iv) need for dedicated financial resources to ensure continuity of FAO engagement and required technical support at the regional and national level.

I. Regional coordination, monitoring and awareness-raising

1. FAO is actively engaged at the Regional United Nations Development Group for Europe and Central Asia (R-UNDG) to improve the effectiveness of the UN development work carried out at country level and to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region.
2. The sessions of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) held in April 2017 and March 2018 represent a key opportunity for the raising of regional awareness on SDGs.³ The main

² ERC/16/3: The Sustainable Development Goals and their implications for agriculture and rural development in Europe and Central Asia region (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-mp172e.pdf>)

³ In 2017, the forum recognized that "reviewing and adjusting national strategies, plans and instruments is a major first step to be taken by governments in the region to start implementing the goals" and that "the subregional level is important to the creation of a multilayered system of Sustainable Development Goal implementation and follow-up." It was stressed that "improving the data situation and building statistical capacities for the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals remains a significant challenge for all countries in the region and beyond" and that "policy coherence between domestic and international actions [is] as an important element of sustainable development strategic frameworks." There was also a strong recognition of "the role of civil society in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals" and that facilitating "dialogue and encourage involvement, communication remains a critical factor" (UNECE, 2017, [Report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development](#)).

In 2018, the forum recognized, among others, the need for developing and adopting a common understanding and single approach to sustainable forest management, opening initiatives to all stakeholders and better involvement of consumers in choosing sustainable patterns of consumption

aim of the forum, led by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in close cooperation with the regional UN System, is to follow up and review the SDG implementation progress in the region – informing the UN High Level Political Forum, held annually in New York. FAO used this platform to raise awareness on SDG 2 in 2017, supporting the roundtable on “National and local adaptation of SDGs” and “Data and monitoring” as well as, in 2018, to contribute to the roundtables on SDG 12 and SDG 15. In addition, at the RFSD 2018, FAO organized a side event on “Rural women, migration and agriculture,” looking from a gender perspective at vital linkages among agriculture, rural development, food security and migration in the region. The side event received broad attention and stimulated an active discussion.

3. Moreover, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia contributed to the work of the Issue-Based Coalitions on gender, health and monitoring. Established by the R-UNDG to provide advice and support to the countries in SDG-implementation activities, the Issue-Based Coalitions constitute a unique feature in the region. They currently cover six areas: gender, health, data and monitoring, youth, social protection, and large movements of people, displacement and resilience.⁴

4. In this regard, FAO recently initiated a discussion together with the World Food Programme to advocate for the establishment of an additional Issue-Based Coalition on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture. The main rationale is that the current structure of the Issue-Based Coalitions does not give due consideration to the cross-cutting nature of food security, nutrition, and sustainable food and agriculture for the achievement of the SDGs and, therefore, does not envisage an adequate level of technical coverage and programmatic support to the countries of the region. The R-UNDG has responded positively to the proposal, and initial steps towards the new Issue-Based Coalition are underway.

5. FAO expects the proposed Issue-Based Coalition to play a critical role in sharpening focus, enhancing coordination and building partnerships to advocate for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable food and agriculture as a key contribution to SDG 2, as well as other related goals, including SDG 1, 3, 6, 8, 12, 13 and 14. A dedicated Issue-Based Coalition on food security and nutrition becomes particularly important in respect to the MAPS missions,⁵ for which Issue-Based Coalitions serve as an instrument to channel technical expertise to support countries in SDG implementation.

6. In this context, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia led the preparation of the “Issue brief on sustainable agriculture and rural development” for the joint regional advocacy paper “Building more inclusive, Sustainable and Prosperous Societies in Europe and Central Asia: A common UN vision for the Post-2015 Development Agenda,” issued by the R-UNDG. In addition, FAO contributes to the monitoring and analysis of the progress towards SDG 2 targets 2.1 (ensuring access to food for all) and 2.2 (ending all forms of malnutrition) and related policy developments through its annual flagship report “Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia.”

7. In order to raise awareness at regional and national level regarding the role of sustainable agriculture and food systems with regard to the achievement of the SDGs, FAO has engaged in technical discussions with Members through a number of regional workshops organized in the framework of the 2030 Agenda.⁶ These events gathered over 200 participants from 20 countries and facilitated exchanges

of forest products, changing the narrative about wood and forests and involvement of audiences outside the forest sector, continue to stress the linkages between forests, forest products, green economy and SDGs.

⁴ European Region Issue-Based Coalitions were established at the meeting of the R-UNDG held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 11–12 May 2016. The purpose of this coalitions of partners of the UN system in the region is to act as a pan-European-enabling mechanism to facilitate and promote the implementation of the targets of the SDGs and other goals by coordinating the activities of the relevant United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies and other intergovernmental organizations and partners.

⁵ UN technical missions available upon request of the governments and the UN Resident Coordinators to assess the SDG nationalization process in the countries and provide recommendations on the way forward to further underpin respective national action plans on implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

⁶ Regional workshops on sustainable food and agriculture, Hungary, December 2016, and Belarus, June 2017; high-level conference on socially inclusive rural development, Lithuania, January 2017; regional workshop on monitoring food security, Turkey, February 2017; social protection workshop, Kyrgyzstan, April 2017.

of experience as well as interministerial and cross-sectoral dialogue on SDG implementation, from the perspective of regional cooperation, among a wide range of stakeholders, including non-state actors.

8. As an outcome of the discussions, a strong need for country-level assistance on SDGs has been highlighted, particularly in terms of raising national awareness on the 2030 Agenda, supporting the SDG nationalization process, strengthening collaboration and coordination on SDGs at all levels, ensuring substantial participation of non-state actors, and exploring opportunities for intraregional cooperation, particularly on trade. Countries also expressed the need to collect best practices on SDG implementation and monitoring from European Union Member States.

II. Country support in the region

9. In line with needs that have emerged at the regional level, FAO is assisting countries of the region⁷ in raising awareness on SDGs at the national level and supporting key national stakeholders in the SDG nationalization process, depending on the availability of resources and requests from the countries for support.

10. Major results include: i) enhanced awareness and increased capacities of the ministries of agriculture and other relevant stakeholders in SDG implementation and monitoring; ii) development of sectoral baseline reports on the agricultural and rural sectors, aiming to map the coverage of relevant SDGs in national policies and statistical frameworks, in order to assess the extent to which SDGs (goals, targets, indicators) are already reflected, to identify policy and data gaps, to identify an existing baseline, and to make recommendations on aspects to be addressed; iii) elaboration of action plans for the ministries of agriculture, with suggested critical actions to be undertaken for the implementation and monitoring of relevant SDGs.

11. In particular, national awareness-raising workshops, co-organized with ministries of agriculture, were held in 2017 in Albania, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Uzbekistan. These workshops were recognized as the first national examples of engagement of relevant stakeholders in cross-sectoral technical discussions on SDG targets and indicators related to the agricultural sector. It is important to mention that in the Republic of Moldova, this support was particularly timely, as it may inform the mid-term evaluation of the National Strategy on Agriculture carried out in 2018, allowing the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment to align its sectoral strategy with the SDGs.

12. Two challenges emphasized in these workshops were: i) the need to improve communication on SDG-related activities within governmental institutions and other stakeholders while timely informing and updating ministry technical departments, governmental agencies and non-state actors; and ii) the lack of involvement of non-state actors from the agricultural sector in the SDG nationalization process.

13. This led FAO to organize a “Private sector sensitization workshop: assessing its contribution to SDG implementation” within the framework of the MAPS Mission in Albania (16–20 April 2018) and to undertake a study with two farmers’ associations in Armenia and Georgia on the availability of and access to relevant tools, techniques and mechanisms for small producers in the dairy and milk-processing/production sector.

14. Since 2017, FAO has also carried out four additional national workshops on SDG indicators under FAO custodianship in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The workshops assisted countries in the nationalization of SDG indicators, providing a good understanding of the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship through an overview on the methodology, on FAO’s role as

⁷ Activities supporting SDG implementation and monitoring are implemented in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Turkey and Uzbekistan, using FAO expertise as well as partnering with BOKU University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (Austria), the UCA University of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan) and the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition – IAMO (Germany).

custodian agency, and on the data needs for the production of the indicators. These activities contributed to developing the capacities of a total of 130 people, mainly from national statistical offices.

15. Last but not least, FAO is contributing to the MAPS missions in the region. These missions took place in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in 2016; in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, and Turkmenistan in 2017; and will take place in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan during 2018. FAO participated in some missions through its country, regional or subregional offices or by providing FAO experts on behalf of the Issue-Based Coalitions. In addition, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia supported the drafting of the MAPS mission reports in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan by developing analyses and recommendations related to the agricultural sector.

III. FAO regional coordination and support to the SDGs

16. In order to ensure greater coherence of global, regional and country-level support, FAO has undertaken a number of steps to maximize the impact of the provided assistance in view of its vast geographical and technical scope in the region.

17. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia established an SDG-coordination team to serve as a coordination mechanism to capitalize on the available technical expertise and to enhance alignment and complementarity of these activities across the region. The core team oversees the overall coordination of FAO's regional- and national-level assistance in implementation, monitoring and reporting regarding the SDGs. This team also assesses available opportunities for mobilizing resources and expertise both internally and externally as well as for building partnerships with various actors, including civil society and the private sector. Furthermore, the regional office has established an expert network of several international and national consultants supporting the work on SDG implementation and monitoring across the region.

18. FAO fosters internal awareness and capacity development for its regional, subregional and country offices, engaging its staff in technical discussions on how to better align interventions with the SDGs, increase impact, streamline the work on SDGs, and foster engagement and exchanges among these offices. A key step in this context was a stock-taking exercise on the status of the SDG nationalization process in early 2017 to assess the current situation and to define the priority actions.

19. Furthermore, the Regional Initiatives in the region⁸ are key instruments to ensure support of FAO technical assistance at the country level regarding the achievement of the SDGs. The nature of the Regional Initiatives as a programmatic umbrella, along with its cross-sectoral approach, facilitates the integration of the principles of sustainable food and agriculture into national policies with particular emphasis on cross-cutting issues such as governance, nutrition, climate change and gender, supporting the universality of the SDGs.

IV. FAO regional roadmap for 2018 in supporting SDG implementation

20. Drawing on the priorities identified during the stock-taking exercise on SDGs in the region and on the lessons learned from the interventions carried out since 2015 as well as on the issues brought up in related consultations with various national stakeholders across the region, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia developed an SDG roadmap for 2018, within its Programme of Work and Budget, to support countries in the SDG nationalization process.

⁸ See more details on the scope and focus of the Regional Initiatives in the document ERC/18/5

21. The SDG roadmap seeks to capitalize on the SDG work conducted in the past biennium as well as to respond to new assistance requests for strengthening national capacities in policy formulation and statistics in line with the 2030 Agenda. It also aims at continuing awareness-raising activities among various national and non-state actors to promote and facilitate partnership-building opportunities, particularly with civil society and the private sector. The scale and extent of the planned interventions varies case-by-case, subject to the level of FAO presence in the countries and the available resources.

22. The work planned in the countries is further complemented by the activities at the regional level, where FAO aims to leverage the expertise of regional institutions by promoting identification and exchange of best practices in European Union Member States and co-developing thematic trainings in cooperation with regional academic and research institutions.

V. Points for consideration

- Importance of establishing an additional Issue-Based Coalition on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture with partner organizations, as the current Issue-Based Coalition structure under the R-UNDG does not ensure adequate technical coverage and programmatic support for all 17 SDGs, considering the malnutrition issues characterizing the region and the cross-cutting importance of food security, nutrition and sustainable food and agriculture for the achievement of the SDGs.
- Seeking engagement and opportunities for partnering with European Union Member States to facilitate the exchange of best practices on SDG implementation and monitoring across the region, particularly in terms of the involvement of non-state actors, alignment of national sectoral policies, financing instruments, and potential south-south/triangular cooperation expertise providers.
- Promoting partnerships with civil society, academia and the private sector to support countries in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
- Need for dedicated financial resources, including voluntary contributions, to ensure continuity of FAO engagement and technical support to SDG implementation, monitoring, reporting, follow-up and review at the regional and national level, including through the establishment of partnerships.