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## Evaluation of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization

### Note by the secretariat

*Summary*

The present document is submitted pursuant to resolution 71/1 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in which the Commission decided to review the continued substantive relevance and financial viability of each regional institution. The document contains an overview of the independent evaluation of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization conducted by an external evaluation consultant and the conclusions and recommendations for enhancing the results-orientation, relevance, sustainability and efficiency of the Centre. It also contains a description of the actions to be taken by the secretariat to address the evaluation recommendations.

The Commission may wish to endorse the recommendations contained in the present document.

* ESCAP/81/1.



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# I. Background

1. In its resolution 71/1, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific decided to review the continued substantive relevance and financial viability of each of its regional institutions every five years. In line with that decision, the secretariat commissioned an independent evaluation of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization in 2024, five years after the previous evaluation of the Centre in 2019.

2. The Centre is aimed at enhancing technical cooperation among the members and associate members of the Commission, as well as other interested Member States of the United Nations, through the exchange of information, the sharing of knowledge and the promotion of research and development, including agrobusiness development, in the areas of sustainable agricultural mechanization and technology transfer for the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals in the region. The Centre has five strategic functions: (a) serving as a regional forum for regular policy dialogue; (b) becoming a data and information hub; (c) serving as a recognized reference point for standards and protocols; (d) strengthening its role as the centre of capacity-building; and (e) facilitating regional agrobusiness development and trade.

3. The present document contains a summary of the purpose, scope, methodology, key findings and conclusions of the evaluation. It also contains the evaluation recommendations and the secretariat response to each recommendation. The full evaluation report prepared by the consultant is available on the Commission's website.[1]

# II. Purpose and method

4. The evaluation was aimed at informing the review by the Commission of the continued substantive relevance and financial viability of the Centre and providing recommendations to the secretariat and the Commission on suggested improvements in that regard. As part of the evaluation, the results achieved by and the performance of the Centre were assessed using the standard evaluation criteria. In addition, methods of enhancing the results-orientation of the Centre were determined. The evaluation covered the work of the Centre from 2020 to September 2024.

5. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the norms, standards and procedures set out in the monitoring and evaluation policy and guidelines of the Commission[2] to ensure the evaluation would be independent, objective and of high quality. It was conducted from July to December 2024 by Mr. Ganesh Rauniyar, an independent evaluation consultant.

6. The primary data sources for the evaluation consisted of key informant interviews with stakeholders of the Centre and an online survey that was used to collect feedback from Governing Council members, national focal points, members of the technical working group, staff of the Centre and other staff of the secretariat. The secondary data source comprised a desk review of relevant Centre documents. The evaluation also included field visits to Cambodia,

[1] See https://repository.unescap.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12870/7729/ESCAP-2024-RP-Evaluation-CSAM.pdf.

[2] Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "ESCAP monitoring and evaluation policy and guidelines" (Bangkok, 2023).

China, Nepal and Thailand for in-person interviews with key stakeholders. The countries were purposefully selected, in consultation with the Centre's team, to ensure geographical representation, a concentration of Centre activities, strategic relevance and other considerations. The evaluation consultant gave a presentation on the outcome of the evaluation to the members of the Governing Council of the Centre at its twentieth session, held in Tashkent on 27 November 2024.

# III. Conclusions and recommendations

7. The relevance of the Centre was rated as satisfactory.[3] It was found that the Centre's strategy for 2020–2024 was well aligned with the needs of member States and that it effectively addressed challenges in agricultural development by supporting sustainable agricultural mechanization. The evaluation also confirmed the relevance of the Centre's flagship initiatives, including: the Asian and Pacific Network for Testing of Agricultural Machinery, in advancing member States' efforts to enhance the quality and harmonization of agricultural machinery testing codes; and the Regional Council of Agricultural Machinery Associations in Asia and the Pacific, in fostering commercial networking, facilitating active information-sharing and promoting trade in high-quality agricultural machinery. Similarly, the regional forum on sustainable agricultural mechanization in Asia and the Pacific was found to be highly relevant for encouraging policy dialogue, knowledge exchange and the advancement of sustainable mechanization practices. Likewise, the climate-smart agricultural initiatives of the Centre, especially the regional initiative on integrated straw management, were found to be relevant for promoting sustainable and environmentally friendly agricultural practices.

8. The Centre's effectiveness was found to be satisfactory. This is reflected in the high level of stakeholder satisfaction with the capacity-development support provided by the Centre, which has contributed to both individual professional growth and the strengthening of institutional capacity in national agencies. Additional evidence of the Centre's effectiveness includes the adoption of testing codes by member States for selected agricultural machinery and the harmonization of national testing codes within the participating countries of the Asian and Pacific Network for Testing of Agricultural Machinery.

9. In terms of efficiency, the Centre has been prudent in its use of resources. While no new donors have been secured, the Centre has effectively leveraged in-kind contributions from partner agencies in member States and from implementing partners. Furthermore, the Centre has engaged interns, contractors and consultants to address human resource gaps within the team. However, some stakeholders expressed a desire for increased in-house technical capacity within the Centre to develop technical solutions.

10. The impact of the Centre was rated as moderately satisfactory. The Centre's impact has been primarily qualitative, including improved capacity within national institutions; enhanced networking; reduced accidents and fatalities owing to the use of agricultural machinery that complies with Asian and Pacific Network for Testing of Agricultural Machinery codes; improved air quality around pilot integrated straw residue management sites; and

[3] The following rating system was used in the evaluation: highly satisfactory, satisfactory, moderately satisfactory, somehow satisfactory, not satisfactory.

increased trade flow in agricultural machinery. However, these outcomes require empirical validation through a robust monitoring and tracking system.

11. The sustainability of the Centre's achievements was rated as satisfactory, which was reflected in the stable and predictable financial base of the Centre and the willingness of some member States to contribute or increase their contributions towards its operational costs. The host Government's continued financial and in-kind contributions further strengthened the Centre's sustainability for at least the next five years.

12. Based on the findings and conclusions of the evaluation, six recommendations were addressed to the secretariat for improving the performance and results-orientation of the Centre. The secretariat welcomed the evaluation recommendations and appreciated the full cooperation accorded to the evaluation consultant by member States, the host Government and other development partners by engaging in constructive interviews and discussions and providing relevant information for addressing the evaluation issues.

## Recommendations addressed to the secretariat

### Recommendation 1

**Continue with the strategic focus on the needs of small farmers, women farmers and other vulnerable groups, with an emphasis on quality, affordability and safety, guided by sustainable practices.**

### Proposed actions

1. Address the potential impact of climate change and enhance disaster resilience with the help of interventions in air quality and land and water management. Focus on resilient agricultural conservation practices with appropriate technologies in view of the growing calls to address the scarcity of water for irrigation, improve air quality, manage sandstorms and soil erosion, and address natural hazards.

2. Ensure that the test codes of agricultural machinery address the needs of women farmers by involving female technical staff in developing and refining the codes.

3. Identify and address the needs of persons with disabilities, including their role in digital mechanization, in the Centre's workplan.

4. Promote standardization to facilitate trade in agricultural machinery and the availability of quality spare parts.

13. With regard to recommendation 1, the Centre will continue its work on addressing the needs of smallholder farmers and women farmers, especially to further operationalize the Centre's gender mainstreaming strategy, which was recommended by its Governing Council at its nineteenth session. In order to focus its interventions on the quality, affordability and safety of agricultural machinery, the Centre will explore innovative technological options in the agriculture sector that may be more suitable for smallholder farmers and women farmers.

14. The Centre will also continue its work on climate-smart agricultural mechanization and practices, especially in the area of reducing crop burning through integrated straw management. The Centre will explore potential space for disability inclusion in its activities, given that that will be a new area of work for the Centre. The Centre takes note of and stands ready to support the

implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. The promotion of common standards and test codes in agricultural machinery will remain a key component of the Centre's work.

**Recommendation 2**

**Increase opportunities for active learning through networking and the training of trainers.**

**Proposed actions**

1. Partner with national focal points and agencies and continue to support pilot demonstrations on the use of sustainable agriculture machinery on farms and sustainable farming practices.

2. Strengthen networking platforms for knowledge exchange among partner institutions in member States.

3. Develop a blended approach to capacity-building with a mix of online delivery and in-person events.

4. Actively involve manufacturers and private sector agricultural machinery commercial entities in the Centre's activities.

15. With regard to recommendation 2, the Centre will continue to leverage its network of in-country focal points and agencies to support demonstrations of sustainable agricultural machinery on farms and sustainable farming practices, which it will carry out through study tours and workshops to facilitate knowledge-sharing and networking among partner institutions in member States.

16. The Centre will explore the possibility of a blended approach to capacity-building, with a mix of online delivery and in-person events, keeping in mind that most agricultural demonstration activities are more effective when held in person. The private sector continues to play an important role in the Centre's activities and will be engaged through the Regional Council of Agricultural Machinery Associations in Asia and the Pacific.

**Recommendation 3**

**Strengthen the consultation process with relevant agencies in member States to ensure that the workplan of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization continues to remain relevant and addresses the needs of member States.**

**Proposed actions**

1. Regularize consultations between members of the Governing Council and their constituencies so that their voices are reflected in the Centre's workplan and budget.

2. Ensure that the Centre's workplan and budget reflect varying agroecological contexts to enhance the Centre's continued relevance and effectiveness.

3. Systematically collect, analyse and report feedback from the Centre's beneficiaries on their utilization of its services and outputs. The monitoring arrangements need to support verifiable data, including economic, environmental and social benefits. The Centre may

coordinate with the Strategy and Programme Management Division in setting up a viable monitoring system.

17. With regard to recommendation 3, the Centre will consult with relevant agencies in member States of the Governing Council, as well as in other members and associate members of the Commission, to ensure that the Centre's workplan reflects the varying agroecological contexts, continues to remain relevant and addresses the needs of member States. The Centre will continue to collect, analyse and report on the feedback from its beneficiaries and will require support from the Strategy and Programme Management Division for additional monitoring arrangements. Avenues for feedback collection include: the sessions of the Governing Council; evaluation responses from Centre events, including follow-up impact surveys; and the statements of member States at Commission sessions.

**Recommendation 4**

**Continue to strengthen collaboration between the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization and the divisions of the secretariat to enhance effectiveness.**

**Proposed actions**

1. Collaborate with the Social Development Division to effectively mainstream gender and address disability inclusion in its workplan.

2. Collaborate with the Environment and Development Division to respond to climate change, disaster resilience and environmental sustainability issues.

3. Collaborate with the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division to systematically monitor and document trade flows in agricultural machinery to and from participating member States.

4. Collaborate with the Strategy and Programme Management Division to set up a system to collect data on results at the regional and national levels from the Centre's initiatives.

18. With regard to recommendation 4, the Centre will strengthen its collaboration with other divisions of the secretariat. In the next five years, the Centre will seek support from the Social Development Division for aspects of gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion in its workplan and aims to jointly implement one activity each with the Environment and Development Division and the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division. The Centre will require support from the Strategy and Programme Management Division to improve its monitoring system.

**Recommendation 5**

**Mobilize additional resources for scaling up and expanding the coverage of the Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization.**

**Proposed actions**

1. Encourage member States to provide additional extrabudgetary support for scaling up the Centre's achievements.

2. Promote the Centre's private sector partnerships in agricultural mechanization with manufacturers and traders of agricultural machinery.

19. With regard to recommendation 5, in the report of the Governing Council of the Centre on its twentieth session, which will be submitted to the Commission, Governing Council members encouraged member States to update and increase their contributions to the Centre to meet the current needs of the region. The Centre will continue to engage with the private sector through the Regional Council of Agricultural Machinery Associations in Asia and the Pacific and by jointly organizing events and activities to mobilize resources and leverage cost-sharing opportunities. Activities expected to involve the private sector include: study tours with visits to factories and offices of the manufacturers and traders of agricultural machinery; and the facilitation of knowledge-sharing and the trade of agricultural machinery through the network of the Regional Council of Agricultural Machinery Associations in Asia and the Pacific.

**Recommendation 6**

**Identify and promote strategic partnerships in agricultural mechanization.**

**Proposed actions**

1. Explore collaboration and partnership opportunities with the CGIAR System Organization institutes in the region for adaptive research such as the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, the International Water Management Institute in Sri Lanka and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics in India.

2. Initiate a dialogue with multilateral development banks, including the Asian Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the World Bank, at a higher level to promote sustainable agricultural mechanization with a focus on climate change and the promotion of smart agriculture.

3. Seek medium-term programmatic collaborations with Rome-based United Nations agencies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme.

20. With regard to recommendation 6, the Centre will explore new partnerships with the suggested organizations, as well as any other relevant organizations working in similar areas. The Centre aims to formalize at least one new partnership in the next two years. Strategic dialogue and partnerships with existing partners will be continued, especially in areas of common interest such as climate change, smart agriculture and national agricultural strategies. Areas for cooperation will be aligned with the priority areas identified in the Centre's strategic plan for 2025–2029.

# IV. Issues for consideration by the Commission

21. The Commission may wish to endorse the recommendations contained in the present document.