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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

## Thirty-fifth Session

**Muscat, the Sultanate of Oman, 2-4 March 2020**

**FAO support to countries for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

### Executive Summary

This document provides a brief summary of the actions of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It describes this support at regional, subregional and country levels. In brief, the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE) has initiated the process of progressively realigning its regional initiatives and field programme with the requirements of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has also enhanced its role in SDG monitoring, outlook and analysis in the region, converting the Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition into a monitoring and analysis publication on SDG 2. RNE has also strengthened its partnerships at the regional level to accelerate the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs. Major partners include the League of Arab States (LAS) and its technical arm, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD); the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); the World Health Organisation (WHO); and the World Food Programme (WFP). RNE has supported and will continue to support countries in a variety of ways, including capacity building for SDG monitoring and implementation, particularly for SDG 2.

### Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

1. take note of the multistakeholder forum support that FAO has provided to advance the understanding and monitoring of the SDGs and the alignment of work in the region with the SDGs;
2. take note of the partnership that FAO is building between the LAS, the AOAD, ESCWA and other organizations;
3. call on countries to continue to align their work with and scale up their work on the SDGs; and
4. take note of the work of FAO as custodian of 21 SDG indicators and call on countries to intensify their efforts, with FAO's support, to measure progress towards achieving the SDGs

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through the strengthening of their SDG monitoring capacities.

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## I. Overview

1. The Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE) forms part of the overall FAO work programme to support the 2030 Agenda at the regional, subregional and country levels. At the regional level, RNE has realigned the field programme throughout the region to the SDGs and has expanded the policy research programme to include SDG monitoring, outlook and analysis. The three FAO regional initiatives for the Near East and North Africa region, namely: “Food Security and Nutrition”, “Small-scale Family Farming” and “Water Scarcity”, are now fully aligned with the SDGs. Furthermore, through a strategic thinking exercise conducted at the regional level, RNE has developed a plan of action for the achievement of SDG 2 based on a set of proposed priority areas to transform food systems in support of the 2030 Agenda.
2. Furthermore, RNE redesigned its annual Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition as an SDG monitoring and analysis publication, in line with the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World.<sup>1</sup>

## II. RNE regional-level support to the 2030 Agenda

### Reporting on SDGs

3. At the regional level, RNE strengthened its engagement in the preparation of the Regional Sustainable Development Forum, convened by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to bring a regional perspective to the review of progress and policy discussions, including the harmonization of the 2030 Agenda with regionally agreed policy priorities and frameworks. As part of this process, ESCWA is mandated to prepare a regional report on the 2030 Agenda, specifically a situation report on SDGs in the Arab region, following a goal-by-goal approach. This report, entitled Arab Sustainable Development Report (ASDR), will be prepared at regular intervals to support follow-up and review of the SDGs at the regional level. The first edition of the ASDR was produced in 2015 to coincide with the announcement of the 2030 Agenda. RNE provided input towards the ASDR 2019.

### Monitoring the SDGs

4. FAO is partnering with ESCWA, LAS, and AOAD on the elaboration and adoption of a comprehensive framework of indicators for monitoring food security and nutrition in the Arab countries. This framework is entitled the Food Security Monitoring Framework in the Arab region and was adopted in March 2018 by the AOAD Executive Committee. The framework recognizes the use of the Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) and the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) as the main indicators for monitoring food insecurity.
5. The framework has 24 indicators that are closely related to the SDGs, the FAO Suite of Food Security Indicators, and other selected global and regional indicators. The 24 indicators are categorized as follows:
  - three core indicators, two of which are direct SDG indicators (namely, PoU and FIES);
  - six indicators in the availability pillar, three of which are direct SDG indicators or closely related to SDG indicators;
  - five indicators in the access pillar, two of which are direct SDG indicators;
  - five indicators in the utilization pillar, four of which are direct SDG indicators;

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<sup>1</sup> 2018 marked the second year of the redesigned publication, available at <http://www.fao.org/3/I8336EN/i8336en.pdf>

- five indicators in the stability pillar, one of which is a direct SDG indicator.
6. FAO supported ESCWA, AOAD and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS) in conducting training workshops on the framework in Lebanon and Tunisia in August 2019.
  7. To enable countries to use the monitoring framework, regional workshops were conducted to introduce the indicators under FAO custodianship and to enable the countries to assess data availability and to develop the capacity to compile the indicators and the technical assistance needs. FAO supported the first workshop, organized by AITRS, entitled “Training Workshop on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Land Holding and Use to Support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 in the Arab Region.” The workshop was conducted in Amman, Jordan, on 1–5 July 2018. This workshop provided a basic introduction on the methodology and data needed to produce the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship. Participants from the national statistical offices of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Syria and Tunisia attended the workshop.
  8. Targeted capacity development was provided through regional workshops on the methodology for collecting data on the SDG indicators, on the assessment of data availability and data gaps, and on the identification of the way forward for improved monitoring and reporting. The two main regional workshops conducted in this regard were: the Regional Capacity Building Workshop, held in Cairo from 15 to 17 April 2019; and the Regional Capacity Development Workshop RNE/FAO Regional Office for Africa (RAF) on Farm Survey-based SDG Indicators (2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.4.1, 5.a.1) held from 7 to 10 October 2019 in Cairo.

#### **Policy support on SDGs**

9. FAO is a member of the secretariat of the Subcommittee for Ending Hunger, established by LAS with the mandate of monitoring the achievement of SDG 2 on ending hunger, improving food security and nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture, amongst other related goals. The aim of this subcommittee is to develop a plan to support Arab countries in their efforts to implement activities aligned with SDG 2.
10. Under the umbrella of the Subcommittee for Ending Hunger, FAO provided a Regional Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) project to advance a Zero Hunger Initiative for the Arab Region. The outcome of the project is a strategic framework for zero hunger initiatives in the Arab region to be endorsed by member countries in 2020.
11. FAO also provided support to and actively participated in the second and third Arab Sustainable Development Week (ASDW), organized annually by LAS. Within the activities of the second ASDW (2018), FAO organized a side event entitled “Achieving Zero Hunger in the Arab Region.” The session highlighted the challenges to ending hunger in the Arab region and the experiences of organizations working on issues related to food security and sustainable development. During the third ASDW (2019), FAO and LAS organized the side event “Towards Zero Hunger in the Arab Region.” This session focused on sharing experiences from the initiative of Zero Hunger in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean, and lessons learned from these two regions. The session also presented the progress to date on developing the Regional Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Zero Hunger in the Arab Region. FAO and LAS also organized a side event on the theme “Towards Zero Hunger in the Arab region” at the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the FAO Conference held in Rome in June 2019.
12. FAO is also supporting countries in the implementation of SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) through its Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity and a regional programme supported by Sweden (SIDA). In particular, FAO supported the organization of the Land and Water Days conference held from 31 March to 4 April 2019 in Cairo. The conference was structured around

- two major segments: a technical segment which gathered professionals to address issues related to water scarcity, land degradation, climate change and land and water governance; and a ministerial segment organized by FAO, AOAD, ESCWA and LAS, which included a landmark joint declaration by Ministers for water and for agriculture on the need for coordinated action in support to food and water security. Following this joint meeting, strong support is required to maintain the momentum generated by the meeting and ensure follow-up. The first meeting of the Joint High-level Committee on Agriculture and Water was organized on 23-24 October 2019 in Cairo and addressed issues of water allocation for agriculture. Additional work in support of SDG 6 includes the promotion of water accounting and capacity development on water productivity and the water-food-energy nexus for selected countries in the region.
13. At the subregional level, the FAO Subregional Office for North Africa (SNE) conducted three country studies (Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) on the integration and alignment of agriculture and food security policies and programmes with the SDGs. Each of the studies covered the following:
- identification of development policies and strategies in the area of food security and agriculture;
  - identification and prioritization of SDG targets (16 targets across 10 SDGs<sup>2</sup>) related to agriculture and food security;
  - analysis of the level of integration of targets in the various operational programmes included in sectoral policies and strategies, and identification of gaps between programmes and SDGs targets; and
  - development of recommendations on integrated interventions to accelerate the implementation of the targets.

### **III. RNE country-level support to the 2030 Agenda**

14. At country level, FAO representatives and technical staff: (1) participate actively in the programming of the United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs), by actively contributing to the Common Country Assessment and the formulation of the UN Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF); (2) attend meetings related to monitoring and implementation of the SDGs; (3) actively support line ministries in aligning policy and planning to the SDGs; and (4) support multistakeholder dialogue on the SDGs. The information provided below corresponds to information received from the countries by the date of the publication of this document.

#### **Progress on SDGs in countries**

15. The degree of FAO support at the country level depends on the status of SDG implementation in the country. Over the period 2018-2019, national institutional coordination mechanisms were established in most countries. Based on a survey of FAO Representatives in the region, these mechanisms are progressively being put in place. In 2018, these mechanisms were considered not yet effective in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen. In 2019, however, only two countries were deemed to have ineffective mechanisms. This reflects an improvement in the effectiveness of these mechanisms over the two years.
16. National governance structures are in place and effective at the planning level in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Palestine and Tunisia. In 2018, the SDGs were reported to be the drivers of the integrated national investments in Algeria, Palestine and Yemen.
17. FAO has supported the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt in the organization of an international conference on sustainable agriculture in the framework of the SDGs. The

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<sup>2</sup> These are: SDG 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15 (with SDG 17 as partnership for the goals).

conference, which took place in March 2019, was organized by the Institute of National Planning and was attended by the ministers of planning, agriculture and water.

### **Monitoring the SDGs**

18. One of the major areas of FAO's support to countries to achieve the SDGs is capacity development, covering a broad range of participants and providing detailed training on the methodology for compiling the SDG indicators under FAO custodianship. RNE organized several in-country workshops to provide technical support in this area.
19. FAO conducted technical workshops in Algeria from 11 to 13 December 2018, and in Iraq from 13 to 17 January 2019, to raise awareness on all SDG indicators related to agriculture, food and nutrition security. A similar workshop was organized in Oman in October 2019. A wide range of stakeholders across several ministries participated in the workshops, which raised awareness of the SDG indicators under FAO custodianship and included activities to assess the broad capacity to monitor SDGs, identify the indicators for which data are available, review the national list of SDG indicators, support their alignment to the global monitoring framework, and provide basic training on the methodology of the indicators.
20. In Iraq, a capacity-building workshop was organized in 2019 covering indicators 2.1.1 (Prevalence of undernourishment), 2.1.2 (Food Insecurity Experience Scale), 2.c.1 (Food price anomalies), 6.4.1 (Change in water-use efficiency over time), and 6.4.2 (Level of water stress). As a result of the workshop, the number of indicators compiled and reported on increased.
21. In Palestine, the SDGs have been tailored to the national context and integrated in the national planning process and sectorial strategies, which now address SDG targets within the overall National Policy Agenda 2017-2022. Twelve SDG working groups were established to regularly track progress under specific goals. The national working groups began their work by identifying the priority goals and targets for Palestine for the years 2017-2022 and developing interventions to implement these priorities. One example is the formulation of the National Investment Plan 2020-2022 for SDG 2 that was developed by the SDG 2 Working Group, actively supported by FAO.
22. Support was provided to Jordan in 2019 for compiling the food balance sheets that are used as inputs to SDG indicator 2.1.1, using the updated FAO methodology. In April 2019, assistance was also provided to build the capacity of Jordan's Department of Statistics to compile SDGs 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 using the data of the Jordan Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2017.

### **Voluntary national reviews**

23. In Algeria, a voluntary national review (VNR) was submitted in July 2019. FAO enhanced the capacity of Algeria's national statistical services, particularly their capacity with regard to the FIES and the PoU methods, which are needed to assess progress against SDG indicators 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. FAO provided the same capacity building activities for Morocco.
24. In Lebanon, the Government submitted its first VNR in July 2018. This followed the establishment, by the country's SDG National Committee, of thematic interministerial working groups to launch the preparation of the VNR. The preparations for a National SDG Strategy were launched on 3 October 2019, in the presence of the Prime Minister and with the support of the United Nations Resident Coordinator.
25. In Mauritania, the country's first VNR was developed and presented at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York, in 2019.

26. In Oman, the country's first VNR was also presented in New York, in July 2019. FAO, in collaboration with various entities in Oman, organized a national event from 1 to 5 December 2019 that focused on two main objectives: (1) raising awareness among all relevant national stakeholders, including state and non-state actors, on mainstreaming food and agriculture in the SDG plans and strategies; and (2) helped build the capacities of national statisticians and related technical staff on a number of selected goals and indicators relevant to Oman.
27. In 2018, FAO supported the Sudan in developing its VNR. The Sudan VNR 2018 was consolidated through a national consultative process, systematically engaging stakeholders and development partners through the 2030 Agenda and SDG activities on institutional structure, interactive consultation and training workshops, experts' meetings, forums for policy dialogue with government officials and voluntary organizations, as well as publicity and awareness campaigns. Based on the analysis of linkages and interactions and through national consultation workshops on the most strategic factors that will help the Sudan implement and achieve the sustainable development agenda, three accelerators have been identified: peace dividend, agricultural transformation and social transformation.
28. In Tunisia, FAO conducted a review study on the integration and alignment of agriculture and food security policies and programmes with relevant SDG targets. FAO also undertook similar studies in Mauritania and Morocco. FAO also contributed to Tunisia's VNR and led the preparation of agriculture and food security papers for SDG 2, SDG 6 (targets 6.1; 6.2; 6.3; 6.4 and 6.5), and SDG 14 (targets 14.1, 14.2, 14.4 and 14.5).
29. FAO SNE also contributed to drafting the 2018 VNR for Tunisia. In this respect, FAO SNE led the preparation of agriculture and food security papers for SDG 2, SDG 6, and SDG 14.
30. Finally, FAO is also contributing to the multi-agency, cross-sectoral missions on "Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support" (MAPS), to support countries in the process of identifying accelerators for SDG prioritization and implementation. In particular, FAO will contribute to the MAPS missions in Egypt and Palestine.