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منظمة
الأغذية والزراعة
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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

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**Report of the First Regional Consultative Technical Meeting for the
35th Session of FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC35)**

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¹ Rescheduled from 2-4 March, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

I. Introductory Items

Organization of the Meeting

1. The Regional Consultative Technical Meeting (RCTM) for the 35th Session of FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC-35) was held in Cairo, Egypt, from 20 to 21 January 2020, under the theme of “Transforming Food Systems to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”.
2. The meeting was attended by 160 participants of which 83 were senior officers from the ministries of agriculture, water, environment and health from 24 Members² of the region (including the Minister for Water Resources of Iraq), Permanent Representatives and FAO Representatives in 14 countries.

Inaugural Ceremony (Opening Session)

3. The meeting was opened with statements by Mr Saad Musa, representing the Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation of Egypt, Mr Ahmed El Bakri, Deputy Minister for Agriculture from the Sultanate of Oman and the Chairperson of the Regional Consultative Meeting, Mr Yousef Juhail, Counsellor, Permanent Representative of the State of Kuwait to FAO and Chairperson of the Near East Group, and Mr Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa.
4. Mr Saad Musa welcomed the participants on behalf of the Minister for Agriculture and Land Reclamation of Egypt. He highlighted some of the key challenges facing the region and called for both collective actions and regional collaboration to address these challenges. Mr Musa reported that Egypt’s Sustainable Development Strategy 2020 – 2030 emphasized sustainable agriculture development as a key contributor to economic growth and employment creation. Key objectives of the strategy include reviewing the laws and legislation related to agricultural investment, encouraging young farmers, and mitigating climate change effects on agriculture. Mr Musa concluded by thanking the FAO Director-General for his attention and support given to the region and called upon FAO to further extend its support to the countries of the region.
5. Mr Ahmed El Bakri welcomed the participants and thanked FAO for organizing the meeting. He highlighted the importance of the meeting in following-up on the recommendations of NERC34 and preparing for NERC35, which will take place in the Sultanate of Oman from 2 to 4 March 2020. He reminded participants of the key objectives of the meeting, which focus on identification of the main challenges facing the region, the effective strategies to address these challenges and successful examples of achievements in the region. Mr El Bakri highlighted the importance of sustainable food systems and the need for well coordinated multisectoral efforts to ensure sustainable food systems that address the increasing challenges facing the region, including land degradation, dwindling water resources, climate change, droughts and desertification. He pointed to the rising levels of hunger and overweight and obesity. Mr El Bakri emphasized the crucial role of the Private Sector in promoting sustainable food systems. He underscored the need for enhanced regional collaboration to address the increasing challenges facing the region by developing and implementing comprehensive policy and programing packages related to, amongst others, sustainable investments, strategic storage, innovation,

² List of countries annexed

value chain approach, food-water coherence and building resilience to water scarcity, climate change and shocks. Mr El Bakri thanked FAO for its support to the region and called upon participants to engage in open discussion and to formulate practical recommendations.

6. Mr Yousef Juhail highlighted some of the key challenges facing the region such as water scarcity, climate change, the marginalized role of women and youth in development and the rural-urban gap. He called upon the participants of the meeting to ensure that the recommendations capitalized on available opportunities and resources. He also solicited the support of countries and FAO in developing and implementing effective policies and programmes.

7. Mr Abdessalam Ould Ahmed welcomed the participants, thanking the Government of Egypt for hosting the meeting and for its support to FAO. He also thanked the Sultanate of Oman for hosting NERC35 and the Near East Group for contributing to the preparations of the RCTM. Mr Ould Ahmed clarified that this meeting replaced the Senior Officers Technical Meeting which used to be back-to-back with the High-Level Ministerial meeting during the FAO Regional Conferences for the Near East. He elaborated on the rationale for this change, which was agreed upon with the Near East Regional Group, highlighting that this change is part of FAO efforts led by the Director-General to reinforce the Regional Conferences and increase both their effectiveness as well as countries' ownership of these conferences and their outcomes. Mr Ould Ahmed indicated that the region could hardly deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals without making a transformative shift towards more healthy food systems. He called upon the meeting to formulate transformative and practical recommendations.

Designation of the Rapporteur

8. The Regional Consultative Technical Meeting designated Ms Wafaa Dikah Hamze, Senior Adviser at the Ministry of Agriculture, from Lebanon as Rapporteur.

Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

9. The Regional Consultative Technical Meeting adopted the Agenda and revised Timetable (Appendix A). Documents submitted to the Regional Consultative Technical Meeting are listed in Appendix B.

II. Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Issues

A. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa - Adapting food systems to meet the needs of growing urban populations

10. The meeting reviewed the document on 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa - Adapting food systems to meet the needs of growing urban population' and took note of the messages highlighted by the discussant under this item Mr Nahla Hwalla, Professor of Human Nutrition at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

11. In the course of its deliberations on the item, the meeting:

- a) recognized the importance of prioritizing the eradication of hunger by 2030 noting that hunger and malnutrition affected almost all countries in the region, especially those confronted by high levels of conflicts;

- b) acknowledged that elimination of malnutrition requires holistic, multisectoral, well coordinated and coherent policies and programmes supported by strong political will;
 - c) raised concerns on the rising new challenges caused by the region's rapid urbanization and the urgent need for interventions for solving key food security and nutrition issues that are affecting urban and rural populations (food safety, food supply, resource use, etc.);
 - d) underscored the crucial role of the private sector in bringing solutions as well as in shaping changes in the food systems to promote better nutrition and healthier diets;
 - e) noted the need to implement the policies and investments required to respond to the growing food and nutritional needs of the region's increasing urban populations, adapting food systems to ensure healthy diets by better linking urban and rural areas, transforming agriculture and encouraging the adoption of sustainable environmental and natural resource management practices;
 - f) recognized the need to promote the role of women and youth and to strengthen their engagement in agricultural and rural development.
12. The meeting then called upon countries to:
- a) develop, in areas where deep and persistent pockets of poverty and hunger persist, evidence-based and targeted programmes in partnership with national and international partners to stimulate agricultural transformation, end poverty and drive rural prosperity;
 - b) adequately finance and implement policy frameworks, investments and education aimed at addressing the multiple burdens of malnutrition, acknowledging the growing public health and economic threats of overweight and obesity;
 - c) ensure availability of statistical data to report effectively against all SDG 2 indicators, seeking support from FAO, if required;
 - d) implement the policies and investments needed to adopt food systems that respond to the growing food and nutritional needs of the region's increasing urban populations in particular through ensuring coherence and convergence across nutrition, health and agriculture sectors as well as strengthening urban and rural linkages;
 - e) include food and nutrition in schools syllabus and programmes from early stages.
13. The meeting also recommended FAO to:
- a) support government efforts to develop appropriate policies and mobilize the investments needed to build sustainable and healthy food systems that nourish people rather than merely feed them whilst safeguarding natural resources and meeting the needs of growing urban populations, in line with the FAO 2019 Framework for the Urban Food Agenda;
 - b) support Members to design and implement public education programmes that raise awareness of all population groups on nutrition and healthy diets;
 - c) support research, innovation and technology transfer to improve productivity of different farming systems as well as to promote healthy food habits and explore ways to make healthier food, including organic food affordable to a wide range of consumers.

B. Building Resilient Farming Communities to Boost Local Economies and Create Decent Rural Employment

14. The meeting reviewed the document on Building Resilient Farming Communities to Boost Local Economies and Create Decent Rural Employment and took note of the key messages raised by the discussant, under this item, Mr Rami Zreik, Professor at the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at the American University of Beirut.
15. In the course of its deliberations on the item, the meeting:
 - a) acknowledged the importance of building resilience through rural employment, introduction of new technologies and digital agriculture and promoting social insurance. It noted that agriculture should benefit from the technology revolution, for example, through the use of digital mobile applications, among others, to support extension services to farmers;
 - b) highlighted the need to adopt the territorial approach to enhance rural and local development, reduce the risk of migration, and ensure a balanced rural urban development programme, by enhancing farm productivity and economic value, to make it more attractive to youth.
16. The meeting then called upon Members to:
 - a) consider territorial approaches as a framework for agricultural and rural development, and adopt multisectoral perspectives; and enhance coordination across sectors and levels of governance and between private and public actors;
 - b) support and enable the emergence of innovation based on modern science and technology, strong rural organizations, and agroecological innovation that together promote sustainable intensification and boost the resilience of smallholder farming systems;
 - c) consider including/mainstreaming climate-smart agriculture practices in extension curricula and developing the technical, policy and investment conditions required to boost their adoption by farming communities;
 - d) tailor national social protection programmes to contribute to enhanced agricultural productivity and employment, protecting the livelihoods of the most vulnerable groups, enhancing their resilience and making rural transformation as inclusive as possible;
 - e) support the implementation of the UN Decade of Family Farming Action Plan and translate it into national policies and programmes;
 - f) invest more equitably in rural areas with the aim of promoting job creation and local opportunities to curb distressed migration;
 - g) strengthen the capacity of small-scale family farmers to facilitate the adoption of improved agriculture practices as well as a business development approach to support innovation entrepreneurs, while promoting socioeconomic development;
 - h) establish institutional frameworks for development of farmers registries, in support of social protection to smallholders and their households;

- i) provide more equitable support to farmers, supporting farmers' associations, social protection, and agro-ecological tourism, considering in particular the needs of women;
 - j) encourage the use of Agricultural Innovation Parks as hubs for innovation-driven food security, private-public partnerships, knowledge exchange and information sharing, which focus on specific challenges faced by the region;
 - k) expand and scale successful examples of innovative financial instruments including microfinance, as needed, for instance in managing climate risks to support smallholders and pastoralists and through promoting climate-smart agriculture.
17. The meeting then requested FAO to:
- a) provide quality support to Members on policy, technical and programmatic perspectives;
 - b) support the implementation and coordination of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming action plan at the regional level and help translate it into policies and programmes at country level.

C. Ensuring Environmental Sustainability in the Context of water Scarcity and Climate Change

18. The meeting considered the document on Ensuring Environmental Sustainability in the Context of Water Scarcity and Climate Change and took note of the key messages raised by the discussant, Mr Abdelkader Hamdane, Professor of Irrigation and Drainage and Researcher at the National Agronomic Institute of Tunis.
19. In the course of its deliberations on the item, the meeting:
- a) noted the critical constraints posed by agriculture to the environment and biodiversity and the threat of climate change in the region;
 - b) recognized the strategic importance and urgency to address water scarcity in the context of climate change building on countries experiences;
 - c) underscored the need for multisectoral policy integration around water, land, marine resources and biodiversity;
 - d) acknowledged the importance of applying the principles of agroecology, climate smart agriculture, organic farming and other approaches that reconcile agriculture and environment.
20. The meeting then called upon Members to:
- a) promote the adoption of climate smart agriculture practices through appropriate policies, strategies and investments;
 - b) acknowledge the results of the Regional Water Scarcity Initiative and strengthen their efforts at national level towards improved water governance in support to food security;
 - c) develop their capacity in monitoring the environmental impacts of agriculture through the use of SDG indicators with support from FAO;
 - d) explore the potentials of adopting innovations in the agriculture sector such as aquaponics, soilless agriculture, solar energy for protected agriculture and others;

- e) raise awareness on groundwater management, use of non-conventional water (for example; water re-use, desalinization, etc.), water harvesting approaches and improved irrigation technologies;
 - f) promote drought and salinity resistant varieties and soil fertility management practices, to improve crop water productivity;
 - g) focus on the nexus approach and mainstream water and environment into agricultural policies;
 - h) support intersectoral coordination mechanisms to inform effective decision-making mechanisms;
 - i) adopt standards, regulatory frameworks and codes of conduct and best practices such as the code of conduct on fertilizers use.
21. The meeting also recommended FAO to:
- a) establish a regional knowledge platform for agriculture, including water and climate;
 - b) support Members in monitoring the environmental impact of agriculture through the use of SDG indicators.

D. Regional Bodies and Major Meetings in the Near East

22. The meeting noted and supported:
- a) the conclusions and recommendations of the Regional Commissions including the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI), the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC), the Commissions for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central and Western Regions (CRC and CLCPRO);
 - b) the conclusions and recommendations of relevant regional meetings in the Near East including the Lands and Water Days, the Multistakeholders Dialogue on Mainstreaming Biodiversity and the Nationally Determined Contributions Workshops (NDCs);
 - c) the recommendations of FAO Regional Bodies and Major Meetings in the Near East;
 - d) the major achievements of FAO work at the regional and country levels including the significant growth in the field programme, the results of the three Regional Initiatives at the regional level and the results of the implementation of the Country Programming Frameworks at the country level;
 - e) the main findings and recommendations from the evaluations of FAO's work in the region during the last five years.
23. The meeting took note of the serious concerns/risks associated with the outbreak of the desert locust in some countries of the region and urged FAO and Members to take the necessary measures.
24. The meeting encouraged Members and FAO to implement key recommendations arising from the Regional Commissions and meetings and to establish the necessary follow-up mechanisms.

E. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative: An approach to address hunger and poverty in the Near East and North Africa region

25. The meeting took note of:
- a) the presentation on the Hand-in-Hand Initiative: An approach to address hunger and poverty in the Near East and North Africa region;
 - b) the ongoing collaboration between the League of Arab States and FAO in preparing a Regional Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Zero Hunger in the Arab Region to form the basis for a Regional Initiative on Zero Hunger in the Arab region, and the alignment of this work with the Hand-in-Hand Initiative in both crisis affected countries and those countries with persistent pockets of deep hunger in high potential rural areas.
26. The meeting valued the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and welcomed its country-led character as well as its emphasis on ending poverty and hunger through accelerated agricultural transformation, evidence-based platform, analytics, integrated GIS platforms, partnership and territorial approaches.
27. The meeting highlighted a number of areas and issues, including the statistical challenges many governments face with implications for future engagement in the initiative, linkages with other ongoing regional and national approaches, as well as implementation modalities with countries across the region.
28. The meeting recommended presenting the Hand-in-Hand Initiative in the forthcoming Near East Regional Conference for consideration by the Ministers of the region.

III. Programme and Budget Matters

A. Results and Priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa region

29. The meeting noted and supported:
- a) the major achievements of FAO's work at the regional and country levels, including the significant growth in the field programme, the results of the three Regional Initiatives at the regional level and the results of the implementation of the Country Programming Frameworks at the country level;
 - b) the main findings and recommendations from the evaluations of FAO's work in the region during the last five years;
 - c) the trends, vision and the four priorities identified by the Strategic Thinking Process launched by FAO.
30. The meeting took note of the main points and messages highlighted by the members of the panel who commented on this item. The members of the panel consisted of Ms Wafaa Dikah Hamze, Senior Adviser at the Ministry of Agriculture in Lebanon; Her Excellency Asmahan Altoqi, Ambassador of Yemen to the Rome-Based Agencies and Mr Mohamed Ait Kadi, President of the General Council of Agricultural Development in Morocco.

31. In the course of its deliberations, the meeting endorsed the four priorities suggested by the FAO Strategic Thinking Process; namely: (i) rural transformation for youth employment and income; (ii) developing food systems that promote food security and healthy diets for all; (iii) greening agriculture: addressing water scarcity, ensuring environmental sustainability and climate action; and (iv) building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations.

32. In the quest of converting the aforementioned priorities into programmes, the meeting called upon FAO to develop programmes that take account of the following:

Rural transformation

a) develop youth entrepreneurship in value chains, agri-food systems' innovation and access to financial resources;

b) support family farming in rural and urban areas;

Food systems that promote food security and healthy diets

c) support diversification of production and consumption whilst raising awareness for safe food and reduced food loss and waste;

d) define healthy diets in ways that are culturally and locally appropriate by using soft and hard levers that the governments retain, including shifting subsidies and behavioral change;

e) apply a holistic approach to promote sustainable food systems taking into account different aspects of a food system and the specificities of local contexts;

f) promote sharing of experiences and learning among countries in using the Food Safety Index;

Greening agriculture

g) build capacity of smallholders across the value chain to improve quality, productivity and access to markets;

h) set production priorities within national visions taking into account natural resource constraints including water availability;

i) enhance circular economy, including in terms of compost production, minimizing cost of solid waste management in cities and offering valuable input for agriculture;

Building resilience

j) develop partnerships to ensure accumulation of assets and combining cash transfer and technical assistance including Information and Communication Technology (ICT);

k) improve early warning in protracted crises as the crises evolve;

l) increase preparedness, response and coordination to combat desert locust;

m) strengthen regional collaboration for addressing transboundary pests and diseases;

Cross-cutting issues

- n) support countries in translating national policies to programmes to attract aid from the donor community;
- o) improve the relationship and coordination among specialized agencies and institutions;
- p) secure the development of the requisite data and statistical frameworks to support Members with the view to ensuring a solid evidence-based approach and greater effectiveness in terms of the impact derived from the implementation of the programmes and initiatives;
- q) promote partnership with the private sector;
- r) ensure effective gender mainstreaming in agriculture and food sectors.

IV. Concluding Session

33. In conclusion, the meeting thanked FAO for the innovative approach adopted in the Regional Consultative Technical Meeting, which had gathered the key stakeholders from the Members of the region together with their Permanent Representatives and the FAO Representatives concerned, and fostered substantive, interactive and engaged consultative dialogues on the issues tabled to the meeting. It further recommended that these meetings be instituted as an effective mechanism of the regional governance and oversight and in this respect, be considered an integral part of the Regional Conferences in the future for both the follow up and preparations of the Regional Conferences.
34. The Chair and participants of the meeting thanked the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for its generous hospitality in hosting the meeting.

Appendix A: List of Countries that participated in the Meeting**I. Member Nations in the FAO Near East Region**

1. Afghanistan
2. Algeria
3. Bahrain
4. Djibouti
5. Egypt
6. Iraq
7. Jordan
8. Kuwait
9. Kyrgyzstan
10. Lebanon
11. Libya
12. Mauritania
13. Morocco
14. Oman
15. Pakistan
16. Qatar
17. Saudi Arabia
18. Somalia
19. the Sudan
20. Syrian Arab Republic
21. Tajikistan
21. Tunisia
23. Turkey
24. United Arab Emirates
25. Yemen

II. Permanent Observers

1. Palestine