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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

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Outcomes of the UN Food Systems Summit and implications for the Near East and North Africa

Executive Summary

The UN Food Systems Summit was convened by the UN Secretary-General from 23 to 24 September 2021 in recognition that transforming food systems provides one of the most powerful ways to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda. The 18-month process towards the UN Food Systems Summit provided an opportunity for stakeholders globally to increase awareness of, and to elevate the discourse on, food systems. Through five Action Tracks, 2 200 ideas for accelerated action were consolidated into 52 solution clusters. An extensive process of UN Food Systems Summit Dialogues, involving over 107 000 participants, provided a basis for ensuring an improved coherence and alignment of action.

Over 37 000 delegates registered for the virtual Summit, which was viewed by more than 50 000 people from across 193 countries. One hundred and sixty-five (165) UN Member States, including 78 Heads of State and Government, made statements. The Summit delivered a Portfolio of Action, comprising (i) The Secretary-General's Chair Summary and Statement of Action; (ii) National Food Systems Transformation Pathways and Strategies; (iii) Coalitions of Action; (iv) Multistakeholder Initiatives and constituency commitments; and (v) a compendium knowledge base.

The follow up from the Summit will be led by the Rome-based UN Agencies in cooperation with all relevant UN Agencies, funds and programmes, as well as all relevant international organizations.

FAO will host a Coordination Hub staffed by secondees from the Rome-based UN Agencies and other UN agencies.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to call upon Members to:

- a) Affirm the critical importance of better coordinated action and investment towards more sustainable agrifood systems to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

- b) Acknowledge the results of the UN Food Systems Summit and commit to supporting national and regional actions that build on these results.
- c) Share experiences of the process of national dialogues and the actions that have been identified as critical to ensuring that agrifood systems developments contribute to an acceleration in the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- d) Provide guidance on the process of follow up and review.

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I. Introduction

1. In 2021, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General convened a Food Systems Summit as part of the UN Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The decision to convene the Summit was in recognition that transforming food systems provides one of the most powerful ways to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda, following the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report's identification of food systems as one of the few key entry points to bring about a worldwide transition to a more sustainable trajectory. Taking place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the process towards the Summit also provided an opportunity to consider how food systems could contribute to the UN Secretary-General's call to "build back better".
2. The 2030 Agenda and its associated SDGs have shone light on the importance of the multiple objectives that future agrifood systems will need to meet and have highlighted the increased recognition that in delivering greater quantities of more affordable food, food system developments have worked against several societal objectives including improved health and nutrition, reduced poverty, improved ecosystem services and social inclusion.
3. Over the past decade, agrifood systems stakeholders have already been taking actions and changing their behaviours; producers, by experimenting with alternative practices to reduce impacts on biodiversity, natural resources and climate; the food industry by engaging in more sustainable sourcing, product reformulation and reduction of losses; consumers, where they can afford to, by seeking out better information about foods for healthier diets and advocating for more environmentally friendly food products and reduction and better handling of waste.
4. However, the many independent initiatives of governments, private sector and civil society that were already emerging in support of more sustainable agrifood systems lacked a common framing of the complex interactions, dependencies and trade-offs intrinsic to food systems, constraining the ability of societies with different priorities, observing different trends and having different agro-ecological and institutional potentials to identify and implement appropriate pathways towards more sustainable food systems.
5. The 18 month process towards the UN Food Systems Summit provided a first opportunity for stakeholders globally to increase awareness and to elevate the discourse and political relevance of food systems to the global agenda. In doing so, it provided a basis for the improved coherence and alignment of action that is so urgently needed.

II. Process towards the UN Food Systems Summit

6. The process was guided by a Summit Advisory Committee chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General with multistakeholder membership, including the Principals of FAO, IFAD, WFP, country representatives and representatives of the private sector and civil society. The Advisory Committee provided guidance to the Special Envoy for the UN Food Systems Summit, who had the overall responsibility for delivering the Summit. A Scientific Group was established to ensure independence in the generation and use of evidence and a UN taskforce worked to ensure broad UN engagement in the process towards the Summit and to support its follow up. A Champions' Network was established to build, mobilize and maintain strategic coalitions with partners.
7. The process was structured around five Action Tracks: (1) Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all; (2) shift to sustainable consumption patterns; (3) boost nature-positive production; (4) advancing equitable livelihoods; and (5) build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress.
8. Supported by robust and independent evidence, the five Action Tracks helped a diverse set of stakeholders to work through the complex challenges that must be addressed if more sustainable food systems are to be achieved, by offering all constituencies a space to share and learn, to foster new actions and partnerships and to amplify existing initiatives. Throughout the Summit process, more than 2 200 ideas for accelerated action were developed by experts and stakeholders. These were

consolidated, through the collective work of the Scientific Group, Action Tracks, Levers of Change, Champions Network and UN Task Force, into 52 solution clusters for consideration by countries and other actors in relation to their own contexts and priorities.

9. To ensure that the objectives of having “A People’s Summit” and “A Solutions Summit” were met, UN Food Systems Summit Dialogues provided an inclusive and unique approach to identifying what’s working and not working, what are the key priorities to improve, and in identifying actions to address these priorities at the subnational, national, regional and global levels. Through 11 Global dialogues, 987 registered independent dialogues and 613 registered Member State Dialogues, over 107 000 participants have helped to shape transformative pathways that can take forward the actions articulated through the Action Tracks.

10. In the NENA region, many Members (15 countries) nominated a high-level individual from within the Government to convene a series of national dialogues as part of the UN Food Systems Summit process. The national dialogues articulated national pathways to sustainable food systems which can serve as points of reference across government and for all stakeholders in coming years.

11. The FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa (RNE) provided technical support to the national dialogues, particularly to Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all, in several countries. For instance, FAO supported the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR) and the National Food Safety Authority (NFSA) in Egypt to prepare the paper related to Action Track 1. The paper prioritized solutions in line with the Summit’s key criteria for ‘game changing and systemic solutions’, as well as supporting gender equity, empowering youth and creating synergies with other Action Tracks.

12. RNE partnered with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in launching the Arab Regional Dialogue on Food Systems which took place on 29 March 2021 to provide an integrative and engaging platform that enables groups representing farmers, women, youth, banks, engineers, the private sector and others as key stakeholders to share their role, perspectives, experiences and issues on making the region’s food systems healthier, more inclusive and more sustainable, in addition to enhancing their resilience within the COVID-19 context. The Arab Regional Dialogue consolidated regional views, perspectives and experiences. It further encouraged national dialogues to take place. The final Regional Outcome Document is set to reflect those discussions. Two preparatory consultation meetings, including the Arab Youth Dialogue (9 March 2021) and the Arab Stakeholder Dialogue (11 March 2021), took place prior to the Regional Dialogue.

13. In preparation for the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, RNE partnered with ESCWA and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) in organising a virtual session on “Priorities for Transforming Food Systems in the Arab Region” on 27 July 2021 as an affiliated session within the Pre-Summit sessions of the UN Food Systems Summit. This meeting provided an integrative and engaging platform that enabled regional stakeholders to share their perspectives, experiences and issues on transforming NENA food systems to healthier, more inclusive, sustainable and resource efficient systems.

III. What were the results of the Summit?

14. The Summit, was held from 23 to 24 September 2021, focused on consolidating the results and commitments to action emerging from the Summit process. Overall, 37 000 delegates registered for the virtual Summit, which was viewed by more than 50 000 people from across 193 countries. One hundred and sixty-five (165) UN Member States, including 78 Heads of State and Government, made statements at the Summit. The most prominent messages were calls for international and regional cooperation and COVID-19 recovery, and commitments to ensuring food security, eradicating hunger and improving nutrition. Taking action towards climate change mitigation and adaptation was also expressed, including making agricultural production climate-resilient and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, care for the environment and ensuring rich biodiversity. Support for small and family farmers and rural populations, through such means as investment, technological support and

extension services were identified as priorities, with science, technology, research, innovation and investment highlighted frequently.

15. The Summit delivered a Portfolio of Action, comprising (i) The Secretary-General's Chair Summary and Statement of Action; (ii) National Food Systems Transformation Pathways and Strategies; (iii) Coalitions of Action; (iv) Multistakeholder Initiatives and constituency commitments; and (v) a compendium knowledge base.

- i. The Secretary-General's Chair Summary and Statement of Action called on the global community to keep its promises for a better future through food systems that work for people, planet and prosperity. It outlined how progress in five key areas would amount to a global shift in making progress on the SDGs. The five areas, informed by the Summit's Independent Scientific Group, Action Tracks, Levers of Change, and the Summit Dialogues are: (1) Nourish All People; (2) Boost Nature-based Solutions; (3) Advance Equitable Livelihoods, Decent Work & Empowered Communities; (4) Build Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks and Stresses; and (5) Support Means of Implementation. It also described the approach to follow-up from the Summit.
- ii. The emerging results of the National Dialogues in 148 countries and a series of Regional Dialogues reflect an understanding that while local context, approaches and perspectives may differ, food systems can and must transform in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The National UN Food Systems Summit Dialogues provided the opportunity for national governments and stakeholders to identify priorities and shape strategic pathways for the future of food systems and to generate commitments from multiple stakeholders. Of the 148 UN Member States leading national dialogues, 103 had submitted National Pathways for food systems transformation by the time of the Summit, providing visions of what governments, together with different stakeholders, expect of their food systems by 2030. The Summit process also resulted in the development of Regional Pathways for Food Systems Transformation that address areas of common focus and priority across many countries and national pathways or that can only be addressed through the joint effort of these countries across national borders.
- iii. Under each of the Areas of Action highlighted in the Secretary-General's Statement of Action, a series of coalitions, initiatives, alliances, partnerships, networks, knowledge and resources have emerged to help countries connect local through to global action. A non-exhaustive list includes the following in which FAO has been engaged:
 - Nourish All People: Zero Hunger; Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems; School Meals; Food Is Never Waste; Social Protection; and Family Farming;
 - Boost Nature-based Solutions: Agroecology; Sustainable Productivity Growth; Blue and Aquatic Foods; Land and Freshwater Nexus; Repurpose Public Support to Food and Agriculture; Halting Deforestation and Conversion; Better Data Better Decisions;
 - Advance Equitable Livelihoods, Decent Work and Empowered Communities: Making Food Systems Work for Women and Girls; Indigenous Peoples Food Systems; Inclusive and Sustainable Urban Food Systems;
 - Build Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks and Stresses: Resilient Local Food Supply Chains; The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus;
 - Support Means of Implementation: Digitalization and Innovation.
- iv. Strong declarations, commitments and statements were made by each of the Summit's self-organising constituencies, including the Champions Network, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, Interfaith leaders, private sector, producers and youth.

16. A UN Food Systems Summit Compendium which provides an overview of the engagement process and the findings, knowledge and contributions generated in the lead up to the Summit by all workstreams has been made available online. This includes links to the more than 2 000 solutions compiled by Action Track and levers of change teams, synthesis reports from national and independent dialogues, and a Science Reader featuring research and more than 50 briefs by the Scientific Group and its global partners with state-of-the-art, solution-oriented knowledge and evidence.

IV. Follow-up and review

17. The UN Food Systems Summit has provided a momentum for all food systems stakeholders to work together in a more systemic and coordinated way. The Secretary -General's Statement of Action articulated the approach to follow-up from the Summit and committed the UN system to jointly lead a Coordination Hub that collaborates with, and draws upon, wider UN system capacities to support countries as they formulate and implement national pathways for food systems transformation. The Hub will align itself with existing UN functions and capacities in its work and existing structures and mechanisms.

18. The Hub will be hosted by FAO on behalf of the UN system and will be supported by the FAO Office of SDGs reporting to the FAO Director-General. Oversight of the Hub will fall on a Steering Group comprised of the Principals of the Rome-based UN Agencies, DCO, and UNEP as the initial Chair of an evolved UN Task Force. The Chair of the UN Task Force will rotate among interested UN agencies with strong connections to the work of the Hub. The Hub will consist of a nimble team, largely comprised of secondments from UN system entities, that understands the broader landscape across the entire food system, makes connections and ensures a systems approach, and showcases success and lessons learned.

19. The Coordination Hub will perform a number of functions:

- a) It will continue to promote a strong narrative around transformative action in agrifood systems to achieve the SDGs and prepare a global stock-take for Member States every two years through 2030 to drive continuous progress.
- b) It will ensure the elevation of priority topics in the food systems transformation agenda for strategic thought leadership of UN Agencies and leading actors in the ecosystem of support, including the science ecosystem of support, to strengthen the science-policy interface.
- c) It will facilitate connection with the broader ecosystem of actors for sustainable agrifood systems through which coalitions and other initiatives as well as the science ecosystem, are connected, with a focus on delivering integrated coherent package for delivery at country level. This is critical to avoid the risk of falling back into a siloed approach.
- d) Key to taking the process forward is the expertise and advice of youth, indigenous groups, women, food producers and the private sector inter alia. This will be drawn on through a Stakeholders Group that will use existing structures and self-organized stakeholders' constituencies.
- e) A key role of the Coordination Hub will be to coordinate and facilitate the required technical and policy support from UN system and other institutions to assist countries in further developing and implementing their national pathways. During the Summit process, UN agencies including FAO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and partners with the support of a number of Member States, have identified the delivery of a set of critical functions to support food systems transformation which would provide, inter alia, (i) advisory services for national dialogue and multistakeholder collaboration; (ii) policy analysis in support of national agrifood systems design; (iii) shared learning on agrifood systems transformation; and (iv) a matchmaking and clearinghouse mechanism to connect Members with relevant global and regional support initiatives.

- f) Where the UN has country presence, country level support will be delivered in coordination with the Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams and in line with the Country Common Analyses and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. The Coordination Hub will facilitate a more aligned and efficient delivery of support at the country level, building on the assets and programmes of the UN and other organizations and initiatives such as the FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative.

V. Relevant UN Food Systems Summit outcomes for NENA countries

20. The Summit has established clear and ambitious goals for agrifood systems that reflect complex relationships between the environmental, economic and social pillars of sustainable development. To this effect, all stakeholders in NENA region, especially governments, must now reaffirm a commitment to act with urgency, at scale and in solidarity with one another to keep the promise of the SDGs. As most of the NENA countries are lagging in achieving SDGs targets, transformation of the agrifood systems to become more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable is the key for achieving food security and improved nutrition, improve the livelihoods of farming communities and sustain the natural resources and environmental services. For this to happen, several key actions are to be taken:

- a) Support national mechanisms that develop and implement national pathways to 2030 that are inclusive and consistent with countries' climate commitments, building upon the national food systems dialogues. The UN system and all relevant stakeholders, including the International Finance Institutions (IFIs), the private sector and civil society play a pivotal role in supporting country implementation.
- b) Action must be driven at country-level by governments in their local contexts. Five action areas have emerged from the Summit process, each with key regional implications. These include:
 - i. **Nourish All People:** NENA countries are facing the challenges of increased food insecurity and malnutrition, particularly conflict countries, with the most vulnerable suffering the most. Actions to end hunger, increase food security and improve nutrition must include and prioritize marginalized groups.
 - ii. **Boost Nature-based Solutions:** The NENA region is characterized by water scarcity, land limitation and degradation, biodiversity loss and is subjected to climate change and weather extremes. Solutions need to optimize the economic, environmental and social outcomes of the agrifood systems while realizing the potential trade-offs. This approach is critical to ensure sustainable and resilient agrifood systems and livelihoods.
 - iii. **Advance Equitable Livelihoods, Decent Work and Empowered Communities:** Income, gender and rural-to-urban inequalities are widening in the NENA region. In addition, informal markets and associated casual workers remain dominant. These together have intensified the poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition in the region. Providing equitable and resilient livelihood sources, empowerment of rural communities and improved work conditions along agrifood value chains are critical for the NENA region to advance the achievement of the SDG targets.
 - iv. **Build Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks and Stresses:** The NENA region, with predominantly dry areas and rainfed farming, is highly vulnerable and subject to climate and environment related shocks (climate change, weather extremes, drought, heat waves, floods, dust storms, water scarcity, land degradation and desertification, biodiversity loss). These are compounded by conflict and economic stresses (including import dependence, income/job losses, debt and high inequality). This means that building resilient agrifood systems and livelihoods are a must for the

countries in the region to be able to maintain food security in the face of multiple intersecting shocks and crises.

- v. **Support Means of Implementation:** NENA countries must develop and implement national pathways for the transformation of agrifood systems. This requires strong political will and leadership by governments; building of national capacities at all levels; increasing funding allocated to agriculture and food systems; investing in marketing infrastructure, particularly in informal markets; enforcing food safety measures; supporting science-based solutions and policies to develop technical, institutional and policy innovations for the transformation of agrifood systems; strengthening governance along the whole food supply chain; and fostering regional cooperation and integration in addressing transboundary issues including diseases, pests and food trade.