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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-sixth Session

10-13 January 2022 and 7-8 February 2022

Summary of the recommendations of regional commissions

Executive Summary

Presentation of the conclusions and recommendations of the FAO Regional Commissions in the Near East and North Africa with regard to policy and regulatory matters and programme and budget matters. This includes regional fora such as the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI), and the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC). The document also presents, for information, the outcomes of other relevant regional meetings in particular the High-Level Joint Water-Agriculture Technical Committee of the League of Arab States.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to call upon Members and FAO to:

- a) Take note of the main outcomes of the Regional Commissions' sessions and major meetings held in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region in the 2020-2021 biennium.
- b) Implement key recommendations arising from FAO's Regional Commissions in relation to policy and regulatory matters, as well as programme and budget matters.

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I. FAO Regional Commissions in the Near East and North Africa

A. Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC)

1. The Twenty-fifth Session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC) was hosted virtually by the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt from 19 to 21 December 2021. Eighty-seven country representatives from 17 Members and one observer country attended the session, in addition to 14 observers from seven regional intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations. The Commission issued a series of recommendations to be brought to the attention of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO), the Regional Conference for the Near East and for FAO programme priorities regarding forestry. In developing the recommendations, the Commission considered global developments within and outside of FAO.

2. In relation to policy and regulatory matters, the Commission:

- took note of the important links between forests, rangelands and the need to transform agrifood systems as well as the main challenges to reduce forest and rangeland degradation and deforestation without adversely affecting food security;
- underlined that moving from purely sectoral approaches to cross-sectorial can help in identifying innovative solutions; and
- stressed the need:
 - a) To acknowledge the importance of interactions between agriculture and forestry for sustainable development.
 - b) For farmers, in particular smallholders, to be provided with the knowledge, tools and incentives or options to adopt more sustainable practices.
 - c) For policies to reflect these interactions, and associated legislations that focus much more on sustainable practices.
 - d) For greener investments, from public and private sources, and to ensure that all stakeholder groups are involved and listened to in the transformation towards more sustainable agrifood systems.
 - e) To emphasize the roles of food security, agriculture, rangeland, forestry and other aspects of rural development in an integrated manner.
- recommended its Members to:
 - a) Strengthen efforts to reduce forest and rangeland degradation and deforestation.
 - b) Strengthen the institutional mechanisms for silvopastoral and agroforestry approaches in integrating livestock management in forest- and tree-based production systems to maximize synergies in terms of provision of food and fibre and other essential environmental services such as biomass circulation, carbon storage, biodiversity conservation, soil fertility and water management.
 - c) Promote efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems that contribute to sustainable forest and land management, including through agricultural capacity building programmes and improved access to technologies and markets, especially for women and youth.
 - d) Mainstream the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus approach in ongoing and future programmes and projects that integrate conflict sensitivity and context specific analysis to avoid exacerbating further degradation.
- encouraged Members to:
 - a) Take advantage of the opportunities provided by the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and other related global initiatives to mobilize resources for large-scale

restoration programmes that aim at reversing ecosystem degradation, halting deforestation and land degradation and enhancing ecosystem health.

- b) Better utilize available FAO technical resources to enhance capacities in areas related to forest and rangelands development, including landscape restoration, sustainable forest and rangeland management, biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation and provide FAO with feedback on their usability and the gaps to be filled in these available resources.
- c) Further implement the activities of the NENA Regional Forest Wildland Fire Network (NENFIRE) and Near East Network on Forest Health and Invasive Species (NENFHIS), and to strengthen regional collaboration on forest/rangeland protection.
- d) Further include Agriculture Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU) targets and activities in the context of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement, and to seek partnerships to harness international climate finance to this end.
- e) Bring their forest and rangeland related climate concerns to the attention of the 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East and request that it recognize the role of forests and rangelands in policies and programmes that combat climate change.

3. Additionally, the Commission:

- stressed the need for Members to designate National Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) Correspondents for future assessments, when requested, with the aim to ensure complete national submissions to future FRA's from all countries of the region;
- invited Members to increase knowledge of forests by updating national land cover maps and conducting National Forest Inventories (NFIs) in countries where forest-related data are outdated or lacking;
- invited Members to raise awareness of the importance of reversing forest cover loss and degradation of forests and other lands in the region, and the function of FRA reporting in monitoring progress towards agreed national and international goals and targets;
- encouraged Members to seek FAO support to undertake studies on the impact of COVID-19 on their key Non-Wood Forest Products (NWFPs) in order to strengthen the resilience of their NWFPs in the face of any similar shocks and stresses in the future and to build back better;
- encouraged Members to mobilize public, private and international development finance to support the valorisation of the NWFPs in their countries and develop robust national research programmes to unveil the health benefit potentials of major NWFPs that already have well-established traditional medicinal uses;
- welcomed the topical focus of FAO's flagship publication "The State of the World's Forests" 2022, titled "Forestry and Green Recovery, Building Inclusive and Sustainable Green Economies";
- welcomed FAO's efforts in mainstreaming forest related issues into the preparations of the UN Food Systems Summit and its Pre-Summit and the proposed follow-up actions;
- welcomed the developments under the UN Secretary-General's Initiative on Turning the Tide on Deforestation and encouraged countries to engage in the initiative by developing policy and legislative frameworks and undertake awareness and actionable programmes aiming to halt deforestation;
- welcomed the themes of the International Day of Forests 2022 (Forests and Sustainable Production and Consumption) and 2023 (Forests and Health) and will consider them in the preparation of celebration events in the region;
- invited Members to support the XV World Forestry Congress (WFC) by encouraging and facilitating good attendance, and encouraged countries (in a position to do so) to provide financial support to the Congress to enable balanced participation;
- given the importance of the WFC - an event that is organized every 6 years and that this time has been delayed by one more year because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic - the

Commission requested FAO to organize a regional preparatory meeting prior the WFC to help prepare the region for such a relevant meeting;

- recommended that COFO strengthen the cross-sectorial work of the Regional Forestry Commissions, especially on forestry and agrifood systems matters, by providing relevant and useful inputs to their Members, to FAO (including through the Regional Conferences) and to other international processes on forest-related issues;
- recommended that FAO consider undertaking a detailed review of NEFRC with the aim of further enhancing its relevance, including the focus on Agenda 2030 and the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, and its efficiency and effectiveness;
- recommended that FAO communicate the results of the suggested NEFRC review to the COFO for its consideration;
- recommended that COFO extend and strengthen its work on rangelands;
- recommended that FAO invite the Chairperson of the NEFRC to attend the upcoming Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) and in the intersessional period increase interaction between NEFRC and NERC Members and their permanent Rome-based representations, with a view to strengthening cross-sectorial policy dialogue and to ensure that important regional forestry and rangeland matters are integrated in the themes of the Regional Conference;
- recommended that FAO synchronize the calendar of future NEFRC meetings with the timetable of NERC meetings, in order to provide inputs from the Commission to the NERC in a more timely manner;
- recommended that FAO strengthen the cross-sectorial work of the NEFRC, especially on forestry and agrifood systems matters, by providing relevant and useful inputs to their Members and to other international processes on forest related issues;
- recommended that FAO provide further analyses and outlooks on the status and use of the forest resources in the region, building on the FRA and other relevant data, to support related decision-making;
- invited the Secretariat of the Regional Conference to give adequate attention to the recommendations of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission when developing the agenda of the Conference; and
- noted that there are many regional and international organizations working in the area of forest and rangelands in the NENA region and called on FAO to strengthen collaboration and synergies with these organizations including through the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and other related Global initiatives and processes.

4. In relation to programme and budget matters, the Commission:

- requested FAO to strengthen action on assessing and monitoring deforestation and rangelands degradation taking into consideration regionally specific degradation dynamics and drivers within the context of the Programme Priority Area (PPA) on Resilient Agrifood Systems and other relevant PPAs;
- requested FAO to strengthen action on halting desertification, land degradation and deforestation while greening agrifood systems, taking into consideration regionally specific land degradation dynamics and drivers across the work of relevant PPAs;
- requested FAO to further strengthen its cross-sectorial work through activities aimed at halting land degradation and deforestation, and promoting sustainable agriculture, rangeland, and forest management in ways that lead to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems;
- requested FAO to continue to support Members with the formulation of development projects that integrate forest and rangelands within the broader food system, conserve biodiversity, adapt to climate change and combat land degradation and contribute to achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- requested FAO to continue to support the implementation of NENFIRE and NENFHIS activities, upon request by Members, especially the Review and Analysis and Risk Reduction

for forest fires and community-based fire management, as well as phytosanitary measures in forestry; and share information on the outcomes of such activities and initiatives to be translated into national and regional programmes;

- requested FAO to continue to provide technical assistance, upon request by Members, to improve institutional capacity to combat biotic and abiotic factors affecting health and vitality of forests and rangelands, including fires, pests and diseases, in support of the development of resilient forests and rangelands in the context of climate change;
- requested FAO to continue to provide technical assistance, upon request by Members, to bolster national forest monitoring and climate risk and vulnerability assessments to evaluate future scenarios, achieve mitigation and adaptation targets, including through leveraging innovative monitoring tools and platforms, including Open Foris and the Framework for Ecosystem Restoration Monitoring (FERM);
- requested FAO to help Members, upon their request, to enhance coordination and collaboration on climate change activities, both within countries, and inter-regionally, with relevant and recognized institutions and international organizations at the national level and in the region respectively;
- requested FAO to continue building national capacity for harmonized FRA reporting, improve reporting on forest characteristics, continue developing the FRA data platform, and further strengthen its support for national forest inventory and mapping in the region;
- requested FAO to explore ways of improving forest data through regional collaboration on thematic mapping and monitoring and through possible linkages to other data sources;
- requested FAO to share its recommendations for the Near East Regional Conference (NERC), COFO and the forestry programme priorities with other Regional Forestry Commissions as well as with the secretariats of the Regional Conference and COFO;
- requested FAO to promote SOFO 2022 within and outside of the forestry sector;
- requested FAO to take an active part in advancing the UN Secretary-General's Initiative on Turning the Tide on Deforestation and related activities;
- requested FAO to continue to take an active role as the Chair of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and through this enhance advocacy on forests through relevant global processes and initiatives;
- requested FAO to organize a regional preparatory meeting prior to the World Forestry Congress (WFC) to allow the countries in the region to be well prepared for this event;
- recommended that FAO, upon request from countries, establish protocols and/or guidelines for sustainable NWFP harvest, resource management and international trade;
- recommended that FAO provide support for conversion of NWFP raw materials into finished products with value added in a way that enables NWFP producers/collectors to earn higher prices for their products; and
- recommended that FAO assist countries in the identification of necessary measures and tools to overcome the impacts of the pandemic on the society and NWFPs, in particular impacts on the economic sector.

B. Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI)

5. The eleventh session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was held virtually from 25 to 27 October 2021. The session was attended by 40 participants, from seven of the eight RECOFI Member Countries (namely Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), as well as the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the FAO Secretariat.

6. The Commission reviewed the progress on the activities of the period 2020-2021 and recognized the importance of a number of matters when discussing its vision for RECOFI including:

- the Regional Aquaculture Information System is a critical resource for the collection and dissemination of RECOFI data, and the efforts to integrate data from the Minimum Data on Aquaculture and Capture Fisheries must be supported. Additionally, this data must be consistently updated in order to remain relevant and useful;
 - cooperation on trade and marketing related issues should also take place under the framework of RECOFI, through discussions, workshops and other coordination mechanisms;
 - countries need to be more engaged and cooperative and provide support to RECOFI, and RECOFI must be strengthened to support member countries;
 - the role of national focal points is critical, their efforts ensure that work can continue over the intersessional period; and
 - Oman called on RECOFI Member Countries to join in fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and specifically to become party to the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing (PSMA).
7. In relation to policy and regulatory matters, the Commission:
- commended the efforts of the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) and the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) at their last meetings and endorsed their outcomes and recommendations for follow-up actions;
 - noted the importance of continuing the cooperation with ROPME and specifically conducting joint activities under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), and requested that the Secretariat proceed with the renewal of the MoU;
 - agreed that it would be useful for each Member Country to undertake a review on the indicators submitted under the 'Recommendation RECOFI/6/2011/1 on Minimum Data Reporting in the RECOFI Area' to determine the continued relevance of those indicators and capacity to produce them at a national level;
 - reaffirmed the request of the WGA for FAO that the questionnaire for aquaculture be updated to accommodate the data collection and reporting on production from newly emerging farming systems such as aquaponics and Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RASs) with regards to the 'Recommendation RECOFI/8/2015/1 Minimum Reporting on Aquaculture Data and Information'; and
 - appreciated that the 'Recommendation RECOFI/X/2019/1 Assessment and Management of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*) stocks in the RECOFI Area' is being broadly implemented across RECOFI Member Countries, noting that the gaps that remain are currently with data submission. The Commission recognized that the efforts made so far in implementing this recommendation have been successful and that the submission of data is key prior to the stock assessment workshop. RECOFI Member countries were urged to submit the data they have available.
8. In relation to programme and budget matters:
- the RECOFI Members noted with satisfaction the reinvigorated positive and promising context of the Commission and agreed to increase Members' contributions from the current 5000 USD/year to 25,000 USD/year on an *ad interim* basis and until further decision on RECOFI contributory system and scale; and
 - the Commission adopted a programme of work for the upcoming biennium, with an estimated budget for activities of USD 206 000.

II. Major Meetings in the Near East and North Africa

9. This section is provided for information only. Major meetings are not to be confused with Regional Commissions which are FAO Statutory Bodies.

A. High-Level Joint Water-Agriculture Technical Committee of the League of Arab States

10. The third meeting of the High-Level Joint (Water-Agriculture) Technical Committee of the League of Arab States (LAS) was held virtually on 26 October 2021, alongside the 2021 Cairo Water Week. In response to the requests of the High-Level Joint Technical Committee, FAO and UN ESCWA prepared a revised version of the draft 2019 Cairo Declaration Action Plan, draft Guidelines on Sustainable Allocation of Water Resources for Agriculture, and a proposal to identify directions for the Joint Water-Agriculture Ministerial Council agenda on the use of non-conventional water resources as a cross cutting issue between water and agriculture in the region.

11. The committee members adopted the following recommendations, which will be raised at the next meeting of the LAS's Joint Water-Agriculture Ministerial Council for endorsement:

In relation to the draft Guidelines on Sustainable Allocation of Water Resources for Agriculture:

- a) collect and disseminate existing guidelines on water allocation among countries; and
- b) consult with member countries to implement the draft Guidelines on Sustainable Allocation of Water Resources for Agriculture in pilot countries of the region on a voluntary basis, supported by partner organizations (FAO and UNESCWA).

In relation to the 2019 Cairo Declaration draft Action Plan:

- a) consult with partners, including development organizations and International Financial Institutions, to support the implementation of the Action Plan.

In relation to the use of non-conventional water resources as a cross-cutting issue between water and agriculture:

- a) coordinate with partner organizations to prepare a study on the use of non-conventional water resources in the region; and
- b) call for more support on the use of non-conventional water in the region.