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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-seventh Session

Amman, Jordan, 5-8 February 2024 and 4-5 March 2024

Report on the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC)

Executive Summary

Presentation of the conclusions and recommendations of the 26th Session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC) held from 10 to 13 September 2023, with regard to policy and regulatory matters and programme and budget matters.

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I. Introduction

1. The 26th Session of NEFRC was held in Amman, Jordan, from 10 to 13 September 2023, at the kind invitation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The 26th Session of NEFRC was organized in conjunction with the Third Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems from 11 to 13 September 2023.
2. The 26th Session gathered 19 member countries and representatives from 14 global and regional observer organizations, as well as France as an observer country.
3. The 26th Session of the NEFRC strived to emphasize the importance of restoring agrosilvopastoral systems and forest and pastoral value chains for the sustainable management of natural resources. The session aimed also to provide an opportunity for the participants of the NEFRC and a wide spectrum of other stakeholders with an interest in forest and rangeland issues to strengthen South-South Cooperation and share knowledge and innovative actions for improved socio-economic management of dryland ecosystems in the region.
4. A series of side events were held during the Near East Forestry Week, mainly on climate change adaptation, ecosystem restoration, urban forestry and urban greening in drylands, and forest health and invasive species.
5. The high-level opening ceremony was presided over by Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Bint Ali, FAO Goodwill Ambassador for the Near East; His Excellency Mr Khaled Hneifat, Minister for Agriculture of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; His Excellency Mr Günter Walkner, Minister Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Austria to FAO and to the World Food Programme (WFP) and Chairperson of the Committee on Forestry; His Excellency Mr Carlos Cherniak, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Argentina to FAO and Chairperson of the Sub Committee on Livestock in the Committee on Agriculture;; and Mr Serge Nakouzi, Deputy Regional Representative of the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa.
6. During the Opening Ceremony, officials emphasized the importance of developing an enabling environment that would support cross-sectoral work towards the socio-economic empowerment of local communities and called for strengthened collaboration and cooperation within the region towards the sustainable management of forests, rangelands and agrosilvopastoral systems for the socio-economic empowerment of forest-dependent communities.

II. Main Outcomes of the Commission

7. The Commission issued a series of recommendations to be brought to the attention of COFO, the Regional Conference for the Near East and FAO programme priorities regarding forestry. In developing the recommendations, the Commission considered global developments.
8. In relation to policy and regulatory matters, the Commission:
 - Acknowledged the multiple linkages between the agriculture and forestry sectors in dryland ecosystems and underscored the need to achieve better synergies between them, for more sustainable agrifood systems, highlighting the potential of the silvopastoral approach as a turning point in addressing drought management and sustainably restoring dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems.
 - Called for the need to improve the cross-sectoral coordination on forests, rangelands, food production, land use, and rural development policies for more effective drought resilience and management of dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems.
 - Encouraged its members to strengthen equitable and inclusive gender-sensitive planning and management to improve livelihoods and mitigate the impacts of drought on vulnerable populations by using available guidelines such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT).

- Took note of the outcomes of the governance review of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission undertaken in 2023 and encouraged countries to strengthen partnerships and collaboration with regional organizations and programmes. It invited members to explore the possibility of co-funding technical events organized within the Near East Forestry Week, and encouraged the possibility of members to consider providing in-kind contributions for regional events hosted by the country. It was suggested that this would strengthen countries' engagement in and commitment to, the NEFRC inter-sessional work programme.
 - Welcomed the progress made on the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and appreciated FAO's contributions to international policy processes and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Forum on Forests, as well as FAO's leadership role in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. The Commission also welcomed the theme of the State of the World's Forests Report 2024: Forests and Innovations.
 - Encouraged members to further develop cross-sectoral programmes aiming at combatting land degradation, enhancing ecosystem health, preserving and mainstream biodiversity in agricultural sectors, and empowering forest and pastoral-dependent communities including women.
9. In relation to the regional and interregional collaboration, the Commission:
- encouraged members to further strengthen regional collaboration in implementing regional initiatives such as the "Middle East Green Initiative" launched by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;
 - welcomed the importance of South-South knowledge and sharing lessons learned between and among countries in the Global South including through the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and other related global initiatives and processes;
 - took note of the status of preparation of the 27th Session of COFO;
 - highlighted the need for the Regional Forestry Commissions (RFCs) to have a more policy-relevant role in the FAO Regional Conferences;
 - encouraged members to continue to actively support the RFCs as the main instruments for the forestry sector for linking the global and regional levels under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31;
 - encouraged members to attend the 27th Session of COFO, to be held from 22 to 26 July 2024 in Rome, Italy.
10. The Commission also took note of the results of the regional assessment on women's participation in non-wood forest products (NWFPs) and pastoral value chain in the Near East region, recognized women's role in the valorization of these products and their importance for the sustainable management of forests and rangelands and invited members to:
- further strengthen the policy and institutional environment for women's economic empowerment in the region and develop an enabling environment that would support women and enhance their contribution to the sustainable management of NWFPs and pastoral value chains;
 - consider collecting gender-disaggregated data and statistics in surveys and assessments related to the forestry and rangeland ecosystems services, in order to analyse the gender-differentiated perceptions and knowledge in terms of NWFP and pastoral product collection, valorization and management.
11. In relation to programme and budget matters, the Commission:

- Welcomed the progress made on the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and appreciated FAO's contributions to international policy processes and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Forum on Forests, as well as FAO's leadership role in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. The Commission also welcomed the theme of the State of the World's Forests Report 2024: Forests and Innovations.
- Requested FAO to consider the Near East as a priority region for accelerating action on the ground for combatting desertification and restoring ecosystems.
- Invited FAO to support countries in strengthening their forest and rangeland monitoring systems to measure silvopastoral, social, economic and environmental values in response to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as other pledges, such as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
- Recommended FAO to support members in developing innovative forestry and rangeland programmes for the restoration of forests and agrosilvopastoral ecosystems and the valuation of goods and services provided by pastoral ecosystems.
- Recommended that FAO conduct, subject to available extra-budgetary resources, a stocktaking exercise on the inclusion of integrated silvopastoral management in land-use and planning-related policies and regulations for better drought management. This would contribute to FAO's biennial theme for 2024-25 "Water resources management for the four betters: better production, better nutrition, better environment, and better life, to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" and submit its progress report to the Twenty-seventh Session of COFO.
- Requested FAO to continue to support members with the formulation of development projects that integrate forest and rangelands and strengthen cross-sectoral work, through activities that promote inclusive and sustainable management of agrosilvopastoral ecosystems and that contribute to achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Recommended FAO to continue implementing the activities of the Near East Regional Network on Forest and Wildland Fires (NENFIRE) and Near East Network on Forest Health and Invasive Species (NENFHIS), and to strengthen regional collaboration on forest and rangeland protection.
- Requested FAO to support countries with regard to resource mobilization and facilitating access to sources of climate and environmental finance.
- Requested FAO to support countries to contribute to conserving and restoring biodiversity while improving nutrition, food security, and livelihoods through the identification of opportunities, challenges and specific technical support requirements for the sustainable use of NWFPs and pastoral value chain.
- Recommended FAO to conduct a stocktaking exercise on the contribution of women and youth to the value chain of pastoral and non-wood forest products in the Near East region. The assessment would help collect gender-disaggregated data and relevant information on women's formal and informal participation in non-wood forest products and pastoral value chains in the Near East Region focusing on women and youth access to productive resources, extension services and capacity building programmes, financial services, to market and decision-making bodies.
- Requested FAO to support countries in assessing women's and youth contribution in climate-smart agriculture and NWFP and pastoral value chains.
- Recommended FAO to continue to support the engagement of women and indigenous people in FAO project implementation as appropriate.

