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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-seventh Session

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Summary of the Recommendations of Regional Commissions and Major Meetings in the Near East on: i) Policy and Regulatory Matters; and ii) Programme and Budget Matters

Executive Summary

The regional commissions serve as platforms for Members to engage in discussions, exchange ideas, address current issues and share resources with the aim of enhancing specific sectorial fields. In the Near East and North Africa, three regional commissions took place in 2022 and 2023 as an integral part of the NERC 37:

1. The 12th Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries: This Commission is dedicated to enhancing the management and sustainability of fisheries resources in the Near East and North Africa, promoting responsible fishing practices and ensuring food security.
2. The 26th Session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission aims at promoting sustainable forest management, conservation and the optimal use of range resources in the region, while addressing challenges such as deforestation and desertification.
3. The 32nd Session of the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region specifically targets the central region to tackle the issue of Desert Locust infestations and mitigate their impact on agriculture and food security.

This Information Note presents a summary of recommendations, and action points of those commissions, in addition to the 10th Session of the Commission for controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO), and the outcomes of the Regional Consultative Technical Meeting (RCTM).

The outcomes of these commissions and events are valuable inputs in informing and guiding the discussions at the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC 37).

The Regional Conference is invited to take note of Recommendations as detailed in the papers NERC/24/INF/11, NERC/24/INF/12, NERC/24/INF/14.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

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I. Recommendations of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI)

1. The twelfth Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was held from 27 to 29 November 2023 in Jeddah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The session was attended by 35 participants, from all eight RECOFI member countries, as well as from the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE), the FAO Subregional Offices for the Gulf Cooperation Council States and Yemen (SNG) and for North Africa (SNE), and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division in FAO headquarters, as well as participation from the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME), as well as from two observer countries, Pakistan and Yemen and two observers from the Arab League.
2. The Commission reviewed the progress on the activities for the period 2022-2023 and recognized the importance of a number of matters when discussing its vision for RECOFI, including:
 - a. Recognizing the significance of a number of recently concluded international agreements such as the *Agreement under the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement)* and the *World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies*.
 - b. The Commission agreed that a number of key and emerging issues in fisheries and aquaculture: climate change impacts, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, aquaculture biosecurity, should be regularly considered by the Commission.
 - c. The Commission recognized the importance of the Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS) and considered the following different options moving forward: to upgrade RAIS with proper system updating and follow-up from Kuwait, to host it in a different country, or develop a system that could be hosted by FAO.
 - d. The Commission agreed that it would be useful to have a scientific review available encompassing and compiling the scientific knowledge on the RECOFI priority species and their stocks occurring in the RECOFI area of competence.
 - e. The Commission agreed that RECOFI and the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME), would proceed with developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation.
3. In relation to policy and regulatory matters, the Commission:
 - a. Commended the efforts of the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA) and the Working Group on Fisheries Management (WGFM) and endorsed their outcomes and recommendations, including adding climate change as a standing agenda item to the meetings of both groups, adding IUU fishing as a standing item to the WGFM, and biosecurity as a standing item to the meetings of the WGA.
 - b. Recommendation *RECOFI/6/2011/1 on Minimum Data Reporting in the RECOFI Area*. The Commission appreciated the work that FAO Information and Knowledge Management Team (NFISI) had undertaken on the pilot regional database, and related activities and supported their continued development, as planned. Further, the Commission endorsed the recommendations of the WGFM at its 13th meeting related to this recommendation.
 - c. Regarding Recommendation *RECOFI/X/2019/1 on the Assessment and Management of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus commerson*) stocks in the RECOFI*, the Commission noted that the Secretariat had initiated a partnership with the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) to undertake the 2nd regional stock assessment, reiterated the need to undertake this stock assessment exercise, and agreed that a virtual meeting should be held in January 2024, prior to the stock assessment workshop, to discuss the data structure and expected results.
 - d. Regarding Recommendation *RECOFI/8/2015/1 Minimum Reporting on Aquaculture Data and Information*, the Commission endorsed the recommendation of the WGA to review

Recommendation RECOFI/8/2015/1 to consider the data that should be collected under this Recommendation to determine which data is available and useful for RECOFI member countries.

4. In relation to programme and budget matters:
 - a. The Commission adopted a programme of work for the upcoming biennium, with an estimated budget for activities of USD 305 000.
 - b. The Commission highlighted that it would be useful to be informed of the expenditures at a more detailed level to further understand the costs associated with the activities and operations. The Commission requested that the RECOFI Secretariat communicate the Programme of Work and Commission Budget, including the anticipated costs, in a letter to RECOFI member countries after the conclusion of the session.

II. Main Outcomes of the 26th Session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission

5. The 26th Session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (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.
6. 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.
7. In relation to policy and regulatory matters, the Commission:
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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).
 - d. 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 for Members to consider providing in-kind contributions for regional events hosted by the country.
 - e. Encouraged Members to further develop cross-sectoral programmes aiming at combatting land degradation, enhancing ecosystem health, preserving and mainstreaming biodiversity in agricultural sectors, and empowering forest and pastoral-dependent communities including women.
8. In relation to the regional and interregional collaboration, the Commission:

- a. 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;
 - b. highlighted the need for the Regional Forestry Commissions (RFCs) to have a more policy-relevant role in the FAO Regional Conferences;
 - c. 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; and
 - d. encouraged Members to attend the 27th Session of COFO, to be held from 22 to 26 July 2024 in Rome, Italy.
9. 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:
- a. 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;
 - b. 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.
10. In relation to programme and budget matters, the Commission:
- a. Requested FAO to consider the Near East as a priority region for accelerating action on the ground for combatting desertification and restoring ecosystems.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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.
 - d. 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, a better environment, and a better life*, to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and submit its progress report to the 27th Session of COFO.
 - e. 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).
 - f. Recommended FAO to continue implementing the activities of the Near East Network on Wildlands and Forest Fires (NENFIRE) and Near East Network on Forest Health and Invasive Species (NENFHIS), and to strengthen regional collaboration on forest and rangeland protection.

- g. Requested FAO to support countries with regard to resource mobilization and facilitating access to sources of climate and environmental finance.
- h. 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.
- i. 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.
- j. Requested FAO to support countries in assessing women's and youth contribution in climate-smart agriculture and NWFP and pastoral value chains.
- k. Recommended FAO to continue to support the engagement of women and Indigenous People in FAO project implementation as appropriate.

III. Recommendations of the Desert Locust Commission for the Central Region (CRC)

11. The 32nd Session of the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust Commission in the Central Region (CRC) resulted in 24 agreed recommendations. Here are the key ones to note:
- a. Recommendation 1: The member countries are encouraged to regularly prepare, activate, and continuously update national Desert Locust action and emergency plans and to send a copy to the Commission's Secretariat with the latest update.
 - b. Recommendation 2: The member countries, especially the breeding countries, should institutionalize all the units/centres/departments/directorates operating for the Desert Locust control. They should be administratively and financially autonomous with a sufficient annual operational budget in order to conduct various Desert Locust control operations.
 - c. Recommendation 3: The Commission strongly recommended that breeding countries should establish departments, centres, or units specialized in managing locust survey and control activities with financial resources to ensure efficient operation and successful management in accordance with the provisions of the Establishment Agreement of the Commission.
 - d. Recommendation 4: The Commission recommended that member countries should retain qualified cadres working in the field of locust control, as well as increase their numbers, and replace the retirees or staff, who have been transferred to other jobs, with new staff.
 - e. Recommendation 5: The member countries recommended that the Organization should pay more attention to the expansion of remote sensing applications so that Members could improve national capacities regarding climate change and its potential impact on the Desert Locust situation.
 - f. Recommendation 6: The Commission recommended that member countries should take the necessary measures to obtain approvals and permits related to the use of drones in survey operations within their countries, before the Commission supports the introduction of this
 - g. system into the survey in those countries and inform the Commission Secretariat of any developments in this matter.
 - h. Recommendation 7: The member countries took note of the current projects of the Commission in cooperation with three different projects: the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development "Promoting early measures and rapid response to mitigate the effects

of the desert locust invasion on food security and livelihoods in the central region OSRO/GLO/1036/KUW”; the French Development Agency Project (the fourth component of the project to “Consolidate the bases of the preventive control strategy and develop operational research on Desert Locust in the western region” GCP/GLO/096/FRA; and the New French Development Agency Project (subject to procedures) “Strengthening the preventive control of the desert locust in the central region” / Horn of Africa GCP/GLO/1081/FRA”. The member countries have also approved the work plans suggested by the Commission’s Secretariat to implement those projects.

- i. Recommendation 8: The member countries agreed to transfer the seat of the Commission from the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (host of the Secretariat’s headquarters) to one of the member countries. In this regard, the host country submits the request to the Organization/Commission accompanied by the approval to give diplomatic status to the mission and the signed agreement in accordance with the procedures followed by FAO. The Secretariat of the Commission should follow up and implement these recommendations with the countries wishing to host immediately.
- j. Recommendation 9: The member countries unanimously agreed to cancel all arrears owed to the Trust Fund of the Commission on all countries until the end of the fiscal year 2021/2022. In contrast, all member countries should be committed to regular payment of the annual contributions assessed to the Trust Fund of the Commission, starting from the fiscal year 2022/2023.
- k. Recommendation 10. The member countries agreed on the request submitted by the Federal Republic of Somalia to join the Commission as a “Nominated Member”. They also requested the Commission’s Secretariat to follow the administrative and legal procedures, according to the Establishment Agreement of the Commission and the regulations in force within FAO to obtain full membership.

IV. Recommendations of the Commission for controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO)

12. The 10th Session of the Commission for controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO) resulted in 15 agreed-upon recommendations. Here are the key ones to note:

- a. Recommendation 1. It is up to CLCPRO to schedule an expert mission to Mauritania in order to make an exhaustive assessment of the locust situation and recommend the measures to be taken in the short and medium term.
- b. Recommendation 2. It is up to the Locust control Center (CNLA) of Mauritania to redouble its vigilance by stepping up survey and the data collection from nomads and travelers.
- c. Recommendation 3. Strengthen Mauritania’s CNLA processing units in the short term.
- d. Recommendation 4. To the Locust control units (UNLA) of countries that have not yet paid their voluntary contribution to the emergency fund, to plead with their authorities to pay off their arrears.
- e. Recommendation 5. It is up to CLCPRO to organize a workshop in 2023 to develop the regional training plan - PRF V (2023-2027).
- f. Recommendation 6. The delegate of Niger to send to the Secretariat a progress report on the work of the first two years of the research project financed from the trust fund in order to decide on the follow-up to be reserved for it.
- g. Recommendation 7. To the President of CLCPRO to bring to the attention of the Director General of FAO the slowness of FAO representations in making funds and equipment available on time for locust control activities.
- h. Recommendation 8. It is up to the UNLA to intervene with their structures responsible for pesticide approvals for the approval of bio-pesticides used in locust control.

- i. Recommendation 9. It is up to the UNLA to favor the use of the biopesticide available at their levels during the appearance of Locust larval infestations.
- j. Recommendation 10. It is up to CLCPRO to intervene with FAO, CILSS, UEMOA and ECOWAS) to establish a regional strategy for managing stocks of obsolete pesticides.
- k. Recommendation 11. It is up to CLCPRO to request FAO to organize an emergency meeting with technical and financial partners to examine the possibilities of eliminating stocks of obsolete pesticides held by countries in the region.
- l. Recommendation 12. It is up to CLCPRO to acquire drones for the benefit of countries that have proven the necessary requirements for their use.
- m. Recommendation 13. It is up to CLCPRO to take social networks into account in its communication strategy for better visibility of its actions.
- n. Recommendation 14. It is up to CLCPRO to organize a workshop on in-depth communication to strengthen the capacities of communication managers in member countries.
- o. Recommendation 15. Cameroon and Cape Verde to initiate the administrative procedure for accession to the commission by sending their instrument of accession to the Director General of FAO.

V. Regional Consultative Technical Meeting (RCTM) for the 37th Session of FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC 37)

13. The Regional Consultative Technical Meeting (RCTM) for the 37th Session of FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC 37) was held online, from 23 to 25 October 2023, under the theme of “Accelerating Transformation of Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa”.

14. The Meeting took note of:

- a. Policy Shift: According to increasing food demand while facing climate change negative effects such as increasing drought events, a policy shift is required to encourage crop pattern and irrigation system changes, as well as reliance on drought-resistant crops. Increasing the water productivity in agriculture to be the aim in all the future projects.
- b. Trade and Investment: that could achieve food security and food sovereignty in the region, and this is achieved through two directives: supporting local agricultural systems that depend on small farmers and by striving towards Arab agricultural integration by enhancing integrated intra-Arab trade.

15. 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.

16. In the quest of converting the regional priorities into programmes, the Meeting called upon FAO to develop programmes that take account of the following:

- a. Reality of social norms between women and men was discussed and training should target both women and men for better integration of women in communities.
- b. Social norms that still constitute obstacles for women on access to productive assets and to access and use the technologies should be clearly addressed.

- c. National coordination for policy towards gender quality is implemented by many countries however, they are often not action-oriented. We have to push down and trickle down to activities.
- d. Concrete measures of economic impacts/return are required (evidence) for decision-making.
- e. promote sharing of experiences and learning among countries in using the Food Safety Index.
- f. Explore options for improving resource mobilization, fund allocation, and subsidies for farmers transitioning to green agriculture. Build farmers' capacity through partnership development and agreements.
- g. Explore interlinkages and synergies between different priority areas.
- h. Achieving rural transformation requires working with small-scale producers to market agricultural production. Especially in places highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, the rewards can be significant – if we plan carefully.
- i. To have a holistic approach to improve the living condition in general among the rural population and not only focus on the technical or technological approaches in agriculture. This requires the interagency and inter-organization cooperation. There are successful national initiatives like 'Hayat Karima' in Egypt which we can take insight from.
- j. Recommended the establishment of multi-hazards regional early warning system/observatory and establishment of a regional emergency fund.
- k. Underscored the importance of financing Anticipatory Action and social protection through various means including establishing national forecast-based financing mechanisms to fund Anticipatory Actions, expanding agriculture insurance schemes with a particular focus on the vulnerable groups.
- l. For any project to remain sustainable in the long term, it must include technical training so that the infrastructure is maintained even after project support ends. Furthermore, successful projects must be transparent and designed with an understanding of local contexts and cultural backgrounds.
- m. Inclusiveness and gender responsiveness are highlighted as critical for sustainability.
- n. Countries are encouraged to seize opportunities in areas like water, aligned with the FAO biennium theme for 2024-2025.
- o. Climate change is a cross-cutting risk across the different areas of greening agriculture.
- p. Cross-sectoral coordination, policy integration and political will continue to be necessary to help address threats to sustainability of agrifood systems.
- q. The Regional Technical Dialogue on Water produced a series of recommendations which will be taken into consideration in the NERC process.