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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Hundred and Sixth Session of the Programme Committee

Rome, 21 – 25 March 2011

EVALUATION OF FAO'S REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL OFFICES FOR THE NEAR EAST

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1. This cover page provides the background and key issues for the attention and guidance of the Committee on the attached *Evaluation of FAO's Regional Office for the Near East and Subregional Office for North Africa and the Management Response*.

Background

2. At its October 2008 session, the FAO Programme Committee discussed the rolling plan of Evaluations and expressed their “support for an evaluation of FAO’s Regional and Subregional Offices in the Near East” as a priority during the period 2009-10. The food and agricultural sector in the region has been primarily served by the FAO Regional Office for the Near East in Cairo (RNE) and the Subregional office for North Africa (SNE) in Tunis. Because of the establishment of a new subregional Office for the Gulf Countries and Yemen (SNG) in Abu Dhabi and the creation of a Multidisciplinary Team for the Oriental Near East (SNO) in Cairo, as well as the approval and ongoing implementation of the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA), the Evaluation scope was revised to

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pay considerable attention to the impact of the ongoing reform more broadly at decentralized offices level, including the FAO country offices (FAORs).

Key Issues in Evaluation Report

- a) FAO technical expertise (from headquarters, RNE or SNE) was widely recognized and generally viewed as providing a stamp of good quality. The quality of FAO technical cooperation received greatest appreciation in countries that already had an established capacity to plan and implement their own strategy and programmes. However, there was a general consensus that FAO has lost its comparative advantage in several areas and as an implementing agency in the region.
- a) FAO priority setting and programming processes during the review period did not result in a clear prioritization of activities for the Near East region or in a clear delineation of tasks at regional and subregional levels. RNE, SNE and FAORs have largely focused on developing and implementing projects (mostly TCP) in a broad range of thematic areas, rather than on agreed priorities or on agricultural sector strategy/policy issues, for which the demand is very high across the region.
- b) RNE and SNE had resource constraints during the period under review. Although this situation was partially addressed in the biennium 2010-11 with the allocation of additional resources for subregional offices, FAORs have not benefited from this recent influx of resources. FAORs are seriously under-resourced.
- c) The rationale for the new organizational structure in the Near East with three layers was not always well understood within and outside FAO. The Evaluation team concluded that the new structure has a sound basis, but needs better implementation and change management and, in some cases, also further refinement.
- d) FAO's presence in the region was found to be in need of streamlining. The location of three offices in the same place (Cairo) has reduced efficiency and transparency in the management of decentralized offices. Staff performing several and diverse functions concurrently led to heavy workload, confusion of roles and sometimes conflicts of interest. Working conditions and status of technical and administrative staff in FAO country offices was not conducive to high performance, especially when compared to other UN agencies and elsewhere in FAO.
- e) FAO's visibility and credibility in the Near East region has declined. Other development agencies have taken over much of FAO's historical comparative advantage in areas such as food security, agricultural development and policy advice. FAO's advocacy and resource mobilization role in support of the food and agricultural sector is now much less competitive (and thus less successful) than before.
- f) The Evaluation concludes that there is an urgent need to further reshuffle FAO's institutional set-up in the Near East, including improving the implementation of the ongoing reform. Although the new reporting lines have encouraged greater integration within the region, a lot still needs to be done to allow RNE to exercise its leading role in assuring that the three layers in the region function as one. The evaluation has made twelve strategic recommendations and proposed forty actionable recommendations. Three strategic recommendations focus on improving the capacity of FAORs to perform their mandates; four address subregional and regional issues; the remaining five target general, cross-cutting issues, affecting most or all the office layers in the region.

Management Response

3. FAO Management welcomes this Evaluation and accepts 9 of the 12 recommendations, partially accepts one, and considers that 2 recommendations are addressed to the FAO membership. Management believes that the recommendations of the Evaluation provide a good basis for defining a consensual agenda for change for FAO's work in the Near East and North Africa region.
4. Follow-up to this Evaluation will require action at two levels. Firstly, many of the recommendations will have to be addressed by FAO's regional, subregional and country offices in the region. Secondly, the implementation of these recommendations is contingent on the corporate

enabling environment for decentralization which would result from the outcome of the dialogue between Members on fundamental decentralization issues.

5. Management is concerned that the proposed “reshuffling” of FAO’s institutional set-up in the Near East, could restrict the ability of countries to access the technical expertise located only at headquarters. Given the limited human resources available in the SROs compared with a wide variety of demands, Management feels that any institutional arrangements should ensure that countries have access to all FAO expertise regardless of its location.

6. Management considers that success in the implementation of the recommendations made by this Evaluation depends critically on: 1) the outcome of Members’ consideration of the PWB 2012-13 and the Vision on Decentralization; 2) the synergy with other change processes to which Management is already undertaking, such as the follow-up to the IPA and the Evaluation on Country Programming; 3) the willingness and engagement of countries and their (sub)regional organizations to prioritize their collaboration with FAO; and 4) effective change management.

7. Management proposes short-term measures stemming from approved decisions of governing bodies and which can be accommodated within the PWB 2012-13, and preparation of a management plan for FAO in the Near East to address longer-term issues through 2015.

Guidance sought

8. The Programme Committee may wish to:

- review the Evaluation findings and the actions proposed by Management relating to recommendations 1-7 at country, subregional and regional level; on aspects of general recommendations 10-11 relating to technical work; and on funding aspects of recommendation 12;
- advise on the utility of conducting similar evaluations in other regions and/or subregions.

Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices in the Near East

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

FAO Office of Evaluation

January 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This evaluation has been a long and demanding process that would not have been possible without the support and information provided by many FAO staff in the Near East region and at headquarters. The evaluation team also benefited extensively from the time, perspectives and data that Government officials, development partners and people in communities shared with them.

The evaluation team expresses particular thanks to all professional and general service staff of the Regional, Sub-regional and Country Offices in the Near East as well as to Senior Management and staff at HQ. They candidly provided useful comments and exchanged views with the mission and made possible to undertake this assessment by facilitating documentation, arranging field visits and organizing meetings for the team.

The team would also like to express its warmest gratitude to Ms. Heather Young, Ms Antonella Apuzzo di Portanova and Ms Alexia di Fabio from FAO Evaluation Office, who provided highly valuable administrative assistance throughout the evaluation.

With our deepest gratitude,

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ACRONYMS

AARINENA	Association of Agricultural Research Institutes of the Near East and North Africa
ACSAD	Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands
ADG	Assistant Director-General
AfDB	African Development Bank
ALAWUC	Agriculture, Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
AOAD	Arab Organization for Agricultural Development
CAEU	Council of Arab Economic Unity
CoC-IEE	Committee of the Conference for the Follow-up to the Independent External Evaluation of FAO
COFI	Committee on Fisheries
COFO	Committee on Forestry
CPF	Country Priority Framework
CRC	Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region
CSH	Human Resources Management Division
ECTAD	Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases
ESCWA	UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FAOR	FAO Country Offices
FAOReps	FAO Representatives
FPMIS	Field Programme Management Information System
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GFCM	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IEE	Independent External Evaluation of FAO
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPA	Immediate Plan of Action
LTO	Lead Technical Office
MDT	Multi-Disciplinary Technical Team
MSU	Management Support Unit
MTP	Medium Term Plan
NEFC	Near East Forestry Commission
NEMEDCA	Network on Drought Management for the Near East, Mediterranean and Central Asia
NERAKIN	Near East and North Africa Rural and Agricultural Knowledge and Information Network
NERC	Near East Regional Conference
NMTPF	National Medium-Term Priority Frameworks

NPO	National Professional Staff
ODG	Office of the Director General
OSD	Office of Support to Decentralization
OTO	Out-posted Technical Officers
PWB	Programme of Work and Budget
RADCON	Rural and Agricultural Development Communication Network
RAP	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
RECOFI	Near East Regional Commission for Fisheries
REIOs	Regional Economic Integration Organizations
RLC	Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean
RNE	Regional Office for the Near East
RNRTWATER	Regional Network on Waste Water Reuse
RP	Regular programme
RPF-NE	Regional Priority Framework for the Near East
RR	Regional Representative
SNE	Sub-Regional Office for North Africa
SNG	Sub-Regional Office for the Gulf Countries and Yemen
SNO	Multi-disciplinary Team for Oriental Near East
SRC	Sub-Regional Coordinator
SRFC	Eastern Central Atlantic Ocean Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission
SRO	Subregional Office
SRPF	Sub-regional Priority Framework
SSC	Services Shared Centre
TCE	Emergency Operations and Rehabilitations Division
TCP	Technical Cooperation Programme
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	UN Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	UN Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WMS	Work Measurement Survey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. At its October 2008 session the FAO Programme Committee discussed the rolling plan of evaluations and expressed their “support for an evaluation of FAO’s Regional and Sub-regional Offices in the Near East” as a priority to be carried out in 2010. The evaluation was to assess the performance of the Regional Office for the Near East (RNE) and the Sub-regional Office for North Africa (SNE) in servicing Near East and North African countries. In particular, the evaluation was to examine:

- The role of the regional and sub-regional offices: the responsiveness of the offices vis-à-vis the expressed demands and needs of FAO and Member Countries as well as their ability to focus their work on priority areas and on countries with greater need for technical assistance.
- The function of the regional and sub-regional offices: whether the administrative, management and organizational arrangements were “fit for purpose”.
- The work of the regional and sub-regional offices: a strategic assessment with an emphasis on i) technical areas that have been identified as key challenges and priorities for food and agricultural development in the region, and ii) technical areas that the regional and sub-regional offices have covered through normative and field activities in the past six years (2004-09).

2. In view of the restructuring of FAO organizational arrangements in the Near East in late 2009, and the broad-ranging follow-up to the Independent External Evaluation of FAO through the “Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal”, the evaluation paid considerable attention to the impact of the ongoing reform at decentralized offices level, including the FAO country offices (FAORs).

3. The Office of Evaluation assembled in early 2010 an independent team of experts to conduct the evaluation. The field phase of the evaluation was carried out from February to July 2010 and included visits to FAO HQ, RNE, SNE and field missions to nine countries in the region. Subsequent to this, the evaluation team carried out several analyses and held several follow-up meetings with FAO staff and Government representatives on the issues emerging from the evaluation including the preliminary conclusions and recommendations. The consultations ended with a presentation on the evaluation at the Regional Conference for the Near East held in early December 2010. Five overarching findings arose from the evaluation’s country visits and analyses that have relevance to essentially all parts of the evaluation’s terms of reference:

4. First, the evaluation team found that FAO technical expertise (from HQ, RNE or SNE) was widely recognized and generally viewed as providing a stamp of good quality. The quality of FAO technical cooperation received greatest appreciation in countries that already had an established capacity to plan and implement their own strategy and programmes. However, there is a general consensus that FAO has lost its comparative advantage in several thematic areas and as an implementing agency in the region.

5. Second, FAO priority setting and programming processes during the review period did not result in a clear prioritization of activities for the Near East region or in a clear delineation of tasks at regional and sub-regional levels. RNE, SNE and FAORs have largely focused on developing and implementing generally small projects (mostly TCP) in a broad range of thematic areas, rather than on agreed priorities or on agricultural sector strategy/policy issues, for which the demand is very high across the region.

6. Third, RNE and SNE had serious resource constraints during the period under review. Although this situation was partially addressed in the biennium 2010-11 with the allocation of additional resources for sub-regional offices, FAORs have not benefited from this recent influx of resources. FAORs are seriously under-resourced, and are widely seen as the poor relations within FAO and among UN partners.
7. Fourth, the rationale for the new organizational structure in the Near East with three layers was not always well understood within and outside FAO. The evaluation team concluded that the new structure has a sound basis but needs better implementation and change management and, in some cases, also further refinement.
8. Fifth, FAO presence in the region was found to be in need of streamlining. The location of three offices in the same place (Cairo) has reduced efficiency and transparency in the management of decentralized offices. Staff performing several and diverse functions concurrently led to heavy workload, confusion and sometimes conflicts of interest. Working conditions and status of technical and administrative staff at country level was not conducive to high performance, especially when compared to other UN agencies.
9. The issues and findings summarized above had a number of negative consequences on FAO. The evaluation team found that FAO visibility and credibility in the Near East region has declined. Other development agencies have taken over much of FAO's historical comparative advantage in areas such as food security, agricultural development and policy advice. FAO advocacy and resource mobilization role in support of the food and agricultural sector is now much less competitive (and thus less successful) than before. The evaluation team concludes that there is an urgent need to further reshuffle the FAO institutional set-up in the Near East including improving the implementation of the ongoing reform. Although the new reporting lines have encouraged greater integration within the region, a lot still needs to be done to allow RNE to exercise a leading role (as "chef d'orchestre") in assuring that the three layers in the region function as one. This includes better defining the roles and functions of each layer, better delineating responsibilities (in accordance with region-wide, sub-regional and country priorities) and foster synergies and coordination between the three layers and with HQ. This also implies a change in the way HQ has been dealing with decentralized offices in the Near East and significant additional efforts to mobilize change management support from the IPA reform machinery, for the region.
10. The evaluation team has made twelve strategic recommendations and proposed forty actionable recommendations for urgent implementation. Three strategic recommendations focus on improving the capacity of FAO country offices to perform their mandates; four address sub-regional and regional issues related to the terms of reference and performance of sub-regional and regional offices; the remaining five target general, cross-cutting issues, affecting most or all the office layers in the region.

INTRODUCTION

11. At its October 2008 session the FAO Programme Committee discussed the rolling plan of evaluations and expressed their "support for an evaluation of FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices in the Near East" as a priority to be carried out in 2010.
12. The evaluation, being the first-ever evaluation of FAO's regional and sub-regional offices, was conducted following an innovative approach that builds on standard evaluation criteria and methodological tools developed in the context of previous FAO global, regional

and country evaluations. The Near East was selected especially because recent evaluations did not cover much of FAO's work in the region. Further details can be found in the Terms of Reference (annex 1 to this report).

13. In view of the restructuring of FAO organizational arrangements in the Near East in late 2009, and the broad-ranging follow-up to the Independent External Evaluation of FAO through the "Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal", the evaluation paid considerable attention to the impact of the ongoing reform at decentralized offices level, including the FAO country offices.

14. The evaluation team would stress that its evidence base was restricted to the Near East, except for benchmarking performance in certain areas against other FAO regional offices where noted in the text. The conclusions and recommendations are thus for the Near East region, although some of the issues raised may deserve further study for their applicability to other regions.

15. It is hoped that by grappling with some of the fundamental institutional issues affecting the contributions by FAO in the Near East, a set of insights and realistic recommendations to improve FAO products and services has been provided.

I. BACKGROUND AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

16. This section provides information on past and recent developments influencing the role, function and work of FAO decentralized offices including those in the Near East region. Decentralization in FAO has been the subject of several reforms since the establishment of the organization. A major reform began in 1994 and was characterized by the creation of a network of sub-regional offices and transfer of staff to regional and sub-regional offices. The current reform process started in 2005¹ and has been accelerated by the actions being taken by the FAO secretariat and the membership following the recommendations of the Independent External Evaluation of FAO² (IEE) in 2007.

A. FAO Reform and the Independent External Evaluation of FAO

17. A first independent, external evaluation of the decentralization process in FAO was conducted in 2004. This evaluation found that direct support to countries was more supply than demand driven, and that a significant percentage of decentralized staff did not meet the required levels of managerial and technical competence. It also found a weak correlation between FAO field delivery and food insecurity levels. The evaluation's main recommendation was to improve the allocation of resources through the development of national priority frameworks, which were also expected to provide the underpinning to regional strategies. It also recommended developing stronger links between global normative work and the specific requirements of regions; raising competency of regional staff and improving gender balance in decentralized offices.

18. In 2005 the FAO Director General launched a package of structural and programmatic reforms intended to "respond to the challenges of the 21st century". Some elements of this reform were approved by the FAO Conference, particularly regarding the creation of sub-regional multidisciplinary teams in Africa as a pilot initiative, but most were put on hold pending the results of the IEE. The task of the IEE (2006-07) was to review FAO as a whole. The IEE assessment of the FAO decentralized structure noted that field offices were scattered and that there was little justification to keep them in some countries due to high costs relative to the size of the field programmes being supported and in such cases this represented a poor use of FAO's limited budget. It also argued that there was a need to restore balance between FAO Headquarters (HQ) and the field, recommending no further net transfers of resources from HQ to the field until resource adequacy was assured. The IEE called for a clearer role for Regional Offices (ROs), with functions streamlined and its technical work focused on analyses and policy advice; it also recommended giving ROs greater autonomy, decision-making powers, and lead the establishment of partnerships with the UN system and with economic integration organizations at regional level. The IEE further recommended that ROs should assume front-line responsibility and accountability for the development of strategies and programmes across the region, and sub-regional offices should become, where relevant, the technical support arm of FAO in the respective sub-

¹ FAO Reform: A Vision for the 21st Century (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/010/j6285e/j6285e00.htm>)

² FAO: The Challenge of Renewal (<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/012/k0827e02.pdf>)

regions. Reporting lines were to be established where Sub-Regional Coordinators (SRC) and FAO Representatives (FAOREps) reported to the Regional Representative (RR). Finally, it recommended that Regional Conferences become part of FAO Governing Bodies with the aim of transforming them into key forums for the regions to assert their views and priorities.

B. The Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal

19. In November 2007, the Conference reviewed the report of the IEE and passed a resolution on its follow-up. This included the establishment of a time-bound Committee of the Conference (CoC-IEE) open to all FAO Members. Based on the work of the CoC-IEE, the Special Session of the Conference adopted the Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal (IPA)³ and extended the CoC-IEE to further develop outstanding aspects and monitor the IPA implementation.

20. The IPA includes 238 actions that deal with a broad range of issues from Governance to technical to administration. Over 40 actions had major implications for FAO's work in the Near East, including activities to enhance the role of Regional Conferences; review the mandate of statutory bodies and technical committees; revamp FAO Programming, budgeting, monitoring and resource mobilization systems; decentralize the Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) and reform the FAO decentralized office structure. The full list of IPA items of relevance for the evaluation is available in Annex 2.

C. Implications of the Reform Process for Decentralized Offices

21. The Report of the CoC-IEE to the FAO Conference on the IPA (page 23) summarizes the implications of the reform process on regional and sub-regional offices as follows: "The ROs working as appropriate with Subregional Offices (SROs) will progressively take on new responsibilities for which they will be accountable, for: (i) overseeing the country offices, including the management of resources of the FAO Representations (FAORs) network; (ii) managing the non-emergency TCP programme in the respective regions; (iii) leading the strategic planning, programming and budgeting process for the region; (iv) supervising regional technical officers; (v) organizing and servicing the strengthened Regional Conferences; (vi) leading partnerships, particularly with regional organizations; and (vii) supporting country offices on matters dealing with UN reforms."

22. The following actions have been taken so far:

- A Director-General's Bulletin 2010/04 (18 February 2010) was issued, establishing new reporting lines in decentralized offices.
- The Field Programme Circular (FPC 2009/03 of 21 January 2010) and the Guidelines on Technical Support and Clearance for TCP Projects (September 2010) were developed to provide guidance for the management of the regional TCP allocation and roles of HQ and decentralized offices.

³ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/IEE/Resolution_IPAEnglish.pdf

- Operational Planning (“work planning”) Guidelines were on 6 January 2010 to explain the process for developing regional and sub-regional work plans aligned to FAO global and regional priorities⁴.
- A note on OCD Responsibilities being transferred to Regional Offices (March 2010) and a Manual for Management of Country Offices (September 2010) were released to provide information on new office management procedures for use by decentralized offices.
- The FAO Basic Texts have been revised (November 2009) to give an enhanced role to the Regional Conferences in priority setting and programming.
- The new Staff Performance Evaluation and Management System was rolled out and human resource policies on staff mobility, rotation and career development are under preparation.
- Web-based support tools to facilitate access to FAO financial data at country level (such as the “Field Office Budget Holder Reporting service”) are under development.
- Regional consultations on FAO proposals for a “New Vision for the Decentralized Offices Network” and on the “Establishment of One Global Shared Services Centre” are ongoing.

23. Most of the above measures are intended to be accomplished in the period 2009-2011. Some major actions of relevance for this evaluation such as the development of a new vision for decentralization in FAO, the adoption of a staff mobility and rotation policy, and the launch of country programming and work-planning exercises⁵ as well as follow-up actions to the evaluations of FAO’s Country Programming and Capacity Development in Africa (such as the development of a Corporate Strategy on Capacity Development) were in progress at the time of finalizing this report.

⁴ Country level work plans will only be produced from 2011 onwards; a pilot exercise covering five countries including Lebanon started in October 2010.

⁵ Other activities under implementation include the participation of ADG/RRs in senior policy and decision-making meetings; new job descriptions for FAO Representatives, etc.

II. APPROACH TO THE EVALUATION

A. Scope

24. As described in the Terms of Reference, the evaluation was to assess the performance of the Regional Office for the Near East (RNE) and the Sub-regional Office for North Africa (SNE) in servicing Near East and North African countries. In particular, the evaluation was to examine:

- The role of the regional and sub-regional offices: the responsiveness of the offices vis-à-vis the expressed demands and needs of FAO and Member Countries as well as their ability to focus their work on priority areas and on countries with greater need for technical assistance.
- The function of the regional and sub-regional offices: whether the administrative, management and organizational arrangements were “fit for purpose”.
- The work of the regional and sub-regional offices: a strategic assessment with an emphasis on i) technical areas that have been identified as key challenges and priorities for food and agricultural development in the region, and ii) technical areas that the regional and sub-regional offices have covered through normative and field activities in the past six years (2004-09).

25. Because of the establishment of a new sub-regional Office for the Gulf Countries and Yemen (SNG) in Abu Dhabi and the creation of a Multi disciplinary Team for the Oriental Near East (SNO) in Cairo, as well as the approval and ongoing implementation of the IPA, the evaluation scope was revised to pay considerable attention to the impact of the ongoing reform more broadly at decentralized offices level, including the FAORs.

26. The evaluation was expected to be forward-looking with the objective of providing realistic recommendations to improve FAO products and services.

27. Besides the ongoing reform process, which the team followed closely, the evaluation had to cope with the limited output and outcome data to allow for a comprehensive analysis of the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the services and products provided to Near East and North African countries. In this respect, the evaluation makes general conclusions, draws from multiple lines of evidence and uses examples to support its findings. It employs a wide variety of evaluation tools and sources of information (including the use of proxy indicators and benchmarking) to compensate for the above shortcomings.

B. Methodology

28. The evaluation made use of tools and multiple sources of information including:

- Background research and desk reviews: this included, a) an analysis of FAO regular and field programme delivery in the Near East; b) an analysis of RNE and SNE programme delivery and outputs; c) a review of a sample of FAO projects implemented in the region; d) a review of the regional technical commissions; e) an analysis of FAO missions to Near East countries (including project and non-project visits); f) a review of RNE and SNE publications and workshops, g) an analysis of FAO information products accessed by users from Near East countries (including FAO Corporate, RNE and SNE Web sites); h) a

citation analysis of selected FAO publications, i) a meta-evaluation of relevant corporate, thematic and project evaluations in the Near East and North Africa.

- Intensive consultation with staff at FAO Headquarters (HQ), RNE, SNE and FAORs: This included a) briefings and follow-up meetings with FAO HQ staff (in particular but not only those working in the Near East region) and with FAO Senior Management; b) briefings and debriefings with FAO staff working in the Near East and North Africa region (including RNE, SNE and FAOR staff).
- Missions to nine countries of the region⁶: Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen.
- Extensive discussions with FAO Member States, United Nations (UN) and other development partners as well as with key regional and sub-regional organizations in the Near East: this included a) meetings with Senior Government, UN Agencies and development partners such as the World Bank (WB), African Development Bank (AfDB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), bilateral donors, civil society, etc. in the countries visited by the evaluation team; c) meetings with Regional Organizations such as the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA), the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD) and with regional integration bodies such as the Arab North Africa Union (UMA), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Council of Arab Economic Unity (CAEU); d) discussions with Regional Authorities of UN System agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP)
- Survey questionnaire targeted at FAO professional staff in the region. The questionnaire focused on FAO organizational arrangements including skill mix composition.
- Benchmarking exercises in order to compare: a) capacities available at FAO regional and sub-regional offices as well as in peer regional organizations working in the region (including UN sister agencies and development partners) to put FAO institutional capacity and arrangements in perspective, and b) FAO regional and sub-regional offices performance in terms of regular and field programme outputs.

29. The assessment of FAO's regional and sub-regional offices role, function and work has largely drawn on the results of the above.

C. Stakeholder Consultation

30. The evaluation team has maintained close contact and interaction with internal stakeholders (Senior Management at headquarters and at RNE; technical staff in the region and at HQ, and the FAO sub-regional and country teams) throughout the process of the

⁶ Countries visited were selected taking into consideration parameters related to FAO's mandate (such as total GNP per capita, share of agriculture in GDP and imports of staple food products), the volume and type of work conducted in these countries as well as geographic and logistical factors. The main objective of the country visits was to gather the views of government authorities and partners on the performance of FAO decentralized offices in responding to their country needs as well as to collect information on the technical, administrative and operational support provided by the regional and sub-regional offices to FAO country offices and programmes.

evaluation. Regular consultations have been held with these stakeholders to get their feedback concerning the outcomes of the various stages of the evaluation. In particular, the Evaluation Team maintained close contact, both formally and informally, with RNE, SNE, and the main concerned HQ services in order to keep abreast of latest developments related to the reform process, as well as to keep these key stakeholders informed of the evolving findings and conclusions of the Evaluation Team.

31. Since the evaluation covers a wide range of technical and administrative areas, FAO HQ and field briefings often involved both international and national staff. At FAO HQ, the evaluation team met with representatives from almost all FAO departments and independent offices. In the field, the team met with virtually all FAORs and senior professional staff working in the region as well as with national professional and general service staff in the countries visited.

32. Three workshops were held in Cairo with regional stakeholders under the auspices of RNE; the first was held in December 2009 to introduce the evaluation and gather input on its proposed terms of reference; the second was held with RNE Senior Management in July 2010 to share with them the preliminary findings at mid-point of the evaluation; the third was held in October 2010 to receive feedback on the main findings, conclusions and recommendations before the report went through the last phase of finalisation. The first and third workshops were attended by FAO Country Representatives and FAO professional staff from the region.

33. The evaluation team has also maintained contact with external stakeholders, particularly with Member Country Representatives to FAO from Near East countries. The Near East Group based in Rome was briefed at the onset of the evaluation on the terms of reference for the assessment and towards the end of the evaluation on the preliminary findings, conclusions and recommendations.

34. The evaluation also paid attention to the new role of Regional Conferences, which are now formally part of FAO Governance Structure (IPA Item 2.52), and recent changes to FAO Evaluation Policy (IPA item 2.87), which requires the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) to make efforts to discuss and bring evaluations to the attention of all concerned Governing Body members. In this regard, a side event on this evaluation was held during the 30th Near East Regional Conference (NERC) in Khartoum, Sudan prior to the finalization of this report.

III. OVERVIEW OF FAO IN THE NEAR EAST

35. This section begins with a brief description of the setting and the FAO decentralized structure in the region. This is followed by an overview of the resources available, their distribution and reallocation over the evaluation period⁷.

The Setting

36. The Near East region covers a wide array of countries, from Morocco in the West to Iran in the East, with diverse economic and social characteristics. Although it includes some of the richest countries in the world, all countries are net food importers and are highly vulnerable to climate change. The region is also home to 5% of the world's population, but contains less than 1% of the world's renewable fresh water and about 10% of the population are considered to be at risk of malnourishment⁸. Below there is a set of development indicators of selected countries from the region.

Table 3.1 Development Indicators of selected Near East Countries (2007), FAOSTAT/World Bank

INDICATORS	ALGERIA	EGYPT	LEBANON	MOROCCO	SAUDI ARABIA	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	YEMEN
Population (Millions)	32.4	72.6	4.2	31.0	27.1	8.1	23.5
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	7,670	5,100	11,040	3,960	23,000	36,175	2,100
Agriculture, value added (% of GDP)	8	14.1	7.4	13.7	2.8	1.8	14.3
Under nourishment (% of population)	< 5%	< 5%	5%	< 5%	< 5%	< 5%	31

⁷ The Overview draws its information from FPMIS and other internal FAO systems such as COIN and PIREs.

⁸ <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/47881/icode/>

37. The 2010 Regional Priority Framework for the Near East⁹ provides further details as follows: “the Region has extremes of wealth and poverty measured on the basis of per capita income. However, all countries face a common set of problems and challenges that are threatening their development prospects. These include the dwindling water and agricultural land resources, structural imbalance between food needs and food production, increasing difficulties in balancing employment and income generation against a growing population, declining investment in the rural sector, increasing threats from environmental degradation, natural and human-induced disasters including conflicts, as well as a looming Climate Change threat”.

38. The region’s diversity has been recognized by FAO through the identification of three distinctive sub-regions, namely:

- North Africa (Maghreb): Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia.
- Oriental Near East (Mashreq): Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria.
- Gulf Cooperation Countries and Yemen (Khalij): Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Oman, Yemen.

FAO Decentralized offices

39. The network of FAO regional and sub-regional offices in the Near East and North Africa during the period under review was composed of RNE (established in 1947) and SNE (established in 1994). Following the 2009 Conference approval of a new organizational structure for the Near East, SNO and SNG have been established and are in the process of being staffed with the objective of becoming operational in early 2011.

40. The region is also served by fourteen FAO country offices (five in the Maghreb, six in the Mashreq and three in the Khalij). Nine are currently fully fledged representations (two of which are co-located within the regional and sub-regional office respectively and one is operated by TCE) and five are led by Out-posted Technical Officers (OTO). Four countries do not have an accredited FAO representation: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia (although the latter has a project coordination office). The resources available from the Regular and the Field Programme to carry out technical work in the Near East region are described below.

Regular Programme

41. FAO has implemented three biennial Programmes of Work and Budget (PWB) in the period under review. Due to the absence of reliable disaggregated data on HQ activities at regional level, the overview is necessarily restricted to regular programme activities funded by RNE and SNE only.

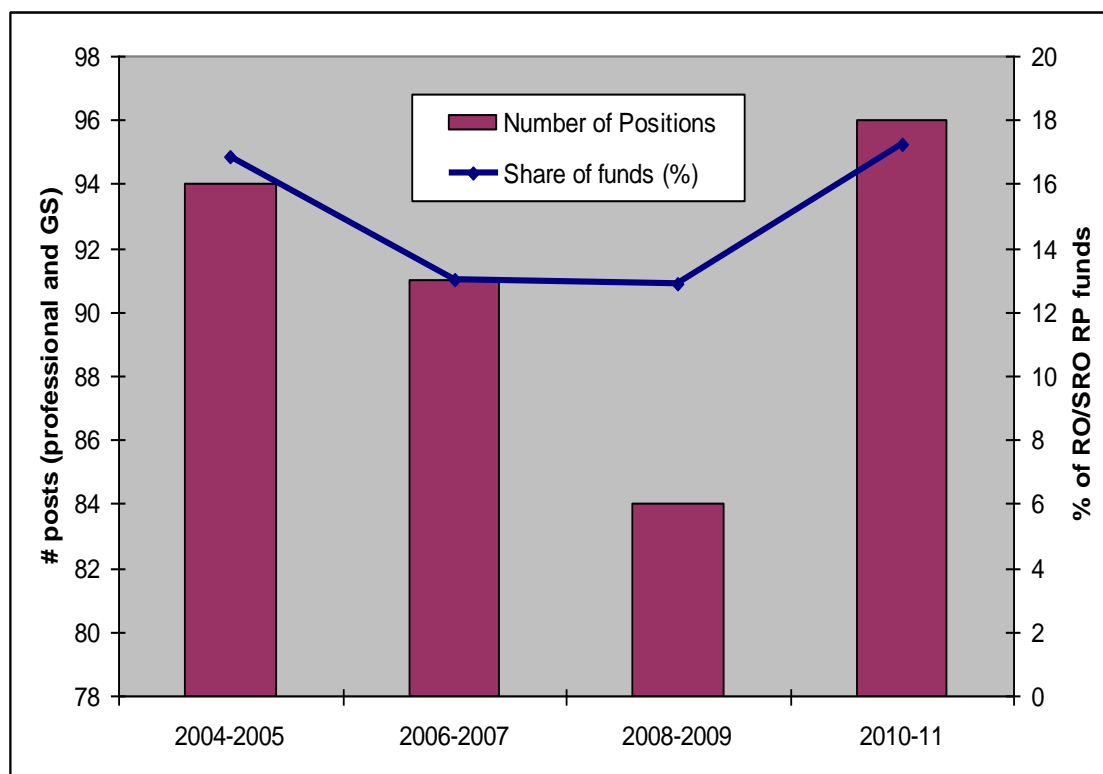
1. Resources

42. The chart below depicts the share of FAO Regular Programme (RP) funds (excluding income)¹⁰ and human resources allocated to RO and SROs in the Near East.

⁹ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/020/k9512e.pdf>

¹⁰ Also referred to as “net appropriations” or assessed contributions paid to the Organization by Member Nations.

Chart 3.1 Regular Programme Funding share and Posts (Regional and Sub-regional Offices in the Near East) 2004-11¹¹, PWB



43. Between 2004-05 and 2008-09, the share of net appropriations allocated to Regional and sub-regional offices in the Near East from the FAO budget for regional and sub-regional offices worldwide decreased from 16.9% to 12.9%, a reduction in relative share of around 20%. At the same time, there was a loss of over 10% of regional and sub-regional posts in the Near East (from 94 to 84) which was further exacerbated by the high vacancy rates of professional posts (which reached 17% in 2008-09).

44. The reduction of financial and human resources in the region can be partially explained by the progressive implementation of the 2005 Director-General Reform (see Chapter V, section B.1), which was approved for the Near East only in November 2009. Following the establishment of SNO and additional posts in SNE in 2010, the share of net appropriations for the Regional and Sub-regional offices in the Near East increased to 17.25% of the total. In addition to this, a voluntary contribution of US\$ 4.13 m was made available to support the establishment of SNG. Taking into account all funding sources, FAO now have 96 budgeted positions (83 funded by net appropriations and 13 by the SNG trust fund) at regional and sub-regional levels. As a result, the regional and sub-regional offices for the Near East have in 2010-11 more financial resources (per country covered) than regional and sub-regional offices in other regions. Moreover, most of the growth has occurred at sub-regional level, which now account for 54% of the funding and 50% of the posts allocated to the region (in fact even in 2008-09, when their share of net appropriations were the lowest

¹¹ Figures for 2010-11 also include posts funded from the SNG trust fund.

during the period under review, the RO and SROs in the Near East were on a per country covered basis better resourced than ROs and SROs in other regions except Latin America).

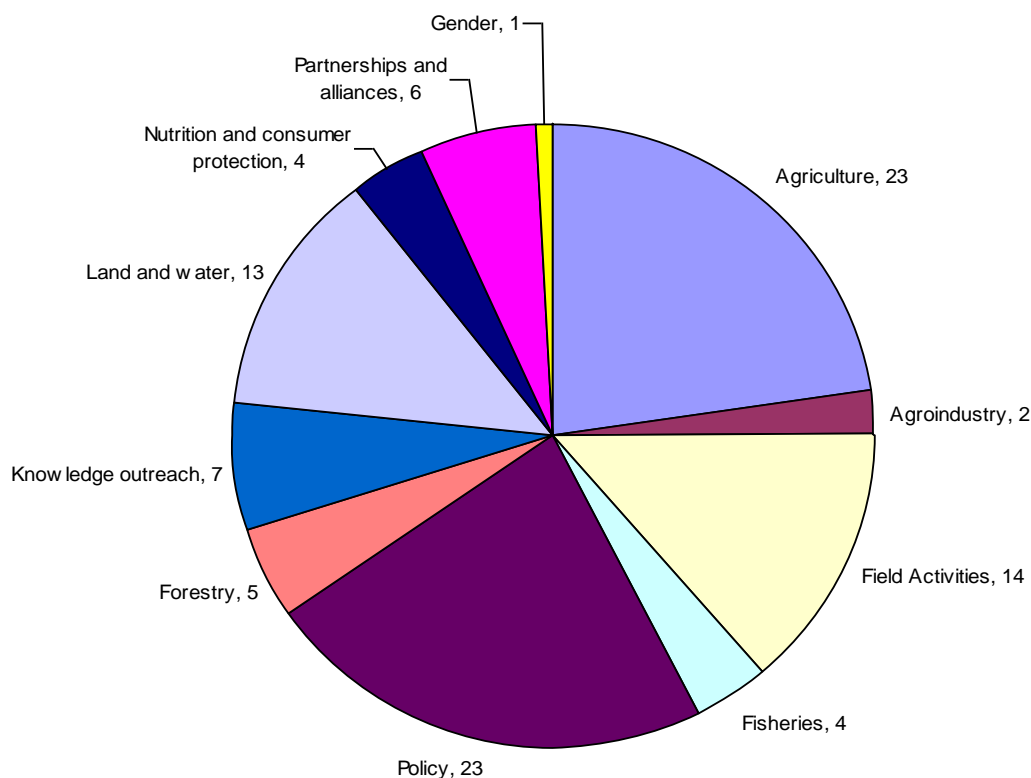
Table 3.2 Regular Programme resources allocated to RO/SROs per region, PWB

Region	Countries		2008-2009		2010-2011	
	Number	%	Budget per country	%	Budget per country	%
Africa	47	29.7	805,000	30.2	826,500	29.1
Asia and the Pacific	34	21.5	721,000	19.6	793,000	20.2
Europe	26	16.5	657,500	13.6	622,000	12.1
Latin America	33	20.9	900,500	23.7	862,000	21.3
Near East	18	11.4	895,500	12.9	1,279,000	17.3

2. Thematic and geographic areas of work

45. From 2004-09, RNE and SNE regular programme resources for technical programmes (i.e. excluding administration) have been distributed as follows: agriculture – which includes crops and livestock (23% of combined funding), policy (23%), land and water (13%), forestry (5%), fisheries (4%), nutrition and consumer protection (4%) and agro-industry (2%).

Chart 3.2 Average thematic distribution of FAO regular programme resources in percentage (2004-2009), FAO Data Warehouse¹²



46. During the period under review HQ activities were not planned at (sub-) regional or country level so that it is not possible to provide a geographic breakdown of RP activities undertaken by HQ technical divisions. The 2010-11 Programme of Work and Budget includes all activities to be conducted by the organization irrespective of the source of funding and following its approval by the FAO Conference in 2009 all FAO units (with the exception of country offices) have had to prepare work plans with information on targeted “implementing countries”. An analysis of FAO HQ divisions as well as RNE and SNE integrated work-plans shows that the combined FAO HQ, RNE and SNE activities will focus mostly on **implementing countries** located in North Africa (36%), followed by the Gulf (34%) and Oriental Near East (28%) sub-regions.

Field Programme

47. From 2004-09, FAO implemented 516 global, regional and national projects in the region¹³: 189 projects (37%) were funded by FAO (TCPs) and 323 projects (63%) were funded through voluntary contributions (about half of them for emergency work). 385 projects (or

¹² It represents the average financial resources from the Regular Programme spent on each technical area during the review period; data was purposively aggregated by theme based on FAO programme entities.

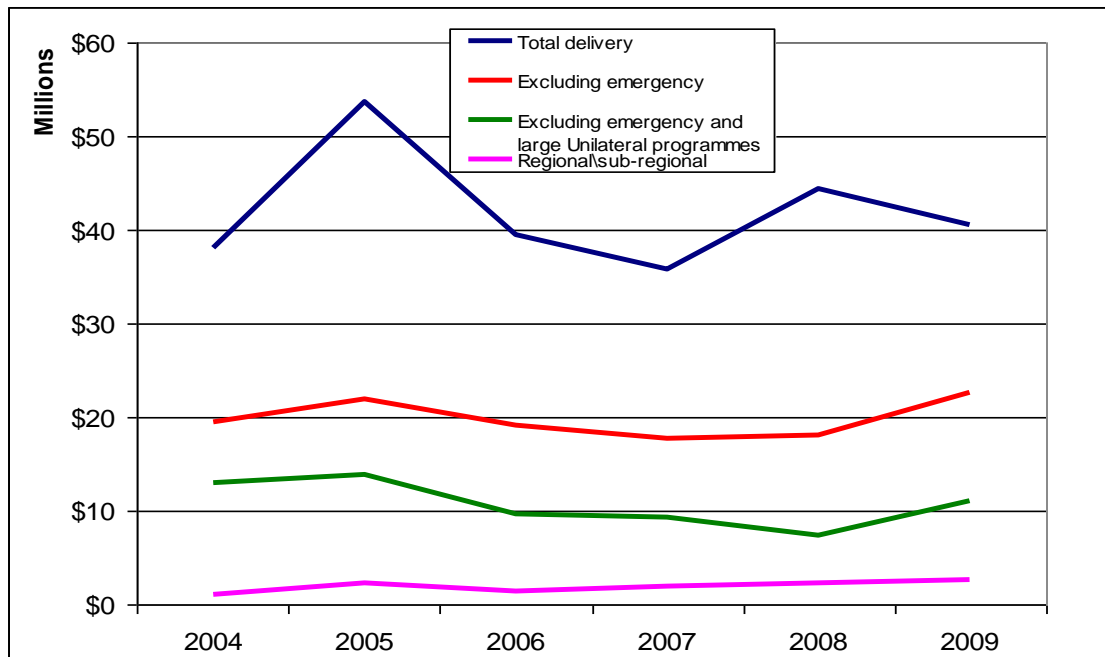
¹³ Excluding TeleFood, baby projects, recoded TCPs and duplicated Unilateral Trust Fund projects but including those in West Bank and Gaza (39 projects).

about 75% of the total) were national projects; 106 (21%) were global/inter-regional and only 21 (4%) were regional/sub-regional.

1. Resources

48. Delivery of the FAO field programme in the Near East is shown below broken down in four categories: i) total; ii) excluding emergency; iii) excluding emergency and large Unilateral programmes (Saudi Arabia); and iv) regional and sub-regional projects only.

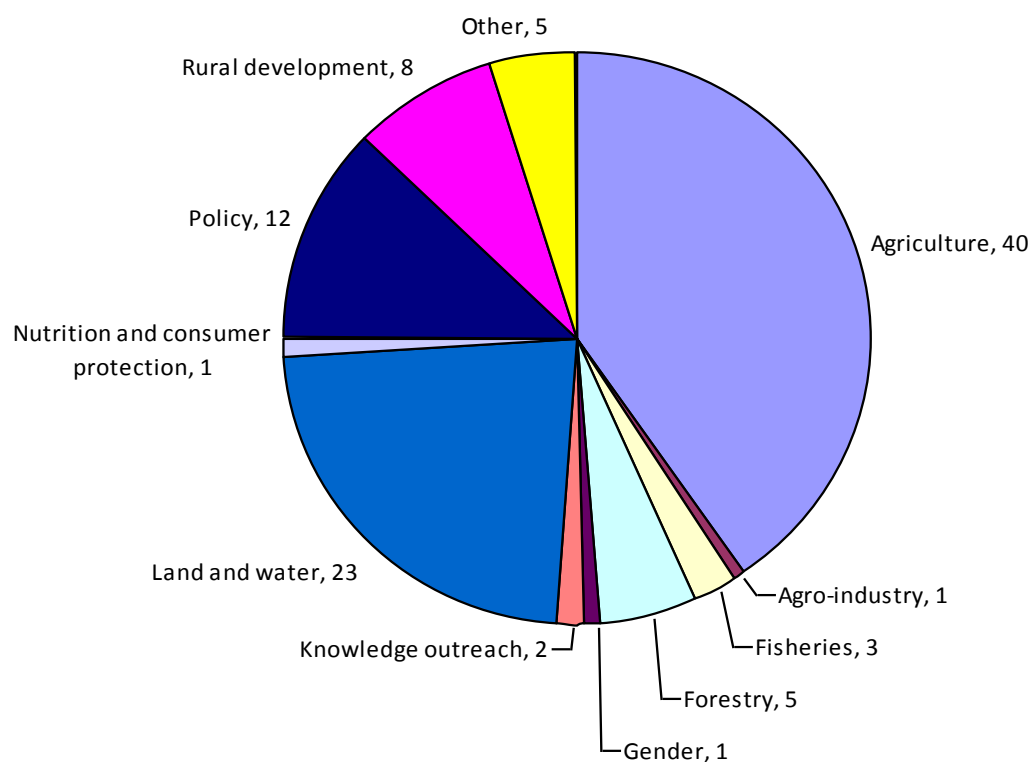
Chart 3.3 FAO Field Programme delivery by category (2004-09), FPMIS



- Total delivery has ranged between US\$ 35-54 m (on average US\$ 42 m) per year with emergency being the largest component (over 45%) of total delivery.
- Excluding emergency, technical cooperation delivery went from US\$ 19.3 m in 2004 to US\$ 22.6 m in 2009 but was heavily concentrated in a single unilateral trust fund programme.
- Excluding emergency and large unilateral programmes, technical cooperation to Near East countries decreased from US\$ 13 m in 2004 to US\$ 11 m in 2009.
- Delivery of regional and sub-regional projects operated by RNE and SNE has ranged between US\$ 1-2.7 m (on average US\$ 1.9 m) per year.

2. Thematic and geographic areas of work

49. FAO non-emergency field programme in the Near East has included work in a number of areas, chiefly agriculture (crops and livestock), natural resources (land and water, forestry and fisheries) and policy.

Chart 3.4 Thematic distribution of non-emergency field programme (2004-09), FPMIS¹⁴

50. Delivery of FAO non-emergency field programme has been concentrated in the Gulf Cooperation Countries and Yemen (around 50% of the funding), followed by the North Africa (with little over 30%) and the Oriental Near East (with around 20%) sub-regions.

¹⁴ It represents the average financial resources from the Field Programme spent on each technical area during the review period; data was purposively aggregated by theme based on FAO programme entities.

IV. ROLE OF REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL OFFICES

51. This section includes a review of key elements defining FAO's regional and sub-regional offices role in the Near East within the organization's mandate, priority setting and resource mobilization systems. It also deals with the issue of regional partnerships and FAO coverage of the Near East. In drawing the analysis, the following sources of information have been used:

- Desk review of FAO mandate, rules and regulations concerning decentralized offices.
- Past evaluations (chiefly the IEE and the Strategic evaluation of FAO's Country Programming) and background documentation on the subject made available to the team (such as IPA progress reports, notes on RNE coverage)
- Discussions with senior management, FAO staff, regional partners and Permanent Representatives to FAO from the region.

A. Mandate

52. The mandate of FAO is set out in article 1 of the FAO Constitution (1946), which states that: "The Organization shall collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information relating to nutrition, food and agriculture." The IEE found the FAO mandate to be "as pertinent today as when it was first crafted sixty years ago" (paragraph 4). The FAO Administrative Manual describes (Section 117) the role of regional and sub-regional offices in achieving the above objectives:

- Regional Offices (ROs) "are responsible for leading FAO's response to the regional priorities for food security, agriculture and rural development. They develop, promote and oversee FAO's strategies to respond to regional priorities and implement related programmes and projects. They develop and maintain relations with region-wide institutions including the Regional Economic Integration Organizations (REIOs)."
- Sub-Regional Offices (SROs) "are responsible for developing, promoting, overseeing and implementing agreed strategies for addressing subregional food, agriculture and rural development priorities. They develop and maintain relations with sub region-wide institutions including REIOs. They assist the FAO Country Representations with addressing subregional food security, agriculture and rural development issues at country level. They are subsidiaries of the Regional Office (RO)."

53. Three main issues were mentioned recurrently to the evaluation team regarding the implementation of FAO's mandate at regional and sub-regional level.

54. The first was the weak capacity of FAO to prioritize, plan, implement and mobilize funds at all levels. This within a region not short of human and financial resources, but with an increasing number of providers and more assertive customers of technical services both in the public and the private sector.

55. The second was the limited partnerships established by FAO with regional and sub-regional institutions, which have led to duplication in terms of mandates and missed opportunities for collaboration.

56. The third was the lack of clarity in terms of FAO operational coverage of the Near East region. Some Government Authorities were indeed confused as to which FAO regional or sub-regional office was supposed to be their main FAO interlocutor in the region.

B. Priority setting, resource mobilization and partnerships

1. Priority setting, programming and implementation

57. During the period under review FAO programming cycle was designed with the view of linking FAO work and budget to the Strategic Objectives established in the Strategic Framework 2000-2015. Efforts were made to highlight areas of regional interest (so called “regional dimensions”) within FAO’s Medium Term Plan (MTP) and the biennial Programme of Work and Budget (PWB).

58. The evaluation found that these efforts were not translated into clear prioritization of activities for the Near East region. An initiative to include regional activities in the MTP was in fact abandoned in 2007. On the other hand, although the PWBs have consistently listed priority areas for the Near East (over 30 in 2008-09 alone), it did not clearly link means (resources available) to ends (actions required to address priority areas). Thus, in the absence of a joined-up framework to identify, plan, budget and implement work in priority areas, FAO regular and field programme activities in the Near East were largely the result of individual initiatives both at regional and sub-regional level.

59. The new planning, programming and accountability processes adopted by FAO from biennium 2010-11 addresses the shortcomings identified above. It envisages a bottom-up process to align FAO’s work to local priorities based on: a) the development of a Country Programming Framework (CPF), b) identification of Sub-regional Priority Areas, based on the aggregation of country priorities and the identification of priorities specific to the sub-regional level, and c) Regional Priority Areas based on: 1) the overall Strategic Objectives of the Organization, 2) the region-specific issues and perspectives and 3) the aggregation of Sub-regional Priority Areas.

60. In 2009, RNE started the process of developing the first-ever FAO Regional Priority Framework for the Near East (RPF-NE) in consultation with HQ¹⁵, SNE and FAORs as well as with the involvement of Member Countries. The document was presented to the 30th Near East Regional Conference (NERC) held in December 2010, marking the first time regional priorities for the Near East are identified under the leadership of the Regional Office and for the purview of the Regional Conference.

61. The evaluation suggests that the scope of the RPF process be progressively expanded to include the preparation of priority frameworks at country and sub-regional levels under the co-ordination of RNE as recommended by the Strategic Evaluation of FAO’s Country Programming¹⁶. It furthermore suggests that this process should be open to the participation of a broader range of partners and stakeholders including other UN agencies, technical organizations, regional economic blocs and donors. Consultation with governments and main partners should indeed take place all along the process in order to ensure that: i) the priorities developed at each level reflect the reality of the situation; and, ii) governments and main partners share the results of the analysis made. An RPF for the Near East based on such a process would be instrumental to strengthen co-operation with development partners,

¹⁵ At the request of RNE the draft document was reviewed with FAO Investment Centre (TCI) support.

¹⁶ See rec. 15 and 16, <http://www.fao.org/pbe/pbee/common/ecg/369/en/CountryProgEval.pdf>

better define FAO contributions to UN system-wide initiatives, and support resource mobilization at regional level.

2. Resource mobilization

62. During the period under review, RNE and SNE had been much less successful than other FAO ROs and SROs¹⁷ in mobilizing extra-budgetary resources. As seen in the overview, funds for non-emergency projects have decreased over time and their distribution became thematically and geographically more skewed. The region is by and large composed of high and middle income countries that, on a cost-sharing basis, have successfully developed large technical cooperation programmes with other UN and technical organizations (including World Bank, UNDP, ICARDA, etc.). For example, UNDP's Regional Cooperation Framework for the Arab States mobilized US\$ 30.2 m for the period 2006-08 with over two-thirds (US\$ 20.7 m) coming from voluntary contributions. Similarly, ICARDA has increasingly raised and spent extra-budgetary funds (US\$ 33 m in 2009 alone) for agricultural projects in the region. At country level, the World Bank is finalising a large Reimbursable Technical Assistance Agreement with Algeria to support the Ministry of Agriculture refining and implementing a Decentralised Rural Development Strategy and formulating an Agro-industry Development Strategy.

63. In this regard, the evaluation team shares the view of the Strategic Evaluation of FAO's Country Programming team that "Regional Offices should be given authority and necessary resources to develop an aggressive strategy of resource mobilization for regional activities" (recommendation 19) and the proposals made in the draft FAO resource mobilization and management strategy (to be finalized in 2011) which considers "emerging regional and subregional priority areas of action as identified by the Regional Conferences" as candidate areas for allocation of un-earmarked voluntary contributions¹⁸. The evaluation team believes that this approach should be extended to FAO Country Representations in the region. Most donors have decentralised their decision making process for external financial assistance. They have also adopted budget support approaches. Consequently, there is a need to strengthen capacity and train decentralized office staff in order to provide them with the skills needed to tap these sources. FAO should also in parallel develop adequate fundraising arrangements and instruments to facilitate the mobilization of resources in the region.

3. Partnerships with Regional and sub-regional institutions

64. Past evaluations have made several remarks regarding the changing environment in which FAO operates. The IEE (paragraph 792) commented that "one of the most striking features of this changed terrain is the presence of many new actors with substantial interests and competence in areas of priority to FAO". The 2006 evaluation of FAO

¹⁷ As of December 2009 RNE and SNE were operating one extra-budgetary regional project which is funded out of a HQ-managed trust fund. In comparison ROs and SROs in Latin America were operating eleven projects; while in Asia and the Pacific twenty one.

¹⁸ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/Fin_Comm_134_Sess/Documents_FC_135/en/JM2010-2-4-E.pdf

Partnerships and Alliances noted that the organisation needed to “think more strategically and adjust relationships with some of its partners”¹⁹.

65. During the period under review, the evaluation team found that RNE and SNE struggled to carry out collaborative initiatives with (sub-) regional institutions including the UN system²⁰. Partnerships were generally weak and at best limited to few joint activities undertaken through projects or UN consultation mechanisms. These have included:

- Joint FAO-IFAD-World Bank study on “Improving Food Security in Arab Countries”
- Support to Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) for developing a Strategic document for Agriculture in the North Africa sub-region.
- Assistance to the Council for Arab Economic Unity (CAEU) for the Formulation of a Regional Programme for Food Security.
- Work on forestry curricula with the Arab Institute for Forestry and Range.
- Participation in UN regional bodies such as the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and UN Development Group for Arab States/Middle East and North Africa.

66. RNE was reportedly active in UN regional consultation mechanisms²¹. However, neither adequate frameworks nor resources (mainly manpower) were available for a more active engagement on regional UN-wide priority issues that are at the core of FAO mandate, such as the Millennium Development Goals, food security, climate change and youth employment. FAO efforts were also constrained by the absence of Regional and Country Programming Frameworks and related work-plans which would have helped to identify areas for joint work²². The strongest partnerships were probably those developed with regional bodies with technical capacity such as the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and AMU. Representatives from these three organizations have regularly attended FAO meetings and events and some joint activities have taken place in the recent past. Collaboration with regional inter-governmental institutions such as the Arab League or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and regional financial institutions such as the African Development Bank (AfDB) was more limited.

Box 4.1 FAO Cooperation with ICARDA

¹⁹ Evaluation of Partnerships and Alliances. PC 95/4b, Preface – page 6.

²⁰ Besides the UN, other major development actors in the Near East agricultural sector are bilateral donors mainly from the Mediterranean basin (such as the European Union, Italy, Spain, France), international financing institutions (such as the WB, IFAD), sovereign wealth funds, private foundations, civil society and – in some countries – faith-based social welfare organisations and charities.

²¹ RNE has chaired the food security working group at the UN Regional Coordination Mechanism for Arab States coordinated by ESCWA and made some inputs to the Regional undg for Arab States regarding support to UNDAF processes.

²² This given that the NMTPF (of which the region only had one signed) was to be FAO’s contribution to national UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and, by aggregation, to regional planning initiatives.

With over 80 experts on crops, livestock, water, climate change and other topics of interest for Near East countries, ICARDA has become an important technical assistance provider in the region. ICARDA holds regular co-ordination meetings with Governments and donors to discuss priority areas for cooperation. FAO has had a long-standing cooperation with this Institute. The main highlights on this cooperation are (as reported by ICARDA) the following:

- ICARDA has been providing training in the improvement of ICARDA mandate crops to scientists nominated by the FAO (e.g. through the regional FAO IPM programme).
- ICARDA participates in the Inter-Agency Task Forces convened by the RNE.
- ICARDA and RNE are co-sponsors of several technical networks including the regional Association of Agricultural Research Institutes of the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA) and the Near East and Mediterranean drought Network (NEMEDCA).

67. The evaluation was informed that there was a noticeable reduction of collaborative activities in the period 2007-09 (particularly with technical partners). As RNE/SNE relative capacity declined, other agencies reportedly increased theirs²³.

68. Overall, FAO was not able to allocate neither adequate resources nor the expertise required to establish strong alliances with regional organizations and lead UN initiatives on key topics of FAO's mandate. An exception was the Joint FAO-IFAD-World Bank food security study²⁴, which was triggered by the soaring food prices crisis, and ultimately resulted in a collaborative effort to provide a comprehensive analysis and possible options for improving food security in the region. The evaluation commends this initiative and suggests it as an example for future collaboration on priority areas for the region which may also result in the development of joint flagship documents. Another best practice that could be worth pursuing is the holding of information-exchange events such as those held between IFAD and ICARDA to "foster joint strategic planning and synergies"²⁵. The above will be in line with the Draft FAO's Organization-wide Strategy on Partnerships (IPA item 3.108) which highlights that "at the regional and sub-regional level, FAO structures [should] interface with regional and sub-regional inter-governmental institutions" and, to this end, envisages the conduct of training on partnership management for decentralized offices staff.

²³ The World Bank (WB) was recurrently mentioned as one of those emerging providers of technical assistance in the region. The WB has developed a portfolio which now exceeds US\$ 500 m for rural development and natural resources management projects in the Near East region, and has strongly relied on the FAO Investment Centre (TCI) and to a lesser extent on RNE expertise for programme development (including strategic programming, project identification, formulation, monitoring and evaluation). The number of missions conducted by TCI staff to Near East countries (over 60 only in 2009) reflects its heavy involvement in World Bank operations in the Region. Since the expansion of WFP mandate in 2006 (to include the provision of development assistance), this organization has progressively developed an increasingly complex portfolio of activities in both low (Mauritania and Yemen) and middle income (Egypt and Syria) food deficit countries. At regional level as well as in several countries WFP has become the leading agency in food security matters e.g. leading the regional study on nexus between food security and climate change for the Arab UN Development Group (UNDG); chairing the UN system Food security cluster in Yemen; being the lead technical counterpart to national food security bodies in Mauritania, etc.

²⁴ <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMENA/Resources/FoodSecfinal.pdf>

²⁵ http://www.icarda.org/News/2009/09-10-27/09-10-27_IFAD-ICARDA.htm

69. In all cases, and as proposed by RNE²⁶, future collaborative initiatives should be based on the regional priority framework endorsed by NERC. It is also the view of the evaluation that by working with relevant organizations and civil society (particularly Non-Governmental Organizations), FAO decentralized offices in the region will be able to make a more efficient use of its resources and all together address the major challenges facing the food and agricultural sector in the region.

C. FAO Coverage of the Near East region

70. Unlike most other regions, there is no internationally acknowledged consensus on the definition or geographical coverage of the Near East. The “Near East” region is defined differently by UN and development organizations, with some countries (notably Sudan and Mauritania) at times either included or excluded. In recent times several FAO regional reports have consistently referred to the region as “Near East and North Africa” although no firm consideration has been given to revising the name of the FAO regional and sub-regional offices servicing the region.

71. The issue of FAO geographical coverage of the Near East region has taken greater relevance after FAO amended operational responsibilities of regional offices in 2007, which reduced the number of countries operationally covered by RNE to eighteen, and NERC, which has thirty-two members, became part of FAO Governing Bodies in 2009. As this issue had been included in the IPA (item 3.86), a debate on the subject took place in the April 2009 CoC-IEE session, which concluded that: (i) the regional breakdown for Council election purposes, and the established practice of allowing dual (and sometimes triple) participation at Regional Conferences at the request of a Member Nation (possibly as observer), were not being called into question and (ii) the question of RNE geographical coverage needed to be further elucidated, and (iii) that Regional Groups should consult on the issue among themselves and with Capitals, and report back to the Working Groups as soon as possible. The evaluation team was informed that no further discussion on the subject has taken place since then.

72. Given that the confusion due to the disparity between NERC and RNE geographical coverage risks getting worse, and the matter is eminently political, the evaluation suggest that concerned member countries should urgently address this issue. At the same time, it would be desirable to look again at the name of FAO regional and sub-regional offices in the region, which at present do not reflect historical ties and names of groups of countries, nor recent FAO and other organizations’ definition of the region.

http://www.icarda.org/News/2009/09-10-27/09-10-27_IFAD-ICARDA.htm

²⁶ Presentation on RNE Regional Priority Framework (October 2010)

V. FUNCTION OF REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL OFFICES

73. This section includes a review of key aspects affecting the functioning of FAO's regional and sub-regional offices in the Near East. It starts with an analysis of the administration function as well as of FAO organizational arrangements, functional relationships and skill-mix in the region. In drawing the analysis the following sources of information have been used:

- Desk reviews, past evaluations (chiefly the IEE and the Strategic evaluation of FAO's Country Programming), internal audits and reviews on the subject made available to the team (such as IPA progress reports, CSH missions and reports²⁷, Audits)
- Discussions with senior management, FAO staff, regional partners and Permanent Representatives to FAO from the region.
- Survey questionnaire to FAO regional staff on skill-mix and functional relationships.
- Results of Annual FAO Work Measurement Survey (WMS).

A. Administration

74. For the purposes of this exercise, Administration includes RNE and SNE work in support of programme management, governing bodies, oversight, shared and common services in the region.

75. During the period under review, administration related work in RNE (and SNE) has consumed a growing share of the RP resources allocated to these offices (up to 38% in 2009). Other regional offices (such as RAP in Asia and RLC in Latin America) have also allocated substantial resources for administration (on average 36% and 41% during the review period, respectively); however, these offices still perform the full array of administrative actions (including personnel, travel, etc), which in the case of RNE are now carried out by the Services Shared Centre (SSC) in Budapest²⁸.

76. Replies to FAO WMS (2004-09) by technical staff at regional and sub-regional offices and the information gathered by FAO missions to RNE in 2009 confirm the perceptions expressed to the team of an increased administrative burden during the period under review.

Table 5.1 Technical professional staff time devoted to administration work (%), WMS

Office	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
RNE	8%	7%	7%	9%	15%	21%

Presentation on RNE Regional Priority Framework (October 2010)

²⁷ at

²⁸ The administration function in RNE and SNE was expected to be streamlined following the abolition of the Regional Management Support Unit (MSU) in 2007, which became an Administrative Support Unit (ASU), and the re-orientation of SNE as a "technical hub" in 2008.

SNE	23%	31%	28%	31%	36%	40%
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77. Specific issues affecting the performance of selected RNE and SNE administrative functions as well as recent developments in some corporate administrative functions of importance for the region are analyzed below.

1. Regional and sub-regional administrative functions

Programme Management

78. In the period under review the programme management function was scattered among the different technical and administration units. With the transfer of budgeting and programming responsibilities for country offices to the ROs (IPA items 3.78, 2.80, 2.81) and the enhanced role of ROs in leading the identification of regional priorities, there is a need to strengthen FAO capacity for strategy planning, programming and monitoring of regional work.²⁹ In this regard, RNE and the Human Resources Division (CSH) have proposed the establishment of a planning function at RNE in order to organize the region's resources and build synergies within the office to better discharge new responsibilities such as servicing of Governing Bodies, oversight and management of the FAORs Network, resource mobilization, field operations (including management of the TCP) and the new Results Based Management system.

Governing bodies

79. During the period under review RNE provided secretariat support to the Regional Conferences at a cost of over US\$ 200,000 per biennium (NERC 2006 data). The IPA calls for a strengthening of the Regional Conferences and for greater involvement of Regional Offices in their organization. In view of the new functions³⁰ and ways of working³¹, the modality for servicing Regional Conferences (for example as part of a comprehensive strategic planning and monitoring function in RNE) may need to be re-assessed.

Oversight

80. In the past oversight activities conducted at regional and sub-regional level consisted mainly of audit work. The FAO Manual for Management of FAORs released on September 2010 indicates that ROs have to "supervise the network of FAORs in the region", and "as part of its mandate, is expected to undertake periodic missions to review the country offices [function and work]". RNE monitoring capacity for overseeing country offices particularly

²⁹ The Evaluation of FAO's Country Programming has already recommended to allocate additional resources to Regional and sub-regional offices for strategic planning, budgeting and programming.

³⁰ Namely, i) Develop issues for regional policy coherence & regional perspective on global policy issues & regulation – presenting its report to the FAO Conference; ii) Review and advise on the FAO programme for the region and the overall FAO programme as it affects the region – presenting its report to the Council through the Programme and Finance Committees.

³¹ The Chair and the "rapporteur" will remain in office between sessions.

with regard to the provision of training and advice, monitoring and supervision needs to be strengthened.

Operations

81. Although servicing field operations seem to be functioning well lately (particularly in RNE, which has provided field programme support to countries without an FAOR), discussions on the introduction of a planning function should also take into account the possible efficiencies to be gained from including some responsibilities of the operations function (such as resource mobilization and TCP management) as part of it.

Shared services

82. The evaluation team noted that in view of the role played by the SSC-Budapest (providing Personnel, travel and other administrative services to countries in the region) and the relatively low volume of financial transactions (resulting from the decline of RP and field activities in the region), RNE seems to have an excessive capacity for shared services delivery (including excess capacity in finance, travel and procurement) which is not commensurate with its needs. There is thus a need to review the current shared services function in RNE with the view of shedding and/or strengthening certain elements (such as the Human Resource function given the growing need to support Staff Development and provide assistance on personnel matters and rules to decentralized offices in the region).

2. Corporate administrative functions

83. There are several administrative functions carried out at corporate level that have an impact on RNE and SNE function. These were reviewed in detail by the IEE (Chapter 8) and as part of the IPA actions have been proposed to improve several corporate policies and services dealing with staff representation, mobility, development and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

Geographic and gender distribution of staff

84. By end 2009, and throughout the evaluation period, RNE and SNE had a low share of RP-funded professional staff from outside the Near East region (around 12% compared to over 20% from outside the region in the case of RLC and over 30% in RAP) and a very unbalanced professional work force in terms of gender (only one female out of 33 technical experts). Geographic representation of professional staff in other UN regional offices was more diverse; for example, at WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean³² over 30% of the professional staff came from outside the region. Similarly, over 30% of the professional staff at UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States³³ (HQ) came from outside the region. In both UNDP and WHO women were better represented in the composition of technical staff but none reached the 50% of ILO's Regional Office for the Arab States³⁴.

³² <http://www.emro.who.int/rd/annualreports/2009/annex2.htm>

³³ <http://arabstates.undp.org/subpage.php?spid=4>

³⁴ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/arpro/beirut/about/staff.htm>

Mobility and rotation

85. By end 2009, over 60% of RNE and SNE technical staff had spent more than eight years in their current positions and at the same grade. This, as already called for in different evaluations including the IEE³⁵, makes the introduction of a staff mobility and rotation policy framework, governing the rotation of staff within the same duty station and region, between Headquarters and the region, and between this region and other regions, urgent to reinforce the linkages among technical (international) staff irrespective of their location, increase staff motivation, widen staff expertise, and promote trust and knowledge sharing at all levels.

Staff development

86. Staff development was identified as one of the weakest areas in the past, at all levels. In 2009, RNE and CSH launched an exercise to review the job profiles of general service staff and produce staff development plans for all RNE staff³⁶. Given the critical importance of staff training, the evaluation team was informed that a 'learning hub' was being developed at RNE for all decentralized offices in the region. By end 2010 staff development plans for RNE and SNE staff had been finalized and tailored training programmes on competency-related skills were under development. An online survey on training priorities for country offices had also been launched and staffing and infrastructure needs for strengthening the HR function in RNE had been identified.

Deployment of support systems including training and upgrade of IT systems

87. ICT infrastructure was identified as a weak area in the past, particularly at country level. Under IPA item 3.90 an ICT "regional hub" was in the process of being set-up in RNE as an integral part of the Global Support Model. A lighter web-based version of Oracle (called "Field Office Budget Holder Reporting Service") will also be deployed to allow for real-time access to financial data at country level. The evaluation team noted that timely access to this information was critical to ensure transparency in the use of funds vis-à-vis donors and Government partners³⁷ as well as to be able to plan and make informed decisions on project activities. This tool will be available in mid-2011.

88. Overall, the evaluation team considers that the administrative function needs to be revised with priority given to strengthening strategic support services (such as planning, and HR management). Out of the several corporate initiatives in progress, the evaluation urges FAO to speed up the implementation of the rotation and mobility policy, the staff

³⁵ The 2004 Evaluation of Decentralization called for the rotation of technical staff, both as a means of ensuring effective linkages between headquarters and the field and to catalyse staff skills development (recommendation 9). The IEE called for the development of a rotation and mobility policy aligned with new recruitment, staff development and promotion criteria (page 328)

³⁶ By end 2010 CSH had developed 28 job profiles per function and grade for RNE and SNO staff including clear lines of command and core competencies.

³⁷ Several bilateral donors indicated to the evaluation team their lack of confidence in FAO financial system based on the untimely delivery of financial reports; unclear reporting of expenditures and discrepancies between FAO country and HQ financial data.

development plans and the revision of job profiles as well as the deployment of the Field Office Budget Holder Reporting service and the strengthening of ICT infrastructure in the region. The thorough review of RNE administrative functions planned for January 2011 as part of the global review of the SSC should provide more specific insights and recommendations on these and other functions and procedures that need to be streamlined at regional level particularly concerning shared services. The review should also take into account options for improving the performance, timeliness and user satisfaction of SSC in servicing decentralised offices in the Near East.

B. Organizational arrangements

89. Below there is an assessment of organizational arrangements in the region including an analysis of the FAO structure, reporting lines, functional relationships and skills mix in the Near East.

1. Organizational structure

90. As mentioned earlier, during the period under review FAO had one regional and one operational sub-regional office in the Near East: RNE and SNE respectively. Following the 2009 Conference decision, a new organizational structure was established with the addition of two sub-regional offices: SNO and SNG.

91. The rationale behind the three layer structure of RO, SRO and FAOR was initially established in the Director-General's Reform Proposals in 2005³⁸. ROs were expected to change, to focus more on major regional issues and region-wide institutions; contributing substantively to the formulation of regional strategies and policies; taking the lead in the organization of Regional Conferences; orchestrating the preparation of the regional dimensions of the programme of work and periodically reporting on FAO performance in the region. Creation of SROs was proposed to provide "more effective and efficient services to member countries" with "FAO technical staff...located closer to the countries" to provide "subject-matter and policy support to FAORs and their host country governments". FAORs were expected to continue their role as front-line support offices. This model was, in essence, not modified by the IPA and, as recalled above, the Conference authorized the introduction of a three-layer organisational structure in the Near East in 2009.

92. Several issues were raised to the evaluation team regarding the new organizational structure in place. The most frequent issue, both within and outside FAO, was the unclear rationale behind the establishment of a three layer structure (regional, sub-regional and country) in the Near East. This was partially the result of a perceived lack of clarity between the respective roles of RO and the newly established SROs in the provision of technical and operational support to FAORs and the potential risk of SROs becoming an administrative layer between FAORs and RNE.

³⁸ C 2005/3/Sup.1 "Supplement to the Director-General's Programme of Work and Budget (Reform Proposal)" of August 2005 submitted to the Thirty-third Session of the Conference, 19 - 26 November 2005, paragraph 100.

93. The evaluation team concluded that the FAO three-layer organizational structure in the Near East (i.e. regional, sub-regional and country level) has a very sound basis but needs improved implementation and, in some cases, further refinement – for several reasons.

94. First, and in view of the major sub-regional specificities and differences highlighted in the RPF-NE, FAO's approach in the Near East has to necessarily include sub-regional and country initiatives that allow for a greater specificity of FAO cooperation. Second, there are relatively mature sub-regional organizations (such as GCC and AMU) with which FAO could establish longer term partnerships. Following the development of the RPF-NE, FAO should progressively be able to develop joint programmes of work with regional and sub-regional organizations. Third, FAO cooperation with some countries of the region (particularly in the Gulf and North Africa) has been virtually nil; thus, earmarking human and financial resources for specific sub-regional work will have a positive effect in improving the geographic distribution of FAO cooperation. Four, there is a need to facilitate FAORs access in a timely manner to FAO technical support and one way to do it is by establishing such technical capacity as close as possible to the field. The sub-regions appear as the most appropriate level for that.

2. Reporting lines

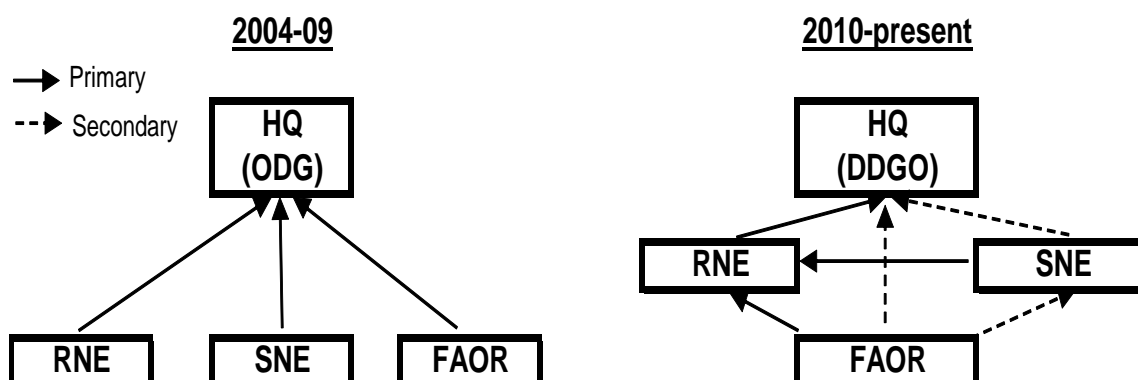
95. During the period under review, all FAO decentralized offices in the Near East reported directly to FAO HQ for administrative and technical issues. There was no hierarchical organization at regional level (i.e. RNE had no oversight role over sub-regional and country offices). The consequences of such a centralized approach were that a) no regional or sub-regional exchange, leading to a coherent regional approach to address Member Country needs, took place during the period under review (i.e. the first-ever meeting to plan, coordinate and exchange views on regional and sub-regional work were held in early 2009); b) the regional structure was composed of a group of isolated offices instead of constituting one integrated structure. Furthermore, each decentralized office (RNE, SNE and FAORs) used to receive its budgetary allocation as directly from HQ without any involvement of the Regional Office.

96. In early 2010 a Director-General's Bulletin³⁹ revised the reporting lines of decentralized offices as follows:

- "The primary reporting line of ADG/RRs is to the Deputy Director-General (Operations), under the authority of the Director-General.
- The primary reporting line of the Subregional Coordinator (SRC) is to the ADG/RR.
- The primary reporting line of FAO Representatives (FAOReps), who are appointed by the Director-General, is to the Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative (ADG/RR). However the FAO Reps would also report, as necessary, to the Director-General through the Deputy Director-General/Operations (DDGO) on representational, policy and political matters."

97. The charts below depict the reporting lines a) during the period under review (2004-09⁴⁰), and b) as revised in early 2010.

³⁹ Director-General's Bulletin 2010/04: Decentralized Offices – Primary Reporting Lines.

Chart 5.1 Reporting lines 2004-09 & 2010-present

Legend: ODG (Office of the Director-General); DDGO (Deputy Director-General for Operations)

98. In discussing with FAO staff from the region, it became clear that the new reporting lines were in the right direction but were not always well understood. One of the reasons was that although FAORs were expected to report primarily to ROs, clearance for some administrative actions (such as requests for travel/leave) was performed by the SROs. FAORs also had less delegated authority than SROs for administrative actions (e.g. signing letters of agreements) and had to report to them on their technical work (see section below).

99. All the above reinforced the impression that contrary to the IPA (item 3.83⁴¹) the SRO is still (in certain aspects) an administrative layer between the FAORs and the RO. The dual role of SRCs (as SRC for the sub-region and FAORep for the host country) also causes confusion since different reporting lines apply to each layer and conflicts of interest (e.g. prioritizing between national or sub-regional duties) may occur.

100. Finally, since both SROs and FAORs still have strong relationships with HQ as in the past, and RNE was, at the time of the evaluation, not yet able to provide adequate oversight of and administrative support to SROs and FAORs, FAO HQ largely remained the de facto focal point (and thus primary supervisor) of decentralized offices in the region⁴².

3. Functional relationships

101. During the period under review, technical staffs⁴³ in RNE and SNE were seconded from their parent divisions to decentralized offices and were thus considered (regional outposted) staff of the technical divisions at HQ. FAORs were free to approach technical staff at any layer (HQ/regional/sub-regional) often without the involvement or knowledge of staff at regional or sub-regional offices.

⁴⁰ As of 2007 the Sub-regional Coordinator at SNE was expected to report to the Regional Representative at RNE.

⁴¹ Page 68, "Discontinue administrative responsibilities with sub-regional offices to allow them to function fully as technical support units to countries of the sub-region."

⁴² The evaluation was informed that the process of transferring the oversight responsibilities for the FAOR Network from HQ to RNE was ongoing.

⁴³ Only administrative staff (including general service) reported to RNE, SNE and FAORs Management.

102. An unintended consequence of the above was that most technical support to the field - expressed in terms of country visits and backstopping of non-emergency field projects – over 80% in both cases, was provided by technical staff from HQ.

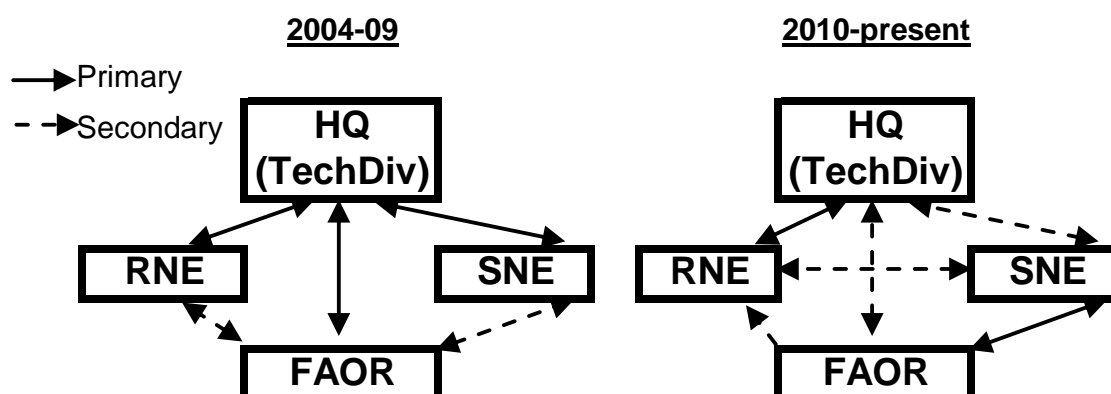
103. Reasons for this include that funding for and clearance of projects (such as the TCP) was centralized at HQ and that the capacity and responsiveness at regional and sub-regional was perceived to have diminished overtime compared to HQ.

104. In 2010 the Director-General revised the functional relationships of technical staff:⁴⁴

- Technical officers in decentralized offices, at headquarters and other regions will form functional Technical Networks to facilitate information exchange on specific subjects.
- Regional technical officers will receive functional guidance from the respective (HQ) Technical Division concerned with respect to their work as technical officers.
- Technical officers of the SRO will receive functional guidance from the concerned (HQ) Technical Division concerned and/or Regional technical officers with respect to their work as technical officers.
- As members of the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) at the subregional level, FAOReps will report to the Head of the MDT (equivalent to the SRC), on their work as technical officers.

105. The charts below depict the functional relationships a) during the period under review (2004-09), and b) as revised in early 2010.

Chart 5.2 Technical functional relationships 2004-09 & 2010-present



Legend: TechDiv (Technical Division)

106. In discussing with FAO staff in the region, it became clear that professional staff had different views on their new functional relationships.

- At regional level, staff felt largely powerless to address regional priorities since they did not have a **clear** role in supervising sub-regional or country level technical activities linked to region-wide issues.

⁴⁴ Director-General's Bulletin 2010/04: Decentralized Offices – Primary Reporting Lines. A new Circular on Responsibilities and Relationships was being prepared at the time of writing this report.

- At sub-regional level, staff were keen to keep strong connections with HQ and FAORs, even at the expense of a more integrated regional approach under the supervision of RNE.
- At country level, FAORs were largely in favour of retaining the ability to tap technical expertise from any FAO unit (HQ, RNE or the respective SRO), even though the SROs were now expected to be “the first port of call” for FAORs.
- FAOReps (and Assistant FAOReps) indicated their inability to play the new technical role expected from them.

107. Although some measures to increase information sharing among the three layers are under preparation, the evaluation team noted that the functional links currently established between HQ and RO/SROs and between RO and SROs as currently set-up do not provide an incentive for co-ordinated work in the Near East region. RO and SROs experts have historically carried out more or less the same kind of activities at country level (i.e. providing support to national projects, participating in meetings and workshops, etc.). The unclear delineation between region-wide, sub-regional and country issues and tasks, also caused by the absence of country and sub-regional priority frameworks, makes it difficult to distinguish the functions of staff in each layer.

108. In order to better define the functions of regional and sub-regional technical staff in the Near East region, the evaluation team launched a survey questionnaire⁴⁵ for all professional staff to gather their views on this matter based on the principle that “the RO should be mainly responsible for co-ordination, planning and supervision of activities in the region and have adequate technical capacity to lead the work across the region on common region-wide priority areas; whereas the SROs would provide technical and operational support to national and sub-regional programmes in their respective sub-regions and be responsible for leading FAO’s response to subregional priorities.”

109. The majority of the staff agreed with this principle and felt that staff at the regional office should be responsible for regional programme development (including developing and managing projects on common priority areas), strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination of FAO’s work in the region. At sub-regional level, the emphasis was in supporting field programme development and strategic planning at sub-regional and country level.

110. Technical staff at regional and sub-regional levels were in favour of maintaining strong links with FAO technical divisions, without this necessarily meaning to reinstate direct reporting lines to HQ divisions (suggestions made included the establishment of a comprehensive rotation and mobility policy as well as the development of functional technical networks around a restricted number of regional priorities under RNE coordination). Resource mobilization was found to be the responsibility of all offices, whereas training and information exchange was considered more a regional than sub-regional function.

111. The survey results, together with the evaluation team’s observations during the field visits, shows that there is in fact a growing consensus on the functions to be played by

⁴⁵ A summary of the questionnaire results can be found in annex 4.

technical staff at each layer and that an explicit clarification of functional relationships is needed particularly in view of the ongoing building-up of sub-regional teams.

4. Regional and sub-regional skills mix

112. The evaluation team noted that the past regional skills mix was largely governed by abolition of posts, retirements, transfers and out-posting of staff to country offices (OTOs) rather than by a defined set of priorities for the region. In a context of reduced funding, it was indeed very difficult to modify the skills mix, let alone to expand the technical capacity of RO and SROs in the Near East region.

113. Following the increase in resources to regional and sub-regional offices in 2010-11, the composition of regional and sub-regional technical teams was revised in 2009. In this regard, the evaluation noted that the consultation between RNE and HQ for the revision of the RNE (and SROs) skills mix was rather limited and, in the absence of regional, sub-regional or national priority frameworks, not evidence-based.

114. Based on the above findings, the evaluation team believes that the RPF-NE should become the basis for defining the skills mix at regional level to better reflect the priority areas identified in the RPF and adopted by the NERC. Sub-regional and country programming processes should now be launched as soon as possible, and when feasible with an expanded stakeholder base including Governments, sub-regional organizations, technical partners and donors, so that the skills mix of sub-regional experts progressively reflect priority areas (and FAO comparative advantages) of interest in each sub-region.

VI. WORK OF FAO REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL OFFICES

115. This section includes a strategic assessment⁴⁶ of technical work carried out by RNE and SNE during the period under review. It starts with an overview of FAO priority areas, followed by an assessment of the work conducted through the regular and field programme. It ends with a review of structural issues, key programme areas and cross cutting issues that are changing the nature of the demand for FAO services in the Near East. In drawing the analysis the following sources of information have been used:

- Desk review of FAO regular and field programme activities as reported in the PWB, PIR and FPMIS as well as in RNE, SNE and FAORs work plans and annual reports.
- Past evaluations (several project evaluations managed by OED and corporate evaluations including the Evaluation of FAO's work and role in Water; the Second Real Time Evaluation of FAO's Work on Avian Influenza; the Multilateral Evaluation of the 2003-05 Desert Locust Campaign, etc.).
- Discussions with senior management, FAO staff, regional partners and direct beneficiaries.

A. Priority areas of work

116. The IEE (paragraph 265) found that “while FAO Members agree on FAO's purposes and broad goals, they have been far less successful in translating these into consensus on [global, regional and national] priorities, choices and decisions on what FAO can be expected to do - and not to do - with the resources at its disposal.” The evaluation team found that the Near East region was not an exception. Although RNE identified five priority areas of work “based on the current and ongoing major food and agriculture related development concerns”⁴⁷, FAO's activities did not reflect clear prioritization of work on these areas.

Box 6.1 Priority Areas for the Near East

- Promoting Sustainable Water and Natural Resources Utilization, Conservation and Management.
- Promoting the Formulation and Implementation of Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development Policy Reforms for Eradication of Food Insecurity, Malnutrition and Rural Poverty.
- Strengthening Capacities for Trade Liberalization, WTO Negotiations and Regional Economic Cooperation.
- Assisting in Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Preparedness, and in Post-Emergency Rehabilitation and Transition to Sustainable Food Security and Agricultural Development.
- Fostering Knowledge Management, Availability and Access to Information.

117. A complicating factor in defining priorities was that the demand for FAO services emerging from past Regional Conferences was very diverse and included a wide array of

⁴⁶ The assessment of RNE and SNE technical work was not intended to assess the impact of all the work conducted by these offices but rather to provide insights on internal and external issues affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of these offices.

⁴⁷ <http://www.fao.org/world/Regional/RNE/morelinks/NERC/Nerc29/Material/RNE-Priority-Areas.pdf>

political, policy and technical issues. At sub-regional level the evaluation did not find clear common priorities identified for North Africa. At country level, while efforts were made in some countries (such as Egypt, Iran and Syria) to develop National Medium-Term Priority Frameworks (NMTPF), only one country had signed an NMTPF (Yemen) by end-2009, which was not operational due to lack of resources⁴⁸.

118. Overall, the evaluation found that while the work of FAO in the region was scattered, the quality and neutrality of FAO technical expertise was still widely recognized. However, in terms of quantity, RNE and SNE staff were not as productive as their peers in other regional offices. For instance, only in 2009 the RAP technical team, which is about twice the size of RNE, together with both FAORs and HQs delivered about US\$70 million of technical assistance programmes in the Asia and Pacific region (against less than US\$ 20 m in the Near East). Regular programme activities were not an exception:

- RAP organized 87 meetings and workshops whereas RNE and SNE organized 33.
- RAP produced 18 technical publications⁴⁹ whereas RNE and SNE produced 2.
- RAP fielded 287 missions whereas RNE and SNE fielded 63.

119. It is against the above background that the evaluation team has assessed the Regular and Field Programme activities conducted by RNE and SNE during the period under review.

B. Regular Programme

120. The assessment that follows examines the various types of normative services and products provided by RNE and SNE. This mainly includes secretariat services to technical commissions as well as technical and policy advice provided through technical networks, workshops, publications and missions. The process of evaluation is based on: (i) a description of the key outputs; and (ii) an assessment of the quality, perceived utility and, if possible, impact of these outputs. A detailed account of outputs during the review period is found in Annexes 3 (regional technical commissions), 4 (workshops and meetings), 5 (publications) and 6 (highlights of FAO technical work in the Near East).

Secretariat and related functions

121. RNE makes substantive inputs to Regional Technical Commissions, which are regional bodies established under articles VI and XIV of the FAO Constitution. To date, the following Commissions have been established for the Near East region:

1. Agriculture and Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East (ALAWUC).
2. Near East Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI).
3. Near East Forestry Commission (NEFC).

122. In addition to the above bodies, some member countries adhere to technical commissions that are functional to their geographic location and interests, such as the following:

⁴⁸ FAO has signed a cooperation agreement with Morocco based on the country's "Plan Vert" and prepared a Medium Term Plan for Iraq; although these are not formally considered "NMTPFs" they are operational with funds contributed by FAO and the Government itself.

⁴⁹ Excluding workshop's proceedings, technical commissions' papers and project-funded publications.

- Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC). Members include Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, UAE and Yemen.
- General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). Members include Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia.
- Eastern Central Atlantic Ocean Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC). Mauritania is a founding member; the Commission was created in 1985.

123. The decisions reached by the above technical commissions are discussed at NERC and in some occasions (like in Fisheries and Forestry), also at global level (COFI and COFO, respectively). The areas of competence and priority topics addressed in past sessions (2004-2008) of regional bodies covering Near East countries are summarized below.

Table 6.1 Summary of priority topics addressed by Regional Technical Commissions

Body	Areas of competence & priority topics addressed
ALAWUC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable increase of food production and agricultural productivity. • Finding alternatives to alleviate the effects of water scarcity, developing strategies for drought mitigation and preparedness planning. • Integration of rangeland, pasture and livestock systems. • Seed policy and international regulations on Plant Genetic Resources. Biosafety. • Biotechnology in crop production with reference to GMO crops. • Plant Protection, Food Safety and Agricultural Trade.
NEFC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National forest assessments, updated forest policies and investment programmes. • Livestock overgrazing and forests. • Prevention and fight against forest fires • Exotic invasive species and biodiversity protection. • Economic valuation of forest goods (timber and non-timber) and services. • Role of forests in food and water security in watersheds. • Forests, energy and climate change mitigation
RECOFI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish stock assessments and reporting. • National and regional measures to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS). • Role of fisheries and aquaculture in food security and socio-economic development. Importance of value-chains. • Development of appropriate information & communication systems to support decision-making and policy implementation. • Legal, technical and human capacity building to help countries enforce regional and international agreements and regulations -Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

124. The evaluation noted three main issues regarding the work of the regional technical commissions. The first one was related to the varying geographic coverage of these bodies. ALAWUC (23) and NEFC (27) have a greater operational coverage than RNE and SNE (18 countries). Other bodies (RECOFI, CRC and GFCM) include only some of the countries covered by RNE. If decisions taken by these bodies are to become key inputs for overall

regional programming and priority setting, then there is a need to revise the membership and timing of these regional bodies⁵⁰.

125. Secondly, a review of FAO follow-up actions to decisions taken by these bodies shows uneven progress. FAO struggled to meet all the demands posed by ALAWUC and NEFC, whereas it was more responsive to needs expressed in RECOFI, CRC and GFCM meetings. This was partially explained by the coverage issue, by duplication of mandates (Member Country decisions taken at COFO were not always consistent with those taken at NEFC e.g. regarding the creation of a forest fire management network). More importantly, as Article XIV bodies, RECOFI, CRC and GFCM have operational funds at their disposal made available by both FAO and the member countries themselves ranging from US\$ 0.2 m (RECOFI) to US\$ 1.9 m (GFCM) per biennium. In comparison, ALAWUC only had US\$ 0.02 m per year from FAO.

126. Thirdly, and emerging from the above, servicing some of these commissions is very resource intensive (i.e., five staff members at RNE and SNE work full or part time on these commissions) and can potentially affect prioritization of work. RECOFI for example is being subsidized by FAO (in kind) although it serves a group of countries that could finance the work of the commission. Others such as ALAWUC are fully paid for by FAO yet it was not always evident to the evaluation team the added value of this body to improved regional decision making since it has recently lacked an adequate quorum and some of their functions (such as discussing priority work in agriculture and natural resources) are the prerogative of NERC.

127. Limited commitment from member countries (in terms of funding and actions), duplication (between NEFC and COFO' decisions and follow-up actions) and disparity (in terms of membership and timing of meetings) add to the need (as expressed in the IPA⁵¹) for a review of these bodies with the view of increasing their effectiveness and coherence of their work as well as progressively aligning their agenda to the RPF-NE approved by NERC.

Networks and linkages

128. During the period under review, RNE has maintained and contributed to a number of important networks linking the concerned public and private stakeholders in the concerned/interested countries and creating the basis for their cooperation on research and

⁵⁰ This issue was discussed by the 31st FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (April 2010) which proposed “that the Commissions should conduct their work in greater depth and detail and should submit recommendations on courses of action to the Regional Conference and suggested that the Commissions could play an advisory role for the Regional Conferences and could serve to promote South-South cooperation”; and by the 27th FAO Regional Conference for Europe (May 2010) which urged “the specialized regional commissions to convene their future sessions in line with the Regional Conference for Europe in order to allow that priority action could be identified and timely submitted to FAO Governing Bodies”.

⁵¹ As part of the IPA (item 2.69) FAO is presently conducting a review of statutory bodies with the “view to making any necessary changes to enable those statutory bodies which wish to do so to exercise financial and administrative authority and mobilise additional funding from their members, while remaining within the framework of FAO and maintaining a reporting relationship with it.” Only CRC, GFCM and RECOFI are part of this review.

development topics. A non-exhaustive list⁵² of regional networks with basic information on their establishment, objectives, funding and membership is below.

Table 6.2 Main thematic networks in the Near East

Network	Objective	Partners and funding
Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA). Established in 1985	Strengthen cooperation among national, regional and international research institutions and centres through the dissemination and exchange of information, experiences and research results	25 Member countries, ICARDA, Bioversity International, IFPRI, Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), and FAO (RNE); Members pay annual fees of US\$ 2,000 to US\$ 5,000
Regional Network on Waste Water Reuse (RNRTWATER) Established in 2001	Foster technical co-operation among the concerned institutions, particularly the exchange of information and experience among countries of the Region.	12 Member Countries, nine regional and international organizations, FAO (RNE) No data on funding
Near East and North Africa regional network for agricultural policies (NENARNAP) Established in 2003	Support member countries' efforts to achieve sustainable agricultural development through the adoption of economically viable, environmentally sound and socially acceptable agricultural policies.	23 Member countries FAO provides secretariat No data on funding.
Near East and North Africa Rural and Agricultural Knowledge and Information Network (NERAKIN) Established in 2008	Strengthen the capacity of the Ministries of Agriculture and Agricultural and Rural Research Institutions for effective information management and knowledge exchange in support of rural and agricultural development in the region	17 Member countries, AOAD, ACSAD, AARINENA, Egyptian Universities Network, Central Laboratory for Agricultural Expert Systems, Bioversity International, GFAR, ICARDA, International Center for Biosaline Agriculture. FAO provides secretariat No data on funding.
Network on Drought	Enhance technical co-operation	FAO (RNE), ICARDA and

⁵² Other networks developed by RNE include the Near East Virtual Extension and Research Communication Network, the Near East Plant Protection Network, the Regional Aquaculture Information System, the Preventive Desert Locust Management Network, etc.

Network	Objective	Partners and funding
Management for the Near East, Mediterranean and Central Asia (NEMEDCA) Established in 2001	among concerned national, regional and international organizations in the Region.	CIHEAM are co-conveners of the Network. The National Drought Mitigation Centre in Lincoln, USA recently joined it. No data on funding.

129. AARINENA is the oldest of these networks. It has the widest geographic coverage (spans countries from the Mashreq, Maghreb, Western Asia and the Khalij) and has been very active in developing thematic networks (on biotechnology, cotton, olive oil, etc.) and information systems (for example NERAKIN was developed by FAO for communication activities and later on placed it within AARINENA to provide a framework for sustainability and ownership by the National Programmes). In the past few years FAO's involvement has decreased whereas ICARDA has taken a stronger role in guiding the work of AARINENA on agricultural research issues⁵³.

130. RNRTWATER and NENARNAP are collaborative efforts between Near East countries and international organizations concerned with reuse of treated wastewater and agricultural policies respectively. They both started in the early 2000s with a range of promising activities but have recently become less active mainly due to lack of financial resources, with RNRTWATER reportedly collapsing in 2006 after a regional TCP project in support of the network (which was conditional upon the approval of a Kuwaiti donation) did not materialise. The last NENARNAP workshop (on soaring food prices) and biennial conference were held in 2008 and no further activity (except online and e-mail communications) have been conducted since then. In comparison, NEMEDCA, which grew out of a European Union-funded project that ended in 2008, has continued to carry out some activities (including annual Regional Conferences on Drought Management).

Meetings and Workshops

131. Besides holding meetings of regional technical commissions and networks, RNE and SNE have also convened or participated in numerous other international workshops, where FAO was called upon to provide high-level advice and bring knowledge from around the globe into the discussions. In total, RNE organized 107 meetings and workshops and SNE 36 during the period under review. The continued use of national and regional workshops is indeed important as a two-way exchange of information enabling RNE and SNE to pass knowledge to the participants and simultaneously gain awareness of their requirements. Target beneficiaries are normally middle-level government officers and technicians, who are often trained as trainers for further dissemination of the information and technologies. Private entrepreneurs are also sometimes trained (e.g. on agro-industry development).

132. The evaluation had two overall comments regarding the quantity and quality of the meetings and workshops organized/supported by RNE and SNE. In terms of quantity, the

⁵³ <http://aarinena.org/Syria2010/index.asp>

workshops and meetings held have been numerous (over 140) and covered many domains: water management, land degradation, plant protection, animal health, livestock, etc. The broad range of issues covered makes it difficult to draw general conclusions although clearly a majority of the workshops were very specialized, with only a handful of them devoted to strategic policy issues for the region. In terms of quality, the majority of the workshops organized by RNE and SNE were highly appreciated. Officials in countries visited by the evaluation team confirmed this. In some cases it was reported that the workshops could have benefited from inviting representatives of other technical organizations, not necessarily from the region itself, working on the subject. This was particularly true in areas where the region felt there were experiences from outside that were worth considering, e.g. Eastern European experience in agricultural trade negotiations with the European Union.

Publications and databases

133. The evaluation team was informed that RNE and SNE staff contributed to several publications issued by FAO HQ. However, little independent work by RNE and SNE was published: only 13 policy and technical publications were produced between 2004-09 (as indicated earlier excluding workshop's proceedings, technical commissions' papers and project-funded publications). This is very low compared to publications produced by FAO in other regions (In 2009 alone RAP produced 18 policy and technical papers⁵⁴ while RLC produced 16⁵⁵).

134. A consequence of the low number of policy and technical publications prepared was a reduced availability of normative products tailored to the region. Since few of the publications were peer reviewed by external experts there was a limited uptake of results by the research community. RNE and SNE publications were indeed cited only four times in scientific journals around the world⁵⁶. This contrast with citations of RAP and RLC publications (e.g. RAP publications alone were cited 248 times in Scirus).

135. Interlocutors in the region expressed their satisfaction with some specific technical publications developed by FAO (e.g. the Qat study in Yemen, the Inter-Agency Food Security Assessment in Egypt, the paper on marketing of agricultural products in Tunisia and Morocco, etc.). However, these were exceptions; when discussing in general about the quantity and quality of technical publications produced by RNE and SNE with Government staff, the mission interlocutors said that they did not know most of them⁵⁷. This broken link with clients of normative products reinforced the findings that RNE and SNE publications were limited and often unknown at local level.

Dissemination of information and knowledge exchange

⁵⁴ http://www.fao.org/world/regional/rap/publication_browse_detail.asp?year=2009&pageNumber=1

⁵⁵ http://www.rlc.fao.org/es/pubs/news_archive.asp?PagePosition=2

⁵⁶ The citation analysis took into account scientific journals listed in Scopus, Google Scholar and Scirus.

⁵⁷ An exception to this was the publications for locust control (produced at HQ with inputs from RNE and SNE) and on water and irrigation.

136. The field missions noted that the diffusion of FAO information (notably documents and publications) to Government officials and partners requires improvement, particularly in the Mashreq and Gulf countries. This problem is generic and refers to many publications. As part of the IPA (item 3.55 and 3.57) FAO has committed to improve publication and dissemination of publications in Arabic including the development of a separate mirror Website.

137. The table below summarizes the percentage of all FAO publications by language, which confirms that publications in Arabic language are lagging behind when compared to other official languages of the organization.

Table 6.3 Breakdown of FAO publications by language (as reported through the PIR)

Language	2004-05	2006-07	2008-09
English	46	49	46
French	19	15	14
Spanish	18	19	13
Arabic	4	7	5
Chinese	13	7	8
Russian		3	4
Multi-lingual			10

138. As in many other parts of the developing world, increasing internet usage particularly by young people is quickly changing readers' habits. The Near East was not an exception to this. A quick review of FAO corporate and regional websites traffic data for the period under review showed that users of FAO information from Near East and North Africa countries were increasing but they do not limit themselves to information available only in Arabic.

139. Website traffic data for April 2010⁵⁸ showed that most users from North African countries queried and accessed FAO Web sites (HQ, RNE and SNE) in French; users from the Gulf and Mashreq sub-regions made queries in both English and Arabic, almost in equal percentage. The FAO corporate website was by far the most consulted source of technical information with over 100,000 unique visitors from the region; RNE and SNE websites only draw about 10,000 visitors. Visitors from Near East countries are also actively participating in FAO online forums which are conducted entirely in English (e.g. 129 out of 1791 participants at FAO's Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition came from the region).

140. The above results confirm the mission findings that in spite of the limited distribution/availability of publications researchers and particularly university students are very enthusiastic and multi-lingual users of FAO information in the region.

⁵⁸ Data for previous months was not available.

Missions

141. As stated earlier the vast majority of missions (over 80%) to Near East countries during the review period were carried out by FAO HQ staff and consultants. In 2004, RNE staff conducted 19 project-related visits (28%) and 50 non-project visits (72%). In 2009, RNE project-related missions to countries in the region reduced to 10 (18%) while non-project visits remained high (46 or 82%). In both years the majority of missions (over 60%) were to Gulf countries (mainly to Saudi Arabia). Missions conducted by SNE staff were focussed on North Africa countries and were largely non-project related (81% in 2004 and 71% in 2009).

Table 6.4 Breakdown of missions undertaken by RNE and SNE staff (2004-09), COIN

Office	Type of mission	2004		2009	
		No. of visits	Percentage	No. of visits	Percentage
RNE	Project	19	28%	10	18%
	Non-project	50	72%	46	82%
SNE	Project	3	19%	2	29%
	Non-project	13	81%	5	71%

142. The fact that the majority of missions were non-project related can be explained by the declining field programme and the relatively high number of workshops and meetings held in the region. Other issues raised to the team were the long periods between project related missions and the tendency by staff to visit countries in which funding for field activities was readily available (such as Saudi Arabia), and not necessarily those with the most serious food security problems (e.g. Yemen, Mauritania).

C. Field Programme

143. The assessment below covers RNE and SNE inputs to non-emergency regional, sub-regional and national projects carried out in the period 2004-09.

Regional and sub-regional projects

144. During the review period (2004-09), RNE and SNE had operational responsibility for 18 (sub-) regional projects, 12 of which were funded by FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) and 6 by extra-budgetary sources. Of the latter, 1 was funded by Italy, 1 by IFAD, 1 by France and 3 by multiple donors. RNE was the operating unit for 13 regional projects and Lead Technical Office (LTO)⁵⁹ of 3 projects. SNE was the operating unit for 5 sub-regional projects and LTO of 3. FAO HQ was LTO for the remaining 12 (sub-) regional projects operated by RNE and SNE. By far the leading technical subject for (sub-) regional

⁵⁹ The Addendum to Field Programme Circular 2009/03 dated on 25 March 2010 defines the LTO as the organizational unit that leads the formulation and implementation of a field project. In order to facilitate the reading of this report, the term "backstopping unit" is also used as equivalent to "LTO".

projects was crops; 8 projects were on this topic. Other topics included fisheries development (3 projects), food security (2 projects), policy, animal health, marketing, trade and forestry (1 project each). The combined budgets of these projects were around US\$ 19.6 million. However, only about US\$ 10.5 m were delivered from 2004-09, out of which US\$ 4.5 m corresponded to a single regional initiative backstopped by HQ (Regional IPM project).

Table 6.5 Delivery of Regional and sub-regional projects 2004-09, FPMIS

Delivery	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Trust Funds	387,253	908,404	640,057	912,074	1,090,786	1,203,931
TCP	654,358	390,313	180,190	22,658	156,109	303,859
Total	1,041,611	2,207,121	1,460,304	1,846,805	2,337,681	2,711,721

National projects

145. Besides (sub-) regional projects RNE has backstopped and operated 17 national projects in countries with no FAORs, and backstopped, but did not operate, 18 national projects in countries with FAORs. SNE had backstopped 16 national projects. The bulk of RNE and SNE project backstopping occurred at country (51 projects) rather than at regional level (6 projects). The list of projects operated and/or backstopped by RNE and SNE are in annex 7.

146. Three observations can be made about the projects backstopped by RNE and SNE.

147. One is the very low number of extra-budgetary (sub-) regional projects approved and implemented during the review period – only six in total. Furthermore, RNE and SNE have had little role in mobilizing resources for both (sub-) regional and national extra-budgetary projects; this was generally done in Rome or at country level.

148. The second relates to TCP projects. Very few regional non-emergency TCP projects were approved by FAO during the review period (four in 2004, four in 2008 and one in 2010, none in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009). Something similar can be said about national TCP projects (see section below on the TCP). The limited number of projects developed and operated in middle and low-income countries can be attributed to both external and internal causes, e.g. poor formulation of project requests, shortage of staff in the region with skills required for project development, etc. In any case, FAO as a whole could have certainly played a stronger role in support of TCP project development in the region.

149. Thirdly, the technical capacity available in RNE to backstop and operate projects has been heavily concentrated in the Gulf sub-region (mainly on the Saudi Arabia programme), with correspondingly less on other countries in the region. This could be explained by the fact that technical cooperation programmes in the Gulf sub-region have been a major source of income for RNE (around US\$ 0.5 m per year of overheads), while the field programme in other countries were rapidly decreasing.

Box 6.2 FAO cooperation with Saudi Arabia

The FAO-Saudi Arabia cooperation programme was established in 1981 and has been renewed since then every five years. The current Technical Cooperation Agreement spans the period 2006-11 and includes 14 projects (with a total budget of US\$ 61.7 m) in the following areas:

- Sustainable management, conservation and development of natural resources
- Development of agricultural rural areas
- Increase productivity, production and marketing efficiency and diversification of production
- Upgrading the technical and quality standards to cope with international requirements
- Training and building of institutional capacity

By end 2009 the programme was implemented by a team led by a Senior Programme Coordinator and included two internationals, twenty- two support staff and fifteen technical experts. Programme backstopping was led by FAO HQ, except in the areas of water, livestock and crop protection which were backstopped by RNE.

1. Assessment

150. Field missions and desk studies undertaken for this evaluation examined ten regional and national projects operated and/or backstopped by RNE and SNE⁶⁰. These included five completed TCP regional projects⁶¹ and five national projects⁶². The full assessment of the projects reviewed can be found in annex 8. Regional projects⁶³ were assessed against 4 different aspects. Scoring was done on a 5-point scale, with 5 being the highest for each item. A score of 3 was deemed satisfactory; average scores above 3 can be considered better than satisfactory and scores below 3 are less than satisfactory. The criteria and average scores for all are presented in the table below.

Table 6.6 Scoring of regional projects against established criteria

Criteria for project assessment		Average
Relevance	Did the project correspond to important country needs? For TCP projects, did it genuinely meet the criteria for approval?	3.6
Project design	Were the objectives clear? How well were target beneficiaries, outputs and inputs specified? Were there linkages between project inputs, activities, outputs and objectives	2.8
Efficiency of	How well and timely were input deliveries by FAO and other	2.6

⁶⁰ The objective of this exercise was not to evaluate the full impact of these projects but rather to assess the performance of RNE/SNE in providing support to develop, implement and/or backstop regional and national projects.

⁶¹ TCP/RAB/2903, TCP/RAB/2902, TCP/RAB/3002, TCP/RAB/3004, TCP/RAB/3003.

⁶² TCP/SYR/3101, TCP/EGY/3001, UTF/EGY/021/EGY, UTF/SAU/011, UTF/SAU/012.

⁶³ National projects were not subject to the above scoring; however, the findings emerging in the individual reviews have also been taken into account when formulating the overall conclusions.

Criteria for project assessment		Average
implementation	parties to the project? What was the quality and quantity of outputs produced, compared to expectations?	
Effectiveness	Was there, or was there likely to be, effective, lasting post-project action that corresponded to what was envisaged when the project was approved?	1.8

151. RNE and SNE contributions to national projects were assessed on a case by case basis since there are several factors influencing the success of national projects that go beyond the specific intervention of RNE and SNE.

152. Overall, and as has been the case in past major evaluations, the relevance of regional and national projects to development problems was found to be high, while the translation of this positive aspect into clear objectives and a coherent and implementable design was found to be less than satisfactory. This is often attributed to poor formulation of requests in countries and the absence of project preparation funds (i.e. most projects reviewed were indeed designed before the TCP facility, which could have been used for this purpose, was established) both at regional and country level.

2. Issues related to field activities

153. Several common issues emerged from the examination of the field activities that should be considered in the future design of projects in the Near East and North Africa region. The first one is an overall remark, followed by three that relate mainly to regional and TCP projects; the last one is particularly relevant to donor-funded national projects.

Project identification

154. As highlighted by the recent Evaluation of FAO Country Programming, in the absence of a Priority Framework at regional level, a SRPF at sub-regional level or a CPF at national level, projects are identified on ad-hoc basis and as a result do not necessarily address key regional or national priorities. For example, none of the regional projects reviewed by the team have dealt with the important issue of water.

Regional focus

155. In the regional projects examined, there were considerable differences in terms of performance between those addressing truly regional priority issues (as defined at the beginning of this chapter) and those for which a regional approach was not always clearly justified. For example, the projects on emerging plant and animal health issues, which represented more than half of the total, were largely successful because they were targeting issues that required supra-national action either at regional or sub-regional level (e.g. harmonization of trade-related legislation, reducing risk of exotic pests introduction).

156. Similarly, the projects on fisheries were conceived for specific geographical areas: the Red Sea, the Khalij and the Mediterranean. Projects targeting more general topics (such as forestry training and marketing regulations) suffered from the lack of a strong recognition for (and thus interest from member countries in) supra-national action. This coupled with weak technical counterparts (e.g. and poor timeliness (e.g. phytosanitary capacity building for GCC states project) reduced their effectiveness.

Regional TCP projects

157. The TCP mechanism has been used for some regional projects for which extra-budgetary funding would have been desirable. TCP, with its budgetary limit of US\$ 500 000, does not seem to be the most appropriate mechanism for projects that require a sustained level of technical support. In addition, these projects tended to address more complex issues and were more likely to slip in their implementation, meaning that sometimes they could not be completed within the two-year statutory limit for TCP projects. This was the case of projects dealing with the development of regional standards (on marketing, trade statistics, etc.). TCP policies restricting certain types of inputs (especially human resources) for project implementation also complicated management of such projects.

Sustainability

158. Very few regional projects in the period under review have been able to continue once project funding ended. The relevance (expressed in terms of need for a regional approach) and complexity of the interventions were key determinants for this. Also, projects focused on specific capacity building activities (e.g. for peach fruit fly prevention) for issues that required regional action (e.g. transboundary pests and diseases) had higher chances to be followed-up.

D. Key Programme Areas

159. This section highlights the results of RNE and SNE work in selected thematic areas and cross-cutting issues during the period under review (2004-09).

1. Natural resources management

160. RNE and SNE work in natural resources (including land and water, forestry and fisheries) has been the second greatest beneficiary of Regular programme (22%) and field programme (31%) resources. RNE and SNE staff made on average more than 20 country visits per year to provide direct technical advice and overall backstopped 15 national non-emergency projects⁶⁴ on this topic in the region.

Land and water

161. RNE had one senior staff member covering the whole region devoted to water and irrigation issues⁶⁵; SNE none. Nevertheless, the quantity of missions conducted, projects backstopped, workshops organized and papers produced in this area were among the highest in the region⁶⁶. The evaluation team also found that the work conducted by RNE staff

⁶⁴ The list of projects backstopped by RNE including emergency was “over 20”.

⁶⁵ An APO was assigned to RNE in support of Land and Water activities in January 2009.

⁶⁶ Based on a review of staff annual reports and other documentation facilitated by the staff the water expert was by far the most active technical expert with 6 missions made to Near East countries, 11 projects backstopped, 6 workshops/meetings organized and contributions to 6 publications only in 2008.

in water and irrigation was generally known by most Government counterparts⁶⁷. The various studies⁶⁸ and projects⁶⁹ on water re-use, drought mitigation and irrigation techniques were particularly appreciated. Funding⁷⁰ and focus⁷¹ of the activities were however not always commensurate with the importance attached or the needs expressed by Member Countries on this area of work.

162. As recommended by the evaluation of FAO's role and work in water there is a need to increase FAO capacity in the Near East taking into account ongoing developments such as the development of a Water Platform in FAO and the establishment of three land and water positions at sub-regional level.

Forestry and Fisheries

163. RNE had one senior staff member devoted to forestry issues; SNE none. Issues such as forest policy and sustainable forest management were considered priority areas by FAO⁷² as well as by Government Authorities met by the evaluation team. FAO regional meetings and workshops (including NEFC) were generally well attended but follow-up activities were reportedly constrained by the limited funding available.

164. RNE had one senior staff devoted to fisheries issues; SNE none. The evaluation team noted that FAO contributions were mainly discussed and agreed within RECOFI, GFCM and SRFC forums, which partially explains that issues relating to marine fisheries received greater support than aquaculture development in the region. Government Authorities expressed high interest in the work of the regional bodies and this was corroborated by their willingness to contribute to their funding (see section on technical commissions for data on Government funding).

⁶⁷ This confirmed the findings of the Evaluation of FAO's Role and Work in Water questionnaire which found a good knowledge of the Organization's work in the water sector only in the Near East region.

⁶⁸ RNE reportedly receives about 50 requests/year for documents on water resources, mainly on water re-use, drought mitigation, CropWat and FAO Irrigation and Drainage Papers 33 and 56.

⁶⁹ FAO water and irrigation projects in the region (such as UTF/SAU/011/SAU & UTF/SAU/012/SAU) were found to have good prospects for sustainability and shown some positive impact on the ground

⁷⁰ Between 2004 and 2009, non-staff resources were on average US\$ 20,000 per year, ranging from US\$ 10,750 to 34,000, plus US\$ 40,000/biennium for the management of ALAWUC. In addition to these funds, RNE staff made use of income generated from project support (on average US\$ 24,000/year) to conduct other activities such as studies and analysis through consultants' services.

⁷¹ The evaluation of FAO's role and work in Water found that that Near East countries demanded greater assistance on water management linked to water availability and scarcity. The FAO Regional Priority Framework for the Near East thus calls for a "holistic approach to water and resource management" that also links with activities on other priority areas of work such as climate change, agriculture emergencies, agricultural production and food security.

⁷² See "Forests and range: adapting to global changes for sustainable development" (paragraph 27), NEFC, April 2010, Tunisia

165. In both cases (forestry and fisheries) the evaluation team noted the strong interactions between the regional staff and their HQ technical counterparts particularly in the context of the regional technical commissions work.

2. Crops and livestock

166. RNE and SNE work in crops and livestock (agriculture) was the greatest beneficiary of Regular programme (23%) and field programme (40%) resources. RNE and SNE staff made on average more than 25 country visits per year to provide technical direct advice and backstopped 8 national projects in the region.

Crops

167. RNE and SNE had four staff members working on plant protection issues. Two were fully dedicated to Locust control operations (one based in Algeria till 2008 and the other in Cairo); the other two were responsible for normative activities (from adopting plant quarantine to plant genetic norms) and field programme development (to deal with exotic pests such as peach fruit fly, wheat rust U99).

168. The 2006 Multilateral Evaluation of the 2003–05 Desert Locust Campaign⁷³ found that the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (based in Cairo) was “fully operational” but warned that as a whole “the capacity of FAO to carry out its advisory responsibilities effectively was limited” due to scarce resources (i.e. only 4 experts at HQ) available. Besides the locust operations, another major programme in the region is the Regional Integrated Pest Management Project funded by the Italian Government and currently active in nine countries⁷⁴. This project has reported several achievements since 2004⁷⁵ and will be subject to an independent evaluation in early 2011.

Livestock

169. RNE had one staff member devoted to livestock issues and one to range management and fodder crops. Although several activities were undertaken by RNE (including several workshops, support to field projects, etc.), the HQ-based Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (EC-TAD) was the main face of FAO in the region through the US\$ 14.2 m (as of October 2009) emergency programme to prevent and control Avian Influenza and other TADs in the Near East. The programme established two sub-regional hubs (one in Tunisia at SNE for the Maghreb countries and one in Beirut for the Middle East) and a country/liaison unit in Egypt. Currently the only functioning sub-regional centre is the one covering the Maghreb.

170. As highlighted in the 2010 Real Time Evaluation of FAO’s work on Avian Influenza⁷⁶ this programme was highly appreciated by Member Countries and partners since it

⁷³ <http://www.fao.org/docs/eims/upload/223124/j8196e.pdf> page 18 PIR 2008-09.

⁷⁴ <http://www.ipm-neareast.com/>

⁷⁵ See page 18 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/019/k8460e.pdf>

⁷⁶ http://www.fao.org/pbe/pbee/common/ecg/391/en/Final_RTE2_report.pdf

addressed an emerging issue for which knowledge was not readily available, and exploited – like in the case of Fisheries and Crops – the “honest broker” role of FAO in setting up regional and sub-regional networks to facilitate information exchange and confidence building.

Box 6.4 Sub-regional ECTAD for North Africa

The Sub-regional ECTAD for North Africa was set up in May 2007 to provide technical assistance to the five Maghreb countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia) for the prevention and control of transboundary animal diseases. Its main partners are the National Veterinary Services of the sub-region (including Egypt), as well as AMU and OIE.

The centre has a twofold aim: i) coordinating and harmonizing policies and strategies to prevent and control transboundary animal diseases, including zoonoses and particularly the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, and support to the implementation of national policies; ii) contributing to the prevention of a prospective pandemic of Avian Influenza. It has lately expanded the scope of its work to cover endemic diseases such as Peste de Petit Ruminants, etc. The main activities of the centre have been the provision of technical assistance to countries in the Maghreb, organization of sub-regional workshops and the establishment of laboratory and epidemiological networks with strong linkages to European countries from the Mediterranean basin. So far US\$ 4.7 m have been mobilized to cover the costs of the centre as well as regional and country-level activities with the majority of the funds provided by Spain and FAO.

3. Policy

171. RNE and SNE work in food and agricultural policy (including trade) was together with crops and livestock the greatest beneficiary of Regular programme (23%) but only the third largest beneficiary of field programme (12%) resources. RNE and SNE staff made on average more than five country visits per year to provide direct policy advice and backstopped six national projects in the region.

172. RNE and SNE had four policy posts but two staff were assigned as OTOs in Jordan and Algeria which left only one full-time senior policy expert in Cairo and one in Tunis for the entire region.

173. The evaluation team noted that the reduction of policy expertise happened during a period of renewed interest from Governments in high-level policy advice, i.e. for the review of specific agricultural policies and development frameworks, especially in the context of national strategic planning processes including the NMTPF and the UNDAF. This renewed interest, expressed at all levels, was not matched with the required resources and capacity particularly at country level. This resulted in missed opportunities for FAO to engage with policy makers of the region.

174. New developments within FAO (such as the need to support the preparation of Regional, Sub-regional and Country Programming Frameworks) and outside FAO (such as the need for a stronger capacity to support policy dialogue with supra-national stakeholders such as UMA and the GCC and to contribute to Regional UN Initiatives) call for a substantial strengthening of FAO capacity in this area of work. In dealing with the increased demand, the involvement of the FAO Investment Center (TCI) should be encouraged. TCI expertise on strategy and programme development for International Financial Institutions such as the

World Bank and IFAD would be particularly helpful to support the development of country priority frameworks in the region.

E. Cross-cutting Issues

175. Funding for cross-cutting issues (such as food security and nutrition, extension and gender) by both the RP and field projects was very low (gender and extension received less than 1% of the total resources; nutrition and food safety received 4% of the RP funds but less than 1% of the field programme resources) during the period under review. RNE and SNE staff (and consultants) made an average of 10 country visits per year and backstopped 6 national projects in the region dealing with cross-cutting issues.

1. Food Security and Nutrition

176. At the time of the evaluation, FAO did not have a comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) strategy for the region; rather these two inter-related topics were treated as separate issues. RNE had a nutrition officer but no food security officer⁷⁷. FAO does provide added value on FSN in the region, as it is the only organization that has the technical capacity to provide comprehensive information and analyses on nutrition and agriculture production linkages. Outputs of regional consultations include the development of food composition table adapted to the local produce and, in collaboration with WHO, regional guidelines for healthy food. However, the lack of a FSN strategy linked to the achievement of the MDGs and adequate resources has affected work prioritization. The mission was indeed informed that work on the subject was mostly demand-driven (e.g. basically in function of the TCPs requests received).

177. At country level, where food security has a high priority, FAO's role is perceived as much less than it should be. The combination of lack of capacity and lack of resources has lessened FAO's comparative edge in food security and nutrition in the region.

2. Gender mainstreaming

178. From 2004-09 RNE nor SNE did not have any capacity to address gender mainstreaming in the region. The PWB 2010-11 includes a significant move in gender mainstreaming by elevating to the level of a strategic objective. The aim is to enhance gender equity, particularly of women, in agricultural and rural development by identifying a strategy, developing a working apparatus and achieving organizational changes that incorporate gender mainstreaming institutionally, and at the regional and fieldwork level. An underlying challenge in undertaking this strategy is that it also involves changing social behaviour. This underscores the challenge of gender mainstreaming globally.

179. The evaluation team noted that FAO staff interpretation of gender mainstreaming at field level was generally confined to including women in projects. More importantly, the FAO Strategic Objective K⁷⁸ is not clearly reflected in the RNE's Regional Priority Framework. On

⁷⁷ In 2009, the nutrition officer was asked to also cover the few food security activities undertaken in the region. Most food security activities were in fact carried out by HQ through the Special Programme for Food Security.

⁷⁸ Gender equity in access to resources, goods, services and decision-making in the rural areas

the other hand, RNE and SNE are limited in their capability to implement gender mainstreaming for several reasons: first, as of yet, neither RNE nor SNE had not been provided with capacity development training on gender mainstreaming; second, they do not have a gender officer among their technical experts; third, no additional resources were available to operationalize the gender strategic objective. Consequently, RNE and SNE have been unable to initiate dialogue with governments on gender mainstreaming, provide backstopping to FAORs or form partnerships with other development agencies.

180. At country level, women represent a significant percentage of the agriculture labour force (with some exceptions in the Gulf sub-region). FAORs application of gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting area is limited to ensuring that gender considerations are mentioned in any project request. In addition, there are gender “qualifiers” to assist the TCP unit in retrieving information for monitoring and reporting on the incorporation of gender issues in TCP projects, in line with TCP criteria and agreed gender biennial outputs for the Unit. However, there was no indication that these qualifiers were actually being used during project implementation.⁷⁹

181. As a result of the above, the evaluation team noted that FAO’s image was affected by their passive role and lack of contribution to promoting gender equity in the agriculture sector.

3. Extension

182. From 2004-07, RNE had an Extension and Communication for Development Officer who was reportedly active in promoting extension services in the region. This included organizing regional workshops on extension services, inclusion of extension in FAO’s fieldwork and capacity development of extension agents. In 2008, the extension and communication development post was abolished and the incumbent was transferred to HQ. As a result, there is no longer any permanent technical staff in the region to oversee extension activities or effectively supervise new ones in the country or the region. Moreover, in HQ there are only two extension officers who are expected to provide support globally. Member states consider extension services essential in the region. In lower income countries such as Mauritania and Yemen extension services in both agriculture and rural development are in great demand and mutually dependent. In medium income countries such as Egypt and Lebanon, the focus is primarily on agriculture extension services. In high income countries such as Saudi Arabia extension is considered an important means to share and exchange information regionally especially regarding transboundary diseases. A good case study that shows how FAO has significantly contributed to capacity development of extension services in the region is the Rural and Agricultural Development Communication Network project in Egypt.⁸⁰

Box 6.5 The Rural and Agricultural Development Communication Network (RADCON)

⁷⁹ Gender “qualifiers” for TCP. FD September 2008. There are four *gender qualifiers*: (1) gender equality; (2) gender mainstreaming; (3) gender affirmative action; (4) gender neutral.

⁸⁰ RADCON was developed on the experience of VERCON (Virtual Extension Communication Network) that was based on the concept of connecting extension with researchers.

This project is founded on participatory communication and sharing information by establishing a triangulation between extension agents, researchers and the community.⁸¹ The objective is to enable rural communities to participate in generating, developing and sharing knowledge. Over 115 extension agents in fifty villages were trained to work with farmers. A comprehensive curriculum for training of trainers (TOT) in Arabic was developed, field tested and implemented. Extension agents, particularly those in geographically dispersed areas, were enabled to have access to information online on various issues involving agriculture and rural development. The system has also been a catalyst for developing rural enterprise. For example, extension agents put small farmers in contact with NGOs to assist them market their crops. Equally, this has allowed facilitators to learn about what crops are in market demand, subsequently, provide farmers with the seeds to cultivate these crops. During the project three training courses were provided to extension agents and twelve follow-up workshops. By project completion, approximately 804 participants were trained in using the system. Other outputs include five guidebooks for extension agents, which were further developed to be included in the curriculum of the Faculty of Agriculture, at the University of Cairo. Since the RADCON project ended in 2008, it has successfully sustained itself; more so, up scaled its activities. It is situated in 240 sites in nineteen governorates in Egypt. Current plans are to expand it to cover one-third of Egypt (2010-2017) and to cover all Egypt by 2030.

F. Structural Issues

183. This section comments on a number of issues that have influenced the ability of RNE and SNE to work towards meeting the demands in the region for technical assistance for emergency and rehabilitation activities and through the TCP mechanism.

1. Emergency and rehabilitation activities

184. Emergency and rehabilitation activities have been the biggest component of FAO field programme in the Near East in the period 2004-09 representing over 45% of total field programme delivery⁸². Staff (and consultants) from the Emergency and Rehabilitation Division (TCE) have been very active in the region, making 422 visits to near east countries only in 2009. This is more than half of the visits made by the remaining HQ divisions, RNE and SNE together (775).

185. Several evaluations of emergency activities⁸³ have highlighted the positive contributions made by emergency programmes to increase the capacity of FAORs in the region but also the need for “considerably greater decentralization by TCE of its operations”⁸⁴.

⁸¹ The budget for RADCON was \$US 1.5 million funded by the Italian government; project formulation and implementer was conducted by FAO.

⁸² RNE was involved in backstopping several emergency projects on water.

⁸³ Including project evaluations in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria; the Second Real Time Evaluation of FAO’s work on Avian Influenza and the corporate evaluation of FAO’s Operational Capacity in Emergencies.

⁸⁴ See page 6 at <http://www.fao.org/pbe/pbee/common/ecg/386/en/OED.pdf>

Box 6.6 FAO Emergency Programme in Lebanon: Win-win FAOR-TCE Cooperation

In the past few years Lebanon had seen an increase in conflict-induced emergencies and forest fire devastation affecting thousands of farming households. Following the hostilities in south Lebanon in the summer of 2006, the FAOR in Lebanon in cooperation with TCE developed an emergency programme for war-affected farmers. FAO received US\$ 8.3 m from the Lebanese Recovery Fund to assist the Government providing support to vulnerable rural households in South Lebanon. As part of this programme TCE supported the strengthening of the FAOR capacity through the provision of funding for the recruitment of additional operations staff and for training of administrative staff on budget holder responsibilities. The FAOR was also able to tap on the expertise of staff working for the emergency programme, receive a share of the overheads and make occasional use of the programme's operational and logistical capacity for non-emergency activities in the country.

186. During the period under review, limited efforts were made to transfer some responsibilities and capacity to the field for emergency preparedness and rehabilitation. However, the need to react quickly and provide strong backstopping to operations in often difficult locations and on complex topics meant that supposedly temporary operational arrangements became de facto long-term solutions. The risk of this was illustrated most recently by the closure of the ECTAD regional animal health centre for the Middle East in July 2010 due to the absence of further "emergency" funds and no longer term arrangement having been put in place.

187. The evaluation team is thus of the opinion that in conformity with the spirit of the IPA and the recently developed TCE Operational Strategy 2010-13 (page 9), FAO should make every possible effort to effectively "increase delegations of authority to country offices to manage emergency operations for response and delegate budget holder responsibility [in the Near East region] when capacity exists". A first step in this direction would be to establish formal communication channels between TCE and RNE to allow for an increase in advocacy, communication and resource mobilization for emergency and rehabilitation activities in the region.

2. Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP)

188. The TCP supports FAO Member Nations through small projects which address specific problems in agriculture, fisheries and forestry. Between 2004 and 2009 the TCP spent US\$ 23.6 m in the region, with the lion's share of the funds operated by FAORs (62%), followed by TCE (17%), RNE (17%), HQ (3%) and SNE (1%). Delivery of TCP funds slowed in the period 2006-07, and recovered in 2009 following an increase in delivery at country level. On a biennial basis, the Near East share of the TCP decreased from 10% in 2004-05 to 6% in 2008-09. This is partially explained by a decrease in the number of countries covered by RNE in the region (from 23 to 18) in 2008. In 2010 regional allocations were for the first time set at the beginning of the biennium based largely on past delivery, which resulted in the Near East being allocated 8% of TCP resources⁸⁵.

⁸⁵ Different from previous biennia the 2010-11 regional allocations were made after deducting 15% for emergency and 3% for inter-regional projects. This causes the table to show a total for 2010-11 of 103%.

Table 6.7 Share of TCP delivery/allocation by region in percentage, as reported through the PIR (2004-09) and PWB (2010-11)

Region	2004-05	2006-07	2008-09	2010-11
Africa	32%	37%	39%	40%
Asia and Pacific	24%	23%	26%	24%
Europe	9%	6%	9%	10%
Inter-regional	4%	2%	1%	3%*
Latin America	21%	24%	19%	18%
Near East	10%	8%	6%	8%

189. In the great majority of Near East countries, the TCP has become the main funding source both in terms of number of projects and delivery. The evaluation team noted that this happened even though the TCP manual (and the recently issued guidelines on obtaining and providing technical support and technical clearance for national, subregional and regional development TCP projects) were considered by most of the staff (particularly those at country level) to be fairly complex and rigid. The evaluation noted the difficulties in managing the relatively small amount of TCP funds for the region in the absence of regional, sub-regional or country level frameworks that identify priority areas for FAO cooperation. In this regard, and as recommended by the Evaluation of FAO's Country Programming, the evaluation suggests to progressively align all resources (irrespective of funding source) to support priority areas of work agreed under the RPF-NE and those identified in each sub-region (SRPF) and country (CPF).

PERFORMANCE OF COUNTRY OFFICES

190. As mentioned earlier, the scope of the present evaluation, which was originally focussed on past performance of RNE and SNE, was revised in order to include the impact of the ongoing reform process on decentralized offices, including FAORs.

191. This section covers some key areas⁸⁶ influencing FAORs performance that are being revisited in the context of the IPA. In drawing the analysis, the following sources of information have been used:

- Desk review of FAO mandate, rules and regulations concerning decentralized offices.
- Past evaluations (chiefly the Strategic evaluation of FAO's Country Programming) and background documentation on the subject made available to the team (such as FAOR Annual reports, IPA progress reports, Audit reports, etc.)
- Discussions at country level with FAORs staff, national authorities, project managers, UN partners, donors and civil society representatives.

⁸⁶ Including FAORs coverage, mandate, priority setting, resources and structure.

- Discussions with senior management, FAO staff, regional partners and Permanent Representatives to FAO from the region.

A. Coverage and mandate

192. The IPA (item 3.84) calls for streamlining FAORs coverage and mandate as a means to free up resources to address the critical deficit in country level capacity across the board.

1. Coverage

193. The table below shows the operational coverage and the types of country offices established in each region.

Table 7.1 FAO Operational coverage of Member States, OSD

Region	Countries	Fully fledged	OTOs	Multiple Accreditation	National Correspondent	Countries not covered
Africa	47	40	1	6	0	0
Asia and Pacific	34	15	0	16	1	2
Europe	26	2	0	4	5	15
Latin America	33	20	3	10	0	0
Near East	18	9	5	0	0	4

194. With 18 countries, the Near East is the smallest region in terms of operational coverage. The Near East has nine fully-fledged FAORs and five OTOs, which makes it the region with the largest number of OTOs. In addition, and with the exception of Europe, it has the largest number of countries not covered by FAORs (4).

195. The evaluation team found that FAO field presence in the Near East was weakened during the period under review by three main factors. First, FAO Representatives (FAOReps) and OTOs positions were often left vacant for periods of two years or more (such as in Yemen, Iran, Qatar, Oman, UAE, Libya). Second, the long-standing practice of appointing the head of other UN country office as acting FAORep (in the absence of an FAORep) was seen as outdated since most other UN agencies are now delegating that function to local professional staff or abbreviating the periods of absence of Country Representatives to the minimum possible. Third, the OTO arrangement has not worked either in terms of effective technical support or as a catalyst for field programme development⁸⁷. All of the above have resulted in a loss of visibility and credibility with partners - including Government, UN agencies and donors - in terms of FAO's commitment to national development.

2. Mandate

196. The FAO Administrative Manual (section 118) specifies the role of FAORs as being to "assist their countries of accreditation with developing national capacity, mobilizing resources, developing partnerships and exchanging knowledge and information in favour of

⁸⁷ All OTOs reported to the team that the budget for FAOR functions and balancing technical work with FAOR functions were a major problem.

food, agriculture and rural development”. To this end, the FAORs receive functional guidance from several FAO units at HQ, regional and sub-regional level⁸⁸. Externally, FAORs receive guidance from the host government on country priorities and the UN Resident Coordinator for UN Country Team activities, priorities and approaches. The evaluation team noted three main issues affecting FAORs capacity to fulfil the above role:

197. First, most FAORs have focused on developing and implementing *ad-hoc* projects rather than on sector strategy/policy issues, programming and planning – activities for which there is an increasing demand from member countries. This was partially the result of FAORs closer association with technical units from Ministries of Agriculture (MoA), who tended to request specialized assistance, rather than with policy makers from the MoA or Government Authorities from the Ministry of Planning and/or Economy. In some countries FAORs close association with MoAs was a strategic choice since FAORs lacked the capacity to fully engage with other key stakeholders. In others, particularly those countries with weak strategic planning and programming capacity, Government Authorities often requested FAORs to focus on project formulation in a wide array of topics irrespective of FAO capacity to mobilise technical and financial resources for implementation. The above situation will need to be addressed as the FAORs are requested to lead the development of Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) which require resources to hold broad consultations with stakeholders beyond traditional Government partners to identify priority areas for cooperation.

198. Second, and related to the above, FAORs have been operating in a shoestring budget without adequate financial and human resources. The need for a revision of FAORs resources (IPA item 3.84) has been exacerbated by the changing environment in which FAO operates (characterized by the increased involvement of other actors in the agricultural sector and competition for resources among technical and UN agencies) as well as the ongoing reform process which is transferring more responsibilities to the field. Third, it was not always clear for FAORs what their primary reporting line was. FAORs must combine representational, managerial and technical (the latter to be up to 30% of their time) tasks but they often had neither the time, resources nor educational background to perform all of them.

B. Priority Setting

199. There are several IPA items dealing with priority setting and the related issues of resource mobilization and partnerships. Prior to 2005, there was no coherent corporate strategy for identifying and developing priorities at country level. FAORs forwarded Government requests to the relevant HQ unit for review, approval and guidance on funding possibilities. In 2005, and following the Evaluation of FAO Decentralization, FAO started the roll out of National Medium Term Priority Frameworks (NMTPF) with the aim of prioritizing cooperation with Member Countries. By end 2009, however, only Yemen had an NMTPF

⁸⁸ Including i) the Technical Cooperation (TC) department on field programme and resource mobilization matters; ii) Technical Divisions for disciplinary activities; iii) the Corporate Services Department (CS) on finance and administrative matters; iv) OSD/RNE for resource allocation, day-to-day office management and corporate coordination issues, and; v) the SRC for 30% of their time spent on sub-regional activities.

with FAO in the whole region. In practice, and despite some support provided by FAO HQ and RNE, no FAOR had managed to develop an operational priority framework in the region⁸⁹. Contributing factors to this include: a) the structure of the FAOR which does not reflect this important function; b) FAORs often have a technical background with limited experience in strategic planning. From a review of annual reports and the field missions the evaluation found that FAORs in the region have largely been project implementers. This focus on field programme development has two main caveats. First, an analysis of FAO country delivery against a set of indicators of need (from FAO/SOFI and the World Bank) shows that sub-regions and countries with higher levels of under-nourishment, poverty (expressed in GDP per capita) and with the greatest contribution of agriculture to GDP have received the smallest share of field programme funds from FAO.

Table 7.2 Geographic distribution of field programme delivery against indicators of need (2005-07), World Bank/FPMIS

Sub-region/countries	GDP per capita (US\$)	Under nourishment (%)	Agriculture in GDP (%)	Delivery (%)
Gulf Cooperation Countries	36.558	<5	1.7	48.9
North Africa (excluding Mauritania)	8.108	<5	9.0	24.5
Oriental Near East	7.213	<5	10.7	18.5
Yemen	2.100	31	14.3	1.6
Mauritania	1.893	7	16.4	6.5

200. Second, as a consequence of the project orientation less importance was attached to other functions (particularly policy and strategy development; partnerships and communication). This was in spite of emerging government-led initiatives to improve development cooperation in several countries in the Near East⁹⁰, which calls for a strong involvement of FAORs.

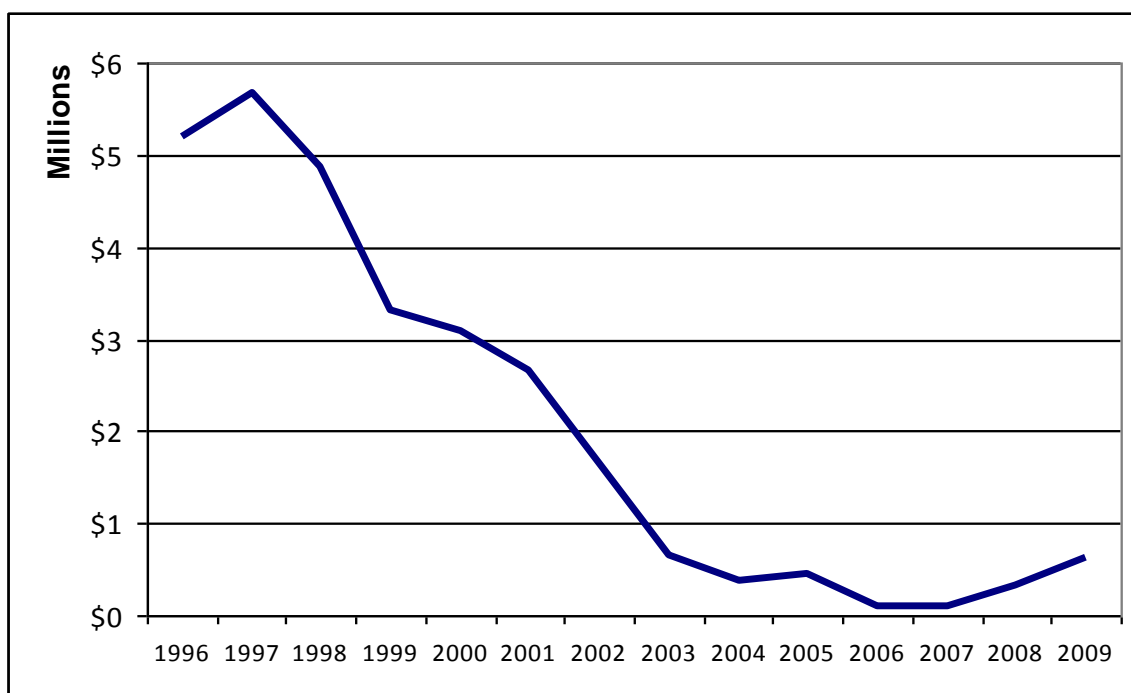
201. The evaluation team noted that although some FAORs were able to engage with Government authorities at strategic levels for priority setting, the majority were unable to effectively advocate for support to or action on key issues with a broad range of local partners (including technical agencies, donors, civil society and academia) and other FAO units. And when they were able to engage, the FAORs lacked capacity and resources to implement programmes on the priority areas identified. A case in point is Yemen, where the Government endorsed the NMTPF (which included project proposals in several technical

⁸⁹ As mentioned earlier Morocco is an exception to this.

⁹⁰ Such as the Cairo Agenda for Action on Aid Effectiveness (July 2009)

areas) but still FAO technical cooperation with the country did not materialise and in fact drastically declined.

Chart 7.1 Non-emergency field programme delivery in Yemen, FPMIS



C. Resources and structure

202. As part of the IPA (items 3.82 and 3.84), the resources and structure of FAORs will be revised based on the outcome of the ongoing consultations on FAO's new vision for the decentralized offices network⁹¹, which has proposed to give regions greater decision-making authority to allocate resources and define the decentralized structure.

1. Resources

203. From 2004-09, and similar to the TCP, financial resources made available to FAORs were not allocated on a regional or country level but on a global basis. 2010-11 is the first biennium that budget allocations for FAORs are made on a regional basis and are available at the beginning of the biennium. Expenditures of the fourteen FAORs in the Near East were about US\$ 7 m in 2004-05. This figure increased to US\$ 7.5 in biennium 2006-07, and to US\$ 8.5 m in 2008-09. Regular Programme funds (excluding income) allocated to FAORs in the Near East in 2010-11 are much less (by around 20%) than the expenditures incurred in 2008-09. This is contrary to the situation of Regional and sub-regional offices which have seen an increase in their budgets both nominally and as a share of RO and SROs RP funds. Besides, over 90% of FAORs expenditures were used to cover staff salaries. Un-earmarked resources were less than 10% of the total and very low compared to resources available to other UN

⁹¹ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/019/k9323e.pdf>

sister agencies⁹². The evaluation team noted that the low levels of un-earmarked resources were a major constraint for FAORs to develop a programme of work that takes into account the numerous demands for assistance and commitments resulting from their interactions with internal and external stakeholders. Several examples in which FAO could not join (UN or Government) country initiatives because of lack of non-staff resources were brought to the attention of the team by UN partners, Government Authorities and FAORs themselves. They ranged from not having US\$ 6,000 to co-finance the establishment of a UN Documentation Centre to US\$ 20,000 to hold a workshop in support of a new Government Initiative. Alternative funding sources (such as the TCP Facility) are often not appropriate for these types of investments since they require prior Government and FAO HQ approval and contain a number of exceptions that limit its effectiveness as seed money for the FAORs. Budgeted positions at country level remained the same between 2004 and 2009 (82 in total). They increased in 2010-11 (85) although only minimally. In the past few years FAO has increasingly relied on National Professional Staff (NPO) but mainly as a resource saving measure. The chronic resource deficit of the FAOR network was given as a major reason to maintain the grading of NPOs positions. In the case of the Near East, this has had the undesired effect of limiting options for career development and thus creating a non-conducive environment for high performing staff.

Table 7.3 Evolution of grades of National professional and general service staff, PWB

Year	National Professional	General Service
	Average Grade (1-4)	Average Grade (1-7)
2004-05	2.3	3.6
2006-07	2.1	3.8
2008-09	1.9	3.8
2010-11	1.8	3.7

204. Although RNE and CSH have started to address the issue of staff development at regional and sub-regional level, working conditions at FAORs in the Near East (with no or very little budget for training, no career path for promotions, inadequate infrastructure, and continuous additional workload) have been generally worse than those found elsewhere in FAO and in other UN agencies.

2. Structure

205. During the period under review, the average FAORs structure in the Near East was composed of one international (the FAORep), two national professionals (one for programme and one for administration) and between 5-8 general service staff (including programme, administration, logistics and ICT staff)⁹³. OTOs (and FAORs co-located with the

⁹² In 2009 non-staff expenditures were about US\$ 55,471 for FAORs and US\$ 15,950 for OTOs.

⁹³ This corresponds to FAO staffing models "B" and "C".

regional and sub-regional offices) were staffed with only one or two nationals often provided by the host country. Most stakeholders, including FAORs, commented on the low capacity in the Representations e.g. to respond to government requests, monitor and follow-up project operations, participate in UN Coordination Team (UNCT) and thematic group meetings, obtain timely technical support, and highlighted the need to adjust the offices structure to deal with the declining performance (in terms of field programme development) of FAORs (and OTOs) in the region (see table below) and to take into account the functions being decentralized through the reform process including leading the CPFs process, mobilizing resources and preparing TCP projects.

Table 7.4 Ratio Field programme vs. office costs in the Near East, FPMIS/OSD

Office type	Office costs (total in US\$)		Field programme delivery excluding emergency (total in US\$)		Ratio Field programme delivery / office costs	
	2004	2009	2004	2009	2004	2009
Fully-fledged	3,124,594	4,030,511	10,735,015	7,026,056	3.4	1.7
OTO	319,661	727,805	1,679,868	897,218	5.3	1.2

206. Furthermore, the quality and morale of local staff in FAORs was generally low due to long-standing personnel issues (such as the limited staff development prospects and training) and the fact that HQ-led emergency activities and other UN agencies in the region had generally greater flexibility⁹⁴ and resources available than the local offices. Specialized, development and humanitarian organizations such as WHO⁹⁵, UNDP⁹⁶ and WFP⁹⁷ had indeed a stronger field capacity in both low and middle income countries in the region. Such a capacity was seen by all UN and Government partners as a prerogative in order to enable country offices to deliver on the medium –term (often 3-4 year) priority areas of work agreed with the host country.

⁹⁴ Delegated authority of FAORs are low e.g. US\$ 200,000 to receive funds; and US\$ 50,000 for signing letters of agreement.

⁹⁵ WHO has 11 professionals including 3 internationals in Mauritania to implement (2009-13) a US\$ 6.1 m programme funded through Regular Programme (US\$ 2.7 m) and voluntary (US\$ 3.4 m) contributions.

⁹⁶ UNDP has 14 professionals including 6 internationals in Syria to implement a programme (2007-11) of US\$ 29.3 m funded through Regular Programme (US\$ 6.7 m) and voluntary (US\$ 21.7 m) contributions.

⁹⁷ WFP has 28 professionals including 5 internationals in Egypt to implement (2007-11) a US\$ 20.6 m programme funded through voluntary contributions.

VIII. OVERARCHING FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

207. This section includes the evaluation team's overarching findings and conclusions, which emerge from the analyses carried out in the precedent sections, and recommendations, which are directed towards improving the efficiency and effectiveness of FAO's work in the region.

A. Overarching Findings and Conclusions

208. There are five overarching findings that arose from the evaluation's analyses and that have relevance to essentially all parts of the evaluation's terms of reference.

209. First, the evaluation team found that FAO technical expertise (from HQ, RNE or SNE) was widely recognized and generally viewed as providing a stamp of good quality. The quality of FAO technical cooperation received greatest appreciation in countries that already had an established capacity to plan and implement their own strategy and programmes. However, there is a general consensus that FAO has lost its comparative advantage in several thematic areas and as an implementing agency in the region.

210. Second, and linked to the above, FAO priority setting and programming processes during the review period did not result in a clear prioritization of activities for the Near East region nor in a clear delineation of tasks at regional and sub-regional levels. RNE, SNE and FAORs have largely focused on developing and implementing generally small projects (mostly TCP) in a broad range of thematic areas, rather than on agreed priorities or on agricultural sector strategy/policy issues, for which the demand is very high across the region.

211. Third, RNE and SNE had serious resource constraints during the period under review. As explained earlier, this was partially the result of the progressive implementation of the 2005 Director-General reform. Although this situation was partially addressed in the biennium 2010-11 with the allocation of additional resources for sub-regional offices, FAORs have not benefited from this recent influx of resources. FAORs are seriously under-resourced (particularly regarding non-staff resources), and are widely seen as the poor relations within FAO and among UN partners.

212. Fourth, the rationale for the new organizational structure in the Near East with three layers (regional, sub-regional and country) was not always well understood within and outside FAO. The evaluation team concluded that the new structure has a sound basis but needs better implementation and change management and, in some cases, also further refinement.

213. Fifth, FAO presence in the region was found to be in need of streamlining. The location of three offices in the same place (Cairo) has reduced efficiency and transparency in the management of decentralized offices. Staff performing several and diverse functions concurrently led to heavy workload, confusion and sometimes conflicts of interest. Working conditions and status of technical and administrative staff at country level was not conducive to high performance, especially when compared to other UN agencies.

214. The issues and findings summarized above had a number of negative consequences on FAO. The evaluation team found that FAO visibility and credibility in the Near East region has declined. Other development agencies have taken over much of FAO's historical comparative advantage in areas such as food security, agricultural development and policy

advice. FAO advocacy and resource mobilization role in support of the food and agricultural sector is now much less competitive (and thus less successful) than before.

215. The evaluation team concludes that there is an urgent need to further reshuffle the FAO institutional set-up in the Near East including improving the implementation of the ongoing reform. Although the new reporting lines have encouraged greater integration within the region, a lot still needs to be done to allow RNE to exercise a leading role (as “chef d’orchestre”) in assuring that the three layers in the region function as one. This includes better defining the roles and functions of each layer, better delineating responsibilities (in accordance with region-wide, sub-regional and country priorities) and foster synergies and coordination between the three layers and with HQ. This also implies a change in the way HQ has been dealing with decentralized offices in the Near East and significant additional efforts to mobilize change management support from the IPA reform machinery, for the region.

216. This reshuffling should be introduced as soon as possible in order to take advantage of the opportunity for reform offered by the IPA. The main thrusts of the proposed reshuffling will be:

- A substantial strengthening of FAO capacity at country level; the evaluation team is strongly convinced that FAORs should be put at the center of the reshuffling since they are at the front line of FAO activities; prioritization, planning and increasingly also resource mobilization take place at this level and the overall impact of FAO is largely measured in terms of results on the ground. For all these reasons FAO needs to revisit its field presence in the Near East starting with the provision of adequate resources to FAORs to meet and carry out the multiple demands and functions expected from them.
- This reshuffling should take into account the three sub-regional structures recently established and/or strengthened, which should, in view of the evaluation team, become the “technical hubs” for country level assistance in their respective sub-regions.
- The Regional Office should go through a re-engineering process in order to build-up its planning, coordination, supervision and oversight capacity and focus its technical work on common region-wide priorities (“upstream” work), placing “downstream” work (dealing with sub regional and country-level priorities) under the responsibility of technical teams at sub-regional and country levels.

B. Recommendations

217. As suggested by the IEE and stated in the IPA, the evaluation team would like to emphasize that the following recommendations should not involve any “further net transfer of resources from HQ to the field” except for new responsibilities being decentralized in the context of the ongoing reform. In view of the evaluation team most of the recommendations could be implemented through a) budget-neutral redeployment and reallocation of existing capacity and resources within the region, and b) the establishment and operationalization of a Regional Trust Fund in support of the proposed reshuffling.

1. At Country Level

218. Given the fact that the weakest link in the chain among the existing layers in the Near East are the FAORs, the evaluation team makes several recommendations aimed to strengthen the capacity of FAORs, reinforce the authority of FAOReps, and streamline FAO presence at this level.

Recommendation 1: FAORs should be given the necessary tools and resources to become the face of FAO at country level. To this end, FAORs capacity should be strengthened by:

- a. Facilitating FAORs access to FAO technical expertise by locating this capacity as close as possible to the countries (i.e. at sub-regional level).
- b. Increasing non-staff resources at the disposal of FAORs; they should be commensurate to the needs identified by FAORs at the work-planning stage, and differently from the TCP Facility, they should be allocated in full at the beginning of the biennium without any precondition.
- c. Addressing long-standing personnel issues (including staff development and career prospects) and revising job profiles and competencies of national staff in order to improve staff morale and better align FAORs manpower to their enhanced mandate. This should include the introduction of a mobility and rotation scheme (see recommendation 9b)
- d. Recruiting a third NPO to address the increased workload related to strategic planning, partnerships and resource mobilisation at country level giving priority to most needy countries and those with large FAO programmes.
- e. Expediting the development and rolling out of Web-based financial tools (for Oracle access) and the required ICT infrastructure.

Recommendation 2: Reinforce the position of the FAORep as chief FAO officer for any activity undertaken in the country, including:

- a. Assigning FAOReps a leadership role in developing CPFs. The CPFs should be prepared with an expanded stakeholder base and ideally have a 4-5 year horizon. In preparing the CPFs, the FAOReps should involve key Government stakeholders beyond line Ministries (including Ministries of Planning and Finance) as well as non Government partners such as donors and civil society organizations. As recommended by the Strategic Evaluation of FAO's Country Programming, the scope of the CPFs should be expanded to cover all FAO activities, including emergency and rehabilitation work. The CPFs would progressively serve as an entry point for establishing/strengthening strategic partnerships with donors, development agencies and UN system led initiatives.
- b. Expanding the delegations of authority to FAOReps for receiving funds, carrying out local procurement, signing of letters of agreement and approving field projects at least to the highest level of other UN specialized and technical agencies in the region.
- c. Introducing a specific training module for newly appointed FAOReps to enhance their capacity to lead country programming processes.
- d. Revising the competencies required for future FAOReps giving special emphasis to strategic planning and programming skills and experience.
- e. In view of the different skills required, FAOReps should only perform functions related to their representational mandate vis-à-vis their country (or countries) of accreditation.

Recommendation 3: Streamline FAO field presence:

- a. In order to avoid confusions in their roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis the host country and FAORs in the region and/or sub-region, a maximum of two FAO decentralized offices per country should be allowed.

- b. The OTO scheme should be phased out in the Near East Region in view of its limited effectiveness and the significant reduction in regional and sub-regional technical capacity resulting from its high use.
- c. FAO should make greater use of alternative field presence arrangements such as multiple accreditations (with the assistance of a NPO in the host country) or, as in the case of Iraq, through the appointment of Programme Coordinators as FAOREps.

2. At Sub-Regional Level

Recommendation 4: Sub-Regional Offices should effectively become the “First Port of Call” for FAORs and strictly act as technical hubs. In this capacity they should:

- a. Be field oriented and equipped to allow for timely technical support to FAORs and sub-region-wide counterparts.
- b. Be consulted before FAORs request Regional or HQ technical assistance. Once the request has been discussed at sub-regional level, a joint request could be addressed to other technical units at HQ and/or RNE.
- c. Support the preparation of CPFs in coordination with RNE. The CPFs will eventually serve as inputs to identify common sub-regional priorities and prepare SRPFs.
- d. Lead FAO’s response to sub-regional priorities. In this regard, the holding of sub-regional meetings, with the participation of National Representatives, FAOREps, Assistant FAOREps, staff from RNE and HQ, and sub-regional partners as a minimum every year would be instrumental to discuss the content of the SRPF and the sub-regional work plans. The ultimate objective of such meetings would be to improve communication, build partnerships and steer synergies within and outside FAO, which are prerequisites for effective resource mobilisation.

Recommendation 5: In order to perform the above functions, the SROs should become Sub-regional Multi-disciplinary Technical Teams (SMTs) with no administrative functions vis-à-vis the FAOR.

- a. SMTs skills-mix should progressively reflect sub-regional priorities identified in the SRPFs. As the CPFs, the SRPF should be reviewed periodically.
- b. A Senior Expert (preferably on Policy) should be appointed as Sub-regional Multi-Disciplinary Team Leader (SMTL). In addition to the expert’s technical role as part of the SMT, the SMTL would be responsible for the organization and supervision of SMTs activities. S/he should not carry any other non-technical function (such as also being FAORep for the host country).

3. At Regional Level

Recommendation 6: Under the IPA process, RNE is receiving greater responsibilities and decision making authority. This decentralization process should not stop at regional level but continue to percolate down to sub-regional and country levels. This will allow RNE to focus in the future on “upstream” work (i.e., region-wide common priorities), placing responsibility for “downstream” work on the SMTs and FAORs (i.e., subregion-wide and country-level priorities). The role of RNE should thus evolve to reflect the orientation mentioned above. Its new mandate would include the following attributions:

- a. RNE should be responsible for coordinating, supervising and evaluating the work of SMTs and FAORs. This will include managing the financial and human resources available to decentralized offices in the region irrespective of the funding source. RNE should then have the capacity and authority to reallocate these funds based on relative sub-regional and country demands and needs.
- b. RNE should be responsible for organising the backstopping and monitoring of CPFs and SRPFs formulation as well as for quality assurance of these processes.
- c. RNE should continue to lead the preparation of the RPF-NE. The CPFs and SRPFs should progressively form the basis for the formulation of the RPF-NE. The RPFs would progressively serve as an entry point for establishing/strengthening strategic partnerships with donors, regional organizations and with UN system led initiatives.

Recommendation 7: RNE should be subject to a re-engineering process as part of the reshuffling of FAO institutional set-up in the region.

- a. RNE should build and/or maintain the expertise and resources required to establish and manage Functional Technical Networks that would mobilize knowledge and encourage specialization around priority topics selected from among those identified in the RPF-NE. FAO expertise available at all levels (FAORs, SMTs and HQ) would be associated to these Networks as appropriate, under the coordination of RNE. The constitution of these networks, which will have a time-bound scope, resources and mandate – will improve the efficiency of internal working arrangements and help FAO functioning as one in the provision of technical assistance to the region.
- b. RNE skills-mix should reflect the new technical, operational and administrative functions assigned to the office.
- c. The assistance of a management expert should be sought to support the ongoing and future change management processes.

4. General recommendations

219. This section includes recommendations that deal with a number of aspects that apply to most or all layers of the FAO organizational structure in the region.

Recommendation 8: Coverage and denomination of field offices in the Near East should be clarified.

- a. Confusion due to the disparity between NERC and RNE coverage needs to be resolved as NERC is now part of FAO Governing Bodies and there is a risk that differential membership may affect priority setting and planning for regional activities. Being a matter that is eminently political, the evaluation team recommends that concerned FAO Member Countries should urgently take an initiative to address this issue.
- b. The evaluation team also recommends renaming RNE as “Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa”. Likewise, SMTs should also be renamed to adopt historical definitions of the groups of countries served: Maghreb instead of North Africa (SNA); Mashreq instead of Oriental Near East (SNM); and Khalij instead of Gulf Cooperation Countries and Yemen (SNK).

Recommendation 9: Administration and management of financial and human resources across the region should be improved.

- a. The type of, funding for and time allocated to administrative actions should be reviewed with the view of streamlining administrative transactions. In reviewing administration, the findings of the SSC review mission (planned for January 2011) and the need to strengthen the planning and human resource function at regional level should be taken into account.
- b. A mobility and rotation scheme for technical experts within the region, with HQ as well as with other regions should be introduced as soon as possible. Simultaneously, an ambitious training programme to up-grade staff skills (to enhance current performance and allow staff to perform new responsibilities) and a drive to enhance cultural diversity and gender equity of staff across the region should be pursued.

Recommendation 10: FAO Technical work in the region should be rationalized and increasingly focus on regional, sub-regional and country priorities endorsed by Member Countries.

- a. Regional technical commissions and networks have been valuable as forums for information exchange and in some cases also for prioritization and mobilization of resources. Some have however been neither very active nor well attended lately and a majority of them have faced financing difficulties. The evaluation team recommends launching a review of the effectiveness of these regional bodies in order to rationalize their numbers. Criteria for deciding their future existence should include the extent of Members' participation and commitment to funding follow-up activities as well as their alignment to priority areas identified in the RPF-NE.
- b. Regional and sub-regional workshops and meetings as well as related publications should have strong linkages with priority areas agreed at regional and sub-regional levels. Efforts should be made to gather feedback from users of FAO technical information to increase the relevance and visibility of the normative work conducted by FAO in the region.
- c. Following the strengthening of SMTs and the enhanced coordination of technical work within the region, field missions to Near East countries should increasingly be conducted by sub-regional staff (and consultants) who will have better knowledge of the local situation and be closer to the field than their peers at HQ.
- d. Regional and sub-regional projects should focus on common issues and priorities of supranational concern. The Regional Trust Fund (see recommendation 12) will be instrumental in funding new initiatives linked to the RPF-NE.
- e. As indicated earlier, technical expertise (at regional and sub-regional level) on key programme and cross-cutting areas for the region, particularly in the areas of natural resources management, policy and gender, should be revised in order to align the FAO regional skills mix to the priority areas endorsed by Member Countries.
- f. Given the positive result of RNE-TCI collaboration in the finalisation of the RPF-NE, it is recommended that cooperation between RNE and TCI continue and be expanded to FAORs and SMTs particularly for the formulation of CPFs and SRPFs, and vice-versa, to encourage Regional and Sub-regional officers to participate more in TCI activities within the region. Besides, TCI experts who are in close contact with International Financing Institutions involved in the agricultural sector could become a good entry point for partnership building and resource mobilization at country and sub-regional levels. If a budget allocation is provided to RNE to cover CPFs

formulation cost (as recommended by the Strategic Evaluation of Country Programming), it could be used for that purpose.

Recommendation 11: Structural issues affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of technical work should be urgently addressed. Of particular interest are issues related to the implementation of FAO emergency field programme. In 2010, TCE issued a new strategy which calls for the decentralization of responsibilities for emergency operations. Taking into account the spirit of this strategy, the evaluation recommends the following:

- a. RNE and TCE should put in place necessary instruments to strengthen information exchange, communication and advocacy for emergency (and non-emergency) programs implemented in the Near East. As done in other regions, this should include the holding of regular meetings and the fielding of a liaison and communication officer based in the region.
- b. In coordination with TCE, Regional and Sub-regional experts should be more involved in backstopping and monitoring of emergency operations undertaken in the Near East. Staff work plans should reflect this activity.
- c. The conditions for out-posting the coordination of regional, sub-regional and country emergency programs should be built as soon as possible.
- d. In coordination with TCE, budget holder responsibility for emergency and rehabilitation activities identified in the CPFs should be progressively transferred to FAORs.
- e. Following the development of the RPF-NE, SRPFs and CPFs, administrative procedures (including those listed in the TCP Manual) that limit the full and unrestrictive alignment of FAO financial resources allocated to the region (including TCP) to priority areas of work agreed at regional, sub-regional and country levels should be streamlined.

Recommendation 12: The evaluation team is aware that FAO does not have the resources required to implement the re-shuffling outlined above without the support from Member Countries. Based on the example of the IPA trust fund and recent regional cooperative programmes in other FAO regions, the evaluation team recommends the establishment of a dedicated Regional Trust Fund to support the reshuffling of FAO institutional set-up in the Near East and allow the establishment of a regional structure able to implement collaborative programmes agreed at regional (RPF), sub-regional (SRPFs) and country (CPF) levels. Possible uses of the trust fund include supporting staff training across the region, carrying out analyses on the main regional, sub-regional and country priorities, supplementing resources available for priority areas of work, etc.