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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-fifth Session

Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 2-4 March 2020

Results and priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa Region

Executive summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines the context in which FAO and its member countries will be working toward reaching the Sustainable Development Goals and achieving country specific targets. FAO is well-positioned to act as a facilitator to assist all countries in realizing the goals of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere, and SDG2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Food and agriculture hold the key to realizing the 2030 Agenda, as agriculture is the most inclusive tool to end poverty and hunger.

The “Results and priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa Region” lays out FAO’s results and priorities in the region, as part of the Governing Body process in which regional priorities are reflected in FAO’s planning for the next biennium, quadrennium and beyond. Deliberations by the Regional Conference on this document will inform the review of the Strategic Framework and Medium Term Plan (MTP) 2022-25 to be submitted to the FAO Conference in June 2021.

In preparation for the biennium 2020–21, the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE) has conducted a strategic thinking exercise to review drivers, trends and risks affecting food and agriculture in the region and to identify priority areas for FAO action in the forthcoming years. These priority areas for action are 1) Rural transformation for youth employment and income; 2) Developing food systems that promote food security and healthy diets for all; 3) Greening agriculture: addressing water scarcity, ensuring environmental sustainability and implementing climate action; and 4) Building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations. The regional programme will be rearranged in the context of these four priority areas for action which are proposed under the overall umbrella of “Transforming food systems to achieve the SDGs.”

Achieving the SDGs requires food systems transformations, as also embodied in the new “Transforming food systems to achieve the SDGs” approach of the region. To ensure progress on

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SDGs and food systems transformations, FAO will promote innovative approaches, including the application of modern science and technologies, digital solutions, and an innovation of mindset and cooperation models.

A major new corporate priority is the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative through which FAO will support evidence-based, country-led and country-owned actions in the region to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development for the eradication of poverty (SDG 1), hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG2). Other priorities include a renewed emphasis on leaving-no-one-behind and organizational consolidation to accelerate support for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs, and strengthened partnerships including with smallholder producers, food companies, procurers and consumers.

Suggested actions by the Regional Conference

- Note the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative through which FAO will support evidence-based, country-led and country-owned actions in the region to accelerate agricultural, transformation and sustainable rural development for the eradication of poverty (SDG 1), hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG2). In doing so, these efforts will contribute to the attainment of all the other SDGs in the region.
- Note the importance of adopting innovative approaches and using modern science and technologies including digital solutions to face new situations and challenges.
- Note the renewed emphasis on leaving-no-one-behind and organizational consolidation to accelerate support for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs.
- Note the importance of strengthened partnerships, including with smallholder producers and food companies, procurers and consumers, as also highlighted in the 46th session of the Committee on World Food Security.
- Note the importance of food systems transformations that embody the dynamic links across sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food security, nutrition and resilience.
- Recognize the importance of FAO's Strategic Framework in providing direction for FAO's technical work and take note of the arrangements regarding the proposed revision of the Strategic Framework.
- Endorse the proposed regional priority areas for FAO's action in 2020–21 and beyond, and request FAO to consider these regional priorities as it embarks on the revision of its Strategic Framework to be submitted to the FAO Conference in June 2021.
- Acknowledge the work completed through FAO Strategic Programmes as well as the achievements under the Regional Initiatives and other main areas of work in responding to the main priorities identified at the 34th Session of the Regional Conference.

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I. Introduction

1. The FAO Medium Term Plan (MTP) 2018–21 (reviewed) and Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2020–21 were approved by the FAO Conference at its 41st Session in June 2019. The MTP sets out the Strategic Objectives and Outcomes for achievement by Members and the international community with support from FAO, in accordance with the reviewed Strategic Framework, approved by the FAO Conference in July 2017.¹ The Conference appreciated the close alignment of the FAO Strategic Objectives with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and highlighted the importance of the contribution of FAO to the full implementation of the repositioning of the United Nations Development System².
2. Web Annex 1 provides an overview of the FAO Strategic Programme, including its alignment with the SDGs.
3. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines the context in which FAO and its member countries will be working toward reaching the SDGs and achieving country specific targets. As food and agriculture hold the key to realizing the 2030 Agenda, FAO is well-positioned to act as a facilitator to assist all countries in realizing the goals of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG 1 (eradicate poverty) and SDG 2 (end hunger and all forms of malnutrition) through food systems transformations that embody the dynamic links across sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food, nutrition and resilience.
4. FAO has launched the “Hand-in-Hand Initiative”, an evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2). In so doing, it contributes to the attainment of all the other Sustainable Development Goals. The initiative adopts a robust match-making approach that proactively brings together target countries with donors, the private sector, international financial institutions, academia and civil society to mobilize means of implementation that support accelerated actions. It prioritizes countries and territories within countries where poverty and hunger are most concentrated or where national capacities are most limited. It also introduces a framework for monitoring and impact analysis.
5. In order to facilitate the adoption of innovative approaches, the use of modern science and technologies including digital solutions, FAO established a new Office for Innovation. The Office for Innovation will further consolidate and strengthen FAO’s innovative spirit, including innovation of mindset, innovation of cooperation models, and innovation of application by digitalization.
6. In consideration of vulnerability to unique and complex food security and nutrition challenges, FAO established the Office for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs³ to ensure that the special needs of these vulnerable populations and countries are met.
7. Furthermore, following the 46th session of the Committee on World Food Security in October 2019, FAO will strive to facilitate partnerships between smallholder producers and food companies, procurers and consumers.
8. The Strategic Framework is reviewed every four years.⁴ As such, the review for the next Strategic Framework will start in 2020 with the final document to be presented to the 42nd session of the FAO Conference in 2021.⁵ As Regional Conferences represent the first step in the schedule of Governing Body input and oversight, this Regional Conference is requested to provide guidance on

¹ C 2017/7

² CL 163/4, Information Note 2, November 2019 provides further information on FAO’s engagement with the UN Development System repositioning.

³ Small Island Developing States (SIDS); Least developed countries (LDCs); Land-locked developing countries (LLDCs)

⁴ Basic Texts Volume II, Section F. “Implementation of the IPA regarding the reform of the Programming, budgeting and results-based monitoring system” para. 1.a)

⁵ CL 163/4, Information Note 1, November 2019, provides detail on the process for consultation on the development of the new Strategic Framework.

areas of regional priority in 2020–21 and beyond, both with the view to guide ongoing regional work and in the context of developing the new Strategic Framework.

9. Areas of focus in reviewing the Strategic Framework will include aligning the results framework with the Agenda 2030, strengthening strategic synergies and partnerships through mechanisms such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, and elaborating regional and global priority areas.

10. In addition to aligning the new Strategic Framework with the Agenda 2030, the results framework will need to better incorporate FAO country level results, balancing Member-specific priorities and the FAO corporate priorities, which are also set by Members through the Strategic Framework. In this context, it should be noted that, following the repositioning of the United Nations Development System, FAO work at the country level needs to fully align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), the most important instrument for planning and implementation of UN development activities in each country. (Web Annex 3 presents details on the UNSDCF and its relationship with FAO Country Programming Frameworks [CPFs]).

11. In 2014, NERC identified three priority areas to be addressed through regional initiatives: water scarcity-, small-scale family farming, and building resilience for food security and nutrition. Over the period 2014–2019, these initiatives have shaped the FAO programme at the regional level.

12. It is proposed that regional priorities be maintained over time and FAO operational modalities be adapted to ensure that FAO support to countries at the regional level reflect country priorities and align with the 2030 Agenda. As such, the regional initiatives will be rearranged in the context of four regional priority areas for action which are proposed under the overall umbrella of “Transforming food systems to achieve the SDGs.” The first priority area will focus on *transforming rural areas for youth employment*, in order to reduce the divide between rural and urban livelihoods. The second priority area will focus on *developing food systems for food security and healthy diets*, addressing food security in all its dimensions and acknowledging the growing problem of overweight and obesity in a rapidly urbanizing region. The third area will focus on *reversing environmental degradation and addressing water scarcity in the context of a rapidly changing climate*. Finally, it is proposed that a special focus be maintained on enhancing the *resilience of rural livelihoods* in the countries facing conflicts and protracted crises.

13. In this context, the Regional Conference provides an opportunity for member countries to advise on the results and priorities for FAO work in the region, as well as regional priorities to be considered in the reviewed Strategic Framework. The remainder of this document is organized as follows:

- Section II describes achievements of the FAO programme in the region during 2018-19, with a special focus on the Regional Initiatives and other areas of work as indicated by NERC-34.
- Section III gives an overview of trends and developments in the region and presents the priorities for FAO work at regional and country levels.

II. Achievements in the region over the biennium 2018–19

A. Priority areas of work in 2018–2019

14. NERC-34 identified priority areas of work for the 2018–19 biennium, in line with regional and corporate priorities. The main targets for the 2018–19 biennium were informed by the CPFs. NERC-34 supported the continuation of the three regional initiatives in the 2018–19 biennium to help focus and guide FAO actions on regional priorities, namely the regional initiatives on water scarcity, small-scale family farming, and building resilience for food security and nutrition.

15. NERC-34 requested that FAO mainstream agroecology throughout its regional initiatives as a means of adapting to climate change and promoting biodiversity conservation. It also requested that FAO document success stories in managing rural migration and identifying solutions for addressing the rural–urban gap to limit rural outmigration of youth, women and men. It further requested that FAO support countries and develop regional cooperation to combat and control transboundary pests and

diseases, particularly in relation to fish mortality and the fight against the red palm weevil (RPW) and the fall armyworm (FAW).

16. Overview and assessment of results in the region at the level of Outputs is provided in Web Annex 2 – Contribution of Results in the Near East and North Africa region to FAO Strategic Objectives in the 2018-19 Biennium. Key results of the Corporate Outcome Assessment (COA) 2019 for the Region are presented in Web Annex 4- Corporate Outcome Assessment 2019 Near East and North Africa Regional Results.

B. Key achievements and lessons learned

17. The **Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity (RI-WSI)** has scaled up its support to strategic planning and policies, capacity building on water accounting, water productivity monitoring, and drought management and groundwater governance. The number of focus countries of the initiative has increased at the request of the countries. Additional activities have included integrated agriculture and aquaculture (IAA) practices that were initiated in Algeria, Egypt and Oman, and used for capacity building at the regional level, as well as the systematic adoption and use of solar energy for irrigation in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

18. Among the key results of the RI-WSI is the development of a regional partnership and a regional strategic platform on water scarcity, in collaboration with all relevant regional institutions. The Land and Water Days event organized in March 2019 gathered 480 participants from 45 countries and resulted in the first ever regional conference of ministers for agriculture and for water under the aegis of the League of Arab States (LAS).

19. Most of the efforts of the RI-WSI have been focused on enhancing water productivity for agriculture. The initiative has developed guidance material on unlocking the potential of protected agriculture in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, showing how protected agriculture technologies can help generate employment, including employment for youth and women. In Jordan, FAO is supporting the establishment of hydroponics and aquaponics units at the Ministry of Agriculture as well as building capacities among extension staff to adopt the technologies.

20. The initiative has also conducted a rapid water accounting assessment in Jordan and is on track to do so in Lebanon, Tunisia and Palestine. It has also implemented farmer field schools on water management practices in five countries, training around 500 farmers. Finally, it has trained specialists in seven countries on the use of remote sensing for water management.

21. Under the **Regional Initiative on Small-Scale Family Farming (RI-SSFF)**, the main areas of FAO's work over the 2018–19 biennium focused on three pillars: enhancing the agricultural productivity of smallholder farmers, creating an environment for decent rural employment and social protection, and promoting inclusive and sustainable agri-food value chains and market access.

22. The initiative identified climate-impacted focus areas and developed a regional strategy and national roadmaps for climate adaptation of small-scale farming in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region. A regional workshop on climate-smart agriculture (CSA) was held in Khartoum, the Sudan in October 2018 with the participation of 15 countries (Egypt, Iran [Islamic Republic of], Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Palestine). The initiative also organized a training workshop for professionals of the Islamic Development Bank on CSA in March 2019.

23. In June 2019, FAO published a regional overview on rural migration trends and contributed to the 2019 Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab States published in December 2019 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), LAS and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA). It also organized a regional workshop on migration governance in the rural–urban continuum, in partnership with IOM and UN–Habitat, highlighting the need to adopt a territorial approach for addressing the challenges that the region faces in this respect. It also launched national studies on migration in Egypt and displacement in Iraq. The RI-SSFF has also worked on identifying best practices in territorial development, in particular cluster approaches, as a tool to address rural migration and generate employment opportunities in the region. In this regard, FAO

is collaborating with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to conduct a study on cluster-based rural development in Egypt and Tunisia.

24. FAO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and LAS have conducted and published a study on child labour in the 22 Arab states. The study, endorsed by Arab States ministers in December 2018, intends to support countries in implementing national action plans on combating the worst forms of child labour in agriculture. FAO also contributed to the development of the “Arab Strategy for Multidimensional Poverty Reduction” led by LAS.

25. An important pillar of the initiative is the development of value chains in support of small-scale family farming. FAO is implementing several projects in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Yemen and Palestine that aim to promote youth employment through value chain development and vocational training, and has trained 35 staff from the ministries of agriculture of 11 countries in the region. FAO has also implemented projects in Egypt, Lebanon, Oman, the Sudan, Tunisia and Palestine that support the establishment of producers’ organizations, including agricultural cooperatives, and increase the participation of women’s associations in agrifood income generating enterprises.

26. Through the **Regional Initiative on Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition (RI-FSN)**, FAO supports countries in developing risk reduction strategies and investments. Country capacities have been strengthened to monitor plant and animal diseases and pests, such as the desert locust (through the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust), and for preparedness for possible highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreaks in the region.

27. Regional partnerships have been strengthened through the establishment and capacity building of the Parliamentary Network for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa and the Arab World, highlighting food security and conflict through the Regional Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Forum; and through building the capacity of the Near East Network on Forest and Wildland Fires (NENFIRE).

28. Through its Country Support Process, RI-FSN has implemented 56 activities to support building resilience in countries affected by crises, including: support to national food security policy development, food security information systems and resilience measurements (e.g. Mauritania, the Sudan, Yemen and Palestine), disaster risk reduction (e.g. Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine), transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases (e.g. Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen), humanitarian programming (Libya and Yemen) and capacity building to strengthen resilience programming in countries (cash, conflict sensitivity, mainstreaming nutrition and emergency response and preparedness).

Transboundary pests and diseases

29. Since NERC-34, 15 new projects addressing transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases have been implemented under RI-FSN. The total budget of these projects is approximately USD 17 million.

30. FAO supported seven countries (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine) to address *Xylella fastidiosa*, including through the introduction of innovative surveillance systems based on mobile phone applications. FAO is supporting Egypt, the Sudan and Yemen to address FAW with capacity building interventions and the application of integrated pest management (IPM) through farmer field schools. It developed a regional strategy to combat the RPW and a USD 20 million Regional Programme for RPW Management. Saudi Arabia, Libya, Oman and the United Arab Emirates have pledged USD 4.35 million for the program to date. Program activities started in October 2018 in collaboration with the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM-Bari), the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and the Khalifa International Award for Date Palm and Agricultural Innovation. In addition, FAO cooperates with AOAD on the development of a framework for the date palm value chain which addresses RPW as one of its priorities.

31. A regional project focusing on the prevention and control of transboundary animal diseases (TAD) was initiated in 2019 in partnership with AOAD. The project focuses on coordinating TAD surveillance and enhancing control capacity in the region. Support has also been provided to the Sudan

on sanitary and phytosanitary standards for livestock and crops; and to Egypt and Iraq on surveillance, preparedness and good practices for fish health and aquatic biosecurity governance for aquaculture.

Food safety

32. Within the framework of the Arab Food Safety Initiative for Trade Facilitation (in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization [UNIDO] and in partnership with LAS), FAO is implementing a regional food safety project aimed at strengthening the capacity of national institutions on food safety and Codex, including training workshops. Seventy-five government staff from the Sudan and Tunisia were trained on the design and operation of a national food control system.

Antimicrobial resistance

33. As part of its work on antimicrobial resistance (AMR), FAO supported Egypt, Jordan and the Sudan in developing and implementing National AMR Action Plans. It also organized several awareness raising events, including in Jordan and Lebanon.

Climate change

34. In addition to the aforementioned regional workshop on CSA, FAO has engaged with countries and partners to support the review of the Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement through a regional workshop held in Egypt in September 2019. A regional knowledge platform provides up-to-date data on climate change-related analyses, water resources, drought and socio-economic vulnerability assessments and other water accounting and water-related metrics.

35. At country level, work has focused on mobilizing funds from the main climate funds, namely the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF). FAO is supporting the formulation of eight GCF projects in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania and the Sudan, focusing on the rehabilitation and sustainable management of landscapes (pastoral, forests, agriculture), oases, strengthening climate resilience of agriculture livelihoods, promoting efficient water management, enhancing adaptive capacity of local communities and enhancing biodiversity conservation.

Gender

36. Trainings on gender mainstreaming in programmes and projects were held in Jordan and Lebanon in 2018. FAO, together with LAS and ILO, organized a side event on social protection for women's empowerment at the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in the context of progress toward SDG 5. In addition, FAO implemented training for practitioners from eight NENA countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iran [Islamic Republic of], Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine) on gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data in water governance in June 2018.

Food security and nutrition

37. FAO has formulated a project funded by the Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) to support LAS in formulating a framework strategy to achieve zero hunger, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture. The strategy is being formulated and will go through a series of national, subregional and regional consultations. FAO and LAS are discussing the possibility of heads of state launching the framework strategy at the Dubai Expo in October 2020.

38. Following the Regional Symposium on Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition held in Oman in December 2017, FAO has undertaken studies on the mortality and burden of disease related to food and nutrition security risks in the Arab world. It also organized a regional multistakeholder policy workshop entitled "Leveraging Food Systems to Combat Obesity in the Near East and North Africa region." In Palestine, 40 government and development agency staff were trained in better integrating nutrition and food security into agricultural programming.

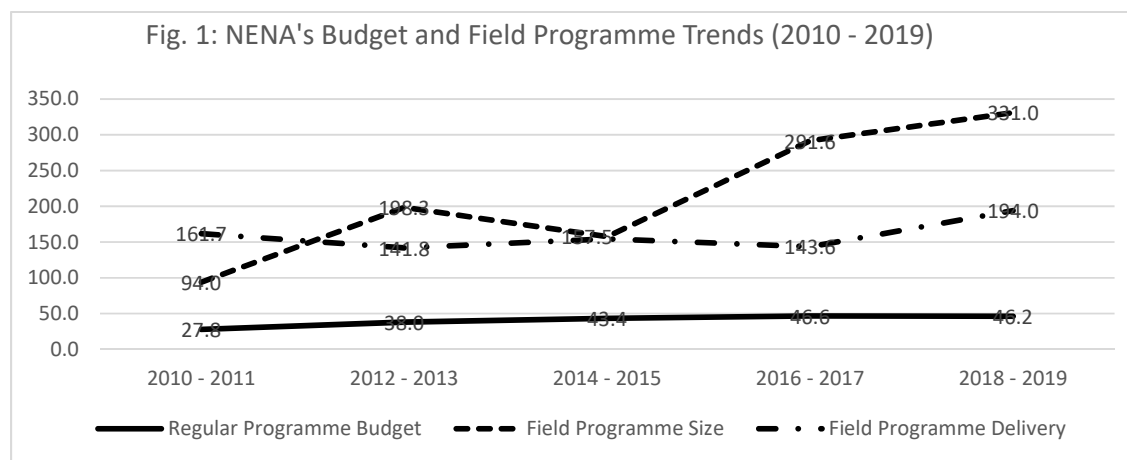
Supporting alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals

39. Work has expanded in supporting the countries in strategically aligning their efforts towards the achievement of the SDGs. This work included support to the development of the countries' Voluntary National Report (Jordan), capacity development in relation with SDG monitoring for the SDG indicators that are under FAO custodianship (Iraq, Jordan, Oman and actions at regional and interregional levels),

and regional cooperation through support to LAS in developing a strategy on Zero Hunger (SDG 2, see above).

C. Resource mobilization and performance of the field programme

40. The size of the Field Programme increased more than threefold during the period 2010/11 and 2018/19, from USD 94 million in 2010/11 to USD 331 million in 2018/19 (see Figure 1). This remarkable growth is due mainly to successful resource mobilization efforts. Since June 2018, FAO has launched 89 new projects, with a total budget of USD 204 million, to improve food security and nutrition in countries affected by crises (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and Palestine).



41. FAO has also worked with Egypt, Morocco and Oman to initiate South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). This cooperation will serve as a model for future SSTC partnerships throughout the region.

42. Unilateral Trust Funds (UTFs) represent a suitable instrument to enhance cooperation between FAO and the Near East region. In 2019, countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates signed agreements with FAO to support their national food security and agriculture priorities. In 2019, UTF contributions more than doubled with respect to the average size of approvals in the previous four years.

43. Working with the private sector and reinforcing partnership with International Financial Institutions to support sustainable agriculture development will be crucial in supporting the national efforts to achieve Agenda 2030.

III. Priority areas of work for the biennium 2020–21 and beyond

44. In the second half of 2019, a strategic review was carried out in the region to identify the specific challenges and priority areas for future FAO work. This review was carried out through a broad consultation process complemented by the review of recent regional assessments and analyses.

45. The review confirmed the main trends and drivers for food and agriculture in the region and identified new areas of emphasis both in terms of the overall policy context, governance and advances in technologies and innovations. Considering the 2030 Agenda as the overall framework for action, the core mandate and functions of FAO, and the renewed emphasis on leaving-no-one-behind and organizational consolidation to accelerate support for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs, the review proposes four main priorities that have the potential to respond to the main regional challenges and realise the food systems transformation that is needed to achieve the SDGs. The review also identified a number of concrete areas for action on which to focus efforts in order to address these priorities.

46. FAO priorities for the next biennium and beyond also embody the renewed corporate emphasis on leaving-no-one-behind, the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative, promoting innovative approaches and modern science and technologies including digital solutions, strengthening partnerships, and following a food systems transformation approach linking sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food security, nutrition and resilience.

A. Main trends emerging from the regional strategic review

47. The review identified a series of external and regional factors that influence agriculture and food in the region: (i) demographics, with high population growth rates and rapid urbanization, bringing a large number of new entrants to the labour market every year and putting pressure on limited resources; (ii) the global economic and political situation and prospects, with a series of risks to the global economy which have the potential to disrupt economic activities, impact development prospects and decrease the economic growth rate; (iii) the regional realities of several countries, characterized by political instability; tensions and conflicts; weak social, political and administrative accountability mechanisms and high levels of gender inequality; (iv) climate change, which is already affecting the region through higher temperatures, increased occurrence of droughts and heat waves, projections of ever more increasingly unpredictable precipitation and water recharge in most of the region, and sea level rise affecting deltas and coastal areas; and (v) poor regional integration, trade and the digital revolution.

48. Related to these external factors, the study identified a series of critical risks and challenges that the region's food and agriculture sector faces. These include (i) poor economic performance of the agriculture sector and low agricultural productivity; (ii) a growing divide between rural and urban livelihoods leading to a lack of job opportunities in rural areas (in particular for youth) and to migration; (iii) poor access to resources for women; (iv) widespread degradation and poor management of scarce natural resources, namely water, land and biodiversity; (v) the multiple burden of malnutrition (hunger, micronutrient deficiency and obesity); and (vi) the continuation of conflicts in the region, in a way that turns emergencies into protracted crises – a risk that affects all efforts towards food security and enhanced nutrition.

B. The 2030 Agenda: a common framework for action

49. The 2030 Agenda offers an overall framework to engage the region on the path to sustainable development. The transformation of agriculture and food systems is an ideal entry point to engage countries on the path to achieving the SDGs. Starting with SDG 2 (zero hunger), it extends to several SDGs that are intimately linked to food and agriculture: SDG 11 (poverty reduction), SDG 6 (water), 14 (fisheries) and 15 (natural resources), SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production), SDG 5 (gender), SDG 8 (employment), SDG 10 (equality) and SDG 13 (climate action).

50. The transition to more sustainable agriculture and food systems requires action that builds political alliances and coalitions with actors beyond food and agriculture. These actions cut across sectors and depend on government collaboration and stakeholder dialogue. They require policy-makers to recognize the need to manage trade-offs and set out concrete measures to better align multiple objectives and incentive structures. They encourage legal frameworks that recognize and secure rights of access for smallholders and local communities as well as favourable policies to incentivize private sector engagement in sustainable market activity. Multistakeholder mechanisms and new forms of participatory governance structures will bolster policy ownership, while helping to mobilize capacities, information, technologies and access to financial and production resources.

C. Priority areas for future FAO action

51. Four major priorities emerge from the analysis to organize FAO's support to countries in the region and maximize its impact over the next 10-15 years. These four priorities fall under the overall umbrella of "Transforming food systems to achieve the SDGs" and focus on: (i) better rural employment opportunities and higher rural incomes; (ii) food security and healthy diets; (iii) sustainable use and protection of natural resources, with a focus on water and climate change; and (iv) building resilience against shocks and protracted crises. Together, they form the basis of a theory of change to address key SDG targets and achieve a vision for food security, nutrition and the sustainable management of natural resources in the region.

52. These priorities are mutually dependent and inseparable. Just as the challenges and risks facing food security and natural resources in the region are interrelated, priorities are also interrelated, and interventions made under one will have an impact on others. Therefore, a complete separation of priorities and interventions is not attempted nor is it considered desirable.

1. Rural transformation for youth employment and income

53. Interventions must aim at raising incomes (especially smallholder incomes) through the implementation of policies that favour an increase in agricultural productivity, on rural development and economic inclusion through sustainable intensification of crops, livestock and fish production, on the promotion of digital agriculture and value chains around high-value products enhancing the capacity of producers and their associations, research and development (R&D), on extension, and on reducing agricultural risk and fostering access to credit. They should also aim at increasing rural, non-farm job opportunities that are attractive to youth by encouraging investments in infrastructure and services and the participation of the private sector in establishing and managing value chains and by facilitating entrepreneurship and the establishment of small businesses, including hydroponics, aquaculture, organic farming, protected agriculture and agritourism. Finally, these interventions should strengthen capacities of smallholder farmers to participate in regional and international trade.

54. Enhancing sustainable rural transformation and agribusiness competitiveness may be achieved through territorial planning. Such an approach could be a critical part of the broader framework aiming at: improving infrastructure and rural services to enhance market access; creating off-farm employment opportunities; providing better social protection to help vulnerable populations; strengthening local governance and institutions; and ensuring access to land and other natural resources.

2. Developing food systems that promote food security and healthy diets for all

55. Transforming food systems to deliver healthy diets will improve people's health, reduce the economic risks associated with growing dependence on food imports, and enable an increasingly urbanized region to meet the food and nutrition requirements of its growing population. In line with FAO's biennial theme 2020-21, of "promoting healthy diets and preventing all forms of malnutrition," interventions will focus on encouraging diversification of production and public-private partnerships towards healthier diets and on strengthening national capacities to improve food quality, food safety, traceability and the detection of contaminants. They will also seek to enhance the consumption of nutritious foods by reforming food subsidy policies, raising awareness about healthy diets, fostering consumer protection systems, encouraging appropriate food trade policies and combating food losses and waste. These interventions will focus specifically on developing more sustainable and healthier urban food systems.

3. Greening agriculture: addressing water scarcity, ensuring environmental sustainability and implementing climate action

56. Agriculture is the largest user of the region's increasingly scarce resources, and it fuels land and water degradation, biodiversity loss, deforestation and the unsustainable use of marine resources. However, with the adoption of supportive policies and innovative governance mechanisms, modern technologies and smart investments, it could become an engine of positive change, minimizing losses through the adoption of practices to conserve and restore ecosystem functions. Building on the work of the Regional Water Scarcity Initiative, interventions should continue efforts to enhance water use efficiency, water reuse and recycling. They should also focus on investing in sustainable soil management, encouraging afforestation, adopting an ecosystem approach to fisheries, preventing overgrazing of rangelands and promoting good agricultural practices to reduce the use of agrochemicals. Interventions will need to focus on the widespread adoption of CSA practices to help adapt and mitigate carbon emissions from agriculture.

4. Building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations

57. Conflicts and protracted crises are the prime drivers of hunger and poverty in the region. Many communities in the region, particularly the most vulnerable, lack the capacities to anticipate, prepare for and respond to shocks and crises. Supporting countries to build the resilience of agricultural and rural livelihoods needs to focus on providing humanitarian assistance, stimulating economic recovery and

helping build stronger rural livelihoods, by strengthening risk governance and integrating disaster risk reduction in sector policies. This will include developing early warning systems and shock responsive social protection systems. Operating along the Humanitarian Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus will ensure the effectiveness of aid while building resilience. Finally, interventions must also address the growing threat of transboundary pests and diseases and strengthen regional collaboration on this important issue.

58. Table 1 summarizes the programmatic action areas that will be needed to address these four priorities. All the programmatic areas for action contribute to at least one priority. In many cases they contribute to more than one.

Table 1: Transforming food systems to achieve the SDGs in the NENA region: Programmatic action areas to address the four priorities

Vision	A region that enjoys food security, nutritional health and sustainable growth from productive, green and market-led agriculture sectors and where rural people, including women and youth, live in peace and prosperity and have control over their livelihoods.			
Priorities	Rural transformation for youth employment and income	Developing food systems that promote food security and healthy diets for all	Greening agriculture: addressing water scarcity, ensuring environmental sustainability and climate action	Building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations
	(building on RI2)	(building on RI2 and RI3)	(building on RI1)	(building on RI3)
SDG Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal rights to economic resources for women and men (SDG 1.4, 5a) - Increase productivity and income of smallholder food producers (SDG 2.3, 10.1) - Create opportunities for youth employment (SDG 8.6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food security (SDG 2.1) - Healthy diets (SDG 2.2) - Efficient value chains (SDG 12.3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainable agriculture (SDG 2.4, 2.5) - Protection and efficient use of water (SDG 6.4) - Climate Action (SDG 13.2) - Sustainable fisheries (SDG 14.4) - Land restoration (SDG 15.1, 15.3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building the resilience of poor vulnerable rural women, men and children (SDG 1.5) - Strengthen adaptive capacities (SDG 13.1)
Programmatic action areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt a territorial approach to rural development, invest in basic infrastructure • Promote sustainable intensification of crop, livestock and fish production • Promote research, innovation, and digital extension and education. • Facilitate rural entrepreneurship, and promote value chain development and agro-processing • Strengthen farmers' associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve food safety, quality, certification and traceability • Promote diversification of production and consumption and healthy diets • Reduce losses and waste along the value chain • Modernize and strengthen cereal import markets • Promote urban agriculture and greener cities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance water productivity and governance • Promote nature-based solutions and recycling • Reduce pollution from fertilizers and pesticides • Scale-up landscape restoration and conservation of biodiversity • Climate change adaptation and mitigation actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen preparedness and early warning systems • Reduce risks and vulnerability (including through social protection) • Combat transboundary pests and diseases • Provide direct support to crisis-affected households
Tools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evidence and knowledge: data collection and analysis, water accounting, use of remote sensing technologies, drones, policy analysis, big data, weather forecasting 2. Technologies and innovation: enhanced varieties and breeds; water harvesting, protected agriculture, hydroponics, digital agriculture 3. Policies and institutions: cross-sectoral policy dialogue, develop green incentive schemes and trade policies 4. Investment: public and private investments in support of public goods and private initiatives: blended finance 5. Advocacy and partnership, including with private sector 			

D. Means of implementation

59. Harnessing the power of modern technologies, the opportunities offered by major global initiatives, and partnerships with relevant organizations and institutions operating at regional or national levels, FAO will support countries through the provision of information, analysis, capacity building, advocacy and the development of platforms for countries to share experiences and knowledge, and through the development of effective strategies and investment plans to meet countries' food security needs while sustainably using and protecting natural resources. As a way of strengthening knowledge-sharing and promoting evidence-based support, the FAO developed the Hand-in-Hand initiative, which aims to increase impact in countries that mostly need help in achieving SDGs 1 and 2, as well as provide support toward the achievement of all other SDGs.

60. To achieve transformational change in these priority areas and in recognition of the need for tailored solutions to suit these diverse but related priorities, a range of policies and tools need to be used. The entry point for successful transformation is building the **evidence base and knowledge**. This requires data collection and policy analysis using innovative and cost-effective means such as remote sensing technologies, drones, big data and weather forecasting.

61. **Modern technologies and innovations are the engine of growth with** the potential to boost productivity and make value chains more efficient. From drones to e-commerce, from remote sensing technologies to precision agriculture, innovations are already shaping the way we produce, process,

distribute and consume food. The role of FAO will be to support countries in ensuring that they harness the potential for innovation in a way that it contributes to food security, enhanced nutrition and the sustainable use of natural resources. As the driving force to transform food systems, innovation is central to lifting family farmers out of poverty, tackling unemployment for youth and rural women, and helping the world to achieve food security and the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda explicitly refers to innovation as a critical means of implementation, acknowledging its role in accelerating the achievement of the SDGs.

62. **Policies, investments and institutions** will need to be scrutinized to assess their impact in terms of food security and nutrition. This will not be possible without good knowledge and evidence. There are still too many areas of critical importance for which information is, in the best of cases, scattered and incomplete, and despite this, is used as a basis for decision-making. These include, but are not limited to, promoting agro-industrial investments as a way to enhance value addition, create jobs, increase exports and provide markets for new and existing producers and promoting better policy targeting and alignment.

63. Finally, no substantial transformation will be possible without the development of broad **partnerships** around shared goals. Fixing food systems to achieve food security, healthy lives and a healthy environment will require government leadership, but above all, the combined efforts of the private sector, civil society, producers and consumers, as well as International Financial Institutions. Advocacy, communication and the development of platforms for partnerships will become increasingly important. One of the main areas in which partnerships will be important is in promoting and implementing digital innovations and the scaling up of innovative digital services.

E. Building on the experience from the Regional Initiatives (RIs)

60. Over the last three biennia, the regional initiatives have helped focus FAO work in the region on issues of key regional importance. They have offered a forum for policy dialogue, achieved concrete results at the regional level, and helped countries to address these issues in an innovative way. The Water Scarcity Initiative, for instance, has triggered changes in approaches and engaged countries in a new way of addressing agricultural water challenges. The proposed regional priorities will build on the approaches, good practices and lessons learned of the Regional Initiatives.