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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-fifth Session

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

Executive Summary

This document provides a brief summary of the main outcomes and recommendations made by the regional commissions in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) during 2018-2019. The commission meetings considered are the Twenty-fourth Session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC), the Tenth Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI), the Thirty-first Session of the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC) and the Ninth Session of the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO). The document also presents the outcomes of major meetings, in particular the Land and Water Days, the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, the Regional Workshop on Supporting Implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in Agriculture and Water Sectors, and the Regional Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- take note of the main outcomes of the Regional Commissions' sessions and major meetings held in the NENA region in the 2018-2019 biennium;
- call upon member countries and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to implement key recommendations arising from these sessions and meetings in relation to policy and regulatory matters, as well as programme and budget matters.

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Introduction

I. Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC)

1. The Twenty-fourth Session of NEFRC was held in Antalya, Turkey from 25 to 29 November 2019. Forty-five country representatives from 13 Members and one observer country, and five observers from regional intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations attended the session. The Commission developed recommendations for the draft agenda of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO), for the attention of the Regional Conference (for possible discussion) and for FAO programme priorities regarding forestry. In developing the recommendations, the Commission considered global developments within and outside of FAO.

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

- invited members to strengthen regional and interregional coordination efforts and collaboration on forest health, fire and invasive species and requested support from FAO in containing emerging pests and diseases;
- invited countries to implement sustainable land management practices that combine biodiversity conservation and land uses in a manner that benefits local people;
- took note of the forest-related outcomes of the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24 to the UNFCCC) and invited countries to consider how to strengthen forest-related contributions to their respective Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs);
- took note of the forest-related outcomes of the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 14) and called on countries to provide input for the development of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework;
- took note of the conclusions of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and informed that it was striving to implement the commitments pertaining to forests listed in the Ministerial Declaration;¹
- invited countries to promote nature-based solutions to climate change;
- took note of the outcome of the 1st World Forum on Urban Forests and invited countries to promote the Tree Cities of the World initiative;
- took note of the United Nations (UN) reform process and encouraged developing countries to ensure that forestry issues are given the priority they deserve in the development of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework documents for their country;
- invited member countries of the International Commission on Poplars and Other Fast-Growing Trees Sustaining People and the Environment (IPC) to engage in the IPC's continued reform and called on non-member countries to consider joining the IPC under its new scope;
- recommended that countries strengthen the engagement of their forestry and rangelands institutions in the preparation of their NDCs and enhance their capacities to access funding

¹ Available at: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/HLS/2018/1&Lang=E

- related to climate change adaptation and mitigation and to achieving land degradation neutrality (LDN);
- highlighted the need for longer-term restoration programmes;
 - suggested that Country Programming Frameworks could be an entry point to enhance FAO support to restoring forest and rangeland ecosystems;
 - invited members to strengthen coordination efforts and collaboration between countries on transboundary invasive species and requested support from FAO in containing emerging pests and diseases;
 - stressed that forest fire management, particularly prevention, is increasing in importance and highlighted the need for more accurate and detailed information on fires to assess the effectiveness of prevention measures and strategies.
 - invited countries to further strengthen efforts in experience sharing, building on successful efforts, including sharing experiences in disaster risk reduction;
 - invited countries to support the XV World Forestry Congress and to encourage the widest possible attendance and participation from all sectors within the region;
 - invited countries to propose themes and topics that could form the basis of technical sessions at the congress, and encouraged members, as appropriate, to support the congress financially, aiming especially at facilitating participation from developing countries;
 - suggested capitalizing on the expertise of Silva Mediterranea in the context of interregional collaboration, including in the areas of forest health and fire management;
 - highlighted some knowledge gaps in the further promotion of non-wood forest products (NWFPs) and raised their concerns about degradation of forest resources that could be caused by the economic promotion of NWFPs, resulting in over-exploitation;
 - highlighted the need to improve the inventory methods of NWFPs that could provide food for local communities and/or wildlife and to strengthen technical capacities in this regard;
 - recognized the importance of strengthening the sharing of information and experience on NWFP promotion and the need to develop local and external markets for NWFPs;
 - highlighted the need to develop national rangeland, wildlife and forest strategies;
 - emphasized the importance of agreeing on and adopting criteria and indicators for sustainable rangeland management.
3. In relation to programme and budget matters, the Commission:
- recommended that FAO consider the opportunities provided by the United Nations Decade of Family Farming and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration for upscaling forest and landscape restoration activities;
 - noted the difficulties that countries with internal conflicts face in accessing international funding and recommended that the international community pay special attention to such cases;

- noted that funds directed to forestry and rangelands are decreasing and that a broader approach must be taken, coordinating efforts with those of related areas and preparing more comprehensive fund applications; and requested continued support from FAO in this regard;
- requested that FAO support countries in undertaking an assessment study on the status of forest and range biodiversity in the region, in identifying gaps for future country actions, and in establishing gene banks to conserve their national genetic resources;
- supported the recommendation on seeking proactive measures to strengthen the linkages between its work and the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests (UNSPF) as well as appropriate ways to strengthen collaboration with the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), as recommended by COFO;
- requested that FAO continue supporting UNSPF implementation, establish clear links between its activities and the UNSPF, and report on implementation accordingly; and requested that FAO continue its leadership role in the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF);
- recommended that COFO consider the opportunities provided by the United Nations Decade of Family Farming and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration for upscaling forest and landscape restoration activities;
- requested that FAO continue contributing to the Global Climate Action Agenda and promote forest-related initiatives, projects and programmes as well as supporting countries in the development of their forest, rangelands and other land use related proposals for the Green Climate Fund;
- requested that FAO explore ways and means to help further enhance the forest sector's contribution to the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework;
- requested that FAO further promote urban forestry activities;
- requested that FAO take an active part in the United Nations Decade of Family Farming and scale up its support to forest and farm producer organizations through the Forest and Farm Facility;
- informed about activities related to follow-up on the NDCs and specific activities in support of the developments of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, noted the need for continuous learning from good experiences and for sharing lessons learned, and recommended that FAO continue facilitating this process;
- requested that FAO continue its support of efforts to access international funds and particularly to assist in building capacity to develop related programmes and projects;
- requested FAO support to strengthen countries' capacities on fire prevention and post-fire interventions, including by extending existing fire guidelines to cover post-fire interventions as well;
- requested that FAO continue supporting the Near East Regional Network on Forest and Wildland Fires (NENFIRE) and the Near East Network on Forest Health and Invasive Species (NENFHIS) in implementing their activities, and continue strengthening regional and interregional collaboration on forest fires, forest health and invasive species;
- acknowledged the importance of the Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems, in particular for the region, and noted the continued need to keep FAO Members abreast of the developments so that countries not yet associated with the working group can join and nominate their experts;

- supported the MedForYouth project and requested that FAO explore ways and means to support its development and implementation;
- requested the assistance of FAO, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) and other related organizations in developing national rangelands strategies, taking into account, as appropriate, the guidance provided in the framework strategies developed by AOAD;
- highlighted the urgency to take action regarding the consequences of climate change on food security in the region and called on FAO to assist countries in the selection of drought-tolerant species in agriculture and forestry and to develop measurable indicators and the needed capacities for institutions in charge of monitoring those indicators;
- highlighted the importance of integrated watershed management approaches to address water scarcity issues in the region and requested FAO support in developing integrated watershed management projects;
- noted the differences in countries' capacities to implement the adopted afforestation/reforestation and landscape restoration techniques, and requested that FAO facilitate information and experience sharing between the countries in this regard; and
- called on FAO to facilitate bilateral collaboration in fire management and monitoring, in forest restoration and in combating desertification, including through South–South cooperation.

II. Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI)

4. The Tenth Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was held in Rome, Italy, from 9 to 11 July 2019. The session was attended by 15 delegates from seven members of the Commission (namely, Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), and from one intergovernmental organization. The Commission reviewed the progress on the activities of the period 2017-2019 and discussed mechanisms that have the potential to improve the overall effectiveness of RECOFI. The Commission also discussed its programme of work and budget for 2018-2019.

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

- endorsed the RECOFI Recommendation (RECOFI/X/2019/1) on the Assessment and Management of Kingfish (*Scomberomorus cavalla*) stock in the RECOFI area;
- agreed upon a RECOFI-wide closed season for kingfish to take place from 15 August to 15 October 2019 to ensure that it will be observed by all countries during the same period and will include all types of fishing gear that would be used to harvest the stock. An exception will be made for hook-and-line fishing; and
- acknowledged the value of cooperation between RECOFI and the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) and the important role that the current Memorandum of Understanding between the two parties will play in that cooperation.

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

- approved the organization of a workshop in 2020 on minimum data reporting/Regional Database to strengthen the statistics and information capacity of the commission under its programme of work for 2019-2021;
- agreed on the organization of a hands-on capacity building workshop on the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS), in 2020, to update RECOFI–FIRMS national

- inventories on fisheries and develop RECOFI inventory on marine resources under its programme of work for 2019–2021;
- tasked the Working Group on Fisheries Management to review the reference list of stocks for the reporting and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.4.1 (Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels).

III. Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC)

7. The Thirty-first Session of the Commission took place from 17 to 21 February 2019 in Amman, Jordan, under the auspices of His Excellency Ibrahim Al Shahahdeh, Minister for Agriculture and the Environment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Twenty-six delegates from fourteen member countries, the FAO Locust Group and four desert locust organizations, as well as a senior representative from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and a number of consultants and observers attended the session. The Commission reviewed the Secretariat's report of activities implemented during the period 2017-2019 in cooperation with member countries and made a series of recommendations.

8. In relation to policy and regulatory matters, the Commission recommended or decided on the following:

- the Commission should liaise with the Locust Control Units of the member countries to continue their efforts to encourage research institutes and universities to submit research proposals on desert locust topics;
- encourage country participation in the workshop organized by the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO) to coordinate the implementation of research projects, giving priority to desert locust research;
- launch the competition for the award presented by the Commission in the field of desert locust research, according to the established terms;
- some of the plant protection staff who are working in the invasion countries should participate in desert locust control operations in the field during campaigns in frontline countries;
- member countries suggested that a meeting be arranged between the commission and the FAO Plant Production and Protection Division (AGP) in the presence of the legal, finance and administrative departments of FAO headquarters to discuss the budget holder responsibilities, as requested by the member countries;
- The Secretary of the Commission is to address member countries on the new technology of using drones in desert locust survey and control and to ensure the needed clearances are obtained from the concerned authorities if drones are used locally;
- the regional contingency plan is endorsed and can be activated upon payment by member countries of their contributions and upon the submission of their national contingency plans (including human and financial resources) to the Secretariat of the Commission;
- Session participants recommended that the FAO Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa extend an invitation to the Secretary of the Commission to participate in the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC), as it would be an opportunity to present the Commission's role in the region and the intensive activities carried out by its member countries with regard to desert locust control, and to inform countries about the

potential damage that the desert locust can cause to crops and pastures, in particular in countries that may be threatened with poverty and hunger.

9. In relation to programme and budget matters, the Commission recommended or decided on the following:

- member countries approved printing the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for desert locust sprayers in Arabic, English and French, in coordination with the Western Region Commission (CLCPRO);
- the Commission Secretariat will organize and conduct a training course on survey and control operations in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Iraq;
- the Commission will contribute to the procurement of the spray equipment for the Royal Air Force aircraft R44 used in aerial control in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan;
- the Commission Secretariat will organize and conduct a training course on survey and control operations, in coordination with the Public Authority of Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources of the State of Kuwait;
- the Commission Secretariat will organize and conduct a training course on survey and control operations and on Environmental and Health Standards (EHS), in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Lebanese Republic;
- the Commission Secretariat will organize and conduct a training course on survey and control operations and a spray equipment operations and maintenance workshop, in coordination with the Ministry of Municipality and Environment of the State of Qatar;
- the Commission Secretariat will organize and conduct a training course on EHS, in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Sultanate of Oman, and will provide the Ministry with 20 GPS devices and 20 compasses;
- the commission secretariat will organize and conduct a training session on EHS, in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;
- it is recommended that the Secretary of the Commission visit the Syrian Arab Republic to explore ways of rehabilitating the Desert Locust Unit through donors. In addition, the secretary will organize a workshop on the maintenance of spray equipment and a training course on desert locust survey and control and on EHS.
- due to the current situation in Yemen, the Commission will explore ways of supporting the desert locust centres, due to the importance of continuous follow-up of the desert locust situation, in view of its development in some member countries;
- the Commission Secretariat will contact the admissions office of the Sudan University of Science and Technology regarding accepting its students and starting the registration process as soon as possible;
- delegates of member countries that are in arrears should follow up with their governments regarding their payment to the commission's trust fund;
- the delegate of the United Arab Emirates will follow up on the issue of raising the contribution with the relevant authorities, similar to other member countries; and
- member countries will pay their annual contributions to the commission's trust fund and a portion of their arrears by 31 December 2019, in view of the difficult position of the trust fund.

IV. Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO)

10. The Ninth Session of the Commission took place from 18 to 22 June 2018 in N'Djamena, Chad, and was organized jointly with the 13th meeting of the executive committee. Under the auspices of Her Excellency Beassemnda Lydie, Minister for Production, Irrigation and Agricultural Equipment of the Republic of Chad. The meeting was attended by delegates from all member countries in CLCPRO (except Senegal); the Executive Secretary of the CLCPRO; the FAO Representative in Chad; the President of CLCPRO; the representative of the Locust group (AGPMM) from FAO headquarters; the Executive Secretary of the CRC, the representative of the French Development Agency (AFD), the representative of the regional centre AGRHYMET and CLCPRO Secretariat officers. The commission reviewed the Secretariat's report of activities implemented during the period 2016-2018 in cooperation with member countries and made the following recommendations:

- The CLCPRO, in collaboration with the FAO Desert Locust Information Service (DLIS), to identify operational improvement needs to the RAMSES database (Reconnaissance and Management System of the Environment of Schistocerca).
- The FAO Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) Phase II Evaluation Mission in the Western Region to include in its final report the implementation record of the recommendations made by the mid-term evaluation mission of the First Phase of the EMPRES Programme in the Western Region.
- The EMPRES Programme in countries in West and Northwest Africa- Phase II Evaluation Mission to take into account the pooling of National Locust Control Units' resources in the actions to be taken to enhance the sustainability of preventive control in the Western Region.
- The management of FAO to entrust the budgetary responsibility of the Trust Fund of the CLCPRO to its Executive Secretary.
- Member countries to make the necessary arrangements to honour their commitment to replenish the Regional Fund for Locust Risk Management.
- The CLCPRO to proceed with the purchase of two vehicles per year under the Western Regional Task Force (FIRO) in 2018, 2019 and 2020 to position them in Chad and to prepare accordingly a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of the Republic of Chad.
- The Secretariat of the CLCPRO to provide two days for the preparation of the Regional Training Plan IV (2019-2022), in the first half of 2019 and on the margins of a regional meeting.
- The Secretariat of the CLCPRO to contact the Niger relevant authorities to conduct, a second operational drones trial before the end of 2018.
- The National Locust Control Units to approach their respective concerned national authorities to get informed on the current regulations governing the use of drones.
- The Secretariat of the CLCPRO to include in the new version of the National Desert Locust Control System (SVDN-v3), modules for monitoring and evaluation (SSE), the regional training database and the Pesticide Stock Management System (PSMS).
- Member countries to pay their annual 2018 contribution as soon as possible to the Trust Fund of the commission and to continue their efforts to clear arrears where appropriate.
- Member countries to finalize their reference budget taking into account the remarks made during the Ninth Session of the CLCPRO.

V. Regional Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors

11. The Regional Dialogue on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors took place in Amman, Jordan, from 3 to 5 November 2019. Representatives of fourteen member countries, two UN agencies and the fifteen regional and international specialized organizations participated in the consultation.

12. The primary objective of the consultation was to review the draft FAO Strategy on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors, and provide FAO with a regional perspective regarding the proposed strategy. The FAO draft report “Near East and North Africa regional synthesis for the State of the World’s Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture” was presented and discussed at the meeting.

In addition, the meeting was an opportunity to make progress in the following areas:

- increase awareness about the importance of biodiversity mainstreaming across the agricultural sectors within the region;
- exchange knowledge, experiences and lessons learned (including gaps and challenges) on biodiversity mainstreaming among countries within the region;
- identify areas for action across sectors and priorities at the regional and country level, including resource mobilization and stakeholder engagement, in preparation for the adoption of the CBD Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that will be adopted in Kunming, China in 2020.

13. The following are the main recommendations that emanated from the discussions at the Regional Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors:

- Knowledge sharing: developing a community of practices, for professionals of the region dealing with biodiversity, bringing together the environment and agriculture communities, and taking advantage of existing networks, including the FAO Biodiversity Mainstreaming Platform, the Technical Network of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and other regional networks.
- Data and information: the FAO Regional Report on the State of Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture in the NENA region points out the lack of data on the subject. More and better information is needed to establish a baseline, agree on targets and monitor progress. The ‘DATAR’ of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the FAO methodology to measure progress towards SDG 2.4 are examples of tools to assess biodiversity in relation to agriculture.
- Coordination: one of the main purposes of the consultation was to bring together agriculture and environment communities. This linkage needs to be strengthened through the development and facilitation of platforms for cross-sectoral dialogue at regional and country levels.
- Awareness raising, capacity building and education: decision-makers, including consumers, must understand the value of biodiversity, and farmers must learn about and adopt biodiversity-friendly practices. Education, capacity building and awareness raising

campaigns are needed at all levels to scale up efforts, building on existing capacities and programmes.

- Stocktaking exercise: documenting good practices and traditional practices and bringing the economic evidence that is needed to scale up these good practices.
- Innovation: the need to offer people the opportunity to innovate was recognized. This could be promoted by replicating good practices, such as incubators associated with research institutions at national and regional levels, and by promoting exchanges of information through innovation platforms.

14. Special focus should be given to the following issues:

- Invasive species: more work needs to be done on this question, which has major implications for the region. The need to link with ongoing research activities and networks regarding this issue was recognized.
- Ecosystem services: estimation of the economic value of the ecosystem services provided by biodiversity elements.
- Pollinators: a focus on pollinators, in particular bees, in coordination with beekeeper communities.
- Climate change study: regional study should focus on climate change, which is been considered one of the major threats to biodiversity.

VI. Land and Water Days Conference

15. The Second Land and Water Days (LWD) Conference for the Near East and North Africa region was held from 31 March to 4 April 2019 in Cairo, Egypt. The objectives of the conference were the following:

- to take stock of what countries and development partners have achieved together in the last five years to address water scarcity and land degradation;
- to look at perspectives for the next phase of the regional initiatives, particularly the Water Scarcity Initiative;
- to assess regional demand for investment in the land and water sectors and identify appropriate related financial mechanisms (targeting the SDGs); and
- to update knowledge on land and water, taking into account innovations and the advances in science and technology.

16. The conference was structured around two major segments: the technical segment (during the first four days) and the high-level ministerial segment (on the fifth day). The technical segment included four themes: water scarcity, land degradation, climate change and land and water governance. Each theme was addressed through a plenary and three technical sessions, along with a market place (that displays innovative projects and ideas) and a hackathon. There were also several side events targeting either project steering committees or training. Additionally, a special plenary session was dedicated to the Inter-Regional Cooperation Asia-NENA, with the participation of the Provincial Minister of Punjab for Irrigation (Pakistan) and the Minister for Water Resources and Irrigation of the Arab Republic of Egypt, discussing major responses to cope with water scarcity in the two regions.

17. The partners of the FAO Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity demonstrated their participation in and commitment to the work of the initiative in the technical segment of the conference. The conference provided a forum to exchange experiences in dealing with water scarcity. In this regard, the Australian water reform journey, which was driven by a harsh ten-year drought from 1970 to 1980, was highlighted.

18. The high-level ministerial segment was organized by FAO, AOAD, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States (LAS). The segment was structured to engage the ministers in two distinct sections: a technical deliberation session and a process-oriented meeting. The technical deliberations included introductory presentations, two panel sessions and a ministerial round table. In addition to ministers, the panels included representatives of international and regional financing institutions, donors and the private sector. The discussions revolved around (i) the current agricultural water challenges facing the region and (ii) the way forward to address a new generation of land and water investment and policies. The second part of the ministerial meeting was devoted to reviewing a draft joint resolution and, after deliberations, adopting the resolution. The resolution included (i) endorsement of the Cairo Declaration and (ii) institutionalizing a coordination mechanism between the water and agriculture sectors.

19. Ten ministers of water and agriculture, representing eight LAS member countries, attended the ministerial meeting.² Deputy ministers, ambassadors and heads of delegation from another ten Arab countries also attended the meeting.

20. The main outcomes of the technical segment of the conference are summarized below:

- The Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity is considered an effective platform for partner cooperation and coordination, and for exchange of experiences between countries.
- The institutional dimension of water resource management requires restructuring and/or strengthening for effective strategic planning.
- Policies, institutions, instruments and tools are all required to achieve sustainable water resource management.
- Reducing the cultivation of high water-consumptive crops is being included in the national agenda of several countries, along with increasing water productivity. Water conservation measures are also considered strongly in the strategic plans of many countries.
- Water salinity is increasing at an accelerated pace and is becoming a looming threat.
- Depletion of groundwater resources in many countries has reached unsustainable limits and bold measures are needed to halt (and possibly reverse) further over-abstraction. An impetus is required on advanced and effective groundwater governance and management, which must include setting the sustainable limits of water consumption – a fundamental issue.
- Beyond managing water resources, water resource valuation is required to build awareness and trigger behavioural change.
- The region is highly vulnerable to climate change, and efforts to improve adaptation measures should be pursued. Climate change is projected to impact rainfall patterns, increase seawater intrusion into rivers and groundwater, and exacerbate trends in land degradation and desertification.

² LAS member states include 22 Arab countries.

21. The outcome of this first meeting of water and agriculture ministers was considered a landmark achievement that requires continuous momentum, internally – from within the LAS – as well as through extended efforts and support from development partners, including FAO. The most important points of the ministerial resolution are elaborated below:

- Endorsement of the Cairo Declaration: the Cairo Declaration includes a set of commitments and action points that, within the scope of sustainable land and water management and food security, examines agricultural water management in a holistic manner that goes beyond the two sectors to include relevant issues such as market reform, trade and social protection. These commitments and action points are grouped under four headings: (i) active regional coordination between water and agriculture sectors; (ii) coherence of agriculture and water policies; (iii) higher investment needs; and (iv) utilizing technology and innovation and exchange of experiences.
- Institutional coordination between water and agriculture: a structured coordination mechanism was adopted, which includes the following elements:
 - biennial joint ministerial meetings;
 - establishing a secretariat for the joint ministerial meetings, comprising the technical secretariat of the Arab Ministerial Water Council and the AOAD;
 - establishing a joint high-level technical committee which will meet annually.

VII. Workshop on Supporting Implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in Agriculture and Water Sectors

22. The regional workshop was held from 9 to 11 September 2019 in Cairo, Egypt as a first step in the regional collaboration between FAO and NDC Partnership in supporting member countries in the implementation of their NDCs. Representatives of twelve member countries participated in the workshop. In addition to FAO, the event host and NDC Partnership, several organizations also participated, including the African Group of Negotiators Expert Support (AGNES), the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), ESCWA, AOAD, IFAD and the Arab Water Council.

23. The overarching objective of the workshop was to bring together all possible stakeholders of climate change interventions, to create a platform that will serve as a knowledge base and a space for sharing experiences in order for the countries in the region to remain up-to-date with global climate change issues. The workshop included reviewing the status of countries with respect to their implementation of current NDCs and initial consideration regarding the formulation of a new generation of NDCs for 2020 and beyond.

24. The event helped NDC Partnership and FAO identify possible interventions and discuss modalities of future cooperation with member countries.

25. The workshop identified the following common challenges faced by the countries in the region:

- access to financing from international funding institutions, including Adaptation Fund and Green Climate Fund, and from the private sector;
- lack of capacities within technical/sectoral, finance and planning ministries;
- inadequate information and knowledge;
- insufficient government structure;

- absence of regional and country-level coordination mechanisms.
26. Workshop recommendations:
- establish a technical coordination mechanism for coordination between governments, donors and other entities providing support;
 - build capacity within water, agriculture and environment ministries;
 - mainstream climate change in planning processes and in national/sectoral strategies and policies;
 - formulate country/regional programmes to mainstream NDCs into government processes and strategies, also to ensure the implementation of the NDCs;
 - strengthen the involvement and commitment of agriculture and water ministries in climate action;
 - establish strong legal frameworks;
 - better information/data for decision-making, MRV systems, etc.;
 - prioritize actions;
 - link climate change and NDCs with development processes and SDG implementation;
 - multi-stakeholder coordination including government, subnational actors, civil society, academia, donors and other institutions providing support;
 - conduct periodic high-level, cross-sectoral dialogue at the regional level.

VIII. Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

27. ESCWA convened the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) in Beirut, Lebanon from 9 to 11 April, under the theme of “Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality”. In line with the HLPF, the AFSD focused on an in-depth review of the same SDGs (4, 8, 10, 13, and 16), in addition to SDG 17, which is reviewed each year.

28. Over 300 high-level representatives of Arab governments, regional intergovernmental organizations, civil society networks and organizations, parliamentarians, academic institutions and UN agencies working in the Arab region came together for a multi-stakeholder dialogue dedicated to fostering a culture of knowledge exchange and a spirit of collaboration.

29. The AFSD 2019 programme included ten special sessions focusing on many SDG-relevant topics. Some of the sessions were:

- Inclusion, Empowerment and Equality as Pathways to Peace and Development
- Advancing Climate Action in the Arab Region
- Gender Equality
- Advancing Social Justice and Social Cohesion through Inclusive Social Protection in Conflict-Affected States

30. The following regional consultations were undertaken in preparation for the AFSD 2019 and HLPF:

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- Regional Consultation on Climate Change for the 2019 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and High-Level Political Forum;
 - Second Arab High-level Forum on World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
 - Regional Consultation on the Environment and Natural Resources for the 2019 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and High-Level Political Forum;
 - Arab Region Parliamentary Forum on the 2030 Agenda;
 - The international conference “Financing Sustainable Development: Curbing Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs).”
31. Some of the main messages from AFSD are the following:
- It is necessary to adopt the transformative approach advocated by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its three principles (inclusion, empowerment and equality) in the work of institutions and at all levels (especially in countries experiencing conflict or occupation), in order to strengthen their resilience and their ability to provide the basic elements of development.
 - Arab countries affected by conflict have twice the difficulty achieving the 2030 Agenda.
 - It is necessary to invest in strengthening institutions to achieve the SDGs.
 - The available data is not sound and information is insufficient to indicate exact status with regard to the SDGs. It is not possible to wait until there is a complete database. It is necessary to advance on the development track.