FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

Thirty-second Session

Rome, Italy, 24-28 February 2014

Summary of FAO activities in the Near East and North Africa Region under the PWB 2012-13 by Strategic Objectives

I. Introduction

1. This note presents brief summary of the major FAO activities in the Near East and North Africa in 2012 -13 categorised by Strategic Objectives.

(A) Sustainable Intensification of Crop Production

2. The major activities in crop production in the region focused on i) enhancing national/regional capacities to increase crop yields per unit area per season and ii) quality of the produce. Support to countries in the region has been extended to international research conferences, regional workshops, which in several cases aimed at reinforcing inter-country cooperation through the sharing of relevant experiences.

3. Technical assistance to enhance capacity of governments has been provided in, among others: i) developing Date Palm production, ii) processing and marketing of olives, iii) developing tropical and sub-tropical fruit and iv) strengthening the national centre for horticultural research and development.

4. Several activities have been implemented both at regional and national level to improve pest management practices, including IPM practices and alternative methods for pest management to minimize the risks of chemical pesticide on human health and environment.

5. In addition, FAO contributed to the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), the International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs), the Rotterdam Convention, the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management and to the Regional Desert Locust Commissions to strengthen the countries’ technical capacities in controlling Desert Locust.
SO (B) Animal Production and Health

6. FAO activities in areas of sustainable livestock production strengthened public and private partnerships in the Near East and North Africa region through transfer of improved technologies, creation and strengthening institutions such as Dairy Producers Associations and the Honey Bee Producers Association, improving access to extension services and better markets. A notable one is the dairy success story in Lebanon that positively impacted food security and livelihoods of more than 3000 households. About 40 dairy producers’ cooperatives were organized and equipped with 40 milk collection centers that have proper refrigeration, pasteurization, sanitation and lab facilities; female-run dairies with less than 10 cows were given the needed equipment for milk processing and product marketing; transport network for the co-ops were set up and raw milk was collected and marketed directly to large dairy-processing plants with a better premium paid per pound of clean milk; refrigerated raw milk has grown from 50 tons per day to 200 tons significantly cutting down import bills.

7. In areas of prevention and control of animal diseases and zoonoses, FAO has assessed impacts of Syria crisis on livestock production and health¹ and undertook capacity building in veterinary quarantine systems, import risk analysis, good emergency management practices, preparedness, early disease detection, disease early warning, early response to livestock disease emergencies as well as direct support in vaccination campaigns, epidemi-survey, diagnosis and vaccines. To control foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) and peste des petits ruminants (PPR), FAO designed progressive control pathway (PCP) for FMD to lead countries in a step-wise control progress towards freedom from the diseases and prepared regional FMD control strategy and roadmap/strategy for PPR control.

8. FAO activities strengthened capacity of member countries in sustainable use of animal genetic resources. This was done through identifying gaps in breed characterisation, value addition to local breeds and their products, and transferred knowledge of unique features the breeds and products, socio-cultural, religious use, and production systems as supporting their valorisation and market access. Capacity of countries built in animal identification, performance recording and traceability as tools for the enhancement and utilisation of animal genetic resources, the fight against animal diseases and food security in the region.

9. Impacts of climate change on livestock were analysed and measures for adaptation and mitigation in the region². Likewise, major areas are identified for integrated drought preparedness and management in the livestock sector for the Near East and North Africa.

SO (C) Sustainable Management and Use of Fisheries and Aquaculture

10. Activities in this region on sustainable management and use of fisheries and aquaculture focused on small-scale fisheries, vulnerability to climate change, trans-boundary and regional cooperation and capacity development with as main outcome The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries and Aquaculture in the region.

11. FAO held a regional consultation on “Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries: Bringing Together Responsible Fishing and Social Development”, producing a critical overview of the sector and contributed to the formulation of the International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries. Furthermore, a regional workshop on “Reducing Vulnerability of Fishing and Fish Farming Communities to Natural Disasters and Climate Change Impacts in the Near East and North Africa” was convened.

12. The regional priority of reducing food waste and loss in fisheries was addressed through a specifically conceived TCP project for Yemen and at the regional scale through the conference on “Food security and income generation through reduction of loss and waste in fisheries”.

13. The development of regional cooperation for responsible fisheries is a central component of FAO’s work, particularly as marine and freshwater ecosystems are shared by countries in the region. FAO formulated a regional project to address Fisheries Management Cooperation in the Northern Area of the Gulf (Iran, Iraq and Kuwait), including a trans-boundary analysis of fisheries. FAO promoted and initiated the network of fisheries and oceanography institutes of the Maghreb countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) and also convened the first regional (Iraq, Turkey and Syria) expert meeting on fisheries and aquaculture in the Tigris-Euphrates river systems.

14. Member countries in the Gulf and Sea of Oman were assisted to develop their capacity on the use of spatial planning for fisheries management and aquaculture development. In addition, a regional TCP was implemented to support capacity development for fishery stock assessment in GCC countries and Yemen.

15. Continued support was provided to the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI), including the organization of the Seventh Plenary Session, the implementation of its first fisheries management recommendation on minimum data reporting, nine additional intersessional meetings, and the working documents and publications for these meetings.

16. FAO facilitated the establishment of an ad hoc network of marine and fishery scientist taxonomists in the eastern and southern Mediterranean for the preparation of the FAO Field Identification Guide to the Living Marine Resources of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean.

SO (D) Improved quality and safety of foods at all stages of the food chain

17. FAO has continued to support countries in the Near East in improving their food inspection services at the ports of entry through the regional workshops that were conducted to develop the capacity of member countries to move from systems depending on end point inspection to modern systems based on risk assessment. Two regional workshops were organised in Jordan for this purpose. In Lebanon, through a GCP project, the foundations to build such a system were established through: developing the capacity of food inspectors at the ports of entry as well as in the domestic market to adopt a risk-based approach in their work through training and sharing experience from other countries by means of study tours, providing infrastructure and tools to assist in their work, assessing the capacity of laboratories servicing inspection and providing them with necessary training, as well as through reviewing the legislative frameworks.

18. On the other hand, FAO continued to provide assistance to countries for complying with international food standards through supporting the Codex Alimentarius Regional Committee for the Near East by means of organising a regional workshop to identify the needs and discuss ways of enhancing the participation of countries in Codex. Support has also continued to be provided to the National Codex Committees to reinforce their role in particular in Lebanon through a technical Cooperation Project.

19. In the subregion of the Gulf States and Yemen, FAO assisted the governments of United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen in the area of food safety, in particular in the areas of assessment, providing recommendations, and backstopping for the formation of food safety agencies responsible for coordinating the disparate official remits for food safety.
SO (E) Sustainable Management of Forests and Trees

20. FAO has continued carrying out its responsibility related to the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC).

21. FAO’s work on strengthening forest and range institutions continued through thematic studies as the: “Non-Wood Forest Products: Safety Net of Rural Livelihoods”; “Challenges in Adopting an Integrated Approach to Managing Forest and Rangelands” “Assessing the Socio-economic Contributions on Forest and Range”.

22. FAO contributed to sustainable financing mechanisms to the forestry sector, the use of treated waste water, strengthening forestry education and the preparation of the first International Day of Forests.

23. FAO contributed to strengthening management capacity and filling information gaps on Forest Genetic Resources in eight countries towards the preparation of the ‘State of the World’s Forest Genetic Resources’ which was completed in 2013.

24. Furthermore the Organization is preparing guidelines to restore the resilience of forest landscapes in dry lands under the Dry Lands Restoration Initiative. Two workshops were organized to launch the process, finalize the guidelines and explore their use within the Great Green Wall (GGW) context.

25. The 21st Session of Silva Mediterranean took place in Antalya, Turkey in February 2012. A main outcome of the Session of relevance to NEFRC was the creation of a working group on ‘Desertification and Restoration of Forest Ecosystems in Arid Zones’ led by Turkey with FAO’s technical support.

SO (F) Sustainable management of land, water and genetic resources and improved responses to global environmental challenges affecting food and agriculture

26. In 2013 FAO launched a Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity in NENA. The Initiative is designed to inject fresh thinking into the process of finding sustainable solutions to water scarcity and food security problems through promoting the implementation of cost-effective water investments and management practices. The Initiative is carried out on a partnership basis among member countries and between countries and international and regional partners. Two major outputs are envisaged: (1) a Regional Collaborative Strategy; and (2) a Regional Partnership to support countries in the implementation of the Collaborative Strategy.

27. In addition, the FAO Regional Office for the Near East joined efforts with the regional project: “Strengthening National Capacities to Manage Water Scarcity and Drought in West Asia and North Africa” lead by the United Nations - Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). It has also become part of the Task Force for drafting the Action Plan for Arab Water Security Strategy which is led by the League of Arab States. In addition, the Regional Office of FAO has joined the Initiative on the Impact of Climate Change on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment in the Arab region (RICCAR) that is implemented through a collaborative partnership involving UN agencies, the League of Arab States, and Internationals development agencies with the aim of increasing awareness and knowledge of tools and methodologies for national planners, policymakers, institutions and stakeholders in member countries in the field of drought management and climate change impacts under water scarcity.
28. Food losses and waste (FL&W) reduction has become a priority area in FAO's work as it has been requested in the NERC-31. A cornerstone of this work was the development of the "Strategy for FL&W Reduction in the NENA Region". A draft version of the strategy was presented and discussed at the FAO/CFS "Regional Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on Food Security and Nutrition" held in November 2013.

29. Activities included: support of education, awareness and advocacy for FL&W reduction, steps were taken towards the establishment of a SAVE FOOD Regional Network and associated knowledge platform3), and a series of documentary films targeting consumers, producers, and policy-makers was initiated.

30. Regional workshops and trainings to reduce FL&W through supporting value chain development and improvement, increased value addition, value chain finance, improved quality and safety management systems, and cold chain infrastructure and application, have been conducted.

31. An ongoing project on Integrated Food Security is supporting value chain development and livelihoods in eastern Sudan. Associated publications and manuals were produced in Arabic and English.

SO (H) Improved food security and better nutrition

32. With FAO assistance, seven NENA countries reviewed and/or updated their agriculture development and food security programmes, policies and strategies. These countries include Egypt (food security policy advisory board), Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen (food security information system and coordination mechanisms), Libya (monitoring food systems and food markets), Oman (formulation of sustainable agricultural development strategy), Saudi Arabia (restructuring the Ministry of Agriculture) and Syria (food security information for emergency response).

33. Dialogue and exchange of information on agriculture and food and nutrition security between stakeholders in member countries have been promoted through supporting the organization of several regional and sub-regional fora. The annual regional multi-stakeholder meeting on food security and nutrition was organized for 2012 and 2013 involving senior government officials, CSOs, UN organizations, donors and other stakeholders. Major issues regional food security and nutrition issues were debated, including on food security strategies and policies, food losses, protracted crisis in the region, climate change and food security, responsible investment in agriculture and nutrition. Other major events organised include, a sub-regional workshop for the GCC States and Yemen on food security and nutrition, two side events during NERC-31 and the 39th CFS and two meetings for UN RCM regional Thematic Working Group on food security.

34. A comprehensive study was prepared assessing the status of food security and nutrition in the region and outlining a draft regional strategy on food security and nutrition.

35. Support continued to strengthen countries capacities in addressing issues related to food price volatility, planning, policy formulation and M & E (Egypt, Iraq and Yemen), and the right to food (Tunisia).

3 http://www.save-food.net
**Nutrition**

36. FAO continued to provide support to countries in the region to develop their capacity to assess, monitor and analyze household food and nutrition security. On the other hand, support continued to be provided for implementing integrated programs to increase the capacity of communities and households to produce food of animal and plant origins and to improve nutritional awareness with the purpose of impacting the nutritional outcomes, especially of the most vulnerable. A GCP project to improve household food and nutrition security in Egypt targeting women and the youth is being implemented employing this approach. The same approach is being implemented in situations of emergency, like in Yemen.

37. A UTF project to improve nutrition of school children through garden-based learning in UAE has also started; training material has been translated and adopted into Arabic and teachers’ training has been undertaken. Implementation in schools is already underway and impact analysis will be undertaken at the end of the school year in 2014.

**Statistics**

38. Activities carried out during the biennium include: i) Development of a project to support the Ministry of Agriculture of Lebanon in Strengthening and Modernizing the Agricultural Statistics System, ii) the RNE Agricultural Statistics Yearbook 2013 which includes statistical analysis of select food and agricultural indicators for the NENA region, iii) a high-level workshop on RNE Regional Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Development Statistics is organized and attended by Directors of Agricultural Statistics Departments of the Ministries of Agriculture and Central Statistics Offices, and iv) FAO Supported and coordinated TCP projects particularly in Sudan, Mauritania and Libya, to improve the data quality.

39. FAO supported regional and HQ activities on statistics including the Quarterly Food Security Update, SOFI, NERC 32, contributed to technical reports on for instance food loss, and co-organized the AFCAS meeting in Morocco that brings in heads of agricultural statistics departments from (North) African countries.

**Knowledge management**

40. FAO, in close collaboration with regional organizations, has continued to provide significant contributions to strengthening and facilitating information management and knowledge exchange, sharing and dissemination through the following: i) Technical support services to three TCP projects in Egypt ii) Technical advisory service to the Government of Oman to formulate a new UTF project called "Development Communication Network for Rural and Agricultural Development and Food Security Improvement" iii) expansion to the second phase of UTF/OMA/006 "Development of an Agricultural Information Centre", and iv) Six Knowledge Management Platforms were developed through Field/Regular Programs Projects. Jordan, Egypt and Oman have effectively established National Agricultural and Knowledge Sharing platforms.

41. FAO facilitated and participated in the development of a Plant Genetic Resources Information and Knowledge Network through the Regional Consultation Meeting of the Coordinating Board of the Near East and North Africa Plant Genetic Resources Network (NENAPGRN) in September 2012.

42. Furthermore, the Organization conducted a regional training workshop in December 2012 for 17 member countries Institutions on Building national institutional capacities in Near East Plant Protection Network (NEPP-NET); subsequently 30 institutions received support for capacity building in partnership with national and regional organizations (AARINENA, NEPPO and ASPP, CALP, MOA-Jordan and MAF-Oman).
43. A regional expert consultation meeting was held in Cairo, Egypt in January 2012 for the establishment of COFO-WANA and was attended by 19 representatives of farmers unions and associations from the countries of the region.

44. FAO participated in an expert consultation on Agricultural Innovation Systems and Family Farming as part of the SOFA series in March 2012.

45. FAO promoted i) Global initiatives AGRIS (International Information Systems for Agricultural Science and Technology) ii) AGORA - Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture iii) CIARD - Coherence in Information for Agricultural Research for Development iv) AIMS - Agricultural Information Management Standards and v) IMARK - Information Management Resource Kit.

SO (I): Improved Preparedness for, and Effective Response to, Food and Agricultural Threats and Emergencies

46. Focus of FAO interventions was on protecting the livelihoods of affected and vulnerable households to restore small farmers and herders agriculture activities and avoid depletion of assets as the first frontline for protecting resilience. FAO activities contributed to i) the enhanced food and nutrition security, the recovery of small-scale crop and livestock production including the rehabilitation of dairy sector, pests and animal disease outbreaks control and prevention, improved household-level food production, strengthened income generation, improved domestic food quality and nutrition, as well as reinforced sectoral coordination and evidence-based, food and nutrition security related information management, including the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC).

47. Technical assistance and emergency response were provided to prevent and control major animal diseases like Avian Influenza, Foot and Mouth Disease, Peste des Petits Ruminants, Rift Valley fever and Lumpy Skin disease. Activities ranged from financial support and capacity building to direct response through emergency vaccination and input distribution.

48. Activities aimed at protecting and building livelihoods included the improved crop production, fruit and vegetable cultivation and backyard food production through the provision of essential inputs, equipment and training, ii) restoration and protection of herders’ livelihoods through water cistern rehabilitation, animal health interventions, fodder production/distribution, dairy production rehabilitation and the establishment of herders’ feed/service centres, iv) improved management of water resources through small-scale irrigation networks and water storage.

49. Different projects addressed the growing unemployment among youth in North Africa through technical capacity building, social cohesion activities, building partnerships with financial organizations and the promotion of microfinance products.

50. Food security and agriculture coordination activities included i) improved emergency preparedness and response (desert locust, avian influenza, tomato leaf miner, red palm weevil, control of livestock diseases through vaccination campaigns, rehabilitation of agricultural assets), ii) food security information and analysis and coordination, including the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) aimed at providing decision-makers with improved analysis of food security information for targeted interventions, and iii) coordination and technical cooperation by leading stakeholder consultations on humanitarian response planning and enhancement of good agricultural practices and quality standards in food production.

51. Regional and national assessments were undertaken and response plans were developed to address the immediate and medium-term needs of vulnerable groups affected by the Syria crisis (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey).
SO (K) Gender equality in access to resources, goods and services and in decision-making in rural areas

52. A wide range of activities were initiated to strengthen gender equality issues for food security and rural development in the biennium 2012-13. These include: (i) Establishing a network of gender focal points at country office level to set up the appropriate communication mechanisms to strengthen gender mainstreaming work and partnership at the regional level, (ii) Supporting the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming in FAO SNE and five country offices (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia) and in FAO RNE and five country offices (Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Oman and Emirates) in programs and project cycles for improving internal working mechanisms and capacities for gender mainstreaming, (iii) Revision of TCP/UTF project documents and integrating Gender Equality Components before final approval to facilitate and strengthen the integration of Gender Equality perspective in the TCP and UTF projects, (iv) Initiation of Network relations with Gender Equality Units in Governmental Bodies; Donors; and various Regional and International Agents (ESCWA, UN Women in Egypt, UDAID, IFPRI, EU) working on Gender Equality, and (v) Developing the virtual network and its related website of Gender Equality and Rural Women’s Empowerment for knowledge sharing, (vi) Integrating gender mainstreaming in the Country Programme Framework (CPF), (vii) Capacity building for staff in FAO Offices in SNE and RNE based on action plan recommendations, and preparing a study for addressing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Rural Women in Near East and North Africa Region. Two consultancy services were initiated to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in Oman and in the United Arab Emirates which resulted in formulating two UTF projects.

SO (L) Increased and more effective public and private investment in agriculture and rural development

53. The Organization assisted governments and donors in coordinating investments, developing new regional strategies, and studied possibilities for countries to promote private investment and the development of sustainable agriculture, helped establish donor relations, promoted dialogue between countries, and created enabling environments for public and private agriculture and rural investment.

54. Several countries in North Africa have recently developed new strategies for food security and agricultural development (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria), and those in transition (Tunisia, Libya) are revising their agricultural policies. In 2013 SNE has conducted studies in Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, to explore the historical development of investment in agriculture, learn from new policies and challenges and inform further policy development in the region to attract investment in agriculture, both public and private.

55. Upon their request, FAO assisted the Mauritanian authorities to undertake a prefeasibility study for the establishment of a livestock development center. The study concluded that the livestock sector in Mauritania suffers from technical (absence of reliable databases, insufficient extension and training programmes) and institutional problems (absence of animal identification and tractability, absence of efficient programmes for the control of animal movements and diseases). The TCP concluded that the center would focus on the development and valorization of small ruminant, cattle and camel productions including hides and skins.

56. The Organization is assisting the Government of Sudan and IFAD to design a $45 million livestock project which will aim at enhancing the social, economic, and environmental resilience of rural communities to climate change. Similarly, SNE is engaging with the Libyan Government to initiate an enabling environment with a particular emphasis on identifying mechanisms for promoting private sector investment in agriculture.
57. Furthermore, it provided support to Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MoAI) of Yemen to focus on the immediate priorities of the Agriculture Sector for 2013-2014. 28 Project profiles for the major programmes in agriculture and fisheries were prepared and submitted to the Government for donors’ consideration.

SO (X) Effective collaboration with Member States and stakeholders

58. Country programming frameworks (CPFs) have been developed or updated, at least in preliminary form, for 16 out of the 19 countries of the Near East and North Africa Region - out of 16 countries, ten CPFs have been endorsed by their respective government, six countries have CPFs in a preliminary draft form, while in 1 country the CPF formulation is ongoing.

59. FAO continued in disseminating technical and scientific information locally produced for national and regional stakeholders and audiences through online outreach using FAORNE website and social media networks as Twitter and Blogs for enhancing communication, strengthening information dissemination and increasing knowledge sharing with all stakeholders from member countries and regional organizations in the Near East Region and for improving FAO visibility and communication messages at regional level. FAORNE Communication strategy was developed in 2013 and is now under implementation.

60. Information and knowledge products, Arabic/English press releases, and digital news and events information items were distributed and disseminated prior and during national and regional meetings, workshops, trainings, conferences, seminars and exhibitions.

61. Knowledge exhibitions were organized within the framework of regional events. Book titles, posters, rollup, brochures and CDs were displayed on various FAO initiatives as information and knowledge products during regional events.

62. Twenty Five Publications on FAO Achievements in Near East Countries (English and Arabic) on RNE, SRO and National Offices Achievements were edited and published during 2012/2013 and digitally disseminated on RNE website.