



**ALAWUC/NE/08**  
**February 2008**

**REPORT OF  
THE FIFTH SESSION**

**AGRICULTURE AND LAND AND WATER USE  
COMMISSION FOR THE NEAR EAST  
(ALAWUC)**

**Cairo, Egypt  
26-28 February 2008**

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
Regional Office for the Near East**

## **I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS**

### **A. Organization of the Commission**

1. The Fifth Session of the FAO Agriculture and Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East (ALAWUC) was held in Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt, from 26 to 28 February 2008, at the kind invitation of the Government. The opening ceremony of the Commission was attended by 44 persons, including 29 official participants from 13 Member Countries, 2 participants from 2 observer countries from the region and 13 representatives of 11 regional and international organizations active in the field of agriculture and land and water in the Near East region.

### **B. Inaugural Ceremony**

2. The Commission was inaugurated by Dr. Adel Abulnaga, Advisor to the Research and Agricultural Development Council, Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, Arab Republic of Egypt, and Dr. Mohamad Albraithen, Assistant Director-General, FAO Regional Representative for the Near East.
3. Dr. Adel Abulnaga, on behalf of H.E. Amin Abaza, Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation in Egypt, welcomed the participants and expressed his thanks to ALAWUC Member Countries for holding the Commission's Fifth Session in his country. Recalling that most countries of the Near East are faced with water shortage, with some well below the scarcity level, he also thanked FAO for the preparation of the session documents that address crucial challenges for the agriculture and water sectors in the Near East. He recalled the decreasing per capita land and water resources in Egypt and gave an overview of the efforts made by the Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation and the Ministry of Water and Irrigation for preparing a long-term strategy. The strategy includes major policy measures, such as the banning of surface irrigation in all reclaimed lands, and aims at increasing water productivity in the agriculture sector, including through technological developments, reuse of drainage and treated wastewater and institutional reforms. He expressed his wishes for a successful meeting of the Commission, including recommendations that are up to the expectations of the Commission Member Countries.
4. In his speech, the Regional Representative thanked and welcomed the participants and conveyed to them the wishes of the FAO Director-General, Mr. Jacques Diouf, for a fruitful and successful meeting. He expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Egyptian Government, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, for their hospitality and the excellent arrangements made for convening the Commission Session. He reminded the participants of the Commission and its goal and requested them to consider reviewing its areas of interest and arrangements, in light of FAO reform and for serving the benefits of its Member Countries more efficiently.
5. Dr. Albraithen highlighted the topics covered by the meeting, which include three papers for presentation and discussion, and four information notes. He reminded participants that these topics were selected based on the recommendations of the previous session and additional screening by the Near East Country Representatives to

FAO. He further stressed the importance and relevance of these topics for addressing the challenges facing agriculture and food security in the Region and requested participants to come up with realistic recommendations that are in harmony with the priorities of the region. He also gave an overview of the major initiatives taken by FAO Regional Office for the Near East and of the new cooperation programmes initiated with some Member Countries over the past two years. The ADG/RR RNE reaffirmed FAO readiness to cooperate with its Member Countries of the region for implementation of the recommendations reached by the Commission.

### **C. Election of Chairman, Vice Chairman and Appointment of Rapporteur**

6. The Commission unanimously elected Dr. Hamdy El-Houssainy Khalifa, Director of the Soils, Water and Environment Research Center of Egypt, as its Chairman for the Session, and appointed Dr. Mahdi Thumad Al-Kaisey, Deputy-Minister of Agriculture, Iraq, as the Session Rapporteur. They further agreed that the Heads of Delegations from all other Member Countries participating to the Session would serve as Vice-Chairmen.

### **D. Adoption of the Agenda**

7. The Commission considered the Provisional Agenda (ALAWUC/08/1) and Provisional Timetable (ALAWUC/08/INF/2). It agreed on moving the items “Any Other Business” and “Proposals of Topics for inclusion in the Next ALAWUC Session” from Thursday 28 February to Wednesday 27 February and adopted both documents with these changes.

## **II. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION**

### **A. Report on Action Taken by FAO for Implementation of the Recommendations of the Fourth ALAWUC Session**

8. The document ALAWUC/NE/08/2 “*Report on Action Taken by FAO for Implementation of the Recommendations of the Fourth ALAWUC Session*” was presented by ALAWUC Secretariat. The Commission expressed its thanks and appreciation to FAO and its Regional Office for the Near East for their commendable efforts in giving due consideration to the recommendations, through implementation of a broad programme of activities and projects, at the national and regional levels, during the biennium (2006/07.)
9. The Commission reviewed the activities implemented by FAO and its Regional Office for the Near East over the past biennium. These activities focused on: (i) improvement of agriculture and land and water use efficiency; (ii) pathways for improving agriculture water productivity; (iii) strengthening the seed sector; and (iv) plant protection and plant quarantine systems in the Near East Region; in addition to a large array of other subjects.
10. Participants to the Session acknowledged the relevance of the activities carried out by FAO, under both its regular and field programmes, for addressing the priority issues

and needs of the Near East region, including land and water policy and regulatory issues, water scarcity, crop pests and diseases, low crop productivity, trade issues, food quality standards, drought impacts, etc. They recommended that monitoring and evaluation should be included in all projects as a means of ensuring success and sustainability.

11. The commission highlighted the important technical support provided to most countries of the region, through the formulation and implementation of a large number of projects; advocacy for the agriculture sector and negotiations with financing institutions; and direct funding under FAO Technical Cooperation Programme. These projects have covered such objectives as policy and strategy elaboration, the introduction of technologies and management tools, the development of guidelines, agriculture information and data management, training and capacity development, etc.
12. The Commission appreciated that improvement of land and water use, including for agriculture production and food security, constituted one of the main areas of focus of FAO work plan on water in the Near East Region over the past two years. The main objectives of these activities included the identification of priorities for agriculture and land and water use, the elaboration of strategies and action plans through analytical studies as well as intensification and diversification of agricultural production systems under irrigation with the objective of improving food security and reaching rapid increases in strategic crops, while sustaining the natural resource base.
13. The participants raised the issue of competition between food production and biofuels for the use of land and water resources. Noting that this issue of concern to both FAO and its Member Countries, they requested the Organization to assess the impact of this competition on food prices and the environment, including the clearing of forest and pasture lands, and to provide Member Countries with relevant policy advice in this respect.
14. Highlighting the role of non-conventional water resources in alleviating the burden of water shortage in the Region, participants stressed the importance of the activities undertaken by FAO on the subject and recommended the continuation of these efforts in future work plans. The promotion of non-conventional water resources use, the development of policy guidelines and technical standards, the provision of training on all aspects and the exchange of experience were particularly stressed by participants. More specifically, the participants noted the joint collaboration by WHO, FAO and UNEP for reviewing and producing new guidelines for “wastewater use in agriculture” and “excreta and greywater use in agriculture”. As these new guidelines are more comprehensive and more relaxed than those of 1989, in addition to being more adapted to countries of the Near East and other regions, the participants urged Member Countries to consider them when elaborating or revising their national standards for wastewater reuse. They also recommended that FAO and other organizations support countries in this endeavor, including through the organization of regional forums on the new guidelines, the provision of training and the promotion of experience exchange between countries. They requested support for addressing the issue of social reluctance towards the use of wastewater for agricultural production.
15. Participants noted with satisfaction the initiatives aimed at assisting countries to review their policies with a view of adapting them to the new social and economic

developments. They also appreciated the assistance provided to several countries for the preparation of National Medium-Term Priority Frameworks (NMTPF) and recommended continuation of the exercise in other countries.

16. Convinced that water scarcity is one of the most crucial issues in the region and that agriculture is the most vulnerable sector impacted by decreasing water resources and quality degradation, the participants underscored the efforts exerted by FAO and other partner organizations for alleviating such impacts and sustaining irrigated agriculture. They emphasized in particular the promotion of water-saving policies and technologies, the adoption of water valuation measures and the setting-up and strengthening of water users associations as means for achieving integrated water demand management, optimizing water productivity and sustaining irrigated agriculture.
17. The Commission approved the support provided to the IFAD/GEF regional initiative on “Integrated Sustainable Land Management in the MENA Region – MENARID” which aims to promote integrated sustainable land management (SLM) in dry lands in the region while improving the economic and social well-being of the targeted communities, through the restoration and maintenance of ecosystem functions and productivity. FAO input to the initiative focused on: i) improved pasture/range and integrated crop-livestock systems; ii) water management and drought mitigation; iii) conservation agriculture and sustainable intensification; and iv) SLM through sustainable forest management. The Commission recommended that FAO continue its support for the development and implementation of the initiative.
18. The Commission indicated the relevance of the regional study on groundwater management that FAO has launched in eight pilot countries of the Near East Region. It noted that the study focuses on economic and social implications and aims at conducting a thorough assessment of the resources and their use, identifying success stories on management, including through beneficiary participation and involvement of the private sector, and bringing in the experience for outside the region. The Commission requested FAO to organize a regional forum for the presentation and discussion of the study results, to consolidate the regional dimension of the findings and recommendation and to share them with Member Countries and other concerned parties.
19. Participants emphasized the relevance of the studies on irrigation of date palms and associated crops that conducted in several countries of the Near East region and of the regional experts’ meeting on the subject. They further recommended that FAO pursue the development of a regional project on date palm irrigation, as proposed by the expert meeting, and requested member countries to consider financing and benefiting from the project. They also requested other relevant research and development organizations to support the initiative and to contribute to the project goals of elaborating a manual on date palm irrigation and conducting training on its use.
20. The Commission appreciated that FAO continued to update and consolidate technological knowledge on water harvesting for agricultural production as a means for addressing water scarcity in the Near East region and elsewhere. In this respect, the Commission thanked FAO for the production and dissemination of a comprehensive and illustrated training manual in five languages including Arabic as well as for the

training based on this manual conducted in several countries. The manual covers all aspects of water harvesting, including technical and economic, and is based on previous work conducted by FAO in water-scarce countries, particularly the Near East.

21. Participants noted the launching of a consultative process for reviewing and updating FAO manual on spate irrigation that dates back to 1982. They appreciated that FAO is funding the process and conducting it in collaboration with several research institutions and with the involvement of experts from around the world including the Near East. The process is expected to take at least one year, including a workshop in April 2008 Cairo.
22. The participants also thanked FAO for securing funds and making arrangements for the organization in the Near East region of a set of national and regional workshops on large-scale irrigation modernization, based on the MASSCOTE Model developed by FAO lately. The events will take place during the biennium 2008-09, with a view of facilitating the modernization of large irrigation schemes in the Near East.
23. The Commission expressed its appreciation that FAO RNE took the initiative of developing and financing two practical manuals adapted to the conditions and the needs of the Near East region: 1) Near East Fertilizer Use Manual; and 2) Methods of Analysis for Soil of Arid and Semi-arid Regions. The Regional Office also translated both manuals into Arabic and made the Arabic and English versions available to member countries. Participants also thanked the International Fertilizer Industry Association and the Arab Fertilizer Association for providing financial contributions and requested other regional and international institutions to support similar initiatives in the future.
24. The Commission noted the support provided to Member Countries for the development of national agricultural information systems and building their capacities to manage land and water resources data and to use it as a decision tool for agricultural development. The Commission also appreciated the development by FAO of tools for the rapid performance appraisal of large collective irrigation schemes and for predicting crop yield response to water under different water regimes and climatic conditions.
25. The Commission acknowledged that AQUASTAT monitors the status of water resources and their use in all 190 countries members of FAO and is the largest and most comprehensive information system on the world water resources. It thanked FAO for updating the database, including in several countries of the Near East, and requested it to continue the exercise in close collaboration with Member Countries.
26. Recognizing that plant protection and quarantine has a vital role to play in protecting the Region's agricultural production, the Commission thanked FAO for supporting the implementation of several projects aimed at increasing access to safe food, reducing incidences of harmful effects of hazardous agrochemicals, and improving land quality and biodiversity. The Commission also appreciated the provision of several technical assistance projects aimed at increasing public awareness at various levels and strengthening phytosanitary capacities for consistency with the IPPC and the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and improving pest control systems to achieve better management of strategic crops. The Commission

recommended that FAO and Member Countries should continue to cooperate on plant protection and quarantine focusing on health and environmental protection and compliance with international standards for enhancing agricultural exports.

27. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) was also the focus of the attention provided by the Commission. Recognizing the important technical and policy supports provided by FAO to the Near East Countries to strengthen their IPM programmes both at the levels of farmers and policy and decision makers, participants requested FAO to support countries IPM strategies that aim to reduce pesticide use and to contribute to the protection of farming communities, their environment and consumers.
28. The Commission acknowledged that FAO has been very active in enhancing the participation of member countries in the works of Codex Alimentarius, including through the organization of an important number of workshops aimed at reinforcing capacities in the areas of food safety risk analysis, food quality and safety of various products and foodstuff. The beneficiaries included technical staff and senior officials from the concerned ministries of all countries. The support covered also the organization of national Codex committees and review of food control systems, for more efficiency and the adoption of modern approaches to food safety management, in many countries.
29. The Commission acknowledged the continued support geared towards the strengthening of Member Countries capacities to manage drought and to alleviate its negative impacts. It highlighted the TCP projects implemented in Jordan, Iran and Syria, resulting in the elaboration of national strategies and action plans on drought preparedness and mitigation in the agricultural sector, in addition to the setting up of an early warning system in Syria. The Commission also appreciated the preparation by FAO of a report on “review of drought occurrence, monitoring, and planning activities in the Near East Region” and of guidelines on drought preparedness and management, in collaboration with the International Drought Mitigation Centre in Nebraska, USA. The participants recommended that FAO and other concerned organizations continue their collaboration in the field of drought, particularly within the framework of NEMEDCA.
30. The Commission noted with appreciation the wide array of activities related to the prevention and elimination of obsolete pesticides that FAO has carried out throughout the region. It also appreciated the translation into Arabic of several manuals and guidelines as well as the production of new documents and training guides, particularly for the safe use of pesticides.
31. Commission noted satisfactorily that FAO has collaborated actively with other UN Organizations; institutions of the CGIAR System, particularly ICARDA and IWMI; financing institutions and donor agencies including the World Bank; bilateral cooperation and development organizations; NGOs; and other agencies active in the fields of agriculture, natural resources management and rural development in the Near East region. The Commission recommended that these organizations further coordinate their respective work plans and streamline their activities in view of creating synergy and avoiding redundancies. It also recommended that Member Countries should ensure good coordination between these agencies and harmonization of their respective activities with national and regional policies.

32. Convinced of the importance of field projects in enhancing development and building the capacity of recipient countries, participants expressed their satisfaction with the large number of project supported and/or implemented by FAO in the Near East region over the last biennium. They requested FAO and other organizations to continue giving priority to the Field Programme, assisting Member Countries to develop and implement development projects and to secure financial support from donors.
33. The Commission recommended that FAO provide additional support to Iraq with a view of rehabilitating and modernizing its agricultural sector, with a particular emphasis on the provision of training to the staff and cadres of the Ministry of Agriculture as well as expansion of consultations with the institutions implementing different projects in Iraq. They also urged the organization to consider re-opening its Office in Baghdad as soon as possible, for greater benefit from FAO support.
34. The participants requested the Commission Secretariat to address a letter on their behalf to the authorities of the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation of Egypt, to thank them for hosting the Commission Session. They further proposed the invitation of representatives from the private sector and agricultural unions to participate to future sessions of the Commission.
35. The participants recommended the posting on the Commission website of successful Member Countries experience that are of relevance to the Commission scope, as a means of sharing these experiences and learning from them. They also recommended advertising the Commission's work and outputs for the purpose of training and advocacy.
36. The participants noted that some countries of the Near East region have acquired practical experiences in areas of relevance to the Commission, particularly water harvesting, groundwater recharge and cloud seeding. It recommended that these countries undertake a scientific evaluation of these experiences, with due consideration to the economic and environmental aspects, with a view of validating their benefits, improving their practices and performance, and benefiting other countries of the region. They also recommended that FAO and other concerned organizations assist in the evaluation process. The participants further recommended that Member Countries encourage the exchange of experience through joint collaboration and mutual visits.

#### **B. Reform of Agricultural Products Marketing Rules and Regulations in light of the New Socio-economic Changes**

37. The Commission considered Document ALAWUC/NE/08/4, titled "*Reform of Agricultural Products Marketing Rules and Regulations in light of the New Socio-economic Changes*". It thanked FAO for covering a relevant issue facing agricultural development in the Near East, highlighting the important factors that countries ought to consider in improving the marketing of their agricultural products and boosting exports and inter regional trade.
38. The Commission recognized that agriculture remains an important economic sector in many Near East countries. In the 1980's liberalization of agricultural marketing gained increasing importance as many countries implemented structural adjustment



programmes and, by the late 1990s, most countries were increasingly committed to the private sector playing a more important role in agricultural marketing.

39. The Commission noted the significant changes in socio economic conditions in recent years in many countries in the NE Region which have seen increasing urbanization, growing middle classes, changing consumption patterns and increasing attention to food quality and safety. The emergence of supermarkets and their particular requirements in terms of quality, consistency of supply and food safety and the impact of their requirements on small farmers were discussed. Agricultural trade liberalization has seen the accession of many countries to the WTO. Currently 17 Near East countries are members and 12 are observers and most of the remaining ones are seriously considering applying for membership. The main WTO issues of relevance to agriculture and food security are the specific binding commitments made to improve market access and to reduce production and trade distorting domestic support and export subsidies which, whilst creating export opportunities also meant increased competition from imported produce on local markets.
40. The Commission observed that most countries in the NE region suffer deficits in their agricultural trade balance. Although countries vary considerably with respect to their self-sufficiency, with a few being net exporters of agricultural goods in value terms, the region is becoming increasingly dependent on food imports. Rising imports have been mainly due to the inability of agricultural production to keep pace with population increase. Yield fluctuations due to the dependency of agriculture on rain further accentuate the food gap problem. However, experience has demonstrated that efforts to increase agricultural production and improve food security have been frustrated, among other things, by the absence of orderly and efficient marketing systems, adequate market and post harvest infrastructure and insufficient marketing support services especially marketing extension services. The Commission urged Member Countries to work jointly towards lifting these constraints and requested FAO and other concerned organization to provide support in this regard.
41. The Commission noted that countries have also ratified a number of Regional Trade Agreements, the most important of which are the Arab Free Trade Area (1996), the Arab Maghreb Union (1988) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (1981). In practice however, these agreements are not fully implemented. Intra-Regional agricultural and food trade is limited in scope due to non-tariff barriers and inadequate logistics infrastructure and transport facilities. The Commission called upon Member Countries to lift the constraints and challenges facing intra-Regional trade and local markets opportunities, particularly non-tariff barriers, inadequate trading support services and divergent political and economic interests.
42. The Commission noted that food trade in the Near East countries is characterized by high commodity concentration: high dependence on food imports especially cereals and dominance of fruits and vegetables in agricultural exports. The main external market for fruits and vegetable is the EU and, as such, both public standards and private voluntary standards are offering challenges to NE exporters. The Commission also noted that there are many regional trade opportunities. The Gulf States are one of the fastest growing markets for international suppliers to the foodservice industry. These regional markets offer opportunities but also challenges as traditional marketing

systems often fail to supply produce of equivalent quality and safety to compete with imports and are in urgent need of improvement. Furthermore, despite numerous trade agreements between the countries of the region, there is a considerable lack of coordination of economic policies, infrastructure and logistics requirements that adversely affect the performance of agricultural trade in the region.

43. The possible marginalization of small farmers if they were unable to comply with the increasing food quality and safety standards of modern food distribution systems, especially supermarkets, was highlighted and the Commission noted the need to better organize small farmers through the promotion of farmer groups, associations and cooperatives. The role of improved marketing extension services and the role that they could play in supporting farmer groupings and improving marketing was endorsed. They recognized the need to introduce Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) in member countries as they are considered the cornerstone for modern, safe, environmentally friendly and sustainable production.
44. The Commission noted that the agricultural marketing system in the Region is characterized by poor infrastructure, limited technical knowledge, lack of transportation and shipping facilities suitable for overseas marketing, poor packing and packaging facilities, lack of cold storage, lack of information on foreign markets, difficulties in the dissemination of information and poor post harvest technologies. The inadequacy of marketing infrastructure, especially existing urban wholesale markets, was highlighted and unless improved markets were established that conform to modern trading practices, then wholesale markets would be bypassed and farmers would lose their primary market outlet. It urged member countries to undertake supply chain analyses of key crops and livestock to improve the efficiency of their respective marketing systems. It also called upon FAO and other concerned organizations to provide policy and technical support and to seek financial resources for strengthening the capacity for agricultural marketing in the Near East and harmonizing it with the world trade environment.
45. The Commission recognized that in most developing countries, small farmers, food processors and sellers are unable to meet international food safety standards, whilst even national standards are often not enforced. Apart from technical and economic difficulties, farmers, processors and exporters are burdened with a new set of transaction costs that emerge from dealing with a food system characterised by different rules, regulations and players which often require certification along the supply chain. Recognizing that failure to adapt to the changing marketing environment will marginalize both countries and smallholders and increasingly marginalize them in both national and international markets, the Commission urged Member Countries to seriously engage in reforming their food control systems with a view to meeting the challenges of the new international trading environment. National food control systems need to be based on a statutory framework supported by administrative officers, trained inspectors and adequate laboratories and other facilities needed for effective administration of legislation.

46. Changing market requirements necessitated the need for changing and improving agricultural product marketing rules and regulations. Certification services should be promoted and the need for conformity assessments of sub sectors was endorsed. The Commission recognized the need to reform national marketing rules and regulations in order for countries to benefit from national, regional and international trade opportunities and countries should consider the harmonization of their standards and conformity assessment procedures and eventually consider setting up a regional accreditation body for harmonized standards and procedures. Suggested reforms include the setting-up of appropriate policies for reducing government involvement confining it to a mostly regulatory and facilitative function, fostering local private initiatives and the promotion of a greater role of the private sector in undertaking marketing, through the provision of incentives for investments in modern marketing infrastructure.
47. The Commission expressed its appreciation to FAO for the assistance provided to many countries on the analysis of their marketing systems, policies, institutional arrangements, and for undertaking capacity building, as well as for the provision of support to strengthen national food control systems in many NE countries.

*The Commission recommend that Member countries:*

- Develop effective food safety and control systems to allow NE countries to effectively compete in international agri-food markets..
- Support national and regional efforts aimed at establishing harmonized standards and conformity assessment procedures for agro-food products, including testing, inspection, certification and accreditation.
- Consider the establishment of quality standards for products that could be registered with geographical indicators.
- Seek to further de-regulate national markets and promote a greater role for the private sector in undertaking marketing through providing incentives for investments in modern marketing infrastructure, including cold chain establishment.
- Introduce measures to streamline customs procedures and introduce greater competition in regional transportation services which would enhance the benefits of regional trade agreements.
- Undertake analyses and introduce measures for the promotion of exports and interregional trade
- Undertake supply chain analyses of key crop and livestock sub sectors including infrastructure needs ( e.g. wholesale markets) to facilitate the preparation of plans to improve the efficiency of the respective marketing system and reduce the costs of marketing (particularly the avoidable losses in the marketing chain).

- Encourage grouping, networking and clustering of producers for agricultural marketing to reap the benefits of economies of scale in conforming to modern market requirements and to supply agri processing plants.
- Encourage improvements in marketing extension and information systems to better orient farmers and traders to meet the demands of modern food distribution systems.

*The Commission recommend that FAO and other organizations:*

- Supports activities in the Region to support reform of marketing rules and regulations in light of the recent global and regional socio economic changes;
- Supports national and regional institutions in undertaking human resource development and research into marketing systems and value chain development in the NE region
- Supports capacity building and information dissemination activities to strengthen NE countries to participate fully in the international standard setting process, in plant protection (IPPC), Food Safety (Codex) and Animal health and safety standards (OIE).
- Seeks resources to continue strengthening capacity for agricultural marketing adjustment to the changing national and international trade environment.
- Provides technical and policy support to countries to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of the changing socio-economic climate, international commitments and private sector standards at the level of policy and decision makers.

### **C. Public Private Partnerships to Finance, Construct and Operate Irrigation Systems**

48. The Commission considered Document ALAWUC/NE/08/3, titled “*Public Private Partnerships to Finance, Construct and Operate Irrigation Systems*”. It thanked FAO for the comprehensive consolidation of the experience gained worldwide, including the Near East region, on public private partnerships (PPP) in the field of irrigation and drainage. The paper explores the potential role of public private partnerships in expanding the area under irrigation, improving water management and control of water use, and diversifying farm production into higher value products. It provides an overview of experiences gained worldwide, examines the interests of potential private sector partners, and uses analyses of case studies to profile possible routes to facilitate private investment and to achieve national goals related to water management. The Commission wished that the private sector actors had been invited to the meeting in order to get their viewpoints. The Commission recommended that the paper be considered as a reference for Member Countries of the region when embarking into PPP ventures.
49. The Commission understood that the purpose of the paper is not to advise, but rather to provoke and inspire discussion. It also recognized that the paper addresses large and medium-scale irrigation schemes managed by the public sector, which are different from privately owned and managed irrigation which is largely practiced in many countries of the region. The participants recommended that future sessions of the Commission should cover an assessment of the performance of private irrigation.
50. The Commission recognized the important role of irrigated lands, accounting for around 260 million ha or some 18% of the planet’s cropped area and supplying around 40% of the world’s food. This role is even more important in the Near East where irrigation accounts for 39% of all planted land and more than 50% of the total agricultural production. The public sector has financed and implemented the majority of irrigation expansion, retained ownership of the resulting infrastructure and remained responsible, at least on paper, for much of the service delivery in terms of operation, management and maintenance (OMM).
51. The Commission acknowledged that the management of large-scale public irrigation schemes has imposed an intolerable financial burden on public finances. As a result, and often at the behest of their development partners, governments have attempted to reduce the burden by initiating water service charging. But the users have not always been adequately sensitized to the need for such charges while the authorities have not always understood key concepts in water service charging. The results are low service charge collection rates which sometimes cannot even cover establishment costs; economically sub-optimal water allocation; increasing liabilities on poor households; poor and inflexible service delivery; inequitable access to water (including by the environment); deferred maintenance; infrastructural dilapidation; reduced production and productivity and hence declining willingness and ability to pay water service charges – a classic vicious circle. The Commission urged countries to give due consideration to these issues, to ensure the provision of adequate support services to farmers, irrespective of whether the services are provided by the public or the private sector.

52. The Commission recalled that while many Near East countries are short of water, performance of agriculture water remains below standards. Countries have exerted important efforts to reform the sector by introducing technical, policy and institutional changes; however, the results have been below expectations because the reform process has only been partially implemented, on one hand, and some of the key reforms required are in sectors outside of water (agriculture, trade, finance, social protection and so on), on the other. As a result, despite the important role of public irrigation schemes in food security and economic development, their productivity is actually declining and their capital assets are deteriorating because of poor service delivery, especially with respect to operation, management and maintenance. The participants were briefed on the on-going process to establish PPPs in irrigation and drainage in Morocco and Egypt and in the construction of dams in Iran.
53. The Commission noted that similar challenges facing the global irrigation sector have faced the drinking Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) sector which, since the mid 1980s has begun to devolve service delivery to one form or another of PPP. While cautioning about the differences between the two sectors and the difficulties associated with agriculture water management, the Commission acknowledged the potential role of public private partnerships in providing better OMM services for public irrigation schemes and improving water management and control of water use. The results of PPP in WSS, although mixed and sometimes controversial, have been promising enough to inspire the question “to what extent are PPPs likely to improve service delivery in the irrigation and drainage sector and hence the sector’s contribution to the global food supply?” The Commission also highlighted the fact that countries have their own policies and specificities and these would be taken into account when embarking in PPP ventures.
54. The Commission recognized that while private sector players already participate in irrigation as growers, this has little in common with the character of private sector service provision which is based on investment in and operation of bulk water services. Hence if the private sector is to participate with existing public models, the potential entity’s revenue is largely going to be derived not from the production of irrigated crops but rather from the provision of services. The success of this venture will depend, at least in part, on the answers to the following questions:
- How profitable is the proposed venture likely to be and over what time frame?
  - How soon would the profits kick-in?
  - What is the cost of financing and (especially where debt financing is involved) how bankable is the proposed venture?
  - What is the opportunity cost of investment finance (i.e. could the available funds be better invested in something else)?
  - What are the risks and how sensitive is the bottom-line to those risks?

55. The Commission acknowledged that under the changing external environment, with open markets, food trade, the need for high value cash crops, etc., public irrigation assets now could have a significant range of new, potentially more profitable markets. The resulting revenue increase would mean that improved irrigation services may be affordable, even at costs that attract the private sector provider. However, the necessary farming system changes mean that the farmers themselves are sharing some of the risks of the service provider.

56. The Commission also noted that in addition to the above-mentioned internal determinants of offer viability and the accompanying change, other micro-determinants (determinants which apply to specific investments in specific locations) should also be considered. These include:

- Accessibility to new external markets,
- Availability of affordable, reliable, appropriate and transparent transportation services,
- Market chain enhancements,
- Added-value opportunities.

When these local/micro externalities are favorable, or becoming so, a well managed irrigation and drainage venture is likely to generate greater revenues and greater profit, either or both of which would reduce or shift some of the commercial risks accruing to privatized service provision. Conscious of these requirements for the success of PPP in irrigation and drainage, the Commission proposed that concerned countries give due consideration to all aspects, through well-founded assessment studies, before embarking in public-private ventures. They also requested FAO to assist in the process especially for conducting the assessments in a professional manner.

57. The Commission reviewed the case studies covered in the paper and debated the responsibility for initiating, facilitating and maintaining favorable changes in the state of market and rural infrastructure linkage, i.e. the drivers of change. The case studies indicate that even though constraint removal is certainly a key factor for the private sector involvement, the private sector actually participated because the Government has invited it to do so. Moreover, not all the constraints are within the control of the policy makers to remove and the removal of constraints may not automatically guarantee profitability. The real question concerns risk mitigation and rights.

58. The Commission noted the existence of three kinds of risk associated with PPP in irrigation and drainage, not all of which are reasonably for the service provider to face:

- Externalities that arise from broader challenges faced by or arising in the country,
- Commercial risks,
- Water Supply risks.

The Commission recognized that, where these risks exist, a great compliance from Government is required for taking a large share of them and creating the enabling environment for PPP to work out. Some risks such as those caused by disasters can be transferred to professional risk takers, such as insurance companies. The long term-risks specific to water availability for irrigation and drainage also require confidence,

whereas international agreements and participation of external entities might be needed for mitigating country risks, such as devaluation. But this is difficult to foresee in the absence of an international acknowledgement among those likely to be involved that PPP for irrigation and drainage is the way to go

59. The Commission agreed that while it is reasonable to conclude that IDSP can be established with minimal institutional makeover, experience shows that successful devolution of irrigation scheme service delivery, at least where OMM is concerned, requires a fundamental shift in institutional mindset, especially where accountability is concerned. It is also necessary that the service users themselves and the beneficiary farmers understand and are happy with the new arrangements. The Commission agreed on the need for regulatory measures that guarantee the private players' right to a fair and sustainable profit, and these require levels of political will that may not always be available – at least when it comes to enforcement.
60. The Commission reviewed the possible PPP models that have been tested under the case studies covered by the paper and noted the following findings:
  - So far, there is no experience of PPP for water regulation and control,
  - With few exceptions, demand for PPPs for irrigation and drainage comes from governments looking for ways to reduce recurring budgets or, to a lesser extent trying to establish improved service delivery for their farmers,
  - Public Service Delegation predominates and usually involves OMM in some way,
  - Private investment in irrigation facilities for the purpose of commercial production, while creating much-needed jobs, has no impact whatever on high recurring budgets and service delivery to “client” farmers.
  - Where the drivers of PPP included poor service delivery, its establishment improved the situation,
  - The longer term sustainability of private service has yet to be proved, especially as risk (at least to date) is always carried by the private investor while the ability of affordable water service revenues to cover large repair costs and the like, has yet to be seen, as has the future of PPPs where unfamiliar institutional arrangements and assumptions have yet to be fully tested.
61. The Commission found the conclusions of the study relevant and agreed to. These are:
  - a) The most obvious conclusion from the study is that PPP for the provision of irrigation and drainage services, though promising is not yet a ‘silver bullet’ for fixing the increasing problems with publicly funded irrigation in the Near East region. The reasons for this are:
    - there is an exotic mix of players, each of which has particular conditions and expectations, not all of which are complementary;
    - each player will be subject to its institutional lag, which will not necessarily be synchronized;



- there is a need for proactive corporate social and environmental responsibility/due diligence not usually associated with a private sector initiative;
  - the demand for PPP usually originates with an entity, usually government, with an agenda which may be fundamentally different from that of those most affected by the intervention (i.e. the farmers); and
  - the need for smart allocation of risk.
- b) In many senses, the problems are generic and apply anywhere in the world, not just the Near East region. However, it should be noted that the Near East is well integrated with European trading partners and is under pressure to make its irrigated sub-sector perform under conditions of increasing aridity. Hence where sufficient political capital is available, none of these constraints should be immutable. The evidence is that there are successful models, involving for the most part purely private service providers, but sometimes ones, which combine public and private players, and which usually, comprise some form of public service delegation, focused on operation, maintenance and management. And this justifies the important role that PPP can play in addressing some of the issues facing public irrigation schemes, particularly those associated with finance and OMM.
- c) The most pressing constraint is likely to be the sharing of risk. For PPP to really take off, the risks need to be manageable or mitigated, not least in the eyes of the private entity. As suggested above, there are normal commercial risks that potential investors will assess before deciding to proceed. But since these are effectively incurred on behalf of governments, it may be legitimate for governments to indemnify a portion of the risk since this is likely to be much cheaper than delivery of service.
- d) Risk mitigation is also necessary where revenues fall due to crop failure, or natural disaster. Such risks can be transferred to professional risk takers, i.e. insurance companies. It is recommended therefore, that where such externalities discourage service offers and farming system transformation, insurance models are developed to protect both service providers and users.
- e) There is a need to mitigate risks that devaluation will compromise returns on foreign capital. This would require international mitigating instruments. Hence it could be argued that this needs irrigation and drainage service provision to be mainstreamed as an agreed strategy at the level of regional and even international development policy. Therefore, it is suggested that regional economic institutions will need to have a much more proactive role to play in opening up market opportunities and driving performance levels in the sub-sector through progressive adoption of PPP models.

*The Commission recommended that Member Countries:*

- Implement adequate reforms of irrigation management aimed at improving the services provided to farmers, increasing water productivity and lowering the financial burden on public finances;

- To create the conditions for enhancing the role of the private sector in improving irrigation services in terms of operation, management and maintenance;
- Assess the possibility of adopting charges for irrigation water services as part of the reforms aimed at boosting agriculture water use efficiency and productivity;
- Develop, enact and enforce a regulatory framework geared toward the promotion of public private partnerships in the provision of irrigation water management;
- Promote the active involvement and participation of farmers associations in irrigation water management, including decision-making and clear responsibility, as a means of achieving better governance of irrigation water, resources sustainability and protection of the environment.
- Assess the potential of PPP for managing the reuse of treated wastewater in agriculture.

*The Commission recommended that FAO and other organizations:*

- Conduct studies aimed at assessing the potential of PPP and the role of the private sector, including financial implications, in improving irrigation water governance and management in the Near East region;
- Elaborate guidelines on public private partnership models in irrigation water management, based on worldwide experience and the conditions of the Near East region;
- Assist in the reform of irrigation management and adoption of PPP models in countries wishing to do so, including for the use of wastewater in agriculture;
- Collect data and organize national and/or regional forums aimed at developing the capacity of member countries to adopt PPP and the involvement of farmers organizations in irrigation water management;
- Provide technical support and training at all levels within the framework of projects aimed at reforming irrigation water management and enhancing the involvement and performance of the private irrigation sector.

### III. CONCLUDING ITEMS

#### A. Information Notes

62. The following documents were circulated as Information Notes:

- *Experience in management of groundwater and implications for governance*
- *Valuation of water use in agriculture*
- *Capacity development for quality control of food for greater security and as a means to promote exports*
- *Irrigation extension and advisory services to promote better management of irrigation water*

#### B. Subjects for Discussion at the Sixth Session

63. The Commission considered various topics for discussion at the next Session of ALAWUC and recommended that the Agenda Items of the forthcoming Session be selected from the following items, giving priority to the topics not covered under past sessions and in accordance with the Commission's mandate and responsibility :

##### 1. **Status of non-conventional water resources use and water recycling in the Near East**

- Reuse of treated wastewater in agriculture: Situation, constraints and prospects for improvement;
- New developments in the use of brackish water for agricultural production in the Near East;

##### 2. **Water resources development and management**

- Role and Importance of Integrated Watershed Management Plans as a base for achieving proper management of water resources and agriculture production
- Training needs on Water Demand Management in Agriculture
- Experience in small-scale water resources development, including water harvesting, flood spreading and groundwater recharge
- Cloud seeding and artificial precipitation: experience and relevance for the Near East
- Strengthening regional capacity for water quality monitoring

- Experience in regulations and legislation of water use in agriculture
  - Management of shared groundwater resources
  - Assessment of water allocation between sectors, including criteria and arbitration,
3. **Irrigation**
    - Performance assessment and improvement of private irrigation in comparison with public schemes;
    - Spate irrigation in the Near East and prospects for improving its management and performance
  4. **Climate change and drought**
    - Impacts of Climate Change on Water and Crop Production
    - Capacity building on drought monitoring and early warning systems for drought preparedness and impact mitigation;
  5. **Land issues**
    - Status of the use and management of fertilizers in the Near East Region and proposals for improvement
    - Land Tenure Issues in the Near East: Situation and Impacts on Land Management
  6. **Experience in agricultural products marketing in the Near East Region**
  7. **Avian Flu impacts in the Near East Region and the means to enhance the Region's capacity to cope with future episodes;**
  8. **Regional experience on range and pasture management, with emphasis on positive achievements and lessons learnt in the Near East Region;**
  9. **Training needs to improve capacities in agricultural products marketing ;**
  10. **Strengthening regional cooperation in controlling trans-boundary animal diseases;**
  11. **Strengthening of plant protection and plant quarantine capabilities in the region;**

12. **Role of agro-climatic zoning in optimizing agricultural water use under water-scarcity conditions;**

13. **Management and valorization of agricultural production residues;**

14. **Research progress in the areas of crop water-stress tolerance and salt tolerance**

#### **C. Date and Place of the Sixth Session**

64. Since it is a standing decision that the meeting of ALAWUC be held back-to-back with the Near East Regional Conference, the date and venue of the 6<sup>th</sup> Session will be decided and relayed to Member Countries once the date and venue of the next FAO Near East Conference is determined.

#### **D. Adoption of the Report**

65. The Commission adopted the report after its discussion of the introduction of minor amendments.

#### **E. Closure of the Session**

66. The Assistant Director-General / Regional Representative for the Near East, Mr. Mohamad I. Albraithen, expressed the appreciation of FAO to the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation for hosting the Session. He also thanked the delegates from Member Countries and Observers for their participation and valuable contributions to the deliberations of the Session, and indicated that the report will be submitted to the Senior Officers Meeting planned to be held right after the Session. He highlighted his appreciation and thanks to the Chairman, the Rapporteur and the interpreters for their efforts as well as to the management and staff of the Grand Hyatt Hotel for providing excellent facilities and services. He also thanked the National Organizing Committee for the excellent organization of the meeting.

67. Mr. Hamdy El-Houssainy Khalifa, Chairman of the Fifth Session, made a statement in which he thanked the participants for their intensive discussion and high level contribution to the deliberations of the Session. He also thanked the Session Rapporteur and FAO Secretariat for producing a comprehensive report that reflects the deliberations and recommendations made by participants and which reflect the concerns of Member Countries and FAO. He also reiterated his appreciation to FAO Secretariat for the excellent organization and holding of the meeting, the quality documents prepared for the Session and the arrangements made for effecting the Commission to its successful conclusions. He finally expressed his wishes for a safe return back home to those leaving after the Session.

68. In a statement made by a delegate on behalf of participants, he expressed their thanks to the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, for hosting the Session and the excellent organization. He also thanked FAO Secretariat for the excellent job done in preparing high quality papers and report as well as for the help provided to Member Countries.

69. The Chairman declared the Fifth Session closed at 14:00 hrs. on 28 February 2008.

**AGENDA**

**I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS**

- A. Organization of the Commission.
- B. Inaugural Ceremony.
- C. Election of Chairman, Vice Chairman and Appointment of Rapporteur.
- D. Adoption of the Agenda.

**II. ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION**

- A. Action taken on the Recommendations of the Fourth Session of the Agriculture and Land and Water Use Commission for the Near East.
- B. Reform of Agricultural Products Marketing Rules and Regulations in light of the New Socio-economic Changes.
- C. Public Private Partnerships to Finance, Construct and Operate Irrigation systems.

**III. CONCLUDING ITEMS**

- A. Information Notes.
- B. Subjects for Discussion at the Sixth Session.
- C. Date and Place of the Next Session.
- D. Adoption of the Report.
- E. Closure of the Session.

## APPENDIX B

### قائمة بأسماء المشاركين

#### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Mr. Edward Seidler	Senior Marketing Officer
Mr. Ahmed AlMutawa	Information Technology Officer
Ms. Dina Moussa	Information Consultant
Ms. Heba Fahmy	Secretary/Typist
Ms. Dahlia Radwan	Secretary/Typist
Ms. Saadeya Ali	Secretary/Typist
Mr. Mohamed El-Telbani	Logistics
Mr. Ramadan Rawash	Logistics

**LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

ALAWUC/08/1	Provisional Agenda
ALAWUC/08/2	Report on Action Taken by FAO for Implementation of the Recommendations of the Fourth ALAWUC Session.
ALAWUC/08/3	Public Private Partnerships to Finance, Construct and Operate Irrigation systems
ALAWUC/08/4	Reform of Agricultural Products Marketing Rules and Regulations in light of the New Socio-economic.
ALAWUC/08/INF/1	Information Note
ALAWUC/08/INF/2	Provisional Timetable
ALAWUC/08/INF/3	Provisional List of Documents
ALAWUC/08/INF/4	Experience in management of groundwater and implications for governance
ALAWUC/08/INF/5	Valuation of water use in agriculture
ALAWUC/08/INF/6	Capacity development for quality control of food for greater security and as a means to promote exports
ALAWUC/08/INF/7	Irrigation extension and advisory services to promote better management of irrigation water

**These documents can be downloaded from the website:**

**[http://www.fao.org/world/Regional/RNE/conferences/conf36\\_en/index\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/world/Regional/RNE/conferences/conf36_en/index_en.htm)**