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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

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### **Agriculture in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: the need to Address Cross-sectoral Interactions in the Near East and North Africa Region**

## I. RATIONALE

1. Sustainable development is at the heart of FAO's Strategic Framework. Driving FAO's work on sustainability is the recognition of the complex interactions between different objectives and interests. The necessary transition towards sustainability needs actions that focus on effective changes in practices, including strengthening respective capacities, and ensuring an enabling policy environment that acknowledges these interactions and addresses the trade-offs and synergies that come from them.

2. Coordinated discussions among member countries in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) Region have the potential to identify pathways towards sustainability and a design of implementation mechanisms that foster a more integrated and effective approach.

## II. THE NEED TO ADDRESS CROSS-SECTORAL INTEGRATION AND SYNERGIES

3. Agricultural development efforts emphasizing individual sectors (crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) has led to major improvements in productivity and future improvements in agriculture's products and services will continue to come from these sectors. However, this uni-sectoral approach has often created competition in resource use across sectors, resulting in conflicts and sub-optimal allocation and management of resources.

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4. Crops and livestock compete for land and water, and their expansion is usually at the expense of forests, which results in erosion of biodiversity and increased emissions of carbon dioxide. Fisheries and aquaculture increasingly interact and compete in the same ecosystem and markets. The expanding culture of high-value carnivorous species has increased the demand for fish feed, which adds to the already high pressure on wild fish stocks. These are only a few examples of the increasingly complex interactions that can no longer be ignored.

5. Trade-offs also exist across the three dimensions of sustainability: social, economic and environmental. In resources-scarce environments, choices often need to be made between conservation and production options; between short term needs and long term requirements; and between agricultural development models that impact food security, equity and rural poverty in various ways. Solutions exist, but they require a clear understanding of these trade-offs, and of the implications of various possible options.

6. A holistic vision of sustainability must look beyond balancing trade-offs. It must also explore opportunities for creating synergies that would reduce or even eliminate them, much as natural ecosystems already do. Important synergies and complementarities can be managed between crops and livestock, and between capture fisheries and aquaculture. All of them are supported by forests, especially soil formation, water purification, biodiversity conservation and climate regulation.

7. Water is also central to any attempt to address sustainability. Especially in NENA, all attempts must be made to ensure that water is used in the most productive and sustainable manner. Many opportunities exist for better integration of crops, livestock, trees and fish production in ways that enhance the productivity of water sustainably. Agroforestry, reuse of wastewater for tree production, watershed conservation, enhanced rainfed productivity, and fish production in irrigation canals and reservoirs, are examples of such positive interactions.

8. While in theory the idea is simple, optimizing synergies and implementation is much more complex. Shifting from trade-offs to integration requires knowledge of where these synergies are possible, and political processes that support an equitable distribution of costs and benefits across different groups, and over time. It also requires innovative technologies, multidisciplinary interventions, and institutions that are geared to capturing synergies rather than maximizing individual objectives.

### **III. A COMMON VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES**

9. FAO has recently developed a vision to address sustainable development in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. This common vision, entitled “Sustainable food and agriculture,” provides a common platform and a set of principles for integration of sustainability work in the different sub-sectors, and offers ways to explicitly address the trade-offs and synergies that are associated with sustainability. It proposes to adopt a multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder approach.

10. The five interconnected principles in the Vision balance social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability, and provide a basis for developing policies, strategies, and incentives to guide the transition towards sustainability:

- Principle 1: Improving efficiency in the use of resources
- Principle 2: Direct actions to conserve, protect and enhance natural resources
- Principle 3: Protect rural livelihoods and improve equity and social well-being
- Principle 4: Enhance the resilience of people, communities and ecosystems, especially to climate change and market volatility
- Principle 5: Promote responsible and effective governance mechanisms

#### **IV. AGRICULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

11. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will shape the development programme of countries in a transformational way. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries are central to many of the 17 SDGs, and the way they will be managed will directly affect the success of SDG 2 (on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture), SDG 14 (on marine ecosystems) and SDG 15 (on terrestrial ecosystems, forests and land). They will further influence the achievement of several targets related to poverty reduction, employment, gender equality, access to resources, sustainable production and consumption and climate change.

12. Of critical importance for the success of the 2030 Agenda is the capacity to monitor progress in implementation. Efforts are being deployed by national statistical offices, with the support of their line agencies and international organizations – including FAO – to develop indicators that capture the complexity of the sustainability agenda such that it is policy-relevant, cost-effective and comprehensive.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

13. The successful achievement of the SDGs associated with agriculture, forestry and fisheries is closely associated with countries' capacity and willingness to address sustainability in a holistic manner. The changes that are needed are not impossible, but they do require vision, concerted action, and determination, and the close involvement of all stakeholders involved.

14. FAO, through its Strategic Programme 2 "Make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and more sustainable", will make all efforts to assist countries in progressively implementing the 2030 Agenda. At regional level, FAO applies these principles through its Regional Initiatives. In the NENA region, the Water Scarcity Initiative focuses on developing holistic responses to achieving food security in conditions of extreme water scarcity in a sustainable way.

15. The Regional Conference is invited to take note of the opportunities offered by the common vision on sustainable food and agriculture to serve as an innovative and effective framework in the context of the 2030 Agenda; acknowledge the need to adopt multi-stakeholder, multi-sector approaches to address trade-offs and encourage synergies; and to consider strengthening collaboration between countries and FAO in developing policy-relevant and cost-effective monitoring mechanisms for measuring progress towards sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

#### **References**

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