The issue

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the vulnerability of food and agriculture production systems in the Near East and North Africa (NENA). The system already faces serious challenges and the region is among the most land- and water-scarce in the world. Climate change is expected to exacerbate food insecurity by widening the same vulnerabilities to agricultural production that COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted. This is especially critical for countries in the region that face severe resource limitations and are highly dependent on imports of food and agricultural inputs.

The disruption to food systems caused by the COVID-19 crisis creates opportunities to invest in longer-term, green and resilient transformation. Such a transformation is necessary to avoid further undermining biodiversity, soil loss, and land degradation which can exacerbate the effects of climate change and destroy the natural buffer against zoonotic diseases. Among the farming systems most vulnerable to climate risk are rain-fed agro-silvopastoral production systems, high-value crop production, and irrigated systems. Intensive crop production, overgrazing, the destruction of habitats and poor land and water management practices pose medium- to long-term risks in the face of climate change and are a barrier to long-term resilience.

The proposed programme addresses the objective of improving the institutional and policy environment for sustainable food systems transformation. This includes strengthening analysis of climate and food system-related risks, capacity building and improved multisectoral dialogue for integrating climate change, biodiversity and land degradation in green recovery, and improved monitoring and data collection systems for assessing climate shocks to agriculture.

The action

The integration of environmental and climate change concerns in the agriculture sectors aim at supporting the institutional and policy environment for enhancing the productivity and sustainability of agricultural practices and livelihoods. This will include the following set of activities:

- Improving the mainstreaming of biodiversity and climate vulnerabilities and solutions for the agriculture sectors by promoting multisectoral dialogue

---

Food systems transformation on climate-resilient agricultural governance and vulnerability analysis of climate and food system-related risks hotspots.

• Enhancing national capacities to develop investment pipelines targeting private and public investments, that support climate-resilient and sustainable food systems that address biodiversity and land degradation.

• Strengthen monitoring, data collection and forecasting systems to inform risk assessments and improve the resilience of agriculture to future shocks and threats to food security. This focuses on the assessment of national agro-meteorological information as well as farmers' information needs.

Expected results

1. Strengthened institutional capacities to mainstream climate change, biodiversity and land degradation in national and sectoral levels (agriculture, water, land, planning, and environment) in an integrated manner.

2. Enhanced systems for monitoring and disseminating agro-climatic data to assist farmers in preparing for future economic and climatic shocks to the food value chain.

Programme links

The proposal links directly to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations’ (FAO) COVID-19 Response Umbrella Programme “Food systems transformation” and “Building smallholder resilience for recovery”. It will build on the Hand-in-Hand (HiH) Initiative; the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration; FAO Strategy on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors.

Partnerships

The programme will work with regional strategic partners including in particular the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA), the International Center for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), the Islamic Development Bank, the Arab League, UN agencies, and the World Bank along with FAO country offices, government, private sector and academia.

Country focus

Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan

Contacts

Theresa Wong
Natural Resources Officer
FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa
FAO-RNE@fao.org

Mohamed Abdel Monem
Senior Advisor
FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa
FAO-RNE@fao.org

Abdel Hamied Hamid
Senior Forestry Officer
FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa
FAO-RNE@fao.org

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Cairo, Egypt