



COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY

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**REGIONAL MULTI-STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP ON FOOD
SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN THE NEAR EAST
2 – 3 OCT 2011**

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The Near East is one of the driest regions in the world and many countries suffer from water shortages as well as deteriorating land quality which impacts food production. The region is also vulnerable to extreme climatic events which further degrade natural resources. A high population growth rate coupled with insufficient economic growth has increased both rural and urban unemployment, poverty and food insecurity.
2. The region is a net importer of food making it vulnerable to the effect of volatile food prices that have marked the recent global economic and financial crisis. Agricultural development and food security have also been threatened by civil strife and social tensions in the countries that are in socio-political transition. Traditional agriculture is dominant in many countries while institutions relevant to agriculture and food security are generally inefficient.
3. At the 30th Session of the Near East Regional Conference (NERC) in Khartoum in December 2010, a request was made to organize a regional workshop on food security and nutrition in the region. Such a workshop would re-enforce linkages with The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and to contribute to the 37th Session of CFS. The regional multi-stakeholder workshop was organized jointly by the FAO Regional Office in the Near East and CFS and was held in Cairo, Egypt from 3 to 4 October.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE WORKSHOP

4. The objective of the workshop was to bring together a wide range of stakeholders concerned with food security and nutrition to examine key issues affecting food security in the region and exchange views on how to “contribute to a more effective food security and nutrition governance mechanism through which countries and other participants provide policy inputs to CFS through a multi-stakeholder consultation process”. Representatives from 19 countries, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, UN Agencies, CSOs, NGOs, farmer's organizations, donors, representatives of international financial institutions, regional institutions, agricultural research institutions and the private sector attended.
5. The workshop engaged the delegates in constructive dialogue on key issues that impact food security and nutrition in the region including the socio-political transition. Workshop participants sought to provide recommendations on how these issues could be addressed. Four policy round tables were held. The first was on the effect of socio-political transition on food security and nutrition. Three policy round tables were held on food price volatility, investment in small-holder sensitive agriculture and gender, food security and nutrition. These round tables mirrored the roundtables in the 37th Session of CFS. Below are the key recommended policy actions that resulted from the discussions. A detailed report for the attention of Member States will be presented to the 31st NERC to be held in Baghdad, Iraq from 26 February to 1 March 2012.

III. MATTERS TO BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF CFS

A. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRANSITION IN THE NEAR EAST IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION RECOMMENDATIONS

6. A regional coordination mechanism should be established to promote regional cooperation to enhance food security. More work needs to be done to define the nature of the mechanism, its main activities and its institutional legitimacy. Examples may include:

- a) A regional CFS- type platform to monitor the food security situation in the region, liaise with CFS in Rome and the Regional Conference
- b) A regional policy network should be strengthened that enables policy practitioners to share information, good practices and lessons learned. In times of transition, existing and new policies should be carefully examined to ensure their effectiveness

7. Accurate and timely information on agricultural production and market dimensions should be analyzed and disseminated to allow effective monitoring of food security and nutrition at the national and regional levels. The tools exist but capacity is needed to implement them.

B. FOOD PRICE VOLATILITY AND FOOD SECURITY RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Subsidies should be targeted at those who need them to reduce market distortions and the fiscal burden on governments. Attention should be paid to the subsidy of cereal crops to avoid the predominance of cereals in the diet which can lead to malnutrition. Safety nets should also be implemented through better targeting of the most vulnerable populations.

9. Strengthen the cooperative systems to support small-holder farmers' production and marketing to ensure that they benefit from high food prices by strengthening their negotiating power. Develop agricultural insurance frameworks to protect small-holder farmers from food price volatility.

10. Promote the sustainable management of natural resources through the implementation of the international environmental agreements such as the Convention to Combat Desertification, to protect biological diversity and advance the utilization of renewable energy.

11. Promote policy coherence and coordination at the national level by expanding dialogue between all stakeholders involved in food security and nutrition (i.e. ministries, service departments, etc.).

12. Water use should take into consideration the scarcity in the region. Treat water as national wealth, and, in addition to price incentives, invest in new technologies to enhance water management efficiency. This involves access to technology and skills that benefit farmers and conserve water.

13. Explore innovative methods for exchange of country experiences, knowledge sharing and technology transfer (*i.e. through mobile phones*), particularly in the areas of water and land management. There was a request for FAO to organize a workshop on this subject.

14. Develop a better understanding of the purpose and costs of different food reserve schemes at regional, national and household level.

C. IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY AND SMALLHOLDER-SENSITIVE INVESTMENT IN AGRICULTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Increased investment is needed in the sustainable intensification of agriculture, the reduction of food losses, improved food quality and safety and improvement of the ability of the poor and vulnerable to access food. Also the promotion of regional integration and harmonization of policies, which are key to improving food security and nutrition at regional, national and household levels, and addressing the underlying causes of price volatility. The national and regional programmes and action plans for food security provide an ideal framework for such investment.

16. Smallholder farmers are the backbone of agriculture. They need to receive information in a way that is timely, useful and relevant to their situations. Extension services should ensure that best practices in agricultural production are disseminated. If farmers receive support that is appropriate and timely, they will produce more and better food.

17. The region is diverse. Some countries have natural resources and others have resources to invest. Private sector investment requires a stable environment. Some countries have internal issues which should be discussed in a pragmatic way. Some countries have laws that do not encourage investment. These issues could be addressed by agreeing on a regional code of conduct for responsible agricultural investment. The CFS-led consultations on Responsible Agricultural Investment can provide the framework for such an agreement.

18. Policy recommendations should take into account analysis of what has happened in the past, what the successes and failures have been and what impact they have had. Prices in the years to come will be higher and more volatile so regional cooperation should take this into consideration.

19. Projects that are targeted at smallholder farmers should be sustainable and stable. Human capacity development, technology, health and education are all important. The participation of women and youth should be encouraged.

D. GENDER, FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION RECOMMENDATIONS

20. Promote capacity building in the implementation of gender sensitive interventions, through the development of national guidelines by the national institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture.

21. Raise awareness of and advocate for women's rights at regional, national and local levels, with a view to promoting the enforcement of existing legal frameworks such as women's rights to land ownership.

22. Strengthen capacities to collect gender disaggregated data, ensuring standardization of methodologies in order to collect comparable data.

23. Establish a multi-stakeholder network to promote exchange of experiences, knowledge and technologies promoting gender and nutrition.

24. Promote the utilization of innovative tools in addressing gender empowerment and nutrition, working in partnership with national government to explore the scalability of similar initiatives.