



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME  
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NEAR EAST**

**Eleventh Session**

**Rome, Italy, FAO Headquarters**

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Transformation of Food Systems for Sustainable Food for Better Health**

*(Prepared by the Regional Coordinator and the FAO and WHO Regional Offices)*

## **1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

1.1. With the rising burden of non-communicable diseases worldwide from both the public health and economic perspectives, the urgent need for reshaping our food systems at national and regional level as we strive towards accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 has become evident.

1.2. In 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) lead to almost 41 million deaths each year, equivalent to 71% of all deaths globally<sup>1</sup>. Each year, more than 15 million people between the ages of 30 and 69 years die from a NCD.

1.3. Malnutrition in all its forms takes a heavy toll on the health, well-being and sustainable development of populations in the region. The countries of the Near East region face the double burden of malnutrition — where undernutrition co-exists with increasingly common overweight and obesity.

1.4. It is well established that dietary changes towards a healthier diet are likely to result in major health benefits, which are often linked also to environmental and economic benefits. Many countries have strengthened their national capacity, leadership, governance, multi-sectoral action and partnerships to accelerate country action for preventing and controlling nutrition related NCDs. Several efforts have been made at national level to improve the availability and accessibility of healthy, safe and sustainable foods and to ensure that the food is desirable to people within their particular taste and food habits.

1.5. In addition, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, as a joint program of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO), aims to protect the consumer's health by setting up international food standards.

1.6. The Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary uses (CCNFSDU) addresses a wide range of technical and regulatory issues for foods that can contribute to the prevention of nutritional deficiencies and diet-related non-communicable diseases. The Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) sets standards and guidelines for nutrition information on food packages enabling consumers to make informed food choices. Thus, the Codex committees are crucial instruments for influencing the food system and achieving international consensus on nutrition-related and food safety issues.

1.7. In Saudi Arabia, there was an alarming increment in NCD-related mortality (73%) in 2018 (WHO). Therefore, in line with Saudi Arabia's vision for 2030 and in light of the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations to reduce NCDs, Saudi Arabia has enacted different initiatives in order to tackle the prevalence of NCDs.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/topic-details/GHO/ncd-mortality>

1.8. In collaboration with other governmental sectors and stakeholders (private sectors), the Saudi Food and Drug Administration (SFDA) has launched a Healthy Food Strategy (HFS) with a vision of “A healthy nutrition pattern contributes to the promotion of public health”. The HFS mission is described as “improving the nutritional value of food products and raise awareness of healthy food to promote healthy nutrition patterns in accordance with the best international practices”.

1.9. SFDA has started working on different initiatives in order to promote public health, by setting different regulations and standards to reduce the amount of sugar, salt and fats (SSF) in all food products. As per WHO these nutrients play a substantial role in the prevalence of obesity and NCDs.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

2.1. In line with the aforementioned global, regional and national context, the keynote address by SFDA will highlight the regional and national nutritional interventions towards providing sustainable food, which will have an impact on nutrition and health outcomes within the community.

2.2. This topic addresses government and mission representatives, policy-makers and stakeholders from countries in the region, who have implemented or would like to implement policy actions for **Sustainable Food for Better Health**.

2.3. The subsequent discussion aims to raise awareness; stimulate engagement of food policy makers related to improving the nutritional value of food products, and proposing recommendations to tackle the prevalence of nutrition related diseases through effective food and nutritional regulations across countries in the region.