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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-fourth Session

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Summary Report of Recommendations of FAO Regional Bodies and Major Meetings in the Near East

Executive Summary

FAO's regional programme has conducted numerous thematic statutory committees and commissions. These events are key in providing a platform for countries across the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region to engage in dialogue and deliberate on the collective direction of the committees'/commissions' thematic area of work. The events synthesize a series of suggested priorities and provide recommendations aimed at driving national and/or regional policies.

This document highlights the topics discussed and the recommendations made throughout the 2016-2017 biennium, by the Regional Committees'/Commissions' in the NENA region. Participants in the Regional Conference for NENA may wish to keep these issues in mind when considering the common course of drafting recommendations and suggesting actions to FAO's Conference and Council. The Commission meetings considered include the Twenty-third Session of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC); the Ninth Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI); and the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC) and the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO). The document also presents the outcomes of major meetings, in particular the Fourth Arab Water Forum, the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development and the Regional Nutrition Symposium.

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Matters to be brought to the attention of the Regional Conference:

The Conference may wish to:

- take note of the main outcomes of the Regional Commissions' sessions and major meetings held in the NENA region in the 2016-2017 biennium;
- call upon member countries and FAO to implement key recommendations arising from these meetings in relation to policy and regulatory matters as well as programme and budget matters.

I. NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION (NEFRC)

1. The Twenty-third Session of NEFRC was held in Beirut, Lebanon, 11–14 December 2017. It was attended by 19 representatives from 13 member countries and two representatives from global intergovernmental organizations. The commission develops recommendations for the draft agenda of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO), for the attention of the Regional Conference and for the programme priorities for FAO in forestry; considering global developments within and outside of FAO.

2. In relation to policy and regulatory matters, the Commission:

- invited countries to enhance work on dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems and encouraged the nomination of national experts to participate in the COFO Working Group on Dryland Forests and Agrosilvopastoral Systems;
- considered the development of a regional rangelands strategy and a harmonized definition for rangelands in the region and encouraged investments addressing land tenure issues and supporting community action towards sustainable and participatory management of rangelands;
- called on Members to raise the awareness of policy-makers and urban planners for promoting the role of UPF as an essential element of sustainable cities and in the implementation of SDG 11, and requested FAO to support regional collaboration in UPF through development of regional networks and exchange of experiences;
- called on countries to contribute actively to the global processes, including to promote and monitor progress on the forest-related indicators and to report on progress during the High-level Political Forum review of SDG 15 in 2018;
- encouraged countries to mobilize national resources for co-financing large-scale projects and ensure the sustainability of investments to meet the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Global Environment Facility (GEF) -7 funding requirements;
- requested countries to participate actively in the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA 2020) reporting process, including in the review and validation of the remote sensing products;
- encouraged countries to develop activities related to youth and women entrepreneurship in bio-economy as a means to address the challenges faced by forests in the context of global changes and to create job opportunities;
- invited countries to strengthen their participation in the Near East Network on Forest Health and Invasive Species and contribute to the activities of this network to strengthen regional collaboration on forest health and control of invasive species in the region.

- invited countries to consider the recommendations of the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and to take appropriate actions;
 - invited countries to promote integrated urban planning that maintains optimal balance between the green and the built environment and encourage investments in the development and sustainable management of UPF;
 - encouraged countries to strengthen coordination efforts and collaboration on forest health and the control of transboundary invasive species;
 - encouraged countries to continue their efforts in implementing sustainable forest management and restoration as the forest sectors' contribution to the mainstreaming of biodiversity;
 - encouraged countries to invest more in addressing land tenure, building capacities of communities and supporting community actions towards sustainable and participatory management of rangelands;
 - encouraged countries' engagement in the proposed GEF-7 Impact Program to address the commitments under the Agadir Commitment and complement countries' baseline efforts on the sustainable management of forests and rangelands.
3. In relation to programme and budget matters, the Commission recommended that FAO:
- identify, document and disseminate best practices regarding food security mainstreaming in forestry;
 - implement assessment programmes to determine the extent of rangelands in the Near East countries, their contribution to gross domestic product and value their goods and services including in food security and nutrition, carbon sequestration, annual feed balance, job and income creation, poverty reduction, recreation and ecotourism;
 - organize regional and national workshops to further develop the capacities of Members on preparation of GCF and GEF-7 projects and impact programmes;
 - facilitate experience sharing between countries across dryland regions on successful practices and technologies for drylands forests and rangelands monitoring, their sustainable management and restoration using quality seed of adapted native species and water harvesting techniques;
 - support countries in aligning their national forest and rangelands policies/strategies with the SDGs;
 - continue supporting the Near East Network on Forest Health and Invasive Species in the implementation of its activities;
 - provide technical support in accessing the required financial resources and mechanisms to support implementation of the developed reforestation and restoration plans.

II. REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR FISHERIES (RECOFI)

4. The Ninth Session of RECOFI was held in Kuwait City, Kuwait, 9–11 May 2017. The Session was attended by delegates from RECOFI member countries in addition to the representatives from regional institutions, academia and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Commission reviewed the progress with the intersessional period activities and discussed likely mechanisms to improve the overall effectiveness of RECOFI in addition to the Programme of Work and Commission Budget for 2017–2018.

5. In relation to policy and regulatory matters, the Commission:

- agreed on the inclusion of the main decisions and recommendations of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and the Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) to the regular meetings of the Subsidiary Bodies of the Commission (i.e. the Working Groups);
 - called upon member countries to consider becoming a party to the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, known as the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA). Furthermore, the Secretariat made a reference to the First Meeting of the Parties to the PSMA, scheduled for 29–31 May 2017 in Oslo, Norway;
 - endorsed the proposal of the Working Group on Fishery Management (WGFM) to add two mullet species to the priority list, namely Klunzinger's mullet (*Liza klunzingeri* [Day, 1888]), and Greenback mullet (*Liza subviridis* [Valenciennes, 1836]). The Commission recognized possible difficulties in properly identifying each species in data collection, but stressed that this decision is paving the way for progressively developing capacity to disaggregate statistics;
 - reaffirmed adequacy of the Recommendation on Minimum Data Reporting in the RECOFI area (RECOFI/6/2011/1) for monitoring and facilitating management decisions;
 - regarding the proposed geographic subdivisions to be endorsed as a RECOFI standard (i.e. split the FAO subarea 51.3 into divisions 51.3.1 - Oman Sea - and 51.3.2 - Arabian Sea [Southwestern]), the Commission was of the opinion that it had not enough background information and requested the WGFM to reconsider the issue in its next meeting;
 - agreed to proceed with the standard FAO aquaculture data questionnaires for use at national and regional levels, which cover most of the requirements in the Recommendation on Minimum Reporting on Aquaculture Data and Information (RECOFI/8/2015/1);
 - acknowledged that, for capture fisheries data, the Regional Aquaculture Information System (RAIS) will have to adapt its information system capacity to handle the submission, management and dissemination of aquaculture data submitted under Recommendation RECOFI/8/2015/1;
 - suggested, for the effective functioning of the Commission, two possible scenarios for consideration: i) maintain RECOFI activities within the current budget and reduced FAO support or; ii) strengthen RECOFI to function with an increased budget and secretariat. The Commission agreed on the official submission of the FAO Review (2005–2015) document, which elaborates on the key challenges and performance of RECOFI, to the respective ministers of each member country for further decision and guidance. In this regard, the organization of an ad hoc session was considered as an appropriate occasion to achieve a final decision.
6. In relation to programme and budget matters, the Commission:
- adopted the proposal of the secretariat to organize the regular meetings of the subsidiary bodies on a biennial basis, with the aim of allocating the budget to more technical activities;
 - adopted a limited number of activities both for the WGFM and the Working Group on Aquaculture (WGA), mainly because of budget constraints;
 - took note that the host country order adopted by the First Session of RECOFI (2001) had been completed; in this regard the Commission suggested, subject to a final confirmation by member countries to restart the second cycle in alphabetical order.

III. COMMISSION FOR CONTROLLING THE DESERT LOCUST IN THE CENTRAL REGION (CRC) AND IN THE WESTERN REGION (CLCPRO)

7. The Thirtieth Session of the CRC was held in Muscat, Oman, 19–24 February 2017. The session was attended by 19 delegates, 15 member countries, the FAO Locust Group and three Desert Locust organizations. The Commission reviewed the intersessional work, including the Commission's administrative and financial reports and adopted the work programme for 2017 and 2018 in addition to reviewing the Report of Desert Locust Situation from November 2014 to February 2017 and an outlook until summer 2017. The session made the recommendations below:

8. In relation to policy and regulatory matters, the Commission recommended:

- for collaboration on Desert Locust Management to continue between the following Commissions and Organizations: CRC, CLCPRO, the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in Southwest Asia (SWAC) and the Desert Locust Control Organization for Eastern Africa (DLCO-EA);
- participation in the Pesticides Storage Management System (PSMS), to be held in Morocco, with member countries nominating the appropriate staff to participate;
- that delegates of member countries follow up with the Desert Locust Information Officers to send their contact details and available resources in their monthly bulletin;
- that the Desert Locust Information Service (DLIS) be requested to send periodical reports to member countries on their Desert Locust reporting quality;
- that the Commission support the organization of national training courses on Desert Locust survey and control operations and on the repair and maintenance of spray equipment in member countries.

9. In relation to programme and budget matters, the Commission:

- agreed to
 - organize a simulation of Desert Locust contingency planning in Egypt in 2018, for frontline countries;
 - provide frontline member countries with an additional blood testing kit "Test Mate" and *Acetylcholinesterase* (AChE) Assay Kit;
 - organize a regional workshop and encourage countries on the use of *Metarhizium anisopliae* var. *acridium* (Green Muscle®) in Desert Locust control operations;
 - organize a regional workshop to assess the progress made in the implementation of the Environment and Health standards in 2018; and
 - organize a regional training course on Aerial spraying for Desert Locust control in cooperation with the DLCO-EA;
- urged frontline countries to regularly provide the Secretariat of the Commission with information on Desert Locust staff blood testing results;
- requested frontline countries to provide a work plan on the implementation of the Environment and Health Standards as per national priorities and implementation facilities (technically and financially) according to the recommendations of the third regional workshop held in Egypt in September 2016;

- endorsed, through its member countries, the amendments to the establishment agreement of the Commission; expenditure reports for 2015 and 2016 and the work plan for 2016–2018;
- authorized the Secretary of the Commission, in consultation with the Chairperson, to cover the cost of implementing any activities that are not reflected in the Commission’s 2017–2018 work plan;
- also endorsed, through its member countries, the provision of Budget Holder responsibilities to the Secretary of the Commission for the Trust Fund of the Commission subject to the rules and regulations of FAO.

IV. SECTORAL MEETING OF LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES (LAS) AND UNITED NATIONS (UN) COOPERATION

10. The Thirteenth Meeting of the Sectoral Cooperation between UN and LAS was held in Cairo, Egypt, 23-25 October 2017. The objective of the meeting was to develop a work plan of cooperation between the various UN agencies and specialized LAS institutions, such as the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTM), the Arab Women Organization (AWO), the Arab Labor Organization (ALO), and a few others.

11. Major results from the meeting were the following:

- concrete steps and actions have to be taken to finalize the narrative that would address the SDG indicator 6.4.3 to be presented at the SDGs High-level Political Forum meeting in July 2018;
- the Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) would be the proper coordination mechanism for the UN Water and LAS. For the joint UN-LAS mechanism of coordination to address water-related issues it was suggested to establish a “Working Group on Water” within the Regional Coordination Mechanism in the Arab Region;
- a UN-LAS cooperation matrix has been developed with specific activities/projects and time frame, following a results-based approach.

V. ARAB WATER FORUM

12. The Fourth Edition of the Arab Water Forum was organized in Cairo, Egypt, 26-28 November 2017, under the main theme “Sharing Water...Sharing Destiny”. The event brought together more than 350 participants from 23 countries, including national, regional and international experts, governmental professionals, parliamentarians, private sector, civil society, media and decision-makers.

13. The objective of the Forum was to engage in interactive discussions and debates about the state of the art of knowledge and experience regarding the following five subthemes: i) water and sustainable development; ii) water, food, energy and climate nexus; iii) water quality and ecosystem livelihoods; iv) sustainable solutions for shared water resources; and v) water and science, technology and innovation. The outcome of this regional water forum will be reported to the Eighth World Water Forum that will be held in in Brazil, in March 2018.

14. The main messages emerging from the various sessions of the Forum can be summarized as follows:

- the proportion of the population affected by water scarcity is defined in SDG 6 but no separate indicator exists. If generated, this would be highly relevant for Arab countries;

- the Arab Water Security Strategy needs to be updated to accommodate the SDG indicators and resources required for its action plan;
- non-conventional water resources play an important role in filling the supply-demand gap. However, high energy is needed for the various desalination or treatment processes. Optimal solutions for their different uses (in agriculture, urban and other sectors) require a nexus approach between water, energy and their uses;
- transparency and data sharing in transboundary water do not undermine upstream country sovereignty;
- developing national strategies for the use of solar energy, considering the comparative advantage of the sunshine hours in Arab countries, is pivotal to future development in the region;
- successful capacity development to advance knowledge and skills through knowledge-sharing and technological platforms are expected to bring institutional and behavioural changes.

VI. HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON CLIMATE CHANGE ASSESSMENT AND ADAPTATION IN THE ARAB REGION

15. Within the framework of the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR), coordinated by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the eleven RICCAR implementing partner organizations (including FAO through its Water Scarcity Initiative) held the “High-level Conference on Climate Change Assessment and Adaptation in the Arab Region” in Beirut, Lebanon, 26-28 September 2017

16. The objective of the High-level Conference was to launch the “Arab Climate Change Assessment Report” as well as a series of technical outputs and training materials on regional climate modelling, hydrological modelling, vulnerability assessment and climate change adaptation in the Arab region.

17. Major outputs from the High-level Conference were the following:

- nine reports and six training modules have been made available in the public domain;
- a project for the establishment of a Regional Knowledge Hub with all RICCAR data has been agreed with ESCWA;
- a work plan for the dissemination and utilization of the RICCAR products at country level has been drafted.

VII. SIDE EVENT ON “WATER SCARCITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE” AT THE 40TH SESSION OF THE FAO CONFERENCE

18. During the 40th Session of the FAO Conference, held in Rome, Italy, 3-8 July 2017, a side event was dedicated to ‘Water Scarcity and Climate Change’, on 4 July 2017, in partnership between FAO and LAS.

19. The objective of this side event was to gather perspectives and experiences from countries in addressing food security and water scarcity in the context of climate change, to discuss possible response options and to make recommendations to achieve higher and more sustainable food security levels under water scarcity in the NENA region and beyond.

20. Major highlights and recommendations from the side event were the following:
- there is clear recognition of water scarcity as a key limiting factor towards sustainable development and food security in the region and that climate change is a threat multiplier;
 - the new Strategic Programme of FAO, and its Regional Water Scarcity Initiative, is supporting effectively the countries in coping with these challenges;
 - each country of the region has its own particular experience in dealing with water scarcity. The Regional Collaborative Platform of the Water Scarcity Initiative will serve to promote exchanges of experience and knowledge between countries;
 - key institutions within countries and FAO should strengthen their partnership to accelerate the responses to offset water scarcity consequences and the anticipated negative impact of climate change.

VIII. ARAB FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

21. ESCWA convened the 2017 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development in Rabat, Morocco, 3-5 May 2017. The theme of the Forum was “Advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing Arab Region”.

22. The FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE) and ESCWA jointly organized a special panel session within the 2017 Arab Forum to discuss the prospects of achieving food security in the Arab region within the 2030 Agenda and with the overall aim of eradicating poverty and achieving SDGs.

23. The main messages from the special panel session were:

- peace and stability in the region are key for achieving the SDGs including food security;
- as the Arab region is still largely dependent on food imports to feed the ever-growing population, countries in the region should increase investments in the agricultural sector and sustainable food systems;
- reducing food waste and losses, increased investment, promoting regional integration and technological transformation are among the necessary conditions for achieving food security.

IX. REGIONAL NUTRITION SYMPOSIUM

24. The First Session of the Regional Nutrition Symposium was co-organized by RNE and the World Health Organization (WHO) in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP), ESCWA, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Muscat, Oman, 11–12 December 2017. The Symposium was attended by delegates of 16 member countries, CFS, ESCWA, LAS, academia and NGOs.

25. The Symposium was organized under the theme of “Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition”. The objectives of the Symposium were to take stock of the regional dimension/specificity of food security and nutrition challenges; and facilitate the development of policy actions in line with the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) Framework for Action.

26. The participants identified the major nutrition priorities and recommendations for their respective countries and what role the UN agencies could play in supporting delivery against those priorities.

27. The priorities and recommendations of this symposium will be shared with all regional directors of the UN agencies and international institutes involved in the preparation of the Symposium, and they will be presented to higher policy and governance mechanisms, in particular, the 34th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East in April 2018; and the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group originating from the Regional Coordination Meeting (RCM).

X. REGIONAL EVENTS ON SMALL-SCALE FAMILY FARMING

28. There were three major regional events within the framework of the FAO Regional Initiative on Small-scale Family Farming: i) Academy for Decent Work for Youth in the Rural Economy (Egypt, October 2016); ii) Regional Launch of the Farmer Field School Guidebook (Jordan, November 2016) and iii) the Technical Meeting on Social Protection for Poverty Reduction in the NENA Region (Lebanon, March 2017).

29. Recommendations focused on fostering opportunities for young people to start profitable agribusinesses as well as empowering women and producers' organizations; the development of social protection systems; and coordination through a Regional UN Social Protection Working Group.