Building Resilience to Enhance Food Security and Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa (FSN)

Regional Initiative on Building Resilience for Food Security
**FAO’s new strategic framework**

Starting in 2012, FAO went through a strategic thinking process to elaborate, from the global trends, the conditions under which agricultural development is foreseen to take place. FAO’s core functions and comparative advantages of being a knowledge-based agricultural agency are shaping the mechanisms through which these challenges are tackled.

As a result of this process, a transformational change is expected to take place, to shape the role of FAO in assisting the beneficiary countries in order to enhance delivery and impact of the various FAO programmes under the aegis of its mandate. These programmes are committed to reflect regional priorities, through a precise results-based approach. During this process, various strategies and guiding principles have been developed for improved collaboration within the UN system, with non-governmental and civil society organizations, and with the private sector. Furthermore, major changes have been introduced in order to enhance the ability of FAO’s decentralized offices to deliver activities. These changes have led to an improved process of regional prioritization and an enhanced ability to respond to regional priorities in a more effective and timely manner.

As part of the process of formulating FAO’s new Strategic Framework, the three main goals of the Organization were revised and five strategic objectives were developed.

**Three Main Goals**

- eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition;
- elimination of poverty and the driving forward of economic and social progress for all; and
- sustainable management and utilization of natural resources, including land, water, air, climate and genetic resources for the benefit of present and future generations.
Five Strategic Objectives

- **Strategic Objective 1:** Help eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition
- **Strategic Objective 2:** Make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable
- **Strategic Objective 3:** Reduce rural poverty
- **Strategic Objective 4:** Enable inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems
- **Strategic Objective 5:** Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises

Working modalities

FAO creates and shares significant information about food, agriculture and natural resources in the form of global public goods, making sure that this is not a one-way flow. FAO also plays a ‘connector role’ through identifying and engaging with various partners, and facilitating a dialogue between those who have the knowledge and those needing it. By turning knowledge into action, FAO fosters a mutually reinforcing cycle between the field and national, regional and global initiatives. By joining forces, FAO facilitates partnerships for food and nutrition security, agriculture and rural development between governments, development partners, civil society and the private sector.

An innovative modality has been the establishment of the ‘Regional Initiatives’ as a mechanism to provide ‘focus’ on the regional priorities leveraging on a set of key approaches, listed in the following box.
Key approaches

- Putting information within reach and supporting the transition to sustainable agriculture
- Strengthening political will and sharing policy expertise
- Bolstering public-private collaboration to improve smallholder agriculture
- Bringing knowledge to the field
- Supporting countries to prevent and mitigate risks

The FAO’s competitive advantage as ‘implementing agency’

- FAO is a global knowledge organization that is specialized in providing policy assistance and technical cooperation to its Member Countries. Partnering with FAO offers access to best practices and lessons learned from projects in the field conducted both by the Organization and by others.
- FAO has a dedicated multidisciplinary workforce able to provide technical assistance in a large variety of technical disciplines in support of project implementation to ensure world-class technical standards.
- FAO’s technical expertise and administrative support capacity are strategically deployed both in its headquarters and throughout its entire decentralized network of offices at regional, sub-regional and country level.
Six Regional Priorities

During the 2012 FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, the following priorities were identified:

- enhancing food security and nutrition and strengthening capacity to address vulnerability;
- protecting and managing scarce and fragile natural resources and adapting to climate change;
- fostering sustainable and inclusive agricultural production;
- enhancing livelihoods of rural people, smallholders and vulnerable populations;
- developing efficient, sustainable and competitive food systems and reducing food losses and waste; and
- increasing resilience of livelihood systems of communities and ecosystems to threats and crises.

Besides the regional priority areas, three main cross-cutting themes have also been identified to further support the actions that will lead to the achievement of regional goals. They are: (i) knowledge generation and sharing; (ii) gender equity; and (iii) regional cooperation.

Three Regional Initiatives

Three Regional Initiatives have been formulated in the NENA region. They reflect the priorities expressed by the Member Countries and are based on the principles of country ownership, participation and partnership. They focus on innovations and enhanced collaboration between the countries of the region, and emphasise the need for multidisciplinary approaches to addressing problems, both with Member Countries and with regional and international partners. Regional initiatives rely on Delivery Teams that include professionals at both the decentralized offices and at headquarters.
This Regional Initiative aims at supporting countries of the region in their efforts to achieve their goals in food security and nutrition while being exposed to challenges of acute vulnerabilities, shocks and stresses. Priorities of individual countries in the region reflect a shared need for building resilience not only to cope with these vulnerabilities, shocks and stresses but also to tap into opportunities for strengthening long-term capabilities. The Initiative focuses on building resilient food security and nutrition institutions, markets and production systems. It emphasises a multidisciplinary approach integrating the political, economic, social and environmental dimensions that are essential to achieving development in complex, multi-hazard risk situations. In so doing, the Initiative will combine emergency assistance – where early action is essential to assist those requiring immediate attention – with longer-term development goals that attend to the needs of the country and its progress in the future. It will also enhance access to relevant information in the region with the aim of increasing collaboration and policy coordination among Member Countries.

The overall objective of this Regional Initiative is to support countries in reducing rural poverty in the region through a cohesive programme addressing small-scale agriculture development. It will address the challenges of small-scale agriculture using a three-pronged approach: (i) improve the understanding of various types of smallholders, their labour dimensions, linkages with markets and barriers in order to support evidence-based policy and strategies and to prioritize interventions as well as better target public and private investment; (ii) sustainably improve productivity, quality, value addition, social sustainability and viability of the sector; and (iii) empower smallholders engaged in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, including strengthening professional organizations and supporting the creation of decent rural employment opportunities for youth and women.
The Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity has been formulated to support the countries of the NENA region to cope with one of their most striking challenges: the pursuit of food and water securities, for a sustainable social and economic development, under an unprecedented severe escalation of water scarcity. The objectives of the Initiative are: enhancing policies, investments, governance and best practices to sustainably increase water and land productivity; providing tools for strategic planning of optimal and sustainable allocation of scarce water resources; and implementing a regional collaborative strategy for a water-reform agenda.

**NENA Region**

**Countries of the NENA region:** Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Emirates, Yemen, West Bank and Gaza.
Rationale

Countries in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region have been exposed to a wide range of recurrent natural and human-induced shocks including a high incidence of conflicts and protracted crises; climate change impacts, including frequent occurrence of droughts and flash floods; increasing water scarcity, food safety hazards and volatility in international food prices as well as frequent outbreaks of transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases. These factors are compounding the structural food security and nutrition challenges that countries in the region have been facing in an attempt to achieve their goals of eradicating hunger and malnutrition, while managing and using their natural resources in an environmentally sustainable manner. The high population growth rates, averaging over 2.2 percent per annum for the region as a whole, and the growing urbanization are putting heavy pressure on the demand for food and water. At the same time, the limited and fragile natural resource base and the declining rate of agricultural productivity in general constitute major limitations to the domestic supply of food, making the region highly dependent on imports for basic staple foods and highly vulnerable to hikes and volatility in international food prices and to other negative externalities.

FOOD INSECURITY

![Bar chart showing food insecurity in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and West Bank and Gaza Strip.]

- Yemen: 5 million food insecure, 12 million total population
- Syria: 6.8 million food insecure, 9.8 million total population
- Iraq: 2.8 million food insecure, 1.4 million total population

[No. of food insecure people (in millions)]

- Yemen: 12 million
- Syria: 9.8 million
- Iraq: 2.8 million
- West Bank and Gaza Strip: 1.4 million
A regional approach to building resilience to crises and shocks in the Near East and North Africa region

Building resilience to these various threats and mitigating the risks they pose to food security and nutrition, and beyond that to peace, stability and economic development of the region, are crucial. An Agenda for Food Security and Nutrition Resilience in the NENA would require action on three levels:

i) building an evidence base to better understand the driving factors beyond the various threats, the associated risks they pose to food security and nutrition;

ii) in the short term, adopting and implementing strategies and programmes that protect and support agriculture, food and nutrition through building the resilience of communities and institutions while addressing, at the same time, the underlying long-term factors driving risks, disasters and crises; and

iii) promoting regional cooperation to collectively address crises and shocks in the region.
Collaborative multi-stakeholder approach and regional cooperation

The Regional Initiative builds on existing initiatives and programmes on FSN in the region, including the Arab Emergency Food Security Programme of the Arab League, the Regional Initiative on “Arab Agricultural Investment in Sudan for Bridging the Food Gap and Achieving Arab Food Security” and the work of the Thematic Group on Food Security of the UN Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM). It supports policy setting bodies such as the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League and the regional multi-stakeholder forum on food security and nutrition to enhance their contributions to increase resilience of livelihoods to the multiple threats and crises the region is prone to. It also builds on and supports ongoing FAO programmes and policy processes at country and sub-regional levels, in particular, on food security and nutrition, bringing resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRR/M) planning and policy formulation to the fore.

Five focus areas

The Regional Initiative features the following five key areas for action:

- Strengthening capacities for developing coherent policy and institutional frameworks for sustainable food security and nutrition;
- Developing reliable food security data and information and knowledge exchange for decision support systems;
- Promoting the development of efficient and sustainable food systems, with particular focus on reducing food losses and waste;
- Promoting sustainable access of households and communities to safe, nutritious and diversified food; and
- Building the resilience of households, communities and agro-eco systems to anticipate, absorb and recover from the negative impacts of human-induced and natural shocks.

The focus countries are as follows:

- Syria crisis-affected countries (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq);
- Crises-prone countries (Sudan, Yemen, West Bank and Gaza Strip);
- Countries in transition (Mauritania and Egypt);
- Countries highly vulnerable to changes in external food supplies (two countries will be selected on a pilot basis).
**Key partners**

The Regional Initiative promotes dialogue and partnerships with key players in the region, including governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia, UN agencies and other development partners active in the region to jointly address the challenges identified and help countries to achieve tangible results in pursuit of their goals of eradicating hunger.

**In practice: Examples of Projects and Actions**

**AT REGIONAL LEVEL**

**Establishment of an inclusive food security information network to strengthen emergency food security and livelihood support interventions in countries affected by the Syria Crisis**

**Donor:** OFDA and FAO

**Partners:** iMMAP, Governments of countries involved, NGOs

**Objective:** The programme seeks to establish a common understanding of the food and nutrition security situation for the region and to share it with stakeholders involved in food and nutrition security in the Syria-crisis-affected countries (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq).
Regional Network for Food Loss and Waste Reduction

**Donor:** FAO

**Partners:** FAO member country Ministries, and all relevant stakeholders in the field of food losses and waste (FL&W)

**Objective:** The NENA Regional Food Loss and Waste Reduction Network is a multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder platform for knowledge, information, and experience exchange developed to support efforts for FL&W reduction in the region. In addition to serving as a knowledge and data hub, the purpose of the Network is to complement and support national initiatives which will allow FAO and its partners to develop evidence-based action plans for reducing FL&W, with a clear baseline, objectives, indicators and targets.

**Policy dialogue on Food Security and Nutrition**

Based on the recommendations of the 30th and 31st FAO Regional Conferences for the Near East (NERC-30 and NERC-31), RNE, in collaboration with the CFS secretariat and the members of the RCM thematic Working Group on Food Security and Nutrition, organizes annual Regional Multi-Stakeholder Workshops (RMSW) on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN). These fora provide a platform for policy dialogue where member countries, donors, financial institutions, regional organizations, CSOs, private sector, UN System, academia and research institutions, and other participants can discuss FSN challenges in the region, propose solutions, and exchange with the Committee on World Food Security’s (CFS) Sessions.
AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Focus Area 1: Strengthening capacities for developing coherent risk-informed policy frameworks and investment programmes for sustainable food security and nutrition at the national and regional levels

FAO has been providing leadership and technical support to the implementation of the National Food Security and Nutrition policy document in Sudan as well as providing support and inputs to develop the national food security strategy in Yemen. Under this focus area, FAO has also supported the dialogue on the development of agriculture-related strategies in Egypt and Sudan.

Focus Area 2: Establishing evidence-based food security information systems and knowledge exchange for decision making processes

Food Security Policy and Strategy Capacity Building Programme (Sudan)
Food Security Information Systems Development Programme (Yemen)

Donor: European Commission (EC)


Objective: Strengthen national-level collection and analysis of key food security information to bolster policy/decision-making (Sudan, Yemen).

Current and past work on strengthening food security information and early warning systems (FSEWS) demonstrates that the efficient evidence-based food security information and knowledge exchange through the provision of timely and reliable data, information and objective analysis are prerequisites for policy formulation as well as indispensable tools for effective response planning and programming. The project aims to strengthen FSEWS through policy support, data collection and analysis on market infor-
Information system, integrated food security analysis/IPC, crop production monitoring, livestock and fisheries monitoring, natural resources monitoring. Furthermore it plans to disseminate information to help build a solid institutional framework. These endeavours will support both humanitarian response efforts and long term resilience building policies and programmes.

**Focus Area 3: Establishing efficient and sustainable food systems, with specific attention to reducing food losses and waste and sustainable access of households to safe, nutritious and diversified food**

**Capacity building for food losses reduction in the Near East (Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon)**

**Donor:** FAO

**Partners:** Ministries of Agriculture in the four project countries, national research institutions.

**Objective:** Strengthen national capacity of leaders of local producer associations, food industry managers, and extension agents on improved value chain management in order to prevent avoidable food losses, thereby preserving the economic and nutritional value of food.

This project will contribute to improved value chains and sustainable food systems in four countries by improving their capacity to reduce inefficiencies, thereby reducing food losses, increasing options for marketing and increasing incomes for growers, handlers, processors, distributors and marketers. Additionally, the project will carry out food losses assessments in selected value chains, develop food losses prevention curricula and guidelines, and conduct a series of capacity building workshops on reducing inefficiencies in value chains. Opportunities for replication and scaling-up will be explored, including developing coherent, evidence-based national food losses and waste reduction plans.
Focus Area 4: Promoting sustainable access of households and communities to safe, nutritious and diversified food

Improving household food and nutrition security in Egypt by targeting women and the youth (Egypt)

Donor: Italy

Partners: Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social solidarity, NGOs

Objective: Improve the nutritional status of children and households in the poorest villages in Egypt.

The project aims to assist the Government of Egypt, its relevant institutions, and the communities in improving the food and nutrition security of vulnerable households, by improving the skills of women and the youth in food production, small animal husbandry, and other food related and entrepreneurial activities in addition to increasing their level of knowledge about nutrition through education and Behaviour Change Communication Plans. Moreover, the project will assist the Government of Egypt in achieving the objective of improving the nutritional status of infants and young children through creating a food-secure environment in which women and the youth have access to sufficient and diversified food of both animal and vegetable sources and have the necessary knowledge of food to consume nutritionally adequate diets.
Focus Area 5: Strengthening resilience of households and communities and agro-eco systems to anticipate, absorb and recover from the negative impacts of human-induced and natural shocks

Emergency vaccination and targeted feeding of livestock grazing in areas along the Syria-Lebanon border (Lebanon)

Donor: UK Department for International Development (DFID)

Partners: Ministry of Agriculture: Directorate of Animal Health; Directorate of Poultry Production; Directorate of Agricultural Extension

Objective: Prevent the spread of transboundary animal diseases (TADs) from Syria through targeted emergency vaccination campaigns and prevent further losses of livestock assets by feeding Bedouin herds grazing on degraded rangelands in areas of Lebanon bordering Syria.

Transboundary Animal Diseases (TADs) and food chain risks are major threats to people’s livelihoods, and to food security and nutrition in the region. As a part of FAO’s response to the impact of the conflict in Syria on neighbouring countries FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture of Lebanon have been jointly conducting a national mass livestock vaccination campaign against three major TADs, as well as providing quality feed to increase livestock production. The aim is to raise the income of poor smallholders, while protecting their livelihood assets. The implementation of Farmers Field Schools (FFS) facilitates learning and exchange of best practices and innovations, further enhancing farmers’ knowledge and productivity, and reinforcing their resilience to potential future shocks.
Prepare and respond to shocks affecting low resilience farmers and herders in West Bank and Gaza Strip

**Donor:** Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD)

**Objective:** Help protect and improve the food security and livelihood resilience of vulnerable and food-insecure communities in the WBGS, with particular focus on Area C, Seam Zone and Gaza Strip.

Preserving the productive capacity (natural, human and financial capitals) of farmers and herders through a series of interventions addressing multiple shocks is a pre-condition to building resilient livelihoods. A multi-year project framework allows for a variety of integrated interventions (e.g. construction/rehabilitation of water cisterns and wells, rainwater harvesting cisterns, animal diseases and plant pest control, land rehabilitation, provision of drought tolerant fodder seed varieties and winterization of animal sheds) that address a whole range of natural, environmental and political shocks that the low resilience farmers and herders in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are exposed to.

Emergency support to winter wheat and barley production in Syria

**Donor:** UK Department for International Development (DFID)

**Partners:** Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Syria Federation of Chambers of Agriculture

**Objective**

Improve food security, livelihood and nutrition conditions of vulnerable households living in crisis-affected areas through the provision of cereal seeds.

Wheat remains a key source of food in Syria and for farming families in particular. However, production has been severely affected by the crisis. In view of the significant agriculture production downfalls, supporting cereal production and associated livelihoods of millions of rural families is key to help alleviate the scarcity of bread, the basic food for poor people, and reduce dependency on imports and food aid. Additional support to backyard vegetable production will enhance food security and nutrition at household level and help avoid further deterioration of the quality of diet and micro-nutrient intake of those affected by the crisis.
Restore, improve, protect and sustain food and nutrition security and contribute to livelihood resilience of the most vulnerable communities in Blue Nile, South Kordofan and West Kordofan (Sudan)

**Donor:** Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)

**Partners:** Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Ministry of Animal Resources and Fisheries, NGOs

**Objective:** Reduce acute food insecurity of vulnerable people affected by conflict and natural disasters; restore and improve food and livelihood security of vulnerable households in Blue Nile and Kordofan States; restore and improve natural resources around IDP/refugee settlements and return areas and strengthen coordination among FSL sector members to build the capacity of national institutions and actors to prepare and effectively respond to the emerging needs of target beneficiaries.

Interventions are aimed at strengthening the self-reliance of vulnerable groups by enabling them to increasingly cover their own food requirements through increased production and income generation. Furthermore, FAO’s activities build the resilience of crisis-affected rural families and communities by protecting their livelihood assets (such as livestock and natural resources) upon which their food security is crucially dependant. In particular, the project focuses on improving access of vulnerable farming and herding families to productive assets, inputs and services, enabling them to increase their food security and sustain their livelihoods. These activities will also enhance the income generation capacities of particularly disadvantaged population groups, such as female-headed households, by providing diversified livelihood opportunities.
Support to quick impact food production and income generation (Iraq)

Donor: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Partners: Ministry of Agriculture, international and national NGOs

Objective: Reduce food and nutrition insecurity, create employment opportunities and increase income generated by vulnerable rural households (including smallholder and marginal farmers, agricultural wage earners and Iraqi IDPs) through support to domestic food production and rehabilitation of productive community assets.

Project activities focus on providing inputs to quickly improve household food availability and income (e.g. backyard poultry breeding, kitchen gardening and small ruminants). Due to the short production cycle of vegetables, multiple harvests are possible. This support is complemented by activities aimed at strengthening women’s technical skills, and will be implemented in cooperation with organizations addressing other constraints (in particular food nutrition and hygiene) of vulnerable households. Cash-for-work (in the form of cash transfers) – combined with the provision of necessary inputs, capacity building and technical support – provides a means to rebuild livelihoods and facilitate the acceptance of IDPs in their host communities, while creating employment opportunities, increasing purchasing power and improving access to food.
Support to the rehabilitation of the Desert Locust Monitoring and Control Centre (DLMCC) in Yemen

**Donor:** Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)

**Partners:** Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Desert Locust Monitoring and Control Centre (DLMCC)

**Objective:** to reactivate the Desert Locust Monitoring and Control Centre (DLMCC) to fulfil its regional and international agreement commitments of controlling desert locusts at breeding areas and implement a preventive control strategy.

Yemen is one of the key countries in the Central Region including important areas of the desert locust breeding habitat, situated in the south-eastern corner of the Red Sea coast. Prevailing insecurity and limited resources of national institutions are posing serious difficulties to and dissemination of information to allow an effective and operational Desert Locust Prevention Strategy.
Why investing in RI FSN?

The Near East and North Africa countries are highly dependent on food imports and are prone to numerous other vulnerabilities and shocks that pose serious challenges to their efforts to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. It is estimated that 79 million (11% of the total population) in the region are chronically undernourished and about 31% of children are stunted. Unbalanced access to food has long been considered as a major driver of instability in the region. Investment is required to enhance food security information systems, strengthen food security and risk governance and institutions, and build the resilience of farming communities and families. This will contribute to improving the food security and the nutritional status of the poor and most vulnerable people in society, as well as aiding social cohesion, stability and the overall resilience of countries in this region.

Contacts

Abdessalam OuldAhmed
NENA Regional Representative
Abdessalam.OuldAhmed@fao.org

Francesco Del Re
Senior Resilience Advisor
Francesco.DelRe@fao.org

Tatjana Popovic
Liaison and Operations Officer
Tatjana.PopovicManenti@fao.org