

**Press Release on**  
**Regional Workshop on Institution Building for Agriculture Policies in the**  
**Near East**

**6 to 7 December 2003 , Damascus , Syria**

The FAO in collaboration with the National Agricultural Policy Centre (NAPC) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform in Syria held a regional Workshop on Institution Building for Food and Agriculture Policies in the Near East on 6-7 December 2003 in Damascus, Syria. The workshop was opened by H.E. Adel Safar, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, H.E. Laura Mirachian, Ambassador of Italy to Syria, and H.E. Mahmood Taher, FAO Representative in Syria.

The workshop was attended by delegates from 15 countries of the Region, comprising Afghanistan, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen. Representatives from many intergovernmental organizations and several professional staff and consultants from FAO headquarter and FAO Regional Office for the Near East also participated in the meeting.

The main objective of this Workshop was to enhance the knowledge of participating institutions about the conditions for adequate technical and institutional capacity development for agricultural policy work; to disseminate information about the different possibilities of addressing policy analysis requirements; to better identify needs for and ways of improving existing situations and practices; and to facilitate regional and international cooperation in this regard.

The initial presentations by FAO highlighted the role of the agriculture sector in the economies of the Near East countries, the major constraints and challenges for its development and the critical policy challenges of the Region with respect to natural resource management, rural poverty, food security, market liberalization and trade policies and the institutional reforms. Furthermore, they reported the experience world-wide in developing capacities for food and agriculture policy analysis through the establishment or strengthening of units or organizations specially created with this goal and through programmes aimed at enhancing the knowledge, skills and attitudes of policy analysts or policy researchers. Examples were given of policy assistance by FAO, such as the formulation of agriculture and rural development strategies at the country level, the formulation of regional programmes of food security and enhancing countries' capacity in the multilateral trade negotiations on agriculture.

The participants also referred to their own experiences and made recommendations on desirable actions and programmes to be undertaken at the national level and at regional and international levels, such as continuing to share experiences, promoting exchange of technical experts among countries with similar interests and problems, networking among institutions in the region, both public sector institutions working in agriculture and rural development and academic and research institutes. They shared the views that natural resources management, increased investments in agriculture, rural poverty reduction, food security and participation in the trade negotiations are critical policy domains for which well functioning policy institutions and capable policy analysts are required. Developing the capacities for formulating, analyzing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies is considered a critical factor.

The Workshop has been an occasion to share experiences and views on the challenges being faced by countries in the Near East Region in achieving the goals of sustainable rural and agricultural development. Although many policy reforms have been carried out with positive results, the need remains for a suitable institutional and technical capacity for

responding to the requirements of formulating, analyzing, adjusting and monitoring policies for agricultural and rural development within the context of a changing domestic and international environment.

The Workshop was very well received by participants from the 15 countries. The presentations and discussions were fruitful and of high professional quality and culminated in a set of recommendations. Chief among them was the calling on the countries of the Region to draw lessons from their own experiences and establish links within the Region among institutions rendering policy analysis, more efforts are needed to develop adequate institutional and technical capabilities to establish priorities within well articulated policy options as part of a strategic framework for sustainable agricultural development and food security at the national and household levels and policy analysts in the Region are required to update their knowledge and capacities to provide timely and sound policy analysis.

The issue of sustainability of institutional functioning after the withdrawal or reduction of donors/partners in developments' participation was underlined and it was noted that the issue is well taken in the case of Syria. Nevertheless, it was admitted that there is no blue print for organizational set up for policy analysis institutions and hence models for institutional reforms and strengthening should be viewed as country specific depending on each country specific political and socioeconomic situation.

FAO and other partners in development are asked to continue working closely with the countries of the Region in identifying needs and developing the institutional and technical capacities of governments and other stakeholders in the area of agricultural policies analysis. However, countries may seek technical support for institutional buildings for the improvement and strengthening of agricultural policy formulation and analysis through preparing bankable projects for technical support for consideration by FAO and concerned partners of development. FAO can help in this process within the available resources, rules and regulations.