

Report of the

NINETEENTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Muscat, Oman, 13-17 March 1988



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

*FAO Member Nations in the Near East Region
(as of 17 March 1988)*

Afghanistan	Lebanon	Somalia
Algeria	Libya	Sudan
Bahrain	Mauritania	Syria
Cyprus	Morocco	Tunisia
Djibouti	Oman	Turkey
Egypt	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Qatar	Yemen Arab Republic
Iraq	Saudi Arabia,	Yemen, People's
Jordan	Kingdom of	Democratic Republic of
Kuwait		

Date and place of FAO Regional Conferences for the Near East

First	— Cairo, Egypt, 2 - 14 February 1948
Second	— Damascus, Syria, 28 August - 6 September 1951
Third	— Cairo, Egypt, 1 - 9 September 1953
Fourth	— Damascus, Syria, 10 - 20 December 1958
Fifth	— Teheran, Iran, 21 September - 1 October 1960
Sixth	— Tel Amara, Lebanon, 30 July - 8 August 1962
Seventh	— Cairo, Egypt, 19 - 31 October 1964
Eighth	— Khartoum, Sudan, 24 January - 2 February 1967
Ninth	— Baghdad, Iraq, 21 September - 1 October 1968
Tenth	— Islamabad, Pakistan, 12 - 22 September 1970
Eleventh	— Kuwait, Kuwait, 9 - 19 September 1972
Twelfth	— Amman, Jordan, 31 August - 9 September 1974
Thirteenth	— Tunis, Tunisia, 4 - 11 October 1976
Fourteenth	— Damascus, Syria, 9 - 16 September 1978
Fifteenth	— Rome, Italy, 21 - 25 April 1981
Sixteenth	— Nicosia, Cyprus, 25 - 29 October 1982
Seventeenth	— Aden, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, 11 - 15 March 1984
Eighteenth	— Istanbul, Turkey, 17 - 21 March 1986
Nineteenth	— Muscat, Oman, 13 - 17 March 1988

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Rome, 1988

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NINETEENTH REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Muscat, Oman, 13-17 March 1988

SUMMARY OF MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Country Statements and General Debate

A. FOR THE ATTENTION OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

1.1 The Conference strongly urged all member countries to timely fulfil their financial obligations to the Organization (para. 29).

B. FOR THE ATTENTION OF FAO

1.2 The Conference expressed its desire that the FAO Regional Office for the Near East be returned to the Region, and called upon the Director-General to include this issue in the Agenda for the forthcoming FAO Conference (Twenty-fifth Session, 1989) (para. 40).

2. Report on the State of Food and Agriculture in the Near East; FAO Activities in the Region; Action Taken on the Main Recommendations Made by the Eighteenth Regional Conference; Meetings of the Near East Statutory Bodies; and FAO Programme of Work for 1988-89 in the Region (paras 41-74)

A. FOR THE ATTENTION OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

2.1 The Conference strongly urged all member countries, in particular those in the Near East, to make timely payment of their contributions to the Organization (para. 72).

2.2 Recommendations: para. 73

B. FOR THE ATTENTION OF FAO

2.3 Recommendations: para. 74

3. Intra-Regional Labour Mobility and Agricultural Development in the Near East Region (paras 75-87)

A. FOR THE ATTENTION OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

3.1 Recommendations: para. 86

B. FOR THE ATTENTION OF FAO

3.2 Recommendations: para. 87

4. Energy for Rural and Agricultural Development in the Near East Region (paras 88-98)

A. FOR THE ATTENTION OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

4.1 Recommendations: para. 97

B. FOR THE ATTENTION OF FAO

4.2 Recommendations: para. 98.

5. Development of Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture (paras 99-110)

A. FOR THE ATTENTION OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

5.1 Recommendations: para. 109.

B. FOR THE ATTENTION OF FAO

5.2 Recommendations: para. 110.

6. Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

A. FOR THE ATTENTION OF FAO

6.1 The Conference called upon FAO to keep up its efforts to ensure effective representation of the Region at CGIAR and to facilitate feedback of the proceedings to member countries. It also requested FAO to include in the document on the regional representation to the CGIAR a statement on the status of research and technology development in the Region (paras 112, 113).

B. FOR THE ATTENTION OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

6.2 The Conference noted that Turkey would continue to represent the Region for 1989 and 1990, expressed its thanks to the outgoing Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Dr Abdel Rahim Shehata, and elected Jordan to represent the Region for the period 1989-1992 (para. 114).

7. Locust Infestation

A. FOR THE ATTENTION OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

7.1 The Conference strongly urged member countries to make timely payment of their outstanding financial contributions and to fulfil their obligations to the Organization so that the Director-General could be able to respond promptly to requests for emergency assistance (para. 116).

8. Date and Place of the Twentieth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

A. FOR THE ATTENTION OF FAO

8.1 The Conference, taking into account the offer of the Republic of Tunisia, requested the Director-General of FAO to determine the date and place of the Twentieth FAO Regional Conference in consultation with Member Governments of the Region (para. 117).

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

Inauguration of the Conference

1. The Nineteenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East was held in Qasr Al Bustan Hotel, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, from 13 to 17 March 1988, at the kind invitation of the Omani Government.
2. The Conference was inaugurated by His Highness Sayyid Thuwaini Bin Shihab, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan. The inaugural ceremony was attended by Heads of Delegations and representatives of FAO Member Nations in the Region, Observers from a number of other member countries, and from regional and international government and non-governmental organizations and bodies. A list of participants is given in Appendix B to this report. Also present were Cabinet members, high ranking state officials and heads/representatives of diplomatic and UN missions.
3. In his inaugural speech, His Highness Sayyid Thuwaini Bin Shihab, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, conveyed His Majesty's welcome to the Heads and Members of Delegations and Observers to the Nineteenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. He expressed his appreciation that the Director-General had personally been able to attend the Conference, commended his efficient leadership of FAO and indicated his pleasure that the Director-General was a national of the Region.
4. His Highness expressed his appreciation for convening the Regional Conference in Oman this year, since it coincided with the declaration of the Sultanate of 1988 as the "Year of Agriculture in Oman". During this year, the Sultanate would undertake major efforts towards accelerating the process of agricultural and rural development to achieve national food security. His Highness emphasized the crucial role of FAO in assisting the Omani Government in this process. In particular, His Highness emphasized the role of FAO in assisting the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in the formulation of a comprehensive rural and agricultural development strategy to meet the aspirations of the Omani people.
5. His Highness indicated that the Sultanate's experience in development, particularly agricultural development, had been short. It began in the early 1970s, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said assumed responsibility for the Sultanate. His Highness emphasized, however, that although it was a short period, significant achievements had been realized, particularly in institution building, cadre improvement, training programmes and infrastructure development. His Highness stressed that despite the serious efforts exerted and the immense progress achieved, the challenge was still great, and the Sultanate was determined to continue its drive towards more progress and development.
6. His Highness reiterated his warmest welcome to all participants, wishing the Conference every success.
7. Mr Edouard Saouma, Director-General of FAO, addressed the inaugural session of the Conference and expressed his profound thanks to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said for having the Conference convened in Oman under his patronage, and for nominating His Highness Sayyid Thuwaini Bin Shihab, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, to honour the Conference by delivering the inaugural address.

Election of the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen and Appointment of the Rapporteur

8. His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdullah Bin Zaher Al-Hinai, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, was unanimously elected Chairman of the Conference.
9. His Excellency Sheikh Al-Hinai expressed his thanks and appreciation for the confidence placed in him through his election as Chairman of the Conference.
10. In his statement, His Excellency Sheikh Al-Hinai commended the Director-General for his dynamic leadership, outstanding efforts and dedication towards the fulfilment of the objectives and cause of FAO, and congratulated him on his re-election.
11. His Excellency stated that the Government welcomed convening the Conference in Oman to emphasize the importance of regional and international cooperation in food and agriculture production. He also expressed his appreciation for the role of the Conference as a platform for exchanging views among member countries on the problems of food and agriculture in the Region to assist FAO in formulating its work programme and priorities.
12. The Conference resolved that all Heads of Delegations should act as Vice-Chairmen.
13. The Conference appointed Dr Abdel Azim Mahmoud El Gazzar, Head of the Egyptian Delegation, as Rapporteur.

Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

14. The Agenda and the Timetable were adopted by the Conference after minor amendments and is given in Appendix A to this report.

Statement by the Director-General

15. In his opening statement the Director-General expressed his gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said and his Government for hosting the Conference in Muscat, and expressed his thanks to His Highness Sayyid Thuwaini Bin Shihab, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, for delivering the inaugural address.
16. The Director-General congratulated His Excellency Sheikh Al-Hinai, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries of Oman, on his unanimous election as Chairman of the Conference. He congratulated the distinguished Vice-Chairmen on their election, and the Rapporteur on his appointment. He also welcomed the distinguished Ministers, Heads and Members of Delegations and Observers.
17. The Director-General reviewed the world economic situation which continued to offer little comfort for developing countries. He emphasized that the future rate of economic growth in the industrialized countries was uncertain, and the danger of a recession had not yet passed. Other uncertainties stemmed from currency instability and fluctuating interest rates. Unemployment was reduced only slowly in developed countries, and inflation was creeping up again in some of these countries.
18. He pointed out that the biggest recovery had been in the price of agricultural raw materials, which had benefited many countries in the Region. He further indicated that international prices of food had lagged behind, benefiting most countries of the Region which were large importers of food.

19. The Director-General further emphasized that the drop in oil prices had serious implications not only on oil-exporting countries, but also on neighbouring countries that supplied them with immigrant labour.

20. The Director-General expressed concern over the grave debt problems which were becoming a serious obstacle to development in many countries of the Region. He stressed that international development assistance, therefore, assumed an even more important role than before. However, he expressed satisfaction at the recently agreed replenishments for the International Development Association (IDA) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

21. The Director-General commended the relatively high rates of financial assistance provided by Arab countries members of OPEC to developing countries in the Region in spite of the current decline in oil revenues.

22. The Director-General pointed out that although food supplies were still adequate at the global level, there had been some deterioration in 1987/88 food production. Several countries were faced with exceptional food emergencies (including refugee populations) for which food aid had been provided by FAO/WFP (e.g. Algeria, Djibouti, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan and Somalia). He therefore called for a careful monitoring of the situation.

23. The Director-General stated that most countries of the Region had managed to raise their agricultural production by about 3-4 percent annually during the past decade. He pointed out that Saudi Arabia had achieved an outstanding rate of growth in agricultural production of about 9 percent. He stressed, however, that these impressive achievements concealed the continued existence of a vast majority of rural poor.

24. Reviewing the outcome of the Twenty-fourth Session of the FAO Conference in November 1987, the Director-General expressed his sincere thanks to countries of the Region for his re-election, and for their renewed confidence in his leadership. He referred to the need for a review of certain aspects of the work of FAO, as outlined by a number of countries during the Conference, and pointed out that such a review would strengthen FAO. He expressed deep concern for the serious implications of the liquidity crisis confronted by FAO since 1987, resulting in arrears amounting to 92 million dollars in budgetary contributions, which compelled him to effect cuts in planned expenditure for 20 million dollars. However, the Director-General was confident that he would be able to implement 90-95 percent of the Programmes. He strongly urged the Regional Conference to re-affirm the value of international and multi-national cooperation.

25. In concluding his statement, the Director-General reiterated his profound appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said and to His Majesty's Government for the warm hospitality accorded to the Conference and the excellent facilities extended to it. He thanked the participants and wished the Conference every success. The complete text of the Director-General's statement is reproduced in Appendix D.

STATE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE IN THE NEAR EAST

Country Statements and General Debate

26. The delegates unanimously expressed their sincere thanks and deep gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said for honouring the Conference by nominating His Highness Sayyid Thuwaini Bin Shihab, Personal Representative of His Majesty, to inaugurate the Conference. They also expressed their appreciation to the Government for hosting the meeting and for the generous hospitality offered to the participants, as well as for the excellent facilities provided.

27. The delegates congratulated His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdullah Bin Zaher Al-Hinai, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, on his unanimous election as Chairman of the Conference.

28. The delegates expressed appreciation for FAO's continued efforts in promoting agricultural and rural development in the Region. They commended the Director-General for his dedication to the fulfilment of the cause of FAO, appreciated his comprehensive address to the Conference, and congratulated him on his re-election.

29. Referring to the Director-General's opening address, the delegates noted with deep concern the serious liquidity crisis currently facing FAO. They endorsed the necessary measures introduced by the Director-General in coping with the crisis. However, they stressed the serious implications of these problems on FAO's plan of work in the Region, and strongly urged all member countries to timely fulfil their financial obligations to the Organization.

30. Most delegates delivered country statements on the state of food and agriculture in their countries. It was noted that food security and agricultural development assumed high priorities in most national development plans. It was further recognized that despite achievements realized, food self-sufficiency ratios were still relatively low and further efforts were needed to close the regional food gap.

31. Some delegates requested FAO to continue its efforts in contacting potential donors to revive the Near East Cooperative Programme in the Region. They also called upon FAO to continue its efforts towards the establishment of the Near East Regional Association for Agricultural Marketing.

32. The delegates noted with satisfaction that FAO was the only international organization which continued to provide technical assistance to Lebanon during the past years of extreme instability, and called upon other national, regional and international organizations to follow suit.

33. Many delegates noted with concern that the world economic environment, which conditioned development efforts, continued to be plagued by uncertainties and shocks. They also noted that the chaotic state of international financial markets, worsening problems of external indebtedness, unfavourable international terms of trade for agriculture, protectionist policies and price instability continued to adversely affect the agricultural sector in most developing countries. They therefore stressed the need to promote regional self-reliance in food and agricultural production through enhanced intra-regional trade and increased cooperative activities among member countries of the Region. They further called upon FAO's Regional Office for the Near East to coordinate and strengthen these activities.

34. The delegates stressed the importance of research and extension in agricultural development and called for more cooperation among member countries in these fields.

35. Recognizing the many agro-ecological similarities and common agricultural problems in the Region, several delegates called for increased intra-regional transfer and adaptation of agricultural technology through strengthening TCDC (Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries) activities. They also called for carrying out periodic reviews and inventories of existing technological innovations and research institutions in the Region.

36. In view of the diversity in natural and human resource endowments among member countries of the Region, delegates emphasized the need for enhancing regional economic cooperation activities among member countries (ECDC).

37. While appreciating the leading role of FAO and the assistance provided by many countries in combating the recent locust invasion, delegates warned against possible recurrent invasions and called for maximum vigilant efforts in this regard.

38. The delegates stressed the importance of formulating appropriate agricultural policies, in particular price and marketing policies, to provide adequate incentive for increased food and agricultural production.

39. Many delegates noted with satisfaction that the 1988/89 PWB for the Near East was comprehensive and that it took into consideration most of the recommendations made by the Eighteenth Near East Regional Conference.

40. The Conference expressed its desire that the FAO Regional Office for the Near East be returned to the Region in order that the Office may carry out its activities from within the Region. The Conference therefore called upon the Director-General to include this issue in the Agenda for the forthcoming Conference of FAO (Twenty-Fifth Session, 1989) for the necessary action to be taken.

Report on the State of Food and Agriculture in the Near East;
FAO Activities in the Region; Action Taken on the Main
Recommendations Made by the Eighteenth Regional Conference;
Meetings of the Near East Statutory Bodies; and FAO Programme
of Work for 1988-89 in the Region ^{1/}

41. The Conference considered the documentation and expressed appreciation for the comprehensive and systematic presentation of the state of food and agriculture and various activities undertaken in the Region.

42. The Conference reviewed at length the state of food and agriculture in the Region, and noted with satisfaction that the agricultural sector continued to receive the highest priority in almost all countries. It commended member countries for their efforts in introducing policies to improve inter-sectoral terms of trade, agricultural productivity, institutional reforms and desertification control.

43. The Conference, however, noted with concern that during the first half of the 1980s most countries in the Region faced a series of external and internal economic shocks, imbalances and distortions that had led to the adoption of highly restrictive macro-economic policies. Furthermore, in spite of countries' efforts,

^{1/} NERC/88/2 and NERC/88/2 - Sup. 1.

growth in food and agricultural production had been too low to meet the rapid growth in effective demand, and the Region's dependency on external food supply continued to be extremely high. The Conference, therefore, called upon member countries to continue their efforts in adopting strategies and policies for increasing national food and agricultural production, and strengthening economic cooperation among countries of the Region with the objective of closing the regional food gap.

44. The Conference noted with concern the relatively low level of intra-regional trade in agriculture, and recognized the potential for increased regional trade with developed countries. It, therefore, called upon member countries to continue their efforts towards increased intra-regional and international trade in agriculture. The Conference requested FAO to assist member countries in this regard, and to include, in the section on the state of food and agriculture of the report on FAO activities in the Region, a brief statement on intra-regional trade in agriculture and on trade performance and prospects among countries of the Region and developed countries, e.g. EEC (European Economic Community).

45. The Conference noted with appreciation that despite the serious financial constraints that affected the Organization during the last biennium, the Programme of Work and Budget for 1986-87 in the Region was satisfactorily implemented through an effective coordination and collaboration between the Regional Office for the Near East (RNEA) and the technical units of FAO Headquarters.

46. The Conference took note of various activities implemented in the field of land and water development. It requested FAO to continue its cooperation with national, regional and international institutions for improved water management, including control of salinity and drainage problems.

47. The Conference appreciated the role of FAO in assisting member countries in national seed programmes and in crop improvement and management. It urged member countries to promote regional cooperation in these programmes, and requested FAO's support in this endeavour.

48. The Conference emphasized the need for effective crop protection, quarantine and sanitation programmes in the Region. It called upon member countries to promote regional cooperation in the analysis of plant quarantine, pest control and reduction of post-harvest losses.

49. The Conference noted with satisfaction the assistance FAO provided to member countries in enacting and updating national pesticide legislation and regulations for the implementation of the International Code of Conduct for the Use and Distribution of Pesticides. It requested FAO to continue its efforts in promoting these legislations.

50. The Conference noted with concern that regional self-sufficiency in food production was constrained by weaknesses in supportive infrastructures. It called upon member countries to strengthen their agricultural infrastructure, in particular, research, training and extension services.

51. The Conference noted with satisfaction the action taken by FAO for the establishment of a Regional Network of National Institutions for Agro-Industries Development in the Near East, and requested FAO to continue its efforts in this regard.

52. The Conference appreciated FAO's technical assistance to member countries in preparing their national development programmes in grassland, forage and feed resources, particularly as affected the arid and semi-arid zones. It requested FAO to continue its support to member countries in improving these activities.
53. The Conference noted with satisfaction that the FAO/UNDP regional project for rinderpest eradication in countries of Western Asia would become operational soon, and urged member countries to coordinate their activities in this field.
54. The Conference noted with appreciation the effective role which the regional project MINEADEP had continued to play in enhancing inter-country coordination in animal disease control. It urged member countries to continue providing their support to this project, and requested FAO to continue its technical backstopping for this endeavour.
55. The Conference noted with satisfaction the fruitful activities of the Near East Regional Poultry Training and Development Centre in the Region. It requested FAO to continue its support to the Centre, and urged member countries to fully participate in its activities.
56. The Conference commended FAO's efforts in supporting the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA), and requested FAO to continue its support to the Association.
57. The Conference, recognizing the need to strengthen agricultural information and documentation systems in the Region, urged member countries to ensure their participation in the utilization of AGRIS (International Information System for the Agricultural Sciences Technology) and CARIS (Current Agricultural Research Information System) systems.
58. The Conference, recognizing the importance of the application of remote-sensing technologies to various aspects of agriculture, requested FAO to continue its technical assistance to member countries in strengthening remote-sensing capabilities in the Region.
59. The Conference noted with satisfaction that the agreement for the establishment of the Regional Centre on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development for the Near East entered into force on 30 December 1987, and that the instruments of ratification or accession had been deposited with the Director-General of FAO by the host State (the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) and five other governments. The Conference urged member countries to accede to this Centre and ratify the agreement. It further requested FAO to continue its efforts in securing other governments' responses to the agreement.
60. The Conference, recognizing the importance and increasing role assumed by women in agriculture, noted with satisfaction various activities undertaken by FAO in this regard, and urged member countries to ensure the participation of rural women in agricultural development.
61. The Conference appreciated the active role played by the Near East and North Africa Regional Agricultural Credit Association (NENARACA) in improving agricultural credit systems. It requested FAO to continue providing technical support to NENARACA.
62. The Conference urged member countries to enhance their capabilities in nutrition assessment and education. It requested FAO to continue providing technical assistance to national food and nutrition institutions in the Region and to promote TCDC activities for training in nutrition.

63. The Conference, recognizing the current external and internal economic difficulties and imbalances facing many countries of the Region and the emerging need for agricultural and policy reforms, expressed appreciation for FAO's efforts in assisting member countries in agricultural planning and policy analysis, especially as regarded price policies. The Conference also called upon FAO to continue its efforts in analysing the impact of structural adjustment programmes on agricultural and rural development in the Region.

64. The Conference noted FAO's activities in enhancing regional training programmes in agricultural planning and project analysis. It called upon member countries to support the establishment of a network among specialized institutes in the Region for enhancing their training capabilities, and requested FAO to continue its efforts in this endeavour.

65. The Conference called upon member countries to strengthen national Early Warning Systems (EWS), and requested FAO to continue its assistance to member countries in this field.

66. The Conference acknowledged FAO's efforts in the improvement of information exchange on fish processing and trade in the Region. It urged member countries to develop national plans for rational utilization of inland water resource to increase fish production.

67. The Conference, recognizing the urgent need to combat desertification, called upon member countries to develop forestry and environmental conservation policies in the Region. It requested FAO to continue its support to member countries in desertification control, watershed management and conservation of forest resources.

68. The Conference noted with satisfaction the activities carried out by the ESCWA/FAO Joint Agriculture Division, especially in agricultural policy analysis and training, and commended the spirit of cooperation between ESCWA and FAO.

69. The Conference endorsed the recommendations of the following Regional Commissions which met during 1986-87:

- i) Second Session of the Near East Regional Commission on Agriculture (COAG/NE), Damascus, Syria, 8-12 June 1987;
- ii) Tenth Session of the Near East Forestry Commission (NEFC), Tunis, Tunisia, 29 June - 3 July 1987;
- iii) Second Session of the Near East Regional Economic and Social Policy Commission (ESPC/NE), Istanbul, Turkey, 7-11 September 1987;
- iv) Ninth Session of the Regional Commission on Land and Water Use in the Near East, Rabat, Morocco, 10-12 December 1987.

70. The Conference requested the Director-General of FAO to take these recommendations into consideration when formulating future programmes for the Region.

71. The Conference expressed its appreciation for FAO's effective and timely implementation of the main recommendations made by the Eighteenth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (Istanbul, Turkey, March 1986).

72. The Conference recalled that the PWB for 1988-89 for the Near East Region had already been discussed and approved by the Twenty-fourth Session of the FAO Conference (November 1987). It reiterated its endorsement of and support to the Director-General's programme proposals, and expressed confidence that these proposals would be fully implemented in spite of the liquidity problems currently facing FAO. The Conference, recognizing the serious implications of the crisis on the programme of work, expressed its deepest concern and strongly urged all member countries, in particular those in the Near East, to make timely payment of their contributions to the Organization.

73. The Conference called upon member countries to:

- Continue their efforts in adopting strategies and policies for increasing national food and agricultural production, and for strengthening economic cooperation among countries of the Region with the objective of closing the regional food gap;
- Continue their efforts towards improved intra-regional and international trade in agriculture;
- Promote sub-regional, regional and intra-regional cooperation in crop improvement and training;
- Promote regional cooperation in studies on plant quarantine, pest control and reduction of post-harvest losses;
- Intensify TCDC activities for the coordination of national disease control for animal health;
- Make full use of training and development support activities of the MINEADEP project and the Regional Poultry Training and Development Centre;
- Continue their participation in and support to the Near East Regional Cooperative Research and Development Network on Small Ruminants;
- Ensure participation of their national institutions in the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa;
- Make full use of FAO's AGRIS and CARIS;
- Accede to the Regional Centre on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in the Near East and to ratify the Agreement, which entered into force on 30 December 1987;
- Ensure, in formulating national strategies and programmes, the full participation of rural women in agricultural development;
- Ensure continuing support of their agricultural credit institutions to the Near East and North Africa Regional Agricultural Credit Association;
- Strengthen their capabilities in nutrition assessment, education, food inspection, consumer protection and food quality control;
- Strengthen their capabilities in agricultural policy analysis by supporting regional projects, workshops and training activities in this field;

- Promote the establishment of regional network arrangements among specialized institutions for enhancing training capabilities in agricultural planning and project analysis;
- Strengthen national early warning systems and other measures for food security in the Region;
- Develop national policies for rational utilization of inland and water resources, and full exploitation of rivers, and natural and man-made lakes to increase fish production;
- Develop forestry strategies and environmental conservation policies for the afforestation and management of forest resources in the Region.

74. The Conference requested FAO to:

- Continue providing advice on techniques for improved water management, including control of salinity and drainage problems;
- Continue its support to regional, sub-regional and intra-regional cooperation in seed and crop improvement, training and information;
- Continue its cooperation programmes with ICARDA (International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas), ACSAD (Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands) and AOAD (Arab Organization for Agricultural Development) on seed development;
- Continue its assistance in promoting rational and safe use of pesticides and in adopting integrated pest management techniques;
- Continue its efforts in the establishment of a Regional Network of National Institutes for Agro-Industries Development in the Near East;
- Continue its support and assistance to member countries in improving and developing grassland, forage and feed resources;
- Continue its support to the Near East Regional Cooperative Research and Development Network on Small Ruminants, the Regional Trust Fund projects (MINEADEP) and the Near East Regional Poultry Training and Development Centre;
- Continue its support and technical advice to the Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa;
- Continue its efforts in supporting TCDC and ECDC activities, and to strengthen its cooperation with regional and international institutions such as ACSAD; AOAD; ICARDA; ICRISAT (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics); and ISNAR (International Service for National Agricultural Research);
- Continue its efforts in promoting countries' participation in the utilization of AGRIS and CARIS systems;
- Continue its assistance in strengthening remote sensing capabilities within the Region;
- Continue its assistance to member countries in rural development by promoting agricultural education training and extension;

- Continue its efforts in securing other governments' responses to the agreement of the Regional Centre on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in the Near East;
- Continue its support to NENARACA;
- Continue providing technical assistance to national food and nutrition institutions in the Region and promoting TCDC for regional and inter-country training activities in this field;
- Continue providing technical assistance to member countries in the analysis and monitoring of agricultural planning and policies, especially as regard price policies, and continue its efforts in analysing the impact of structural adjustment programmes on agricultural and rural development in the Region;
- Provide further assistance to member countries in establishing and/or strengthening national early warning systems;
- Strengthen regional training activities and network arrangements among specialized institutions by providing training curricula, teaching materials and computer packages;
- Continue its support to the Near East Network on Arid Land, Forest Restoration and Desertification Control, and to continue its assistance to countries on watershed management, afforestation, fuelwood production, sand-dune stabilization and conservation and management of forest resources.

SELECTED ISSUES OF AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Intra-Regional Labour Mobility and Agricultural Development in the Near East Region 1/

75. The Conference considered the document on "Intra-Regional Labour Mobility and Agricultural Development in the Near East Region", which examined the magnitude, composition and trends in labour migration and remittances, assessed the impact of migration on agricultural development, addressed the emerging issues of return migration, posed policy issues for consideration by governments and outlined the role of FAO in assisting member countries in this field.

76. The Conference recognized that the impact of migration on agricultural development in the Region had been very complex, and called upon member countries to adopt a comprehensive and balanced approach to labour migration.

77. The Conference noted that in some countries of the Region, intra-regional labour mobility had created certain "labour shortages" that were primarily temporally- and spatially-localized. These were mainly confined to adult male-hired labour in seasons of peak demand for certain crops and in specific locations. It further noted that these shortages were more serious for crops with low prices and/or in marginal ecological zones.

1/ NERC/88/3.

78. The Conference noted that migration of young adult males had led to an increasing production of farm work conducted by women, and expressed its concern that social customs combined with limited experience of rural women in farm management could pose certain difficulties for them as farmers. However, the Conference noted with satisfaction that education had been rapidly spreading among rural women in the Region, and that there were numerous cases of successful farm management by women.

79. The Conference noted that farm mechanization had been spreading rapidly in the Region. It further recognized that in some countries, farm mechanization had been substituting more for animal power than for human labour.

80. The Conference observed that farm mechanization had also been encouraged by governments' policies. Most countries directly subsidized tractorization, via credit subsidies and fuel subsidies. Imported tractors were either directly subsidized or indirectly subsidized through the frequently overvalued exchange rates. The Conference noted with satisfaction that, to the extent that these policies had been successful and had promoted farm mechanization, necessary technological changes had been developed and introduced.

81. The Conference emphasized that remittances had had both positive and negative effects on agricultural development. It noted the positive effects derived from the general stimulation of the economies through greater investment and increased demand for food. However, it urged member countries to pay particular attention to the negative effects derived from the possible inflationary impact.

82. The Conference urged member governments of labour-exporting countries to adopt and employ carefully-designed, country-specific agricultural price and non-price policies which provided a favourable climate for investment and productivity and which enhanced technology by producers. More specifically, the Conference called upon governments to introduce appropriate fiscal, monetary, trade, institutional and other policies, with the view of attracting more remittances for agricultural investments.

83. The Conference noted that migration had both positive and negative impacts on the agricultural natural resource base. To the extent that remittances were invested in land reclamation, irrigation schemes and other infrastructure development, there had been an enhancement of the natural resource base. On the other hand, migration from certain countries had led to increased urbanization and a decline in a fertile agricultural land.

84. The Conference noted with satisfaction that migration and remittances had generally reduced rural poverty in the Region. It recognized, however, that these measures were hardly panaceas for the problems of poverty and inequality in the countryside.

85. The Conference noted with concern that return migration had become a major emerging issue for many countries of origin of migrant labour in the Region. This had led to a decrease in remittances as a source of foreign exchange, and pressure on domestic labour markets to absorb not only the returnees, but also young people who sought employment for the first time.

86. The Conference called upon member countries in the Region to:

- Adopt a regional perspective in the formulation of national manpower plans and strategies with the view of supporting ECDC and TCDC activities in the Region;

- Collect more accurate information on the migrants themselves, particularly on basic characteristics such as age, regional and sectoral origin, pre-migration employment, skills, education, and to maintain records of net migration;
- Set up contingency plans for return-migration e.g., by setting up a contingency fund which could be spent on agricultural investment activities and infrastructure, thus generating employment;
- Maintain "realistic" exchange rates to encourage migrants to transfer funds into their countries of origin through official banking channels, and to strengthen the banking system by offering attractive incentives for holders of savings in encouraging deposits in banks;
- Support recent trends in formulating agricultural price policies that provide farm incentives to attract increasing proportions of migrant remittances for investment in agriculture;
- Consider developing credit, marketing, extension and other supporting services especially designed to enhance rural women's involvement in food and agricultural production;
- Support the adaptation and development of indigenous appropriate technologies to provide the necessary opportunities for agricultural investment and growth;
- Investigate the technical feasibility and economic viability of agricultural mechanization in relation to specific cases of labour shortages in certain countries of the Region in order to derive optimum strategies for agricultural mechanization;
- Improve rural infrastructure, transportation, communication and flow of information between spatial labour markets.

87. The Conference requested FAO to:

- Assist member countries in the formulation of national agricultural manpower plans, taking into consideration intra-regional labour mobility.
- Collaborate with other concerned international, regional and national agencies in collecting and disseminating agricultural labour market information and data and in conducting relevant in-depth case studies on labour mobility to assist member countries in improving the functioning and performance of their labour markets;
- Continue to provide sound agricultural policy advice to ensure that migration and remittances promote agricultural development;
- Advise agricultural banks and other financial institutions on designing rural credit and savings schemes and programmes, which would be instrumental in providing incentives for investment in agriculture and short-term credit facilities for farm inputs and in applicable agricultural technology;
- Assist member countries in the formulation of development programmes that encourage returning migrants to undertake agricultural productive activities utilizing their remittances;

- Continue its efforts to assist member countries in promoting women's integration in agricultural development programmes;
- Continue to assist in indigenous development and local adaptation of improved agricultural technologies, in particular in the introduction of economically-viable crops with different harvesting calendars, to accommodate labour shortages and to be compatible with the "seasonality", age and gender of returning migrants;
- Assist member countries in the organization and implementation of training programmes to enhance the required skills needed for intra-regional labour mobility and to meet the adjustment needs of returning migrants.

Energy for Rural and Agricultural Development in the Near East
Region 1/

88. The Conference considered the document on "Energy for Rural and Agricultural Development in the Near East", which reviewed and analysed the energy resources in the Region with reference to rural and agricultural energy requirements, and proposed areas for action in energy assessment and planning, in efficient use of energy and in promotion of new and renewable sources.

89. The Conference recognized that energy was an essential element for socio-economic development in rural and agricultural sectors, and that agricultural production and quality of life were mutually-dependent variables of the quantity, kind and cost of energy.

90. The Conference noted that energy resources varied widely between the oil-producing countries, where traditional fuelwood resources played a marginal role, and countries with limited or no fossil fuel resources, where fuelwood and other biomass were essential sources of energy in rural areas.

91. The Conference also noted that, although the rural sector of most developing countries in the Region was characterized by low per caput use of commercial energy and was dependent on non-commercial sources, the use of commercial energy in agricultural production for fertilizer, mechanization and agro-processing had to increase substantially in the future. In this perspective rural energy development had to be seen within the overall context of rural and national development objectives and constraints.

92. The Conference noted that countries in the Near East were consuming their fuelwood supplies far more rapidly than they could be renewed. If current trends continued, it was estimated that, by the year 2000, fuelwood supplies would fall short of demand by 35 million m³ per year, requiring the equivalent of approximately 8 million tonnes of oil to replace them. The Conference further noted with concern that excessive use of wood for energy had serious implications for the forest resources of many countries, leading to deforestation and degradation of the environment.

93. The Conference stressed that energy plans and programmes in the Region should be set within national development plans and should form an integral component of overall agricultural planning. There was, therefore, an urgent need to incorporate energy issues and requirements into rural development planning, which, in turn, should be integrated with national energy plans as an identified sector.

1/ NERC/88/4.

94. The Conference observed that in the Near East countries, little data were available on rural and agricultural energy consumption patterns, particularly for households, transport and agro-industries.

95. The Conference noted that new and renewable sources of energy encompassed a heterogeneous range of energy forms, as well as a wide range of associated technologies at different levels of maturity, from those proven and in operation, to those on the frontier of scientific knowledge. Among these, many solar, wind and biomass technologies had proved to be viable for rural and agricultural application. Commercially available solar heaters, dryers, and wind pumps could be locally manufactured in the Region.

96. In view of the diversity in the regional capabilities regarding energy technologies and strategies for rural and agricultural development, the Conference called upon member countries to strengthen their cooperative activities at regional and sub-regional levels by promoting networks and TCDC activities.

97. The Conference called upon member countries to:

- Incorporate rural energy planning as an integral component of rural and agricultural development plans, in particular, and of overall national economic and energy planning in general;
- Integrate fuelwood development activities in rural sector policy and planning. Energy policies should be directed toward giving priority to investment in reforestation and energy plantations and toward reducing dependence on imported conventional fuels;
- Undertake surveys of energy consumption, patterns and problems of the large pastoral community in the Region in order to develop appropriate energy systems;
- Promote efficient use of commercial energy in agriculture (e.g. irrigation schemes, and agro-industries);
- Adopt strategies to reduce fuelwood consumption through efficient use of wood and alternative sources of energy; and promote the use of fast-growing tree species. These efforts should be integrated with agriculture and livestock activities;
- Promote the development of viable proven solar, wind and biomass technologies for agricultural and rural development in the Region;
- Promote R&D programmes to develop local designs, improve efficiency and reduce production costs of renewable energy technologies;
- Develop capabilities for the manufacture of renewable energy equipment. National and regional organizations should assess relevant industries, their resources and technological capabilities, and ways of strengthening their potential. Regional manufacturing standards and specifications should be developed.

98. The Conference requested FAO to:

- Promote practical regional training programmes for policy makers, economists and engineers in the economic analysis of energy requirements for the agricultural and rural sectors;

- Promote integration of rural energy requirements in agricultural plans, in the application of proven technologies to new and renewable sources of energy in agriculture, and in training in related fields;
- Promote the utilization of new and renewable sources of energy in cooperative agro-processing activities at regional and sub-regional levels through the FAO Regional Network of National Institutes for Agro-Industrial Development in the Near East;
- Assist member countries in carrying out a detailed assessment of energy resources and utilization in rural areas to provide an adequate data base for rural and agricultural energy planning;
- Continue assisting member countries to strengthen their cooperative activities at regional and sub-regional levels by promoting networks and TCDC activities.

Development of Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture ^{1/}

99. The Conference considered the document on "Development of Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture", which described the present status of inland fisheries and aquaculture in the Near East, assessed its development prospects in the future, listed FAO's assistance to countries of the Region, outlined main constraints that hamper inland fisheries and aquaculture undertakings, presented policy issues for consideration by member countries and identified areas of FAO assistance needed for further expansion and development of the sub-sector.

100. The Conference noted that the Region produced only one percent of the global fish production from aquaculture, and emphasized that this production could be largely increased, especially in countries where fresh and brackish water were available and along sea coasts wherever sites were suitable for aquaculture activities.

101. The Conference observed that aquaculture was a new activity in most countries of the Region and stressed that its full utilization required more attention for technical aspects, ecological conditions, socio-economic factors and domestic and international marketing.

102. The Conference recognized the large potential for increasing fish production from inland water capture fisheries and stressed the need for appropriate fishing regulations, construction of access roads and water pollution monitoring and control.

103. The Conference noted with concern that seed availability continued to limit the expansion of aquaculture, and that the demand for hatcheries/nursery farms was expected to increase.

104. The Conference observed that in the Mediterranean region finfish and mollusc cultures were expected to expand substantially during the next decade. Shrimp culture would remain extensive and limited to coastal lagoons. It also noted with satisfaction the regional prospects for intensive production of sea bream, sea bass, eels, groupers, rabbit fish and tilapia.

^{1/} NERC/88/5.

105. The Conference recognized that with growth and intensification of culture systems, environmental problems were likely to increase and it urged member governments to adopt environmental protection measures and to implement appropriate legislation aimed at permitting safe and sustainable use of natural resources.

106. The Conference noted with deep concern that growth of aquatic plants in fish ponds had become a major obstacle to development of fresh water farms in some countries of the Region. It called upon member countries to support research activities for the development of appropriate technologies, and to enhance cooperation among countries and institutions of the Region in controlling this serious impediment to the expansion of the sector.

107. The Conference emphasized that technical assistance requirements in the Region included improvement of mollusc culture, improvement of traditional culture-based fisheries in lagoons and reservoirs, expansion of high-priced species and establishment of hatcheries/nursery farms.

108. The Conference urged member countries to pay special attention to the development of technologies suitable for small-scale rural fishermen and farmers and to develop efficient extension services.

109. The Conference called upon member countries to:

- Establish sectorial policy strategies and national plans for the development of aquaculture to overcome possible conflicts and trade-off when using natural resources for inland fisheries and aquaculture development;
- Pay special attention to economic, social and cultural aspects when promoting aquaculture activities in rural areas, and to take into consideration possible conflicts between fish farming and capture fisheries when using fish and discharge of wastes;
- Develop and implement a system of credit and a code of investment to attract rural communities into aquaculture and to promote investments in large commercial projects for inland fisheries and aquaculture;
- Increase access of fish farmers to production inputs, such as seed, food and equipment;
- Identify domestic and international markets for fish farming products and to provide continuing and accurate data and information on these markets;
- Promote regional and sub-regional cooperation among countries of the Region for exchange of information on various aspects of inland fisheries and aquaculture.

110. The Conference requested FAO to:

- Continue providing advice to member countries on site identification and feasibility of aquaculture projects in the Region;
- Continue its support to member countries in the preparation of national plans for development and management of inland fisheries, aquaculture and, in particular, for the culture of high-value species such as shrimp and sea bass;

- Identify and prepare regional and sub-regional projects for implementation, with the objectives of strengthening cooperation among member countries, promoting fisheries research and facilitating transfer of technologies in aquaculture;
- Continue its efforts in establishing a Regional Network of National Research Institutes for the Development of Capture Fisheries and Aquaculture;
- Continue its support for the establishment of a sub-regional arrangement for the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden bordering countries within the framework of the Indian Ocean Fisheries Commission (IOFC);
- Continue to provide up-to-date information on fish markets through its Globefish Network and INFOSAMAK projects;
- Include comprehensive training activities for national staff in various fields of inland fisheries and aquaculture when formulating and implementing projects and programmes designed for the development of this sector.

Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) 1/

111. The Conference considered the document entitled "Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)", and took note of the combined report submitted by the Representatives of all the Regions at the last CGIAR meeting. The Conference expressed its desire to continue receiving the Representative's report in addition to the combined report.

112. The Conference appreciated the recent developments in the CGIAR system and the improvement that took place in the attendance and participation of the Near East Region at the meetings. It requested FAO to keep up its efforts to ensure effective representation of the Region at CGIAR and to facilitate feed-back of the proceedings to member countries.

113. In view of the importance of food and agricultural research and technology development in the Region and in order to facilitate the exchange of information in this regard, the Conference requested FAO to include in the document on the regional representation to the CGIAR a statement on the status of research and technology development in the Region.

114. The Conference noted that Turkey would continue to represent the Region for 1989 and 1990, and expressed its thanks to the outgoing Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Dr Abdel Rahim Shehata. It elected Jordan to represent the Region for the period 1989-1992.

CONCLUDING ITEMS

Locust Infestation 1/

115. Alarming news was received informing the Conference that the North African countries were currently suffering from large-scale desert locust infestation, that threatened not only food and agricultural production, but also the lives of millions of people in the Region.

1/ NERC/88/8.

116. The Conference therefore expressed its deepest concern over the aggravation of this problem especially at a time when FAO was confronted with an unprecedented liquidity crisis that had compelled the Director-General to reduce FAO's activities and expenditure by about 20 million dollars. Thus, the Conference strongly urged member countries to make timely payment of their outstanding financial contributions and to fulfil their obligations to the Organization so that the Director-General could be able to respond promptly to requests for emergency assistance received from member countries. This would enable him to immediately organize control campaigns and to take necessary measures to avoid further large-scale infestations which threaten crops and human lives in many countries of the Region.

Date and Place of the Twentieth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

117. The Conference welcomed the kind invitation extended by the Republic of Tunisia to hold the Twentieth Session of the FAO Near East Regional Conference in Tunisia. It requested the Director-General of FAO to take this kind invitation into consideration, and to decide the date and place of the meeting in consultation with Member Governments of the Region.

Adoption of the Report

118. The Conference adopted the present report after introducing some minor amendments.

Closure of the Conference

119. His Excellency Marawan Abdul Haleim El-Hmoud, Minister of Agriculture, Jordan, speaking on behalf of all the delegates, thanked His Majesty the Sultan, the Government and the people of Oman for the generous hospitality, the warm welcome and excellent arrangements provided. He thanked His Highness Sayyid Thuwaini Bin Shihab, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, for inaugurating the Conference. He paid tribute to His Excellency Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdullah Bin Zaher Al-Hinai, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (Oman), for his able guidance as Chairman of the Conference. He thanked the Director-General of FAO and the Conference Secretariat for the efforts made in preparing the Conference documents and for the smooth and efficient management of the meeting. He congratulated the Director-General on his re-election.

120. Mr Salah Jum'a, FAO Regional Representative for the Near East, spoke on behalf of the Director-General. He expressed his gratitude to His Majesty the Sultan, the Government and the people of Oman for hosting the Conference, for the generous hospitality and for the excellent arrangements and facilities which contributed substantially to the success of the Conference. He expressed his appreciation and thanks to His Highness Sayyid Thuwaini Bin Shihab, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, for inaugurating the Conference. He paid special tribute to the Chairman, His Excellency Sheikh Al-Hinai, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries (Oman), the Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur, whose presence and experience made this meeting a notable success. He thanked the National Organizing Committee and the Secretariat for their efforts in ensuring the smooth running of the Conference.

121. In his closing statement, His Excellency Sheikh Al-Hinai, Chairman of the Conference, reiterated his profound thanks and appreciation to the Director-General of FAO and the Regional Representative for the Near East for their continued effort in making a success of the meeting. He thanked Their Excellencies

the Ministers, the Heads and Members of Delegations for their active participation and invaluable contributions. He paid tribute to all those who took part in preparing and servicing the Conference. He noted that the Conference was able to discuss in depth the Agenda items and reach concrete and constructive recommendations and conclusions.

122. The Conference Chairman announced the Conference closed at 11.00 hours on Thursday, 17 March 1988.

APPENDIX A

AGENDA

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

1. Opening of the Conference
2. Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairmen and Appointment of Rapporteur
3. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

II. STATEMENTS

4. Statement by the Director-General
5. Country Statements and General Debate on the State of Food and Agriculture in the Near East
6. Report on the State of Food and Agriculture in the Near East; FAO Activities in the Region; Action Taken on the Main Recommendations Made by the Eighteenth Regional Conference; Meeting of the Near East Statutory Bodies; and FAO Programme of Work for 1988-89 in the Region

III. SELECTED ISSUES OF AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

7. Intra-Regional Labour Mobility and Agricultural Development in the Near East Region
8. Energy for Rural and Agricultural Development in the Near East
9. Development of Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture
10. Representation of the Region on the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

IV. CONCLUDING ITEMS

11. Other business: Locust Infestation
12. Date and Place of the Twentieth FAO Regional Conference for the Near East
13. Adoption of the Report
14. Closure of the Conference

APPENDIX B

المرفق " ب "

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

قائمة بأسماء المشتركين

OFFICERS OF THE CONFERENCE

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Vice-Chairmen: Heads of Delegations نواب الرئيس : رؤساء الوفود
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جمهورية اليمن الديمقراطية

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

اللجنة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية لغربي آسيا

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نائب الممثل المقيم في سلطنة عمان
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المستشار الاقليمي للتعاونيات
للمنظمة في الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا
المكتب الاقليمي لمنظمة العمل الدولية
للدول العربية - جنيف

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CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT

أمانة المؤتمر

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NERC/88/REP/1 Draft Report of the Conference

NERC/88/OD Series

NERC/88/OD/1 to
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STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies ... Ministers, Heads of Delegations,
Distinguished Delegates and Observers,
Brothers and Sisters,

It is a privilege and honour to meet, once every two years, with the leaders of agriculture and food affairs in the countries of the Near East Region.

Indeed, it is a valuable and dear occasion, which gives me the opportunity to confer with such an elite gathering, bringing together the most senior officials who are responsible for the development of this sector.

Agriculture, we are often reminded, is an issue of vital importance. More accurately, we should say that agriculture and food are the two basic issues of human life.

A decent life, after all, is a life free from want, free from hunger, where no man is enslaved or subjected, because of his need to food, or fear from hunger.

These noble humanitarian objectives brought us together here, to hold our Conference which opens today, in this hospitable country, Oman, under the auspices of His Majesty, Sultan Qabous Ben Saïd.

We have all enjoyed the lavish generosity His Majesty has conferred upon this meeting. Such splendid facilities, and excellent arrangements are but a glimpse of his royal outstanding generosity.

In the name of the Conference, and on behalf of the FAO Secretariat, and all the distinguished delegates participating, I express our deepest thanks to His Majesty Sultan Qabous, and to the Government of Oman, in the meantime conveying our special appreciation to H.E. Shiekh Mohammed Ben Abdallah Ben Zahir El Hanafi, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mr Chairman,

The Conference has unanimously elected you chairman of the current session, placing their trust in your wisdom and ability, and expressing their gratitude to your great and hospitable country. It is my great pleasure to be the first to congratulate you on your election, wishing you all success and looking forward, with my colleagues in the Conference Secretariat, to fruitful and close cooperation with your Excellency.

I express my congratulations also to their Excellencies the Heads of Delegations, elected as vice-chairmen of this Conference, and to the Rapporteur you have designated.

I should also like to welcome their Excellencies the Ministers, the distinguished Heads and Members of delegations, the Observers and the Representatives of Regional and International, Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations, and thank them for accepting FAO's invitation to attend this Regional Conference.

Following these introductory remarks, I would like to make only a brief statement before you begin your deliberations. I will talk about the principal subjects: the economic situation and its prospects, and the latest food and agricultural situation, in both cases concentrating on their effects on the countries of this region; and, third, the decisions of the very important session of the FAO Conference in November last year.

WORLD ECONOMIC SITUATION

The world economic situation and prospects continue to offer little comfort for the developing countries. Above all, the future rate of economic growth in the industrialized countries is uncertain, and the danger of a recession has not yet passed. The latest forecasts are for slower growth this year than last in these countries. Although the same forecasts indicate a recovery in economic growth in the developing countries, how far this can be sustained will depend greatly on what happens in the industrialized ones, which are still their main markets for most products.

Other uncertainties stem from currency instability and fluctuating interest rates. Unemployment is being reduced only very slowly in the developed countries, and inflation is creeping up again in some of them.

In spite of some recent recoveries in commodity prices in world trade, they are still at very depressed levels, in some cases below the costs of production. The biggest recovery has been in the prices of agricultural raw materials, and the cotton exporters in the Near East have benefited from this. Prices of food commodities have lagged behind, but this has probably benefited a majority of countries in the Region, as so many of them are large importers of food. The most important price change for the Region is, of course, the further drop in oil prices. This has had adverse effects not only on the oil exporters themselves, but also on the neighbouring countries that supply them with immigrant labour.

There was only a small increase in the volume and value of international trade (in total and agricultural products) in 1986, the latest year for which there is full information. There are still many tensions concerning world trade, and especially its agricultural component, including continued pressure in some countries for stronger protectionist measures. We can only hope that good progress in resolving these problems can be achieved in the current round of GATT negotiations, which cover agricultural products for the first time, although concrete results are clearly going to take some years to have effect. Another of the rather few encouraging signs is that, with the recent adherence of the USSR, it looks as if UNCTAD's Common Fund for Commodities will finally become a reality quite soon.

The large debt problems of so many of the developing countries are obviously going to limit their development prospects for many years to come. Although not yet anywhere near as serious in the Near East as, for example, in some Latin American countries, they are already becoming an important problem in the Region. With lower oil revenues, even the richer countries are having difficulty in financing the debts incurred during their earlier prosperity. This is already affecting the finance available for their agricultural development and for the purchase of food imports. In several countries these problems are reinforced by the diversion of large sums to armament expenditures, in order to meet national security problems.

In this context, the availability of international development assistance assumes even more importance than before. Its recent performance has, however, been disappointing. It is many years now since there has been any substantial growth in real terms (discounting inflation) either in total official development assistance or in that for agriculture. But we can at least take some comfort from the recently agreed replenishments for those two particularly crucial financing institutions, IDA and IFAD.

This Region can also be proud of the record of OPEC assistance. In 1986, the latest year for which there is fairly complete information, official development assistance from the industrialized countries was less than 0.4 percent of their GNP, and only five of them exceeded the target of 0.7 percent set many years ago in the United Nations International Development Strategy. OPEC aid, however, in spite of lower oil revenues, was still 0.9 percent of GNP, with figures up to 3 percent in Kuwait and 4.5 percent in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, most of it is deployed in this Region and is "untied".

FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SITUATION

Turning now to more specific aspects of the world food and agricultural situation, food supplies are still adequate at the global level, but there has been some deterioration in 1987/88 and developments will need to be carefully monitored this year. World cereal production declined substantially in 1987 and for the first time in four years was less than annual consumption, so that stocks will be sharply reduced at the end of the current season. As a result, cereal prices, especially for rice and wheat, have strengthened on international markets, with adverse effects on the import bills of most Near East countries.

Fertilizer prices have also risen, although they are still well below the levels of the early 1980s. The long-term growth of fertilizer use in the developing countries is slowing down, reflecting the inability of many of them to import their full requirements because of balance of payments problems. In the Near East the main exporters of fertilizers (Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia) are benefiting from the higher prices, but in the rest of the Region they have caused increased difficulties.

The overall food and agricultural situation in the Near East has become slightly less favourable. Cereal production fell by 6 percent in 1987 and the outlook for the current crops is mixed. The Region's cereal stocks are expected to fall by about 14 percent in 1987/88. Several countries are facing exceptional food emergencies (including the need to provide for refugee populations), and I have approved FAO/WFP emergency food aid for Algeria, Djibouti, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan and Somalia. Near East countries received almost 40 percent of the total food aid in 1986/87. This year the food aid needs of several of them are higher, but the total supply is expected to be lower.

Almost half of the countries of the Region (excluding those with a negligible agricultural base) have raised their agricultural production by 3 percent or more a year in the past decade, and several have exceeded the "sound barrier" of the United Nations target of 4 percent. Saudi Arabia has achieved the remarkable growth rate of 9 percent. These attainments are a tribute to the high priority given to food and agriculture and to investment in this sector, in spite of the difficult national security problems in so many countries.

Food consumption levels have improved dramatically. Average dietary energy supplies per head rose from 2 400 calories a day in the early 1970s to nearly 3 000 by 1983/85. This is much more than in the other developing regions and almost on a par with the industrialized countries.

However, we must not forget that such impressive average figures conceal the continued existence of a vast amount of rural poverty. A recent World Bank study found that nearly a third of the Region's rural population could be considered as living in poverty.

Moreover, the pace of progress has recently slackened. This probably mainly reflects a reduction in investment funds, in subsidies and in the foreign exchange available to pay for imports, resulting from the lower oil prices and other adverse factors in the world economic climate.

During the 1970s food production in the Region rose faster than in the developing world as a whole, but in the present decade the increase has fallen behind this average. And in 1987 the Region's food production expanded by less than 1 percent, or only a third as much as population. Indeed, only half of the countries have managed to raise their food production faster than population growth since the mid-1970s, so that in the Region as a whole, production per head has stagnated for a decade.

The food consumption improvements have been at the cost of large imports. The Region's food imports reached a peak value of almost US\$ 23 billion in 1981, or 13 percent of the world total. In 1986 they still cost nearly US\$ 18 billion in spite of much lower prices. However, they declined in volume in both 1985 and 1986. Since this coincided with slower

increases in domestic production, it seems unlikely that the increases in food consumption per head have been sustained in the last few years.

FAO CONFERENCE

Since this Regional Conference is the first to be held after the particularly important full Conference of FAO in November 1987, I should give you an account of its decisions.

The Conference just ended was one of the most important for the future of the Organization. It was attended by representatives from 155 countries, which included 120 ministers and 75 observers. A son of this Region, His Excellency Faisal Al-Khaled, the Minister of Commerce and Industry of Kuwait, was elected Chairman. I was pleased to receive the renewed confidence of the majority of Member Nations which re-elected me for another term of office. I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to the countries of this Region, my most natural constituency, for their continued confidence in me and for their sponsorship and support of my candidature.

I was also happy that yet another person from the Region, His Excellency Lassaad Ben Osman, Minister of Agriculture of Tunisia, was elected as the Independent Chairman of the Council.

As is customary, the Programme of Work and Budget for the 1988-89 biennium was the main item on the Agenda. After detailed discussion, it was approved by an overwhelming majority, with only five votes against, at the level of US\$ 493 million. The main contributor has substantial arrears for the years 1987 and 1988. The resulting liquidity crisis has lead me to slow down the implementation of the programme in 1988.

The Conference dealt with the need for a review of certain aspects of the work of FAO. The debate was most heated. Although most countries did not believe this to be necessary, it was agreed that a review would be made by the Programme and Finance Committees, meeting jointly and with such external expert assistance as decided. The Director-General's role and responsibility is fully recognized and I am invited to service the Committees and present my views and proposals on all aspects of their study. I am to transmit their findings to the Council in June 1989.

I am confident that this review will lead to the strengthening of FAO, and in particular enable Member Governments to have a better understanding of how the Organization works. This Region will have an important voice in the outcome, since the Chairman of the Finance Committee, Ambassador Bukhari, the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to FAO and Libya and Lebanon are members of the Programme Committee.

The Conference also dwelt on FAO's liquidity crisis. During the 1986-87 biennium there were arrears of US\$ 92 million in budgetary contributions, more than two-thirds of them due from the largest contributor. In 1987 we were forced to reduce planned expenditures by US\$ 25 million, with obvious effects on programme delivery and services to Member Governments. The Conference requested me to report every four months on the state of conditions, cash flow and liquidity, and the first of these financial reports is due at the end of next month. In addition I am reporting verbally every month on the situation to the Permanent Representatives in Rome.

At present I envisage that this year we shall have to reduce planned expenditures by about US\$ 20 million. The final reduction might still be slightly smaller if some of the major contributors make sufficient payments in time. I have appealed to all Member Governments to pay the arrears as well as their assessed contributions for 1988 as quickly as possible, and this has met with some favourable response. I renew this appeal today to the Governments of the Near East Region.

I remain confident that I shall be able to implement 90-95 percent of the programme by using credit facilities until receipt of outstanding contributions.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not refer to the debate on budget procedures. Two proposals in the form of draft resolutions were made, one by the USA and the other by Costa Rica and India. This subject is of great concern to the major contributor and will be reviewed this year by the Joint Programme and Finance Committees and by the Council.

Those of you who were at the Conference will have seen that there was an unfortunate atmosphere of tension and indeed distrust between two groups of delegates. It is my hope that the review now under way will help to reduce this polarization and that all the decisions involved can be made in a renewed spirit of consensus.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The tension is symptomatic of a major crisis in international cooperation for development. Several industrialized countries manifest disenchantment with multilateral cooperation. This loss of confidence has resulted in reduced support for it and at the same time an insistence on a bigger say in its administration.

I hope that the Regional Conference will strongly reaffirm the value of international and especially multilateral cooperation both in meeting emergencies and in promoting longer-term food supplies. Multilateral assistance has a number of well-known advantages for the recipient countries and can also effectively complement bilateral assistance. In this Region it has, for example, been particularly useful in mobilizing resources to combat the age-old locust plague and in helping small countries to gain access to improved agricultural technology.

Mr Chairman, I do not wish to delay any further your deliberations on your heavy Agenda.

To my regret, I cannot stay here for more than the beginning of your discussion. However, my Assistant Director-General for the Near East and other senior staff will be here with you and I shall await with the greatest interest their reports to me on your conclusions.

In thanking you for listening to me, may I also extend my best wishes for a most successful Conference.

You have, undoubtedly, noticed that I did not deal with any of the subjects on your Conference agenda. It is because these issues will be dealt with accordingly by my colleagues in the Secretariat, each in his turn and

according to his expertise. I shall be pleased to follow, through the Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative for the Near East, my colleague Salah Juma', your comments and all your practical recommendations which, I am sure, would be in the interest of the countries of the Region, and within the mandate of FAO and its objectives.

I should like once again, to express my warmest gratitude and highest appreciation for the great leader of this country and the planner of its recent development and progress, His Majesty Sultan Qabous Ben Saïd, to His Majesty's Government and the generous hospitality and marvellous welcome treatment. I should also like to thank all those who contributed to the preparations for this Conference, and reiterate my appreciation for the participating delegates, wishing them and their countries every success and prosperity.

