



1. Do you agree with the priorities in FAO's regional plan to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and build more resilient, inclusive and sustainable food systems? Have you identified any additional priorities specific to your country?

FAO Priorities

- Building resilience for food security and nutrition is essential to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Degradation of natural resources, water scarcity, increased desertification and conflict are among the key drivers of food and nutrition insecurity in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region.¹
- The impact of crises is long-lasting affecting both the production capacity and economic growth in the NENA region and the resilience capacity of individuals, households and communities. The COVID 19 pandemic has exacerbated these issues, making implementation of the FAO regional plan an even greater priority.
- Investing in resilience and food security in the NENA region is vital to fight hunger and sustain peace, whilst it is a powerful lever to reach the Sustainable Development Goal pledge 'to leave no one behind.' With its global reach and influence, the FAO is best placed to create the partnerships and stimulate the actions needed to ensure food security.

Specific UAE Issues

- From the perspective of the United Arab Emirates, we are a country considered relatively food secure thanks largely to our economic and political stability. Because of this, we are currently ranked at number 21 on the Global Food Security Index. However, we are still required to import around 90% of our food and addressing food security challenges from our arid climate, shrinking groundwater levels and the instability of the wider region is a priority.
- Naturally, ensuring adequate supplies of potable water is a priority for the UAE in view of our low annual rainfall and shrinking groundwater levels. World Bank figures show that our agricultural sector alone consumes about 83% of the total water demand of the country compared to our domestic and industrial sectors.
- To reduce the UAE's dependency on energy-intensive desalination methods that are currently in use, we are progressively introducing solar-powered desalination techniques

¹ <http://www.fao.org/neareast/perspectives/building-resilience/en/>



that are enabling us to reduce our carbon footprint while still ensuring adequate quantities of potable water to meet our needs.

2. What are the roles of different stakeholders in transforming food systems in the region: governments, FAO, development partners, the private sector, civil society organizations, and producers' organisations?

The FAO:

- The FAO serves an essential function as a neutral forum where countries can debate food and agricultural policy, negotiate agreements and reach a consensus on food security targets. In its capacity serving 194 member nations, two associate members, and the European Union, the FAO is vital to meeting the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.²
- The FAO can work closely with governments to impart their expertise. For example, in May this year, the UAE Food Security office signed two partnership agreements with the organisation to the value of USD 3.8 million, with the collaboration targeting the transformation of the agriculture sector to help ensure that everyone has access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food at all times - especially during crises such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Development Partners

- Development bodies such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), United Nations and World Bank are vitally important as partners for ensuring global food security.
- Work on food security at the WTO takes place in the Agriculture Committee. The WTO also contributes expertise to the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), as recommended by the United Nations High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, to which the WTO is a member.³

² [https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/food-agriculture-organization-fao.asp#:~:text=The%20Food%20and%20Agriculture%20Organization%20\(FAO\)%20is%20an%20agency%20of,%2C%20forestry%2C%20and%20fisheries%20practices.](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/f/food-agriculture-organization-fao.asp#:~:text=The%20Food%20and%20Agriculture%20Organization%20(FAO)%20is%20an%20agency%20of,%2C%20forestry%2C%20and%20fisheries%20practices.)

³ https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/food_security_e.htm#:~:text=Since%202013%2C%20WTO%20members%20have,it%20to%20people%20in%20need.



- Launched by the UN in 2002, GAIN is an international organization working to end malnutrition within this lifetime. They focus their efforts on children and women, while building alliances between businesses, government, and civil society to deliver programs in 29 countries and help reduce malnutrition globally.

Governments:

- Governments have a key role to play in formulating food security strategies that enshrine policies and protocols for domestic food production, minimising food loss and waste and promoting the free flow of food products across borders. They enact legislation and can also establish nutritional guidelines that aim to keep their populations healthy and productive by ensuring that they understand what constitutes a healthy diet.
- Governments are vital to opening up national agricultural sectors to private companies. For example, following the establishment of the UAE's Food Security Office in October 2017, one of the first things we did was to remove perceived barriers to private sector involvement in all aspects of the food value chain in the UAE. In the space of 100 days from its opening, the office attracted 50 stakeholders and came up with 10 new initiatives, in the process, opening up a new economic sector in the UAE. One of these initiatives included the Emirates Sustainable Agriculture Label. Compatible with the FAO Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture (SAFA), the label will adhere to the country's AgTech standards, relying on sustainable, pesticide-free and water efficient methods of production. This label will provide a tool to transition towards more sustainable food systems.
- As well as facilitating access for private companies to the agricultural sector, governments can be influential in harnessing the inherent strengths of commercial organisations to meeting national goals. Earlier this year, the UAE formed the AgTech Development Team, a body comprising public sector and private sector stakeholders from the UAE's agricultural technology sector to examine ways of applying the latest technological means, scientific methods and policy developments to enhance the overall food security system.
- The UAE's National Food Security Strategy was launched in November 2018, with key food production targets and other objectives such as healthy nutrition enshrined in a framework comprising key pillars. The strategy's various goals and timelines aim to see the country as the world's most food secure nation on the Global Food Security Index by 2051.



The Private Sector:

- Incorporating the private sector is essential to meet agricultural goals. The private sector and commercial organisations - particularly start-ups and SMEs - are innovative, disruptive and can accelerate transition from traditional agricultural systems into smart ag-tech ones.
- Following the government's efforts to transform its agriculture landscape to technology-based and sustainable agriculture, the UAE is now attracting many companies from around the world to establish themselves in the country.

Civil Society Organisations

- Civil organisations have a vital role to play in meeting other aspects of food security, such as food loss and waste. The UAE Food Bank, for example, is a non-profit charitable organisation launched in January 2017 under the umbrella of the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives. Since then, several other branches have been announced to open in the country and a number of partnerships have been established to channel food donations to those in need. The initiative aims to reduce the amount of food wasted in order to help the UAE in its aim of recycling 75% of its food waste by 2021.
- The UAE also places tremendous efforts when it comes to foreign aid and our humanitarian objectives, helping with food and medical supplies. In the last 10 years, the UAE has helped 198 countries with a total contribution of USD 53.25 billion

Producer Organisations

- Producer organisations are essential for driving market reform and food security. Farmer based groups are influential in campaigning for fairer market conditions, fairer access to international markets, improved government support, the provision of rural infrastructure and a greater role for smallholder farmers in the decision-making process.⁴

3. How can countries across the region bring together their resources, knowledge and skills to transform domestic and regional food systems?

⁴ <http://www.fao.org/3/am072e/am072e00.pdf>



- Diplomacy is the bedrock for food security. The UAE has successfully created a strong food supply import network thanks to the leadership's policy of forging firm and friendly relations with other governments in the region, as well as around the world.
- Our country's outstanding foreign and international cooperation policy has added resilience to the food supply framework which has been an instrumental factor in enabling us to weather the current global pandemic.
- Meetings between the UAE and regional stakeholders have examined the various systems set up to monitor food imports and the flow of agri-food goods, discussed the progress made on diversifying food import sources, and reviewed how to bring together all actors in the food security ecosystem.
- In April this year, the Food Security Office attended a regional meeting to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Food Security and nutrition. The event was hosted by The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - the current president of the G20 - and was instrumental in improving bilateral food security relations during this critical time.
- Fundamentally, it is diplomacy and good international relations that are the foundation for food security. A strong food supply import and information sharing network can be derived from a policy of friendly relations between governments in the region, as well as with those around the world.
- Thank you.

-Ends-