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منظمة
الأغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-third Session

Rome, Italy, 9-13 May 2016

Statement by the Chairperson of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East

Your Excellency Mr Independent Chairperson of the Council,

Your Excellency Mr Director-General of FAO,

Your Excellencies Ministers,

Your Excellencies Ambassadors,

Honourable Delegates,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. It is an honour and a pleasure for me to be here today to present to you the results of the follow-up to the recommendations of the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) during the Lebanese term of office as Chair. As you know (NERC 32) was held in Rome from 24 to 28 February 2014, attended by 155 Delegates from 22 Member Nations, 7 Observer Nations, 3 UN Organizations, 1 Inter-governmental Organization, 3 International Non-governmental Organizations and 1 Observer.

2. The Conference made very important recommendations under the Programme and Budget matters which I reported to the 149th Session of the FAO Council in June 2014. I have also presented the recommendations of NERC32 related to the Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Matters to the 39th Session of FAO Conference in June, 2015.

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3. Today, the actions taken by the Regional Office in response to the recommendations made will be the focus of my talk.
4. As you know, conflicts in the region were highlighted in NERC32 as a major factor contributing to food insecurity and to increasing the vulnerability of a wide sector of the population in the Near East and North Africa. In 2015, FAO confirmed the fast deteriorating food security and nutrition situation, due to the spreading of conflicts and instability, through a "Regional Overview report of Food Insecurity in the Near East and North Africa". This report called for collective action to build resilience for food security and nutrition in the region.
5. Consequently, FAO carried out different types of country assessments to provide accurate data to inform FAO and other UN agencies' programmes. The assessments include the FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) in Sudan and Syria and the Damage Needs Assessment (DNA) in Iraq and the West Bank/Gaza Strip.
6. Advocacy and outreach initiatives targeting donors were also intensified in 2014–2015, leading to mobilizing USD 109 million for countries in crisis from different donors including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a regional donor.
7. Moreover, FAO continued to convene the Regional Multi-stakeholder Workshop on Food Security and Nutrition, and, in 2015 held the fourth such meeting jointly with the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the League of Arab States, WFP and other members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism Thematic Working Group on Food Security and Nutrition. Such workshops have contributed to the understanding of the challenges and options facing the region in improving food security and nutrition.
8. In the last session, the Conference endorsed the Regional Strategic Framework for the Reduction of Food Losses and Waste in the Near East and North Africa, and during the inter-sessional period support has been provided for the implementation of the regional strategic framework for food losses and wastes.
9. Advocacy material to sensitize the public on the importance of reducing food losses and waste were developed, published in print media and broadcasted online and on regional TV stations.
10. The Sub-regional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council States and Yemen (SNG) co-organized, with the UAE Ministry of Environment and Water, an awareness campaign to reduce losses in fruits and vegetables, while the Sub-regional Office for North Africa (SNE) worked with caterers for the promotion of food waste reduction.
11. On the other hand, efforts to mainstream gender into regional activities intensified including through regional and sub-regional gender networks. Country gender assessments were conducted in Algeria, Lebanon and Sudan, and two case studies on social protection with a gender perspective were completed in Egypt and Lebanon. Women entrepreneurs in the UAE and Egypt have been encouraged to establish agro-food business enterprises through events held in collaboration with the General Women's Union of UAE and the Arab Women Investors Union. Moreover, capacity building of rural institutions in gender mainstreaming through a gender-sensitive value chain analysis on medicinal and aromatic plants in Fayoum, Egypt, has been undertaken. Of particular interest, I am pleased to report on the work on gender disaggregated information and statistical data which has been completed in Algeria, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia in 2015, and is being extended to Egypt, Iran and Iraq in 2016.
12. In relation to the priorities for FAO Activities in the Near East and North Africa, I am pleased to confirm that all three endorsed Regional Initiatives have been launched as planned, with delivery

teams established, focus countries identified and work plans at the country and regional levels developed and operationalized during 2014 - 2015. In his statement, Mr. Director General has reported on their achievements. Here I would like to mention that in response to the recommendations of NERC32, multi-country projects, under the three initiatives have been formulated for Jordan and Lebanon in the context of the Syria crisis; a multi-country project has also been formulated to support 'water sustainability' for implementing the 2030 Agenda for water-related Sustainable Development Goals in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen. Dialogue is ongoing with donors to secure funds for these projects.

13. Projects proposals for Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Sudan, Syria and West Bank/Gaza Strip have also been developed and submitted to donor countries in the region.

14. One of the important political milestones that I am glad to report about under the Regional Initiative on "Water Scarcity for the Near East and North Africa" is the official endorsement of the Initiative by the Arab Water Ministerial Council.

Ladies and gentleman,

15. The previous NERC session has emphasised the importance of interregional issues, such as trans-boundary plant pests and animal diseases. I am pleased to inform you that these have been partially addressed particularly in the context of Regional Commissions and workshops addressing MERS-Corona Virus and FMD, and that more efforts are planned for the coming biennium.

16. On the other hand, South-South Cooperation agreements have been signed with Egypt and Morocco, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. A concept note for South-South action plans of collaboration has also been developed and presented to several recipient countries for potential funding considerations.

17. In relation to decentralization and decentralized offices network, efforts to strengthen the capacity of the Regional Office have seen the number of professional staff and long-term consultants at RNE registering an increase of 7 percent approximately. New areas of expertise covered include resilience, small-scale agriculture, farmer field schools, social protection, results-based management and communication.

18. During this Conference, we will discuss as well the document related to the Independent Review of the Decentralized Offices Network. Within this context, I would like to reiterate the readiness of the Government of Lebanon to host generously the FAO subregional office for the Mashrek, and thank in advance the Regional Conference for its support.

19. The Sub-regional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council States and Yemen has been strengthened during the biennium and achieved important results, including the formulation of a sustainable agriculture development strategy for the UAE; the initiation of pilot projects for water-saving in the UAE; the organization of several technical meetings addressing major challenges for the sub-region, including MERS-Corona Virus and the support to the formulation and implementation of fisheries and aquaculture projects in Yemen and Oman.

20. The Sub-regional Office for North Africa has also been strengthened during 2014-2015. A new subregional coordinator was appointed subsequent to the retirement of his predecessor; a national field programme support and monitoring officer was recruited, and an international senior policy officer was selected.

21. The FAO Representative positions in the region have been filled. A fully fledged FAO Representative has been appointed in Jordan and Deputy Representative positions in Sudan, Syria and Yemen have been established during 2014-2015.

22. On the other hand, the decentralization and integration of emergency and development has been completed with multidisciplinary country support teams established to support the implementation of the CPFs and facilitate the mobilization of technical expertise in the Country Offices.

23. In response to the NERC recommendations, FAO strengthened its support to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A Letter of Intent was signed between the Palestinian Minister of Agriculture and the Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa. An appeal for USD 117.5 million for the reconstruction of the agriculture sector was launched.

24. Following the Gaza crisis, FAO stepped up its humanitarian support to farmers in Gaza and to the Bedouins, and implemented projects in value chain development, irrigation and capacity building to control trans-boundary animal diseases, including Avian Influenza. FAO is also supporting the Ministry in the formulation of a sustainable agriculture development strategy.

25. Collaboration with partners has been reinforced and institutionalized through regional Memoranda of Understanding with ICARDA and ICBA in support of the establishment of the Agricultural Innovation Center of the UAE as a regional centre of excellence for research and development on the potential of protected agriculture. Additionally, partnership with ICARDA includes support to the introduction of new techniques to improve water efficiency in pilot sites in rain-fed and dry-land systems in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. Agreements with other regional partners are under consideration.

26. Recognizing the importance of the Unilateral Trust Fund (UTF) modality as a means to respond to middle – and high - income country priorities, RNE organized the Saudi Arabia Agriculture Week in Cairo in April 2014, back-to-back with the UTF joint committee meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen, under other items discussed in the previous session of NERC, I would like to inform you that:

27. Following the approval of the revised MYPOW 2012-15 for the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, meetings with the Chair of NERC as well as regular video conferencing with the Rome-based Permanent Representative Group for the Near East were arranged to brief them on the progress achieved in implementing the recommendations of the 32nd Session of NERC and the preparations for the 33rd session.

28. In relation to the FAO/WHO Second International Conference on Nutrition, RNE provided technical support to countries for reviewing their respective nutrition papers (Egypt, Lebanon, Oman & Sudan) and for organizing pre-ICN2 national workshops/events (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan & UAE).

29. In relation to the support provided to Yemen, I am glad to report that a "Plan of Action: Towards Resilient and Sustainable Livelihoods for Agriculture and Food and Nutrition Security 2014–2018", with funding requirements totalling USD 145 million, was developed, of which USD 33.7 million were mobilized up to the end of December 2015.

30. A USD 5.8 million worth Memorandum of Understanding was signed in September 2015 with the King Salman Center of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to support food security and local food production in crisis-affected districts in Yemen. In total, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has provided a generous contribution of USD 19.5 million to support FAO interventions in Iraq and Yemen.

31. I would like to conclude calling upon other countries to support the Regional Solidarity Trust Fund.

Thank you for your attention