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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-seventh Session

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Results for FAO in the Near East and North Africa region-2022-23

Executive Summary

To assist Members in managing the multiple challenges caused by conflicts, climate change and economic shocks, FAO implemented proactive and tailored approaches and reoriented its programme of work in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region. FAO helped Members to transform their agrifood systems and achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets related to food and agriculture. This included the restructuring of the Regional and Subregional Offices, the establishment of dedicated teams such as the Strategy and Policy Unit, and innovative approaches such as the regional food security and nutrition observatory, the regional leadership development academy, and capacity building for transformation, including of FAO staff.

Over the 2022-23 biennium, FAO has taken significant steps toward reorienting its programme of work in NENA countries to better contribute to agrifood system transformation and the SDG targets related to food and agriculture. This includes the introduction of new working modalities and innovative initiatives at regional and country levels. This document highlights some of the most salient results and achievements during the 2022-23 biennium.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- a. Recognize the progress made in 2022-23 through innovative approaches, restructuring and focused programme of work in the region to achieve more socially and economically inclusive, sustainable, resilient and nutrition-sensitive agrifood systems.
- b. Acknowledge the need to apply strategic, systemic, flexible, responsive and tailored approaches, welcomed the improvement of the structure, working modalities and strategic initiatives to respond to major challenges related to agriculture and food security in the region.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

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I. Introduction

1. This document presents major developments and principal results achieved in the Region during the 2022-2023 biennium, which represents the first biennium under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, focusing on the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life*, leaving no one behind.

2. FAO conducts its regional-, subregional-, and country-level work under the Strategic Framework 2022-31, delivering against its results framework through identified Programme Priority Areas (PPAs). Furthermore, during the biennium, FAO supported Members for the successful implementation of the FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031, the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy and their action plans, as well as other thematic strategies.

3. Following the 36th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East held in 2022, FAO focused its work in the region through the following Regional Priorities:

Regional Priority 1: Rural transformation and inclusive value chains

Regional Priority 2: Food security and healthy diets for all

Regional Priority 3: Greening agriculture, water scarcity and climate action

Regional Priority 4: Building resilience to multiple shocks

4. These Regional Priorities were aligned with relevant PPAs and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure a clear causal results hierarchy, complemented by elements to focus, accelerate and enable the Organization's work.

II. Context changes and priority adjustments

5. The region has been facing multiple crises in recent years, negatively affecting food and nutrition and eroding the public sector's mitigation capacity. Development partners, particularly FAO, are key in supporting Members to ensure food security and nutrition and transform agrifood systems for more efficiency, inclusivity, sustainability and resilience. FAO has adjusted its programme to address emerging challenges and enhance its assistance effectiveness.

Adjustments for Better Production

6. The region continued to face negative impacts of the economic slowdown caused by COVID-19 and other social- and security-related challenges. It has posed significant challenges to the agriculture sector such as the lack of adequate capital, labour and supply chain disruptions.

7. Responding to these challenges, FAO focused on supporting Members in ensuring and enhancing agriculture production and yields through innovation and deployment of digital agriculture and related practices. The focus was also on improving rural livelihoods, and the inclusion and strengthening of marginalized communities, women and youth in the agrifood systems.

8. FAO supported smallholder farmers for better integration in agriculture and food value chains and enhanced support through policy tools and investments or public spending. The development of food value chains, particularly in conflict-affected areas, and improving agribusiness and related ecosystems were also areas of FAO's programmatic support. The launch of the Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services (AFRAS) helped to provide an effective and inclusive platform to manage the aforementioned challenges.

Adjustments for Better Nutrition

9. As the region depends heavily on trade for ensuring food security, the recent disruptions in global markets, mainly due to the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, and rising prices in global and national markets posed significant challenges for affordable healthy diets.

10. In order to mitigate such challenges, FAO focused on supporting Members in adopting policies and implementation framework for using trade as an enabler for food security. FAO support included

the development of analytical papers, capacity development activities and the analytical model to find untapped potential of intraregional trade in food.

11. FAO also focused on enhancing the understanding and adoption of the agrifood systems approach and mainstreaming nutrition in food security and related policies.

12. Other areas of support and enhanced work were on urban food systems through a first regional dialogue, a launch of the guidelines on food loss and waste, and a mapping of food safety and related challenges in the region.

Adjustments for Better Environment

13. The region is at the forefront of facing negative impacts of climate change, particularly water scarcity, droughts and soil erosion. It is imperative that FAO works with Members in a dynamic, timely and tailored manner.

14. As the last two of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conferences of Parties were held in the Region, FAO supported Members, especially the host countries, in ensuring that agriculture and food are mainstreamed in the discussion on climate change. FAO contributed towards the launch of initiatives such as the Nexus of Water, Food and Energy (NWFE) and Food and Agriculture for Sustainable Transformation Initiative (FAST). FAO also upscaled its efforts to mitigate water scarcity challenges through its Water Scarcity Initiative that is the leading regional platform for knowledge exchange and capacity building for managing water stress.

Adjustments for Better Life

15. FAO continued to support Members in managing natural and anthropogenic shocks and emergencies, as well as protracted crises situations, affecting several countries of the region. This support aimed to mitigate the effects of such shocks and emergencies, which lead to hunger, decimating livelihoods, restricting people's future life opportunities and driving displacement and migration. The efforts were geared towards enhancing technical and institutional capacities to anticipate, prevent, prepare, respond, cope with and recover from shocks and crises.

III. Achievements in the Region

1. Regional Priorities and key achievements in 2022-23

16. During the 2022-2023 biennium, FAO revamped its work programme in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) countries to enhance the transformation of agrifood systems and the achievement of food- and agriculture-related SDGs. This shift focused on four interlinked Regional Priorities, new working methods and innovative initiatives at regional and country levels. Key actions included the establishment of the Regional Leadership Development Academy to enhance leadership capabilities for transforming agrifood systems, the establishment of a strategy and policy unit at the Regional Office to provide tailored and strategic support to Members, the development of a country- and sub-regional food security and nutrition observatory, the launch of the One Country One Priority Product (OCOP) Initiative and the formation of transformative partnerships.

17. The major achievements through four Regional Priorities are as follows.

Regional Priority 1: Rural Transformation and Inclusive Value Chains

Programme Priority Areas (PPAs)	SDG Targets	Regional Areas of Emphasis
BP1: Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	2.3, 2.4	Promote sustainable intensification of crop, livestock and fish production
BP4: Small-scale producers' equitable access to resources	1.4	Develop competitive and inclusive value chains and agri-business Support producers' organizations and agricultural services
BP5: Digital agriculture	1.4, 5.b, 9.c, 17.8	Promote digital innovation and extension
BL1: Gender equality and rural women's empowerment	5.a	Promote rural women's empowerment
BL2: Inclusive rural transformation	10.1, 14.b	Promote rural youth employment Adopt a territorial approach to rural development, invest in basic infrastructure

18. FAO has made significant improvements in enhancing agricultural productivity and supporting smallholders in the NENA region. Key achievements include the reinforcement of the Farmer Field School (FFS) portfolio, including the creation and dissemination of FFS-related guidance materials. A gender-responsive version of FFS was successfully piloted, focusing on targeting rural women, adapting curricula and challenging harmful gender stereotypes.

19. FAO developed a range of policy briefs and materials targeting key action areas, such as studies on territorial markets and the digital landscape, to increase awareness, resource mobilization and donor engagement in the agrifood sector's digital transformation. These efforts also provided guidance for policymakers and practitioners on implementing digital traceability and transparency systems.

20. As part of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy, the Digital Agriculture Solutions Forum (DASF) was held in July 2023, with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), enhancing regional digital agriculture knowledge and capacity.

21. In collaboration with International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS), the Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services (AFRAS) will be launched on 5 March 2024 at the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC37). A regional consultation on "pathways for advancing Rural Advisory Services (RAS) for inclusive transformation in NENA" in June 2022-2023 focused on enhancing RAS in NENA, gathering government officials, experts and practitioners.

22. During 2022-2023, FAO organized a regional gender training for FAO country focal points and partner counterparts, conducted in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) International Training Centre.

23. In response to interest in the OCOP initiative, FAO developed a regional Technical Cooperation Programme project for six countries.

24. To tackle Food Loss and Waste (FLW), FAO conducted three regional consultations, developed guidelines for FLW reduction, launched a regional network platform for knowledge sharing and held two webinars on food loss measurement and data generation.

25. To respond to the need for tailored guideline to address specific challenges of value chain development in conflict-prone or conflict-affected countries, FAO has published [Developing](#)

[sustainable and resilient agrifood value chains in conflict-prone and conflict-affected contexts](#) adapted to the specificities of conflict-prone and conflict-affected contexts.

Regional Priority 2: Food security and healthy diets for all

Programme Priority Areas (PPAs)	SDG Targets	Regional Areas of Emphasis
BN1: Healthy diets for all	2.1, 2.2	Promote healthy diets and food diversification
BN2: Nutrition for the most vulnerable	2.1, 2.2	Revise food security policies and subsidies
BN3: Safe food for everyone	2.2	Enhance food safety and quality
BN4: Reducing food loss and waste	12.3	Reduce losses and waste along the value chain
BN5: Transparent markets and trade	2.b	Secure food import, promote export and intra-regional trade
BE4: Achieving sustainable urban food systems	2.1	Promote urban agriculture and green cities

26. FAO's efforts focused on transforming agrifood systems, diversifying production, fostering public-private partnerships and advocating for healthier diets through policy reforms, consumer awareness and improved food quality and safety. The emphasis was also on building sustainable urban food systems to meet the region's nutritional needs.

27. The NENA *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition* editions for 2022 and 2023 have been instrumental in highlighting the critical role of trade and trade facilitation in ensuring food security and nutrition. FAO has focused on supporting data-driven policy development, the Quarterly Food Policy Monitoring Bulletin has been a pivotal tool.

28. In response to global crises and their regional impacts, FAO has also undertaken focused studies, such as addressing the challenges posed by the Ukraine crisis and developing a regulatory framework for agricultural data in the NENA region. These studies reflect the programme's agility and responsiveness to emerging global events and their local implications.

29. The development of several online tools marks a leap forward in supporting regional countries with data, evidence and analytics. The Food Security Monitoring and Reporting Dashboard for Jordan, the Trade Map, and the regional version of the Food Price Monitoring and Analysis (FPMA) are exemplary in providing accurate and timely recommendations to decision-makers. These tools are crucial in enhancing the region's capacity to respond to food security challenges effectively.

30. FAO participated as a strategic partner in the World Investment Forum by leading the theme titled "Investing in Transforming Agrifood Systems". The event offered an extraordinary opportunity to highlight the critical need for sustainable investment in agrifood systems.

31. In September 2023, a regionally-tailored *Guidelines for action on food loss and waste reduction in NENA* was developed to support Members in implementing the FAO global [Voluntary Code of Conduct for Food Loss and Waste Reduction](#). The guidelines offer a basis for developing national strategies, policies and legislation enabling food loss and waste reduction in line with national agrifood system objectives of NENA countries.

32. An important milestone was the launch of [a regional FLW network](#) anchored in FAO's global Technical Platform on the Measurement and Reduction of Food Loss and Waste. The network serves as a technical hub for sharing knowledge and good practice on FLW reduction in NENA and

complements the efforts of FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE), Members and partners to take effective action in terms of policy and strategy, data and measurement, and promoting good practices.

Regional Priority 3: Greening agriculture, water scarcity, and climate action

Programme Priority Areas (PPAs)	SDG Targets	Regional Areas of Emphasis
BP1: Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	6.4	Enhance water productivity and governance
BP2: Blue transformation	14.4	Adopt an ecosystem approach to fisheries and aquaculture
BE1: Climate change mitigation and adapted agrifood systems	2.4, 13.2	Climate change adaptation and mitigation actions
BE2: Bioeconomy for sustainable food and agriculture	12.2, 12.4, 12.5	Promote nature-based solutions and recycling
BE3: Biodiversity and ecosystem services for food and agriculture	2.5, 15.1, 15.3	Reduce land and soil degradation (including soil pollution) Scale-up landscape restoration and conservation of biodiversity Adopt an ecosystem approach to fisheries and aquaculture

33. FAO focused on addressing the acute climate-related challenges faced by the NENA region, particularly in terms of food security, environmental sustainability and the well-being of its population.

34. FAO developed and launched the regional flagship publication *The State of Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture in the Near East and North Africa region* in 2022, a significant contribution to the understanding of land and water resource management in the region.

35. FAO has been proactive in organizing various regional workshops and training sessions. These include workshops on pesticide management, sustainable soil management, agricultural plastics and ecosystem restoration initiatives such as a series of webinars and a stocktaking exercise on ecosystem restoration actions in five countries of the region.

36. FAO's commitment to addressing climate change is reflected in its contribution prior to and during the 27th and 28th sessions of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties, and particularly supporting the initiatives related to agriculture and food security, such as the NWFE and FAST.

37. FAO compiled a report entitled *Desalination in the Arab region: Status, Challenges, and Prospects*. This extensive document provides an in-depth analysis of desalination techniques, their applications, challenges, best practices and the role of the private sector. It also outlines various capacity-development strategies and offers recommendations for optimizing desalination practices in the region.

38. FAO has been instrumental in assisting countries like Jordan, Libya, Palestine and Tunisia in developing and implementing sanitation safety plans on a pilot scale. This process, aligned with World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, focuses on wastewater reuse and aims to establish robust, safe and sustainable sanitation practices across these nations.

39. Under its 5-year regional project (2017-2022), FAO made significant progress in promoting integrated water management approaches in eight countries. The project emphasized water accounting,

water productivity, and the Water-Energy-Food nexus approaches, thereby supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's implementation of water use and management.

Regional Priority 4: Building resilience to multiple shocks

Programme Priority Areas (PPAs)	SDG Targets	Regional Areas of Emphasis
BP 3: One Health	1.5; 3.d; 15.8	Enhance One Health approach to address transboundary pests and diseases
BE2: Bioeconomy for sustainable food and agriculture	12.2, 12.4, 12.5	Sustainable pest control practices and combatting antimicrobial resistance
BL3 Agriculture and food emergencies	2.1, 2.2, 16.1	Provide immediate support to crisis-affected households
BL4: Resilient agrifood systems	1.3, 1.5	Strengthen risk information and early warning systems Reduce risks and vulnerability Enhance the quality and impact of resilience programmes
BN2: Nutrition for the most vulnerable	1.3, 2.1, 2.2 3.1, 3.2	Provide immediate support to crisis-affected households to reduce malnutrition

40. Given the region's context of compounded threats, shocks and crises brought about by conflict, climate change impacts, natural hazards, economic challenges and natural resource degradation, the Regional Priority on Building Resilience to Multiple Shocks (RP4) sets out to enhance the resilience of agriculture-based livelihoods and agrifood systems against threats and crises that affect food security and nutrition in NENA. Within the current biennium, FAO has delivered against the below priority Output areas:

- a. improved agriculture hazard and risk information systems (including early warning systems) at regional and country levels;
- b. improved agriculture risk governance in NENA region;
- c. improved risk and vulnerability reduction systems; and
- d. improved quality of resilience and emergency response programming in the NENA region.

41. FAO improved risk governance and risk reduction systems in the region through the development of studies and guidance related to transboundary plant pests and diseases, and the creation or revival of regional coordination networks for risk monitoring and management. FAO contributed to strengthening national capacity to manage and govern various risks through the development of national risk management action plans, institutional capacity building and implementing risk management actions.

42. Desert Locust surveillance and control has continued to be a consistent contribution and activity throughout the biennium through the regional Desert Locust Commission. Countries such as Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Sudan among others, have benefitted from capacity building on the management and response to the Desert Locust. Additionally, countries in the region have continued to receive early warning bulletins, providing surveillance, tracking and early warning information on Desert Locust upsurges in the region.

43. FAO contributed to improved resilience programming in the region through a number of studies, guidelines and capacity-building activities geared towards increasing awareness of cross-cutting

elements such as gender, conflict sensitivity and accountability to affected populations/protection from sexual abuse and exploitation. Further cross-country sharing and collection of best practices on building resilience in countries has been produced. Contributing to this achievement, the RP4:

- a. Contributed to the development of the [practitioner's guidelines on *Developing sustainable and resilient value chains in conflict-prone and conflict-affected contexts*](#). This was followed by a technical workshop attended by representatives from FAO and county partners.
- b. Understanding vulnerability and resilience through a combination of Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA) and SHARP+ methodologies in Jordan and Egypt. This exercise addressed the lack of information to inform the design of resilience programmes that target the most vulnerable populations and focus on those facets that will have the greatest impact on overall resilience.
- c. Continuous capacity building on key elements of accountability to affected populations through support to countries in their beneficiary feedback mechanisms and awareness sessions on protection from sexual abuse and exploitation, especially in high-risk and extensive operations such as Yemen and Sudan.

2. Accelerators, cross-cutting themes and partnerships

44. In order to accelerate progress and maximize efforts in meeting the SDGs and to realize the *four betters*, FAO applies four cross-cutting accelerators in all programmatic interventions to accelerate impact while minimizing trade-offs:

- a. FAO supported Members in the adoption and mainstreaming of technology for sustainable agrifood systems. The support towards developing the regional digital agriculture strategy, the 1 000 Digital Villages Initiative and collaborative work with ITU and other partners was relevant and well received.
- b. FAO has supported Members in the adoption of innovation in the agrifood systems in order to achieve more sustainable, inclusive, productive and resilient agrifood systems in the region. The regional strategy on science and innovation and related advocacy and capacity-development activities have been undertaken during the biennium.
- c. Data products contribute to strengthening evidence-based decision-making and include the development of methods, standards and frameworks, and also the collection, processing and dissemination of data, together with required capacity building and partnerships. FAO has started working towards a regional food security and nutrition observatory that will bring together all existing data, through tailored analytics, in a dashboard that will support regional action towards agrifood system transformation.
- d. Complements (governance, human capital and institutions) are necessary and complementary dimensions of effective collective action at all scales, considering, in particular, that while technology and innovation have achieved important progress over the last decade, many stakeholders remain excluded from their benefits. Through the newly established Strategy and Policy Unit, FAO aims at supporting the Members in developing capacities of human resources and institutions. FAO has established the THRIVE Academy, a Regional Leadership Development Academy, to strengthen capacities in leading the agrifood systems transformation.

45. The cross-cutting themes of gender, youth and inclusion are critical areas identified to be taken into account across all of FAO's programmatic work in order to ensure the achievement of the UN programming principle of leaving no one behind, as reflected in FAO's strategic narrative. FAO's work in the region focused on enhancing inclusion, particularly of the marginalized communities, women empowerment and mobilizing potential of youth for transforming agrifood systems.

3. FAO's corporate strategies and initiatives

46. FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative strives to facilitate agrifood systems transformation and sustainable rural development accelerated through targeting the poorest and the hungry, differentiating territories and strategies, and bringing together all relevant dimensions through analysis and partnerships. Three countries in the region have embarked on the Hand-in-Hand initiative (Yemen, Syrian Arab Republic and Sudan). Approaches are tailored to country specificities, and it is expected that, in the forthcoming biennium, the Initiative will be able to accelerate progress towards addressing the needs of the poorest and the hungry. The Initiative also contributes to FAO efforts to promote territorial approaches to rural transformation.

47. Under the FAO's Global Action on Green Development of Special Agricultural Products: "One Country One Priority Product", the following countries of the region are participating in the OCOF: Algeria for figs; Egypt, Iraq and Jordan for dates; Lebanon for pulses; Morocco for carob; Saudi Arabia and Yemen for coffee; Syrian Arab Republic for olives; and Tunisia for harissa.

48. FAO's 1000 Digital Villages Initiative (DVI) aims to convert 1000 villages across the world into digital hubs - with the aim of supporting the transformation of agrifood systems. In the NENA region the DVI has been rolled out in seven countries through the Regional Innovation Flagship (RIF).

IV. One FAO

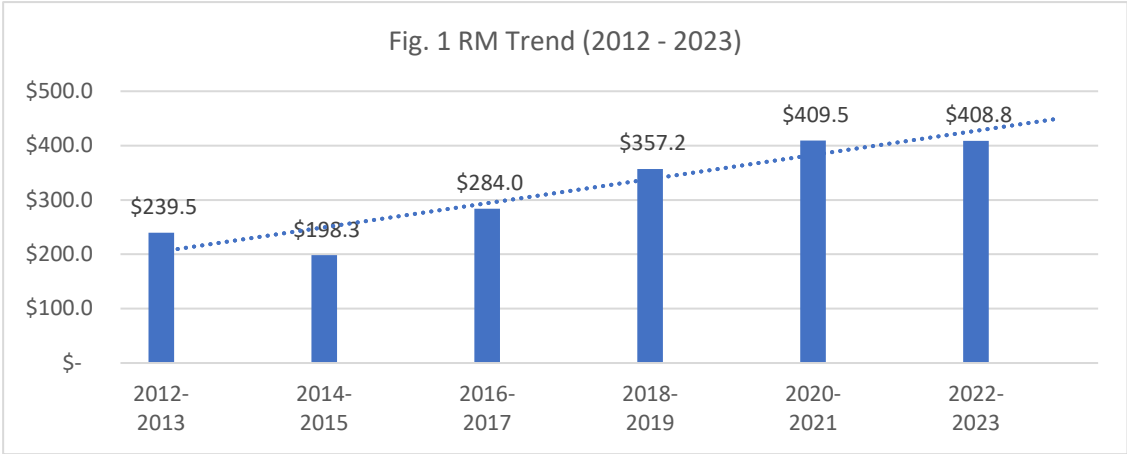
49. FAO's engagement, at the country level, is geared towards the One UN and One FAO approaches. The process of Country Programming Framework (CPF) is aligned with the UNSDCF and the FAO Strategic Framework. The One FAO approach is based upon synergizing technical resources and knowledge platforms, using digital tools, engaging in transformative partnerships and resource mobilization and adopting a programmatic approach.

50. In order to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of its action, the Regional Office has gone through the restructuring process at regional and subregional levels. This will enhance the synergy of programmatic efforts and better and timely response to the emerging needs and demands of the Members. The establishment of a dedicated Strategy and Policy Unit, the strengthening of the Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Units, and working through the clusters of expertise (such as in water scarcity, One Health and resilience) are some of the notable results of the restructuring exercise. The following figure shows the new structure of the Regional Office.

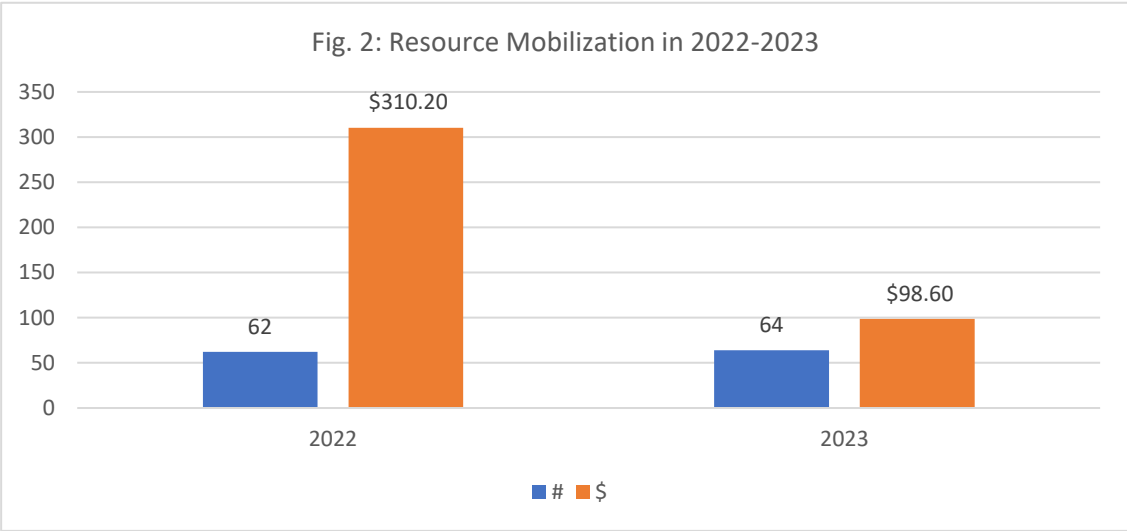
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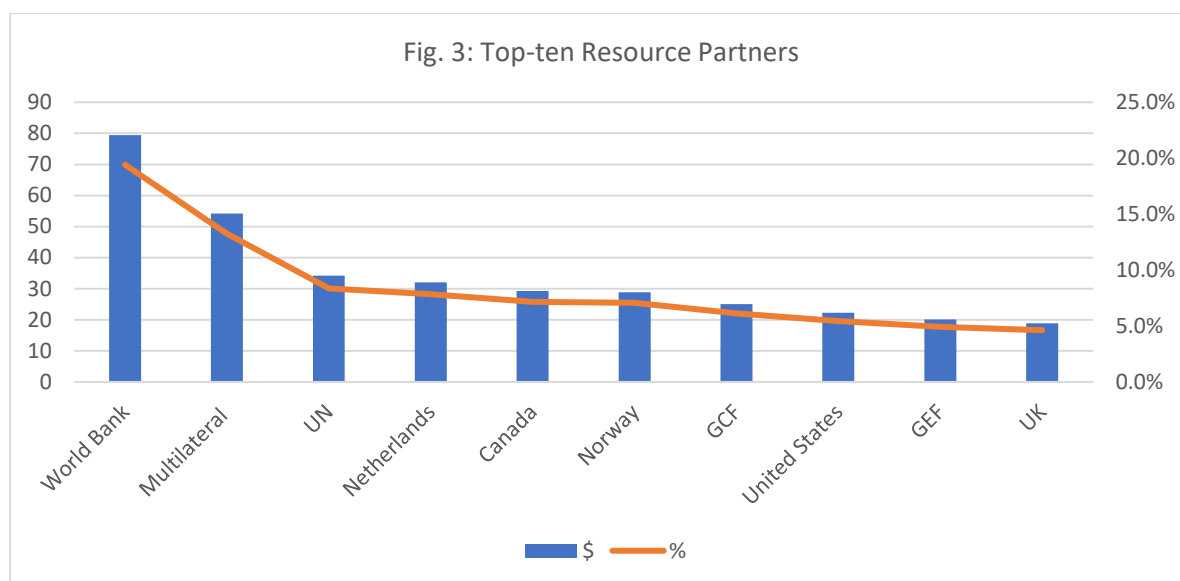
51. Resource Mobilization has been on a steady increase for the last five biennia with an average resource mobilization of USD 316 million per biennium.



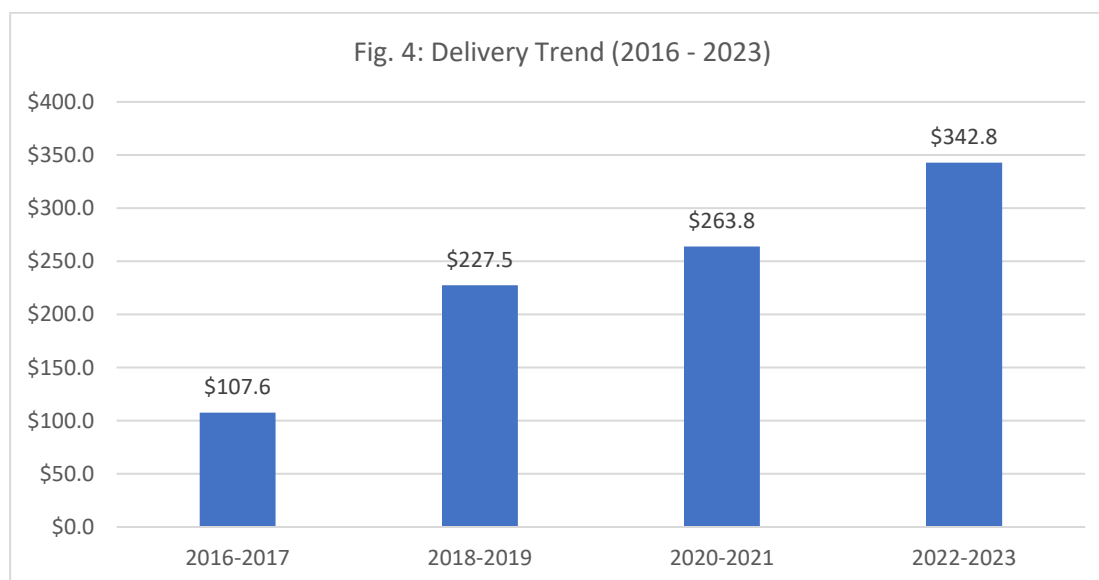
52. During the current biennium, 126 projects were initiated with a total budget of USD 408.8 million (Figure 1), which is about 29 percent above the average since 2012.



53. The top ten Resource Partners (the World Bank, Multilaterals “including Sweden and the Netherlands [Kingdom of the]”, the Netherlands [Kingdom of the], Canada, Norway, the Green Climate Fund, the United States of America, the Global Environmental Facility, and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland [the]) contributed to 84.2 percent of the total resources mobilized in 2022-2023 (Figure 3).



54. Delivery for the 2022-2023 biennium is USD 343 million, 30 percent above the delivery of the last biennium (2020-2021) and 45.6 percent above the average since 2016 (Figure 4).



Gaps and lessons learned

55. In order to respond to the dynamic and ever-evolving food security and related challenges, mostly as a result of some natural or anthropogenic shocks in the region, FAO is striving towards adopting innovative, flexible, responsive and tailored approaches, delivery mechanisms and engagement with stakeholders.

56. The new approach has been started through the restructuring of Regional and Subregional offices, the establishment of new units and delivery through innovative approaches and initiatives, but there is still a long way to go. The continued guidance and support of Members is crucial in this regard.

57. NENA is a diverse region with different requirements in terms of support from Regional and Subregional Offices, and RNE/Subregional Offices (SROs) technical and operational resources are stretched. The regional programme is striving to find the right balance between supporting Country Offices in achieving impact in areas of focus and serving the Regional Office's functions related to regional policy dialogues, knowledge management, regional assessments and servicing the Regional Conference.