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Decentralization issues, including the coverage of the Near East Office and the Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Sub-Regional Offices in the Near East

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I. Introduction

1. FAO is a knowledge organization with its feet on the ground. In order for FAO to maximize its impact on the lives and livelihoods of people in its Member countries, the Organization's normative and standard-setting work must be translated into country-level impact; its global knowledge products must lead to tangible change in policy and practice; and its programmes in the field must produce measurable and valued results. Significant changes are required to improve the performance of FAO to produce knowledge, norms and standards that are translated into country-owned policies, strategies and programmes, while also learning from national and regional experiences. This also requires a (greater/ more involved) partnership with governments, civil society and the private sector, as well as the UN system, other development organizations and research institutions, working together to make the most of available resources to eradicate hunger.
2. The Organization has been working over the past four years on reforms to improve its impact and ensure that all parts function as one in an efficient and effective manner. As highlighted in the Independent External Evaluation, agreed by Members through the Immediate Plan of Action and reiterated in a number of evaluations and other documents, decentralization is a critical element in improving the Organization's performance and impact. It is not an end in itself but a means to achieving greater efficiency, accountability, transparency and impact in providing support to Member countries. It is a process that aims at fundamentally changing the way FAO works, refocusing, as appropriate, the Organization's programmes and activities to achieving development goals at country level. There is both urgency and opportunity in how the Organization implements this process.
3. A flexible and responsive country-impact-centred support network is needed. This, together with empowered ADG/Regional Representatives and FAO Country Representatives who will have greater latitude in dealing with resources within the region and countries, entails a significant change in organizational culture, processes and information systems. The first step is clearly to make the best use of those human and financial resources that currently are available within each region. Members and the Secretariat of the Organization have been working together on a renewed vision of the structure and functioning of FAO's decentralized offices and on how they relate to other parts of the Organization. The proposal, and the plan for its implementation, will be presented for consideration by the Finance and Programme Committees in May 2012, and for endorsement by the Council in June 2012. The Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) is invited to make recommendations and to offer guidance, in line with its new role as a Governing Body, with full awareness of the financial implications of the programme it endorses.
4. The changes outlined in this paper represent implementation proposals by FAO management in response to the expressed wishes and expectations of Members for improvements integral to greater FAO reforms. They also embody the elements of the agreed organizational Culture Change Strategy and take its implementation forward. The Culture Change Strategy, approved in 2011, stated that "FAO aspires to a culture that is less hierarchical, more results-focused, more collaborative, entrepreneurial and accountable; and one which makes the best use of the skills of its people, creating mutual respect among employees at all levels." Decentralization has major implications for FAO's organizational culture and touches directly on all the actions recommended in the Culture Change Strategy, building renewal around people, performance and partnerships. Drawing on elements of the Strategy, the decentralized office network (i) is critical, for example, for career development and an inclusive work environment; the selection, evaluation and succession planning of country representatives is necessary to ensure professional excellence of the Organization; enhancing the performance of FAO depends on the prioritization, results, efficiency and accountability of what it does in the field; "Working as One FAO" can only be accomplished if this extends to the country level; and the real test of strengthened partnerships will depend on knowledge sharing, learning and stakeholder orientation on the ground.

5. Many of the changes introduced below will have significant behavioural and mindset impact regarding decentralized regional offices, but actions are also required at headquarters. In the past, moving out of headquarters to work in the field was often seen as undesirable or detrimental to professional advancement. Now, however, many FAO career development paths are expected to include a rotation in a decentralized regional office. Promotions, particularly at the higher levels will take this into consideration, on a merit basis. Furthermore, greater technical support is required from headquarter based officers to assist in the translation of normative work to country actions and to respond to requests from decentralized offices in a timely fashion. Similarly, feedback from field experience is necessary to enrich headquarters normative work and headquarters staff must be fully engaged in Functional Technical Networks (FTNs), on equal footing with colleagues in the field. New human resource policies and new administrative processes are being introduced and new information systems and a strengthened global ICT network are needed. There are a number of ways in which FAO may encourage this shift in mindset, such as requirements that work plans make interaction with field activities an explicit requirement, or that decentralized staff are included in headquarters staff evaluations, and vice versa, among others discussed below. How this is achieved will vary across departments and technical units, within Organization-wide policy guidelines. At all locations there will be a "clear line-of-sight" from global goals through strategic objectives, results and outcomes all the way to individual annual work plans. Efforts to implement these changes are currently underway and should be seen as part and parcel of decentralization.

6. Based on the advice of the Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committees of 12 October 2011, the 143rd Session of the Council (November-December 2011) endorsed two related sets of actions. The first aims at making the Organization more responsive to the needs of Members through improved results-based planning and priority setting. They reiterated "the lead role of decentralized offices in the country programming process, the development of their capacities in this regard, the necessity of the engagement of member countries, and the close linkages between FAO's resource mobilization strategy and the country programming process." The second proposes adjustments to the "the structure and functioning of FAO's decentralized regional offices network and the urgent need to carry through the process of decentralization" to make the Organization more efficient and effective in delivering and catalyzing results.

7. The next section of the present paper builds on three key themes identified by Governing Bodies in Rome in 2011 for consideration by the Regional Conferences in formulating their guidance: i) improved planning and priority setting in which the countries and regions play a greater role; ii) a more flexible decentralized regional office network with a new balance between regional and country offices and technical hubs ; iii) an integrated model for programme delivery, including improved human resources management for enhanced performance, accountability and country-level impact.

8. Section C of the paper outlines regional considerations related to decentralized efforts in the Near East and highlights changes to make FAO more effective. The paper also seeks guidance of the Regional Conference on key decisions required to carry this process. Section D and Annex I address recommendations of the Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Sub-Regional Offices in the Near East.

9. The Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices for the Near East was conducted during 2010 and the Management response to this Evaluation was presented and discussed during the 106th Session of the Programme Committee and endorsed by the 141st Session of Council in 2011. The Management welcomed the recommendations of the Evaluation, and accepted 9 of the 12 major recommendations, partially accepting one, and considering the two remaining recommendations to be addressed to the FAO membership. Annex V summarises the key elements of the FAO Management Plan in the Near East (NEMP) to the Recommendations of the Evaluation.

II. Key Themes Identified by Governing Bodies at the Global Level

A. Improved Planning and Priority Setting

10. A key theme of the Governing Bodies is the need for improved planning, priority setting and resource mobilization. It requires a revamped process, now underway, that builds both from the bottom up the planning at the country and regional levels, and from the top down, through the global level guidance of the Members. This places new demands on the Regional Conferences to provide input that lay out clear priorities and provides guidance on the allocation of FAO resources. Regional priorities need to be based on an assessment of the existing and emerging regional trends and challenges, build on consultations at sub-regional level and take into consideration the global goals and overall strategic objectives of FAO. The Regional Conferences also need to consider the priorities of Regional Economic Integration Organizations and the recommendations of Regional Technical Commissions. These regional priorities will guide the work, and have an impact on the structure of FAO in the region, as well as contribute to the formulation of the Organization's global Medium Term Plan and Programme of Work and Budget.

11. For this to happen, strengthened Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) are required. In order to improve focus and coherence of FAO's actions they will be prepared in close alignment with the planning cycle of each Government and its priorities, the work of other UN system organizations through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process, as well as linkages and partnerships with the Rome-based agencies. The CPFs will provide the basis for FAO to engage with Member governments on jointly agreed priorities and results, consistent with regional, sub-regional and global priorities. The CPFs will also help define the rationale and priorities in FAO's resource mobilization efforts.

12. A number of countries are well advanced in preparing CPFs based on strategic analysis. It is, however, a complex challenge for which not all countries are currently equally prepared. During 2012, successful CPF formulation experiences will be followed closely, their lessons synthesized and applied elsewhere. It is also important that the work coincides and builds upon the analysis and priorities that emerge from the Government's own planning process. Taking this into consideration, it is expected that, by the end of 2012, all countries will have at least the CPF outline under discussion with the government (ii). Country offices with annual delivery of less than USD 1 million and those without international staff, may opt for a "light version" for the CPF listing four to six priorities, with a plan for its implementation endorsed by government.

B. A More Flexible Decentralized Office Network with Strong Country Office Leadership

13. A more flexible and adaptable structure of decentralized offices is needed in order to better address the needs of the Member states, particularly the most vulnerable countries and populations, as well as take full advantage of the knowledge and resources that each country has to offer. This will require FAO Representatives of the highest quality in all countries, who are able to lead the CPF process, coordinate technical inputs, mobilize resources, form strategic partnerships and manage sizeable integrated development and emergency programmes. A guiding principle of this more flexible structure is that all of FAO's human and financial resources in a particular region must be used to ensure more efficient and effective delivery at the country level. There are also important regional and transboundary activities that will continue to be carried out by officers based in regional offices, who also play an important role in supporting county programmes. Within this overall approach a number of actions, most of which will be completed within 2012, are set out below.

a) At the Country Level:

- a.1 Renewal of FAO Representative contracts will be dependent upon satisfactory performance, with a strengthened performance evaluation system; the posts of FAO Representatives are now integrated into the Organization's mobility and career development programmes; as part of the selection process, all finalists will undergo professional management competency testing prior to appointment; and a succession planning process is being implemented to ensure the smooth and timely transition between accredited FAO Representatives.
- a.2 Increased use of cost-sharing agreements with host governments will be explored, particularly in large and middle income economies,. This could open up the opportunity to reallocate resources to vulnerable countries in the same region.
- a.3 There will be greater collaboration with other UN system organizations, particularly the Rome-based agencies, as well as the International Financial Institutions, the private sector and civil society at the country level.

b) At the Regional or Sub-regional levels:

- b.1 The Regional Office serves the countries and provides support and services to the country offices in the region. It is the operational hub of the region, providing overall administrative and managerial support to the decentralized regional offices network, as well as provide strategic coordination, including the most efficient use of staff and resources. This strategic coordination also includes more effective policy advice and the systematic exchange of experiences between countries of the region and participation in various regional and subregional fora dealing with food security, agriculture and rural development. As with other aspects of decentralization, one size need not fit all and appropriate management models may be designed according to regional capacities and specificities, the number of countries to be serviced and the size of the field programme.
- b.2 The ADG/Regional Representatives will be empowered in several ways: politically as representatives of the Organization in their region and, as managers, they are responsible for the FAOR network in their region. They will be involved in the selection of FAO Representatives and are responsible for the performance evaluation of the FAORs and their offices.
- b.3 As FAO moves to define its comparative advantages and plans of action around more cross-cutting themes for execution at the global, regional and country levels, it is important to maintain a critical mass of technical expertise in multidisciplinary teams that are able to interact easily with each other. While keeping this in mind, technical posts and technical staff will be considered to be 'mobile' within the region and depending on the priorities and changing needs of countries or groups of countries, may be allocated to different duty stations. These duty stations would effectively become technical hubs that country offices can access based on their needs and requirements. The job descriptions of these technical staff will be amended to clarify that their primary function will be to support country-level actions guided by CPFs, sub-regional and regional priority frameworks, and higher level strategic frameworks of the Organization.
- b.4 Current Sub-regional Offices will become technical hubs in the sense that they will no longer have a strict sub-regional coverage. Country offices could thus access technical support from any of the technical hubs located in the region.

c) In general:

- c.1 The technical skills and resources in different regions will be strengthened to provide improved/enhanced technical support to countries. Programmatic adjustments will facilitate integrated programme planning, operations and resource mobilization support. Administrative support for procurement, human resources management and finance will be established at the regional level and strengthened.
- c.2 Transfer of functions and associated resources that are within the authority of Management will be implemented over the 2012-13 biennium.
- c.3 Human resources will be used more efficiently and effectively through, among other things, the introduction of the new mobility policy in 2012, to increase greater exchange of experiences between headquarters and decentralized regional offices. In addition, the new competency framework will help clarify expectations and define staff development needs, as well as provide a sound basis for consistent and objective performance standards and competency-based recruitment. It will also assist in strengthening the performance appraisal process.
- c.4 Increased flexibility will be provided to decentralized regional offices through enhanced use of non-staff contractual instruments, increased recruitment of national experts, junior professionals, volunteers, South-South Cooperation experts/technicians. In addition, the Organization will expand its agreements with national and international universities and research centres for the provision of fellows/volunteers.
- c.5 FAO Country Representatives, ADG/Regional Representatives and Subregional Coordinators will be empowered to undertake more operational responsibilities, which will require a higher level of delegated authority and training, especially with regard to procurement, as well as improved integration with corporate financial and administrative systems.
- c.6 Guidelines for the provision of administrative and operational support (AOS) to projects, and the allocation of project support cost recoveries, will be reviewed to ensure that decentralized offices have the flexibility and operational capacity to provide AOS services to projects that they support.

C. An integrated model for programme delivery

14. Integrated programme management is required to ensure results and accountability in a coherent manner for all FAO's programmes and projects at the country level. This includes the integration of development, emergency and rehabilitation activities. The responsibility, management and accountability for operations related to emergency and rehabilitation activities will be transferred from the Director, Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division (TCE), to the decentralized offices, under the overall authority of ADG/Regional Representatives. Following this transfer, the role of the Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division will shift from operational management to one of policy development, global coordination, provision of upstream support, resource mobilization and monitoring and reporting of the emergency and rehabilitation activities of the decentralized offices. This requires the building of capacity in the field for delivering one integrated emergency, development and policy assistance programme under a single authority, together with the necessary operational and accountability framework. The target date to complete the roll-out of this new management model is June 2013.

D. Risk, monitoring and oversight

15. The extent and scope of the process of change outlined above will have a major impact on FAO's operations and effectiveness, and implementation will imply financial, reputational and operational risks which cannot be underestimated. Recent assessments and evaluations have identified some of the most important of these risks and challenges associated with decentralization and these have been brought to the attention of the Members together with proposed measures (see for example CL141/15). Some of the most critical risks and challenges relate to how to determine the optimal scale and scope of the country offices network, ensure an adequate level and allocation of core resources and income for decentralized regional offices in line with their expanded responsibilities, and reap the synergies between the Organization's emergency and development work – proposals on these issues are contained in this paper. Building on the findings of recent reports by the FAO Inspector-General on financial management and administration (AUD 2811), and on decentralization of reform activities in field offices (AUD 3711), the Organization will address the weaknesses which undermine the capacity of country offices to manage operations. It will do so by ensuring that decentralized regional offices are staffed with well trained individuals, with the skills mix and experience required to manage a complex programme. Common characteristics of well performing offices are now clearly understood: adequate staffing and funding for posts; leadership and “tone at the top”; commitment to competence and real-time response to policy opportunities; and information and communication. Strong and reliable communication and information will also be pursued in connection with the implementation of the Culture Change Strategy. Furthermore, the virtualization of FAOs work and the increase of responsibilities to decentralized regional offices will increase the exposure of key FAO financial, administrative and technical processes to the risk of disruption in the event of a natural or man-made disaster or crisis. Such risks are addressed in the FAO Business Continuity Framework Plan (BCFP) developed in 2011 and to be implemented in 2012.

16. The current administrative and operational structure, including programme monitoring and oversight of activities in the region, sub-region and countries, has evolved over the years as different functions were incrementally decentralized. For example, field programme operations were decentralized a decade ago, a Shared Services Centre hub was established in 2008, and since 2010 the Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) and country offices network support and monitoring responsibilities have been delegated to the regions. This decentralization experience is the focus of a series of on-going or planned regional-level evaluations, of which an evaluation of the Near East Region has been completed. It appears from the evaluation that while there have been clear benefits, there have also been problems of incremental changes leading to a fragmented structure that can inhibit the integrated support, management and oversight of field activities. These aspects need to be implemented and managed thoughtfully and carefully.

17. Opportunities therefore exist to make the most effective use of available resources by rationalizing the execution of administrative and operational functions and sharpening the focus towards integrated monitoring and oversight of country, sub-regional and regional programmes. The deployment of a new Global Resource Management System in 2012-2013 will provide all regions with improved tools to carry out delegated functions in managing field operations and supporting decision making. It will facilitate the establishment of an integrated operational unit in the Regional Office covering all field activities in the region, irrespective of the source of funding.

18. In 2012, adjustments will be implemented to strengthen the TCP criteria on meeting priorities in the region, in particular the needs of the countries, in line with the CPFs and regional priority frameworks. This will allow TCP projects to be used more strategically and be upscaled into programmes that have significant national/regional impact and can leverage more resources.

19. To ensure accountability, the ADG/Regional Representative has the authority for the work planning and implementation of the approved Programme of Work and Budget for the Regional Office, technical hubs and country offices in the region. In order to achieve this, the policies and procedures governing decentralized regional office resources management will be reviewed and oversight mechanisms put in place to allow for the necessary flexibility.

III. Considerations for the Near East Region

20. The on-going decentralization process of FAO in the Near East Region is aimed at improving efficiency, effectiveness and delivery by strengthening planning and priority setting, as well as consolidating FAO's offices that will network and work closely with member countries, regional partner organizations, national institutions, the private sector and civil society. This process is flexible and recognizes the heterogeneity of FAO's Member in the RNE region in terms of geographic conditions, size and location of countries, institutional development, endowment of natural resources, social and economic conditions, human resources, as well as current and long-term challenges and opportunities for sustainable agricultural development, food security and rural development. The main objectives are to bring the Organization's technical and operational expertise much closer to those countries and regions where the need is greatest, make the best use of national capacities, and to promoting innovative mechanisms to strengthen South-South cooperation.

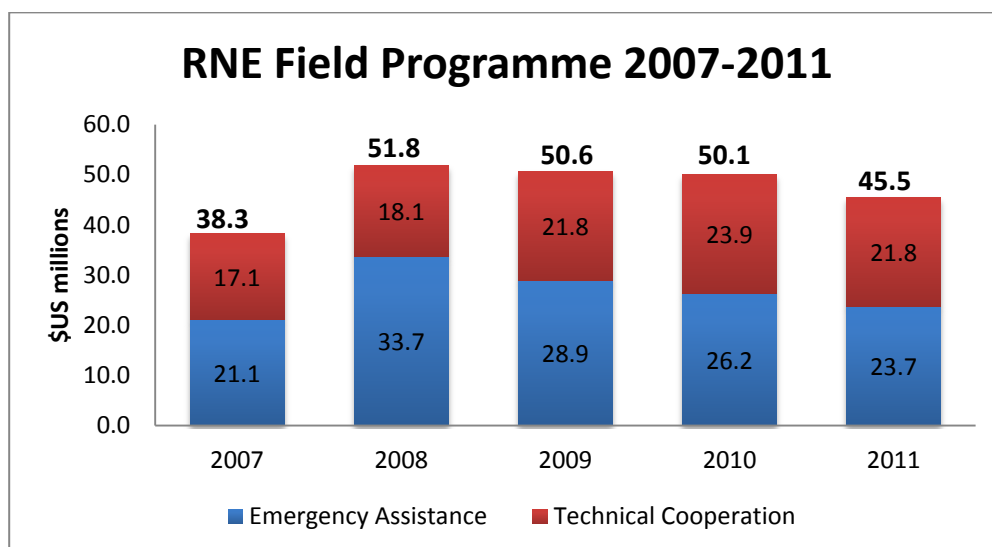
21. This section of the paper outlines several proposals specific to the decentralization efforts in the Near East regarding structural, functional and programmatic changes at regional, sub-regional and country level that may involve adjustments to the current PWB 2012-2013 and require the input and advice of the Regional Conference. These include:

- i. Improved planning and priority
- ii. A more flexible decentralized country office network with strong country leadership; and
- iii. An integrated model for programme delivery.

22. FAO's Near East Regional Office (RNE) covers 19 countries, three of which (Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen) are classified as low income countries where level of undernourishment is high ranging between 8 to 30%, mostly due to conflict situations in these countries. Six countries in the Gulf are high income countries and the rest are mostly upper middle to lower middle income countries. While undernourishment is less than 5% in most of the non-LDC countries, malnourishment in the form of micronutrient deficiencies or obesity is prevalent in many countries. Some higher income countries in the region have the highest obesity rates in the world.

23. Specific strategies to support agricultural and rural development of more vulnerable countries are being developed. It is essential that FAO work closely with the Members and partners to take strong and well directed actions to rapidly reduce undernourishment. In recent years, FAO's field programme in the Near East has remained stable, with annual project delivery at about \$50 million. There is room for much more to be done, with actions tailored to the individual or collective needs, circumstances and capacities of member countries. In countries where overall food insecurity continues to rise, the priority is to focus on policies and programmes that shift the pattern of agriculture and rural growth in favor of the poor and small farmers, such as including them preferentially when procuring food for local safety nets. In other countries, where undernourishment in overall terms has been falling but hunger persists among those outside the mainstream economy, more targeted programme and projects are required. The need for strong action was highlighted by the 30th NERC held in 2010 in Khartoum, which requested FAO to respond to the needs of Member countries in a more timely and effective manner through promoting multi-disciplinary approaches, as well as other measures.

Figure 1. FAO Annual Field Programme Delivery in the Near East (Emergency Assistance and Technical Cooperation)



A. Improved Planning and Priority Setting in the Near East

Regional priorities

24. The five priority areas for FAO assistance in the Near East for the period 2010-2019, as endorsed by the 30th Session of NERC in December 2010, include Priority A: enhancing food security and nutrition; Priority B: fostering agricultural production and rural development for improved livelihoods; Priority C: sustainable natural resource management; Priority D: responding to climate change (CC) impacts and developing adaptation strategies; and Priority E: preparedness for, and response to, agriculture and food emergencies.

25. Following the recent political and social developments in the Near East - the so called Arab Spring- new challenges have emerged which were reviewed at two sub-regional consultations organized in late 2011 for the Oriental Near East (SNO) and the GCC States and Yemen (SNG). These consultations reconfirmed the five overall regional priorities but also identified focus areas within these priorities that reflect specificities of each sub-region as well as emerging issues that would need to be emphasized in light of the recent developments.

Sub-regional focus areas within the overall regional priorities

26. Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) are under preparation in a number of countries in the region and CPF preparation (at least in preliminary form) for all countries in the region will be completed by the end of 2012. The sub-regional consultations have outlined major focus areas within the identified priorities for improved food security and sustainable agriculture development in the region. Document NERC/12/2 provides a brief outline of the major sub-regional focus areas for SNO, SNE and SNG within the overall regional priorities.

Addressing priorities in the Near East, 2012-15: main areas for FAO intervention¹

27. To support countries in addressing the above-mentioned priorities and focus areas, the FAO Decentralized Offices (DOs) network in the region, with the support of FAO HQs, will utilize its

¹Document NERC/12/2 provides a brief outline of the major sub-regional focus areas for SNO, SNE and SNG within the overall regional priorities.

available resources to focus its assistance in the following key action areas which are closely linked to the Regional Priorities set out in paragraph 24:

- Formulation of sustainable food security and agriculture development strategies and policies;
- Strengthening food security monitoring and information systems
- Sustainable management of water resources;
- Enhancing food safety and quality;
- Promoting sustainable livestock production;
- Sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture;
- Sustainable management of forests and range lands;
- Mainstreaming of climate change adaptation in agriculture and food security strategies and policies;
- Enhancing monitoring, detection and prevention of transboundary pests and disease, including locust and avian influenza;
- Responding to, and preparedness for, non-transboundary pest and diseases crises and emergencies.

28. In addition, specific groups of countries have specific needs as described below:

- **Special focus countries:** Special attention will be given to Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen, being low income countries with very high incidence of hunger and poverty. The needs of these countries are wide and cover all priority areas for FAO assistance in the Region. FAO assistance to these countries will focus on human and institutional capacity development;
- **Crises and emergency affected countries** – Iraq, Palestine and Yemen. In these countries the focus would be on emergency and rehabilitation;
- **Countries in transition:** Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Syria. Their needs are mostly of a post-conflict rehabilitation and development nature.
- **High income non-OECD countries (GCC states):** Their needs are mostly for support on food safety and quality, commodity chains, and upstream policy and technical support.

B. Towards a More Flexible and Streamlined DO Network in the Near East

29. To properly address country priorities in the Near East, taking into account the recent developments in the region, and in order to respond to the recommendations made by the Evaluation of FAO Regional and Sub-regional Offices in the Near East, actions are proposed to streamline the DOs network in the region in order to make it flexible and responsive to country needs.

Present situation

30. **Structure:** The FAO Decentralized Offices (DOs) network in the Region includes the FAO Regional Office (RNE), two sub-regional offices (in North Africa – SNE; and the GCC States and Yemen - SNG), a MDT for Oriental Near East (SNO); and country presence in 15 countries through different arrangements: 9 countries benefit from fully fledged FAO Representations (three of which are co-located with the Regional and Sub-regional Offices), four countries are covered through Technical Officers/FAO Representatives outposted from the Regional or Subregional Offices, and two countries have FAO programme coordination units.

31. **Staffing:** At present the professional staff in the region comprises 175 professional and general staff in RNE, SNE, and SNO. In addition to this, the SNG Office has 12 staff, which brings the total number of staff in RNE to 187. Out of this total number staff in the region, 51 staff members work in the Regional Office, while the rest are assigned to the sub-regional offices and the Multidisciplinary Team for the Oriental Near East (SNO). (Table 1)

Table 1 : Near East - Staffing and Regular Programme Resources for 2012-13

Office	Biennial RP Budget (Net Appropriation)		Posts (C 2011/3 Annex XI)		
	(USD '000)	%	Prof	GS	Total
RNE (Regional Office) ¹	12,719	40%	21	30	51
SNE (Subregional Office)	6,344	20%	12	12	24
SNG (Subregional Office) ²	0	0%	8	4	12
SNO (Multidisciplinary Team)	3,941	12%	7	3	10
RNE (FAOR Network)	8,734	28%	22	68	90
Total Near East	31,738	100%	70	117	187

Notes:

¹ RNE provides Administrative support to ECTAD Unit which is EB and has 2 professionals and 7 GS RNE provides all administrative support to SNO and FAOR, Egypt office.

² SNG is covered by a EB project of \$4 M for this biennium. SNG has 9 Professionals and 6 GS

Proposed Actions

32. The following actions are proposed:

Planning and priority setting:

33. **Promoting effective country programming.** As recommended by the Strategic Evaluation of FAO's Country Programming and in accordance with the CPF Guidelines, which were adopted by the 143rd Council, FAO will engage with Governments in the region to jointly prepare, during the course of 2012, CPFs (at least in preliminary form) so as to arrive at a full suite of programming documents (Regional Priority Framework (RPF), Subregional Priority Frameworks (SPFs), and CPFs). Thus, FAO can focus both its technical support as well as its resource mobilization effects on the highest priorities of the 19 countries serviced by RNE.

34. **Speeding up efforts for mobilizing resources for the Near East Region in line with recommendations of NERC-30.** At the 30th FAO Regional Conference for the Near East Member Countries urged that adequate resources be mobilized to address the priority areas of action in the Region. In order to mobilize financial and human resources, FAO will: (i) engage in consultations with Member Governments and other partners in the region on appropriate funding sources and relevant partnerships to be developed in support of the agreed regional priority areas of action; (ii) strengthen communication with potential resource partners to mobilize resources; and (iii) develop proposals on the approach and modalities to mobilize resources.

Structure:

35. **Strengthening FAO Representations in LDCs:** in accordance with the notion of putting priority on the most needy, the Organization will continue to maintain a fully fledged FAO Representation in the three LDCs in the region (Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen).

36. **Replacing the current Outposted Technical Officers/FAO Representatives with National Professional Officers (NPOs) who would be supported by an FAO Representation in a nearby country through double/multiple accreditation:** special arrangements will be made for the countries which are currently covered by such a scheme (Algeria, Jordan, Libya and Oman) where a suitable NPO would be appointed and the country will be accredited to the nearest FAO Representation. For

Libya, arrangements may be agreed to designate the proposed coordinator of the UTF programme as Focal Point for FAO activities in the country. Similar arrangements could be considered for other countries with substantial UTF programmes.

37. **Regarding the placement of the multidisciplinary team of SNO, there are two options.** The first option is to merge the Multidisciplinary Team for Oriental Near East (MDT-SNO) with the Regional Office in Cairo - following the recommendation of the Evaluation, which emphasized that there should not be more than two Offices in any country. This is similar to what has been implemented in the Regional Offices for Latin America and Caribbean (RLC) and Europe and Central Asia (REU). In the Regional Office for Asia, the MDT/SRO and the RO were never separated. The second option is to establish a sub-regional office/technical hub in another country in the Mashreq region.

38. **Restructuring sub-regional offices into technical hubs²** – to ensure that a critical mass of technical expertise exists in an effort to better organize and streamline FAO assistance, in line with para 13 bullet b.4, which states that the sub-regional offices will no longer have a strict sub-regional coverage.

Staffing:

39. **Strengthening the staffing of FAO Offices in LDCs** - Staffing of country offices of the fully fledged FAO Offices in the region would comprise one internationally recruited FAO Representative and two National Professional Officers for Programme and Administration. Depending on the size of the field programme, and consequently on the income earned from project operations, a third National Programme Officer, either a specialist in Operations or in a Technical discipline that is considered a priority in the country, would be added.

40. **Establishing region-wide thematic technical groups** - For an effective support to member countries, the mix of FAO expertise across the region will be organized and streamlined along the identified priorities and building synergies between technical areas in a highly collaborative manner to address the various facets of the inter-disciplinary nature of these priorities and their expected results. The implementation will be facilitated by establishing thematic task forces of experts around four core areas: agriculture and livestock production; economic, social and policy assistance; natural resources and climate change; and operations and programme development.

41. **Out posting of relevant technical staff to countries when necessary** – adequate flexibility will be introduced to allow allocating technical staff across the region according to need and established priorities. For instance, it is envisaged that an emergency/rehabilitation officer may need to be located in Yemen for the next few years in view of the anticipated growing needs.

42. **Strengthening the skill mix in the region** – while all efforts will continue to be made to review and re-arrange the staff mix and available resources for the DOs in the region, the overall staffing level is low compared to the needs of countries in the region (both in terms of depth and coverage). This needs to be urgently addressed, should resources become available. For a minimum delivery in the identified five regional priorities, there is a need for specialized professional officers in the following areas: food safety and quality; climate change; agri-business and marketing; and resource mobilization.

Other Actions:

43. **Harmonization of Coverage of Regional Office and Regional Conference for the Near East.** The Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) included an action item (3.86) which required Management to: “Clarify Coverage of the Near East Regional Office”. This topic was discussed by the CoC-IEE on 17 April 2009, based on a paper prepared by Management, which considered that the Near East Office

² With regards to the SNG office, which is funded entirely through a trust fund, this restructuring will be dependent on negotiations with the donor country.

(RNE) geographical coverage needed to be further elucidated and Management was requested to revise and expand the Note on coverage of the RNE. As a follow-up, Management provided, in May 2009, additional information to the Chair of the Near East Regional Group. It was agreed that the Regional Group would discuss the matter and revert to the Secretariat. However, no further feedback was received from Members. The Programme Committee, in its 106th Session, discussed the Evaluation of FAO's Regional and Sub-regional Offices for the Near East and the Management Response and recommended that a paper on harmonization of the Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) and the Regional Office for the Near East (RNE) be submitted to this Session of the Regional Conference. Annex II summarises the key aspects of the issue.

44. **Renaming of the Regional Office for the Near East and its Sub-regional Offices.** In accordance with the recommendation 8.b) of the Evaluation it is proposed to officially name the RO "***the Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa***" rather than the "Regional Office for the Near East". In accordance with the same recommendation, it is also proposed to rename the technical hubs, as described in para 37, as follows:

- Technical hub for North Africa to become Technical Hub for the Maghreb
- Technical hub for SNO, if not merged with RNE, to become Technical Hub for the *Mashreq* Sub regional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Countries and Yemen to become Technical Hub for the Khaleej (pending negotiations with donor)

45. **Reviewing regional technical commissions.** FAO sponsored regional technical commissions have provided a platform for the membership to jointly address regional food and agriculture issues. The context in which these Commissions are functioning is changing given the enhanced role of the Regional Conference and the need for the recommendations of regional technical commissions to be considered by the Regional Conference as well as an increasing role of regional integration organizations Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC).

46. Where possible the work of regional technical commission should also be aligned with the regional priorities as they arise out of the priority frameworks (SPF and RPF), CPFs, the Strategic Framework and the Medium Term Plan (MTP) processes. Regional Technical Commissions falling outside the scope of regional priorities could be reconsidered. It is proposed that FAO undertakes an assessment of the regional technical commissions in the Near East during the course of 2012-13.

IV. Risks, Challenges and Mitigation Measures

47. A change process of the extent and scope outlined above will have a major impact on FAO operations and effectiveness, and implementation will imply financial, reputational and operational risks which cannot be underestimated. Recent assessments and evaluations have identified some of the most important of these risks and challenges associated with decentralization and these have been brought to the attention of the Members along with proposed measures (see for example CL141/15). Some of the most critical risks and challenges relate to how to determine the optimal scale and scope of the Country Offices network, ensure an adequate level and allocation of core resources and income for DOs in line with their expanded responsibilities, and reap the synergies between the Organizations emergency and development work - proposals on these issues are contained in this paper.

48. The recent report on Financial Management and Administration (AUD 2811) also noted that while there are a number of weaknesses which undermine the capacity of COs to manage operations, the Organization needs to ensure that field teams are staffed with sufficient, well-trained individuals, with the skills mix and experience required to manage a complex programme. The report also provides details of the common characteristics of well-performing offices which are: adequate staffing and funding for posts; leadership and "tone at the top"; commitment to competence; and information and communication. The importance of communication, and of adequate and well qualified staff, was also highlighted in a recent report on the decentralization process carried out under the IPA (AUD 3711) which again highlighted the need for strong and reliable communications and information and the need for adequate resources in DOs to take over and manage the new roles and responsibilities

V. Guidance Sought

49. In considering actions arising from the Vision and Strategy of the DOs network, the Conference in 2011 requested that “the Regional Conferences which will be held in 2012 should review FAO’s country coverage in their region, with a view to enhancing the Organization’s effectiveness and efficiency at country level and make recommendations to the Council in 2012 on the most suitable structure and skills mix of the DOs network in their region, including close alignment to country needs in line with country frameworks.” (C2011/7 paragraph 158). In line with this guidance the 31st NERC is invited to advise on:

- a) The appropriateness of the current coverage in the Near East Region including in particular:
 - i. the adoption of a more flexible approach for determining the size of COs and enhanced fungibility of resources allocated within a region in order to achieve the expected results (paragraph 13);
 - ii. the possibility of enhancing cost sharing arrangements, with the host governments, in particular those of middle- and higher-income countries and reallocating available resources to the poorest countries (paragraph 13 a.2); and
 - iii. indication of the countries that face specific challenges and require a strong FAO country presence (paragraph 28);
- b) The proposals to make the Organization work more effective and efficient at country level through:
 - i. improved planning and priority setting as a means ensuring that the Organization’s work is focused and driven by Members’ needs (paragraphs 10-12);
 - ii. enhanced resource mobilization efforts, particularly at country, subregional and regional level (paragraph 34); and
 - iii. an integrated approach to programme delivery that draws together projects and programmes related to emergency and development activities (paragraph 14).
- c) The suitability of the current structure in the region and in particular the proposals to:
 - i. strengthen the regional and subregional offices (paragraph 13 b.1-b.4);
 - ii. adjust the skills mix to better meet Member needs, including those set out in the CPFs (paragraph 13.c.1); and (paragraph 12.d).
- d) The adoption of the proposed actions of the Management Plan for the Near East (NEMP) as summarized in Section C, paragraphs 32 through 46, as well as in Annex 1.
- e) Members may wish to provide guidance on how the coverage between Council, RNE and the Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) should be harmonized in view of the fact that NERC has become a full part of the governance structure feeding into the Conference and Council (paragraph 43).

Annex I: Summary of follow-up to evaluation recommendations that were referred to the Management Plan in the Near East (NEMP)

Recommendations of the Evaluation included in the Management Plan for the Near East	Status of Follow-up to the Recommendation
1a. Facilitating FAORs access to FAO technical expertise by locating this capacity as close as possible to the countries (i.e. at sub-regional level).	This is elaborated in paragraph 13b3, 13b4 and 38 on the creation of technical hubs
1d. Recruiting a third NPO to address the increased workload related to strategic planning, partnerships and resource mobilisation at country level giving priority to most needy countries and those with large FAO programmes.	In accordance with paragraphs 39 of this document, this will only apply to LDCs depending on the size of the programme. .
2e. In view of the different skills required, FAO Reps should only perform functions related to their representational mandate vis-à-vis their country (or countries) of accreditation	This is partially accepted taking into account the ongoing decentralization process.
3a. In order to avoid confusions in their roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis the host country and FAORs in the region and/or sub-region, a maximum of two FAO decentralized offices per country should be allowed.	Paragraph 37 of this document presents, two options to deal with the Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) for Oriental Near East.
3b. The Out posted technical Officers (OTO scheme should be phased out in the Near East Region in view of its limited effectiveness and the significant reduction in regional and sub-regional technical capacity resulting from its high use.	See paragraph 36 of this document. It is proposed that OTOs be replaced by National Professional Officers.
3c. FAO should make greater use of alternative field presence arrangements such as multiple accreditations (with the assistance of a NPO in the host country) or, as in the case of Iraq, through the appointment of Programme Coordinators as FAO Reps.	See paragraphs 35 and 36 of this document.
4a. [Subregional Offices should] Be field oriented and equipped to allow for timely technical support to FAORs and sub-region-wide counterparts.	See paragraph 13 b.3, 13 b. 4 and 38 on creation of technical hubs
4c. [Subregional Offices should] Support the preparation of CPFs in coordination with RNE. The CPFs will eventually serve as inputs to identify common sub-regional priorities and prepare SPFs.	See paragraphs 11, 33 and 34

Recommendations of the Evaluation included in the Management Plan for the Near East	Status of Follow-up to the Recommendation
5a. Sub-regional Multidisciplinary Teams (SMT) skills-mix should progressively reflect sub-regional priorities identified in the SPFs. As the CPFs, the SPF should be reviewed periodically.	See paragraph 40,41, 42 on skills mix
6a. RNE should be responsible for coordinating, supervising and evaluating the work of Technical Hubs and FAORs. This will include managing the financial and human resources available to decentralized offices in the region irrespective of the funding source. RNE should then have the capacity and authority to reallocate these funds based on relative sub-regional and country demands and needs.	See paragraphs 13 b.1 and 13 b.2 on the role of the Regional Office and the ADG/RR
7b. RNE skills-mix should reflect the new technical, operational and administrative functions assigned to the office.	See paragraph 40,41, 42 on skills mix.
7c. The assistance of a management expert should be sought to support the ongoing and future change management processes.	The assessment was done by FAO staff.
8b. The evaluation team also recommends renaming RNE as “Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa”. Likewise, Technical Hubs should also be renamed to adopt historical definitions of the groups of countries served: Maghreb instead of North Africa; Mashreq instead of Oriental Near East ; and Khaleej instead of Gulf Cooperation Countries and Yemen.	This issue is addressed in paragraph 44 of this document
10a. Regional technical commissions and networks have been valuable as forums for information exchange and in some cases also for prioritization and mobilization of resources. Some have however been neither very active nor well attended lately and a majority of them have faced financing difficulties. The evaluation team recommends launching a review of the effectiveness of these regional bodies in order to rationalize their numbers. Criteria for deciding their future existence should include the extent of Members’ participation and commitment to funding follow-up activities as well as their alignment to priority areas identified in the RPF-NE.	See paragraph 45
10b. Regional and sub-regional workshops and meetings as well as related publications should have strong linkages with priority areas agreed at regional and sub-regional levels. Efforts should be made to gather feedback from users of FAO technical information to increase the relevance and visibility of the normative work conducted by FAO in the region.	- Focus of workshops, meetings and publications on agreed regional and subregional priorities realized through work planning processes during 2012-13 and 2014-15.

Recommendations of the Evaluation included in the Management Plan for the Near East	Status of Follow-up to the Recommendation
<p>10c. Following the strengthening of Technical Hubs and the enhanced coordination of technical work within the region, field missions to Near East countries should increasingly be conducted by staff in technical hubs (and consultants) who will have better knowledge of the local situation and be closer to the field than their peers at HQ.</p>	<p>See paragraphs 13 (b.1, b.3, b.4) and paragraph 40 of this document</p>
<p>10d. Regional and sub-regional projects should focus on common issues and priorities of supranational concern.</p>	<p>Will be addressed in design of new regional and sub-regional projects</p>
<p>10e. As indicated earlier, technical expertise (at regional and sub-regional level) on key programme and cross-cutting areas for the region, particularly in the areas of natural resources management, policy and gender, should be revised in order to align the FAO regional skills mix to the priority areas endorsed by Member Countries.</p>	<p>See paragraph 40,41, 42 on skills mix</p>
<p>12. The evaluation team is aware that FAO does not have the resources required to implement the re-shuffling outlined above without the support from Member Countries. Based on the example of the IPA trust fund and recent regional cooperative programmes in other FAO regions, the evaluation team recommends the establishment of a dedicated Regional Trust Fund to support the reshuffling of FAO institutional set-up in the Near East and allow the establishment of a regional structure able to implement collaborative programmes agreed at regional (RPF), sub-regional (SPFs) and country (CPFs) levels. Possible uses of the trust fund include supporting staff training across the region, carrying out analyses on the main regional, sub-regional and country priorities, supplementing resources available for priority areas of work, etc.</p>	<p>Exploring the possibility of establishing a regional trust fund and its working modalities to address regional and sub-regional priorities. Review and endorsement by the Regional Conference. See paragraph 10.</p>

Annex II Harmonization of Coverage of the Near East Regional Office and the Regional Conference

The Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) included an action item (3.86) which required Management to: “Clarify Coverage of the Near East Regional Office”.

This topic was discussed by the CoC-IEE on 17 April 2009, based on a paper prepared by Management on the Coverage of the Near East Regional Office, which is part of the document submitted by Management to the CoC-IEE of 17 April 2009. In this document tables were provided with clarification on the coverage of the Near East Regional Office as well as how this compared with the coverage of the Near East Region for Council election purposes and for participation in the Regional Conferences (Table 1).

The discussions of the CoC-IEE on this matter were summarized in the Aide-Mémoire of the CoC-IEE session of 17 April 2009, in paragraphs 5 to 7. In particular:

- a) *“Members agreed that the regional breakdown for Council election purposes, and the established practice of allowing dual (and sometimes triple) participation at Regional Conferences at the request of a Member Nation (possibly as observer), were not being called into question”* and
- b) *“on the specific question of the Near East Regional Office (RNE) geographical coverage, it was considered that the issues at stake needed to be further elucidated”,* and
- c) *“Management was requested to revise and expand the Note on coverage of the RNE in light of the discussion by Members to allow Regional Groups to consult on the issue among themselves and with Capitals, and report back to the Working Groups as soon as possible”.*

As a follow-up, Management provided, in May 2009, additional information on country coverage of the Near East Office (Table 2) to the Chair of the Near East Regional Group. It was agreed that the Regional Group would discuss the matter and revert to the Secretariat. However, no further feedback was received from Members.

Members may wish to provide guidance on how the coverage between Council, RNE and the Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) should be harmonized in view of the fact that RNE now has the status of Committee of the FAO Conference and has become a full part of the governance structure, feeding into the Conference and Council.

There are also 11 countries that are invited to NERC but are not covered by RNE. These countries, except for Djibouti, are also invited to other Regional Conferences. The Regional Conferences to which these countries are also invited to in addition to NERC, the Regional Group to which they belong for Council election purposes and the Regional Office providing backstopping are shown in Table 3. Table 3 provides information on countries’ participation in other regional intergovernmental bodies:

FAO Bodies. In particular, for invitees to NERC, the Near East Regional Group for Council election purposes, and coverage by RNE, see column I.

UN Regional Commissions. Countries belonging to FAO bodies related to the Near East are assigned to three UN Regional Commissions. These are the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The allocation of countries to the UN Regional Commissions is shown in Column II.

Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) with formal agreement with FAO. A number of regional IGOs are invited to NERC.

Table 1: Countries Covered by RNE

Countries covered by RNE	Regional Conferences, in addition to NERC, to which they are invited	Regional Group for Council Election Purposes
Algeria	ARC	Africa
Bahrain		Near East
Egypt	ARC	Near East
Iran	APRC	Near East
Iraq		Near East
Jordan		Near East
Kuwait		Near East
Lebanon		Near East
Libya	ARC	Near East
Mauritania	ARC	Africa
Morocco	ARC	Africa
Oman		Near East
Qatar		Near East
Saudi Arabia		Near East
Sudan	ARC	Near East
Syrian Arab Republic		Near East
Tunisia	ARC	Africa
United Arab Emirates		Near East
Yemen		Near East

NERC – Regional Conference for the Near East

ARC – Regional Conference for Africa

APRC – Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific

Table 2. Countries not Covered by RNE but which are invited to NERC

Countries not covered by RNE but invited to the Near East Regional Conference	Regional Conferences, in addition to NERC, to which they are invited	Regional Group for Council Election Purposes	Regional providing Support	Office Technical Support
Afghanistan	APRC	Near East	RAP	
Djibouti	ARC??	Near East	RAF	
Kyrgyzstan	ERC	Near East	REU	
Somalia	ARC	Near East	RAF	
Tajikistan	ERC	Near East	REU	
Turkmenistan	ERC	Near East	REU	
Azerbaijan	ERC	Europe	REU	
Cyprus	ERC	Europe	REU	
Malta	ERC	Europe	REU	
Pakistan	APRC	Asia	RAP	
Turkey	ERC	Europe	REU	

Table 3. Country Coverage of the Near East by Different Purposes

I. FAO Bodies			II. UN Regional Commissions	III Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) with formal agreement with FAO		
Countries invited to the Near East Regional Conference	The Near East Regional Group for Council election purposes	RNE Coverage		Financial Institutions	Agriculture and Economic Institutions	Regional Co-operation Institutions
Afghanistan	Afghanistan		ESCAP	IDB		
Bahrain	Bahrain	Bahrain	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU	GCC
Djibouti	Djibouti		ECA	AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD	
Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	ECA, ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU, ICAMAS, CARDNE	
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	ESCAP	IDB		
Iraq	Iraq	Iraq	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU, CARDNE	
Jordan	Jordan	Jordan	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU, CARDNE	
Kuwait	Kuwait	Kuwait	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU	GCC
Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyzstan		ESCAP	IDB		
Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU, ICAMAS, CARDNE	
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	ECA	BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU	AMU
Oman	Oman	Oman	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU	GCC
Qatar	Qatar	Qatar	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU	GCC
Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, CAEU	GCC
Somalia	Somalia		ECA	AAAID, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD	
Sudan	Sudan	Sudan	ECA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU, CARDNE	
Syrian Arab Republic	Syrian Arab Republic	Syrian Arab Republic	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU, CARDNE	
Tajikistan	Tajikistan		ESCAP	IDB		
Turkmenistan	Turkmenistan		ESCAP	IDB		
United Arab Emirates	United Arab Emirates	United Arab Emirates	ESCWA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU	GCC
Yemen	Yemen	Yemen	ESCWA	AAAID, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU, CARDNE	

Table 3 (Continued). Country Coverage of the Near East by Different Purposes

I. FAO Bodies			II. UN Regional Commissions	III Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) with formal agreement with FAO		
Countries invited to the Near East Regional Conference	The Near East Regional Group for Council election purposes	RNE Coverage		Financial Institutions	Agriculture and Economic Institutions	Regional Co-operation Institutions
Algeria		Algeria	ECA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, CAEU, ICAMAS	AMU
Azerbaijan			ESCAP	IDB		
Cyprus						
?			ESCAP	IDB		
Malta					ICAMAS	
Mauritania		Mauritania	ECA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CARDNE	AMU
Morocco		Morocco	ECA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, CAEU, ICAMAS	AMU
Pakistan			ESCAP	IDB		
Tunisia		Tunisia	ECA	AAAID, BADEA, AFESD, IDB	ACSAD, AOAD, API, CAEU, ICAMAS, CARDNE	AMU
Turkey			ESCAP	IDB	ICAMAS	
?			ESCAP	IDB		