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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

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**FAO Activities in the Region in 2010-2011, Programme of Work and
Budget 2012-2013 and Areas of Priority Actions for the Near East Region
for the Following Biennium 2014-15**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Conference in 2009 approved a set of changes to the Basic Texts, as well as a new results-based Strategic Framework 2010-19 (see Annex 1) and Medium Term Plan 2010-13, which are intended to help focus and prioritize FAO's work. The changes included a renewed and more inclusive intergovernmental process to review programme priorities and implementation. In particular, the Regional Conferences advise the Council on the special problems of their respective regions and the priority areas of work, which should be taken into account in the preparation and adjustment of the corporate planning, programming and budgetary documents of the Organization.
2. At their meetings in 2010, the Regional Conferences provided advice on regional priorities that cut across FAO's strategic objectives. In the case of the Near East Region, a Regional Priority Framework with five regional priorities was adopted in December 2010,¹ as summarized in Annex 2.
3. The Council requested that the Regional Conferences provide more structured advice on regional priorities at their sessions in 2012. The report of the Conference Committee for the Follow-up to the Independent External Evaluation of FAO (CoC-IEE) on the Immediate Plan of Action for FAO Renewal, adopted by the Conference in 2011, indicated that, in establishing a coherent set of priorities for future biennia, the Secretariat should identify emerging issues to inform the review and refinement of the Medium Term Plan for the 2014-17 period, and address across the strategic objectives the coordination of cross-cutting issues to help drive priority setting.
4. The purpose of this document is to present, for review and advice of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East: the activities carried out by FAO in the region during 2010-11, as described in Section II; and the priorities for FAO's work in the region during 2012-13 and the proposed priorities for the next biennium, which are set forth in Section III. These should be considered with and further inform the emerging global trends and future challenges for the work of Organization, as presented in document NERC/12/INF/9. Section IV sets out the guidance sought from the Regional Conference.

II. ACTIONS TAKEN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 30TH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE PWB 2010-11 IN THE REGION

5. At its 30th Session in December 2010, NERC made ten main recommendations for action by FAO in the areas of soaring food prices, transboundary plant pests and animal diseases, regional commissions for fisheries, and the desert locust commissions. The actions taken in follow-up to these recommendations are reported in Annex 3.
6. Within the Regional Priority Framework endorsed by NERC in December 2010, FAO continued to focus its activities towards enhanced food production, rural development, sustainable livelihood and efficient management of natural resources. The major activities undertaken under the PWB 2010-11 are summarized for the Strategic Objectives in Annex 4.
7. FAO continued to fulfil its core functions of monitoring and assessment of long-term and medium-term trends and perspectives; assembly and provision of information, knowledge and statistics; development of international instruments, norms and standards; providing policy and strategy options and advice; technical support to promote technology transfer and build capacity, advocacy and communication; interdisciplinarity and innovation; and partnerships and alliances.

¹ NERC/10/7

III. PRIORITIES FOR 2012-2013 AND FOR THE FOLLOWING BIENNIUM

A. Developments

8. The Director-General has set out five pillars on which to focus the work of the Organization: to eradicate hunger; to accelerate the shift towards truly sustainable food consumption and production systems; to promote greater fairness in the global management of food; to complete the agreed reform process improving decentralization; and to expand South-South cooperation in FAO.

9. During 2012 FAO is undertaking a process leading to the formulation of a revised Strategic Framework 2010-19 and a new MTP 2014-17. The first part of this process is identification of the major global trends that drive change, the main global challenges that represent the possible priority areas of future work for FAO, and the strategic objectives and action plans that will guide the future programme of work of the Organization. The various steps and components of the process are shown in document NERC/12/INF/9 Figure 1.

10. The Director-General has launched a broad and inclusive Strategic Thinking Process to identify the major trends, main challenges and strategic objectives, involving FAO staff, partner organizations, member countries and governing bodies. The first step, undertaken during January-February 2012, has initially identified seven main challenges based on major global trends and regional specificities, as prepared by selected FAO staff at headquarters and decentralized offices with input from an external Strategy Experts Panel. These trends and challenges are presented in document NERC/12/INF/9.

B. Regional Trends and Challenges

11. The Near East is one of the driest regions in the world and vulnerable to extreme climatic events, which degrade natural resources and further impact food production. A high population growth rate has increased both rural and urban unemployment which, coupled with widespread poverty, exacerbates the food insecurity situation and undernourishment. The region is a net importer of food and major importer of cereals making it vulnerable to the effects of volatile food prices that have marked the recent global economic and financial crisis.

12. The situation of food security in Near East countries mirrors the world situation, with more people suffering from hunger and malnutrition. The number of hungry and undernourished people in the region in 2010 is estimated at 37 million. This represents an increase of 17 million people relative to the base period of the 1996 WFS. Nevertheless, it corresponds to a reduction of 5 million people from the 2009 level. Huge disparities exist among countries in the region in terms of the level and prevalence of undernourishment and in the progress in meeting MDGs.

13. There are wide resource and income differences across countries in the region, but countries face similar challenges to agriculture and food security. For most of the Near East countries, the overwhelming concern is to secure adequate and stable supplies of food at the national level, making food security a concern for both rich and poor countries of the region. The three major challenges in the region are: (i) limited water availability (ii) high population growth, an increasingly young population, and rapid urbanization and (iii) heavy dependence on food imports.

14. Water scarcity is the most critical development problem in the region and the single most important factor in limiting agricultural growth. Water availability in the region has been declining steadily since the late 1950s. Out of the 20 countries in the Middle East and North Africa part of the region, only four countries are classified as "water abundant" (availability of water is higher than 1700 m³/inhabitant/year) and twelve of the 20 countries are characterized as having acute water scarcity (less than 500m³/inhabitant/year).

15. Population is expected to almost double by 2050 with 67% living in urban areas. The population of the region grew 3.4 times from 1960 to 2005, widening the food demand/food availability gap and creating other problems such as a very large young population with an insufficient number of available jobs, as employment growth lags behind. New income generating opportunities are essential to absorb the growing number of unemployed youth (ages 15-24) which was around 27 percent for males and 33 percent for females in 2005 the Near East region. With an

average percent of unemployed youth around 26%, the Near East represented the highest rate among all regions of the world.

16. Over the past ten years, the region experienced rapid urbanization which is expected to continue in the near future. Out of a population of about 300 million, 170 million reside in urban areas. Most of these people will be displaced workers, pastoralists and farmers from rural areas. The poor in urban areas are particularly vulnerable in terms of food security, not having the option of producing their own food. Feeding an urban population creates additional demands on the food system.

17. In the last 30-40 years, food imports in the region have risen much more than the world and developing country averages; from over 100 times in UAE to around 20 times in Yemen. Food import quantities in eleven countries (which include Sudan) have risen much over the developing country average of 5.4 for the same years. Egypt has continued to be the largest food importer in the region and the world over the period 1960 to 2005. Food import dependency is a continuing issue in the region which has worsened in the past 25 years with the sharp increase in food imports in all countries between 1980 and 2005.

18. Agricultural development and food security have also been threatened in many countries of the region by conflicts and civil strife in Afghanistan, Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Iraq, Somalia, and the Sudan and by the social tensions in countries that are in socio-political transition, notably Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria and Yemen.

C. Regional Priorities in the PWB 2012-13

19. The five priority areas for FAO assistance in the Near East as endorsed by the 30th Session of NERC in the Regional Priority Framework for the Near East 2010-2019, include:

- A) Enhancing food security and nutrition;
- B) Fostering agricultural production and rural development for improved livelihoods;
- C) Sustainable natural resource management;
- D) Responding to climate change impacts and developing adaptation strategies; and
- E) Preparedness for, and response to, agriculture and food emergencies.

20. The five regional priorities continue to broadly reflect the medium to long term priorities. However, the areas of focus under each priority are likely to change over the short to medium term. Following the recent political and social developments in the Near East new challenges have emerged that necessitate revisiting the regional priorities. This issue has been addressed as part of the 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 and 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 in the region.

21. To address these regional priority areas and the sub-regional specific focus areas, Regional Results contributing to the achievement of FAO's corporate Organizational Results and Strategic Objectives have been formulated, as shown in Table 1. The Regional Results guide operational work planning and allocation of resources within the region during the 2012-13 biennium. It should also be stressed that in addition to the five regional priorities, FAO will also be concentrating on how to integrate gender equality in national policies and programmes. The skill mix of the regional office is being adjusted to reflect this priority.

22. The Net budgetary appropriation allocation for 2012-2013 for the Near East Region amounts to USD 41.25 million, while voluntary contributions are estimated at USD 12.6 million, as shown in Annex 5.

Table 1: 2012-13 Regional Results Categorized by Regional Priority Areas**Priority A: Enhancing food security and nutrition**

OR	Regional results
A01	National strategies elaborated for sustainable crop production intensification and diversification
A04	Seed systems in selected countries improved
B01	Livestock productivity is improved for food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable economic development in the Region
D03	Countries have strengthened capacity to develop, adopt and enforce food standards and improve food control systems in line with international recommendations
F05	Food security-related sectors in the region have strengthened capacity to adapt to climate change impacts
H01	Countries have strengthened capacity in food security analysis, and to formulate and implement food security and nutrition policies and programs
H01	Countries have strengthened capacity in the assessment, monitoring, and analysis of nutrition and household food security and in developing science-based guidance and policies
H04	Countries have strengthened capacity and systems to collect, process, analyze and disseminate agricultural statistics for improved information and food security decision-making, and have facilitated the exchange of best practices and methods
H05	Knowledge exchange and information management in food security and rural and agricultural development sectors are strengthened.

Priority B: Fostering agricultural production and rural development for improved livelihoods

OR	Regional results
A01	National strategies elaborated for sustainable crop production intensification and diversification
A04	Seed systems in selected countries improved
B01	Livestock productivity is improved for food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable economic development in the Region
B04	Strengthened partnership with national, sub-regional and regional public and private research and development institutions for the integration of smallholders into livestock value chain
C01	Support for the formulation of policies and standards that facilitate the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), as well as response to emerging issues
C06	Support to Members and other stakeholders to achieve more responsible post-harvest utilization and trade of fisheries and aquaculture products, including the enhancement of the fish supply and value chain
D03	Countries have strengthened capacity to develop, adopt and enforce food standards and improve food control systems in line with international recommendations
G03	Agro-industry and agribusiness strategic capacity strengthened in the Region
L02	Improved regional capacity in investment and policy planning and implementation
L03	Increased and more effective public and private investment in agriculture and rural development in the Region

Priority C: Sustainable natural resource management

OR	Regional results
A03	Pesticide management capacity of the countries built
B03	Sustainable use of natural resources including genetic resources to improve adaptation of the livestock sector to drought, market, and other uncertainties in the Region
C02	Contribution to sustainable management and development of fisheries and aquaculture through supporting national and regional institutions and networks including Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs)
C06	Support to Members and other stakeholders to achieve more responsible post-harvest utilization and trade of fisheries and aquaculture products, including the enhancement of the fish supply and value chain
E02	Importance of arid zone forests and rangelands in the Near East region recognized through international and regional cooperation and dialogue
E03	Sustainable management of arid zone forests and rangelands strengthened and needed investments for the national forest program mobilized
E06	Environmental services of forests and rangelands enhanced by implementation of strategies for improved carbon stocks in sustainably managed forest and range resources; water, soil and biodiversity conservation; and climate change adaptation
F01	Member countries promoting and developing sustainable land management, taking into account land tenure related issues
F02	Resilience to water scarcity in the Region is increased
F06	Access to scientific and technical information on innovation in natural resource management and agricultural development has been facilitated in the Region

Priority D: Responding to climate change impacts and developing adaptation strategies

OR	Regional results
A03	Pesticide management capacity of Region countries built
B03	Sustainable use of natural resources, including genetic resources, to improve adaptation of the livestock sector to drought, market, and other uncertainties in the Region
E06	Environmental services of forests and rangelands enhanced by implementation of strategies for improved carbon stocks in sustainably managed forest and range resources; water, soil and biodiversity conservation; and climate change adaptation
F05	Food security-related sectors in the Region have strengthened capacity to adapt to climate change impacts

Priority E: Preparedness for, and response to, agriculture and food emergencies

OR	Regional results
A02	Risk of transboundary plant pests and diseases reduced
B02	Reduced economic, environmental and public health impacts and risks of endemic, transboundary, zoonotic, and food-borne diseases in the Region

D. Regional Priorities for 2014-2015

23. In light of the sub-regional consultations held in 2011, the five regional priorities broadly reflect the medium to long term priorities. However, several focus areas of activity within these priorities have been identified as sub-regional areas of action in light of the recent developments in the region. Below is a summary of the key sub-regional focus areas under each regional priority.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES	SNE	SNG	SNO
Priority A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategy and policy development; - Strengthening food security monitoring and information systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthening national capacities for policy development; - Enhancing food safety and quality; - Food loss prevention and development of efficient information system for food and nutrition security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategy and policy development; - Reducing/preventing food losses and improving food safety and quality; - - Strengthening food security monitoring and information systems.
Priority B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rural development and employment generation, particularly for youth and women; - Commercialisation of agriculture; - Supporting urban/peri-urban agriculture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting the commercialization of agriculture, - Diversifying agriculture into high value added activities in terms of both economic value and nutrient content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employment generation along the value chain; - Promoting trade and investment in agriculture; - Development of livestock, particularly small ruminants; - Aquaculture development.
Priority C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated water management; - Management and conservation of fisheries; and improved policy for aquaculture; - Regeneration of vegetation and forests. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainable management of water resources; - Sustainable management of forest, trees and range land resources; combating desertification; - Enhancing efficiency of livestock production and combat transboundary animal diseases; - Conserving genetic resources and biodiversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated land and water management; - Sustainable management of range & forests; - Sustainable management of fisheries and development of aquaculture.
Priority D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainstreaming climate change (CC) adaptation in policies and strategies for agriculture, forestry and fisheries; - Mainstreaming CC adaptation in agriculture, forestry and fisheries policies and strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving national and sub-regional capacities to cope with adverse impacts of climate change, and reduce the contribution of agriculture to climate change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainstreaming CC adaptation in policies and strategies for agriculture, forestry and fisheries; - Awareness raising about CC adaptation and mitigation.

Priority E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancing monitoring, detection and prevention of transboundary pests and diseases; - Strengthening programmes for relief, rehabilitation and preparedness for emergencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhancing capacities for disaster response and risk reduction, linking relief efforts with long term sustainable development, and mitigating long term impacts of disasters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring, control and prevention of transboundary pests and diseases; - Strengthening programmes for rehabilitation and preparedness for emergencies.
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24. In delivering actions stated in the priority areas, FAO will focus its work in the region in three major components: (i) Food Security Frameworks (ii) Policy Advice (iii) Investment Planning. These focus areas reflect FAOs core functions and will help organize and deliver FAO actions in a more concise and focused manner through established teams in each of these areas, streamlining results and indicators to be able to more effectively measure achievements and impacts of FAO's work. In designing programmes, due consideration will be given to gender equality and youth employment.

IV. GUIDANCE SOUGHT

25. The Regional Conferences play a critical role in shaping the main challenges for the future and providing input for formulation of the new strategic objectives, through guidance on the regional priorities for the work of the Organization. They also provide advice on the current programme of work and the strategy for implementation in the region, including the allocation of human and financial resources within the region necessary to address the agreed priorities and better deliver the expected results.

26. In order to have the greatest impact on shaping FAO's priorities for the present and future biennia, the Regional Conference is requested to:

- a) Review the activities carried out under the PWB 2010-11 in the Region;
- b) Validate the Regional Results for 2012-2013 and the proposed areas of sub-regional focus in the biennium.
- c) Advise on the extent to which the main challenges identified for FAO's work are consistent with the conditions in the region, in the context of FAO's vision and goals and the global trends; and
- d) Suggest regional specificities that should be incorporated in each of the identified challenges and which should be taken into account when formulating FAO's strategic objectives, including the proposed regional priorities for 2014-15.