

Towards healthy soils in the Near East and North Africa region

Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

March 7, 2023

Muscat communique on sustainable soil management in the NENA region

We, the senior representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources of 12 countries in the Near East and North Africa (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kingdom of Morocco, Lebanese Republic, Republic of Iraq, Republic of Sudan, Republic of Tunisia, Republic of Yemen, State of Palestine, Sultanate of Oman and Syrian Arab Republic), participated to the event “Towards healthy soils in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region”, held in Muscat, Oman from 7 to 8 March 2023. The meeting was organized and supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Global Soil Partnership (GSP), and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources of the Sultanate of Oman. We recognize the importance of soil and land resources management in the NENA region. In light of this, we have duly developed this communiqué to be shared with national authorities and institutions in our countries, and with key implementing, political, and financial stakeholders involved in the management of soil and land resources in the region. Our participation in this event signifies our commitment to promoting healthy soils in the NENA region. By working collaboratively, we are confident that we can make meaningful progress towards achieving this goal.

Acknowledging that soils are the basis for farmers to produce 95 percent of food we eat and to provide key ecosystem services that we all depend upon, contributing directly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) particularly those on eradicating hunger (SDG2), providing clean water (SDG6), fighting, mitigating and adapting to the negative impacts of climate change (SDG13), and preserving life on land (SDG15).

Recognizing that soil is a non-renewable resource and that it can take more than 400 years to produce one centimeter of soil.

Recognizing that soil degradation poses a serious threat to food security and exacerbates water scarcity in all countries of the NENA region.

Acknowledging that the main threats to the soil's capacity to provide ecosystem services in most of the NENA countries are salinization, water and wind erosion, loss of soil organic carbon, soil pollution, soil physical degradation (including compaction and surface crusting), and soil sealing and land use change due to urbanization.

Recognizing that sustainable soil management can contribute to addressing the challenge of water scarcity and food insecurity in the region by increasing soil fertility and the capacity of soils to store water, and to enhancing the resilience of ecosystems to climate change.

Recognizing that sustainable soil management can also boost food production on salt-affected soils, reduce soil erosion, sandstorms, soil contamination and improve the biodiversity and the resilience of the agro-ecosystems in the region.

Conscious:

- That soils have been greatly overlooked for many years in the development agenda. Leading them to become increasingly susceptible to degradation due to several factors such as population growth, competition over limited resources, unsustainable management practices, urban expansion, and impacts of climate change;
- That the area that is reaching the bottom limits of its productive capacity is fast increasing limiting our ability to meet growing demands on this precious resource;
- That costs of restoring degraded soils are prohibitive compared to the costs of ensuring sustainable soil conservation and use;
- Conscious also of the need for enhancing awareness, education, training, extension, research, knowledge sharing, and information, as well as policy and institutional support for prioritizing soil protection, sustainable soil management, and restoration in the development agenda.

Recalling that:

- In 2012, the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) of FAO recognized the need to preserve soil resources in NENA and established the NENA Soil Partnership.
- In 2013, the 21st summit of African leaders urged Member States to place land degradation at the center of the debate on the post-2015 development agenda.

- In 2019, the first Joint Meeting of Arab Ministers of Agriculture and Water organized in Cairo, Egypt, called for “Establishing a sustainable regional mechanism to build individual and institutional capacities necessary to plan, design, and implement water and land management programmes efficiently”.
- In 2020, FAORNE financially supported the implementation of the first ever regional Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) project on soil to support capacity development for the sustainable management of soil resources in the region (TCP RAB 3802).

Appreciating the contribution of governments, policy and decision makers, academic and research organizations, non-governmental and civil society organizations, financial partners, and regional initiatives in supporting soil protection, sustainable management, and restoration and calling upon them to join, collaborate in, and actively support the NENA Soil Partnership and FAO in their mission to achieve sustainable soil management and to help implementing agricultural policies statements.

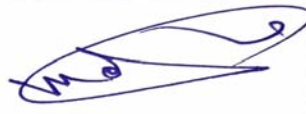
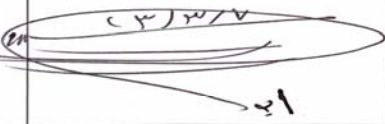
We, the senior representatives of 12 countries from the region participating in this regional workshop hereby:


- Agree on the urgent need to implement the national and regional action plans developed under the FAO funded project to increase the availability of accurate, precise and harmonized soil data at the national and regional level, to promote data sharing, and to support decision-making, including the development and implementation of soil legislation and legal frameworks.
- Also agree on the need to technically and financially support soil laboratories, which often may have inadequate health and safety measures in place and struggle to meet national demands on soil analysis because of the lack of personnel, training, equipment, internet, consumables and electrical power supply.
- Further agree on the need to improve or implement existing legal frameworks and regulations on the laboratory’s waste management and drainage system, and to define minimum data quality standards for decision making aligned to the implementation of internationally recognized methods
- Agree on the need to recognize and support farmers for the protection of soil and water resources, and to increase their capacity to manage soil fertility, building their resilience to fertilizers’ market shocks.

- Further call the attention on the need to advocate for sustainable soil management as a mean to address humanitarian crisis and to promote peace and development. Thus, awareness should be raised on the positive impact that sustainable soil management has on local productions, food security, and farmers' resilience to market restrictions on agricultural inputs and goods.
- Further call attention on the need to mobilize investments to implement sustainable soil management programs and to monitor soil health and its impact on water resources and food security throughout the region since national soil assessment and monitoring systems may still be weak .
- Finally, we hereby support the implementation of the FAO's Strategic Framework 2022-2031, the GSP action framework 2022-2030, and the national and regional action plans developed under the FAO funded project through the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of national and regional projects, including those under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and the establishment, implementation, and monitoring of legislative frameworks at national and regional level. Projects should include
 - o the planning and organization of training courses on sustainable soil management in the NENA region;
 - o the development and implementation of comprehensive regional and national action plans on sustainable soil management;
 - o the organization of regular meetings, forums, seminars, ...etc for better collaboration between countries in the NENA region;
 - o the planning and implementation of regional and national TCP projects;
 - o the establishment of a network for regional and international exchange programmes to support experience and knowledge exchange and boost training.

Muscat Communiqué (Muscat, 7 March 2023)

Country	Full name	Position and affiliation	Signature
Jordan	ayman alorain	assistant General director	
Palestine	Ammar Salabat	Director General of Agricultural Land	
Yemen	Mohammed Hezam AL-Mashreki	Director General of RNRAC	
Iran	Karim Ghorbani	Head of mapping and modernizing department	
LEBANON	Mohamad ABOU ZEID	Director of plant Resources	

syria	Majeda Mohamed Mofleh	Dg of GCSAR	
Sudan	ABU BAKR OMER ALBUSHRA	MinAor of Agriculture & Forests	

MOROCCO	Faouzi Bekkaoui	Director of the national institute for agronomic research	
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Annex I List of Participants – Sheraton Oman

Sr	Name	Country
1	Rachid Moussadek	Morocco
2	Tarik Benabdelouahab	Morocco
3	Rafla Sahli Attia	Tunisia
4	Ayman Alorana	Jordan
5	Emad ElQoudah	Jordan
6	Fatme Beydoun	Lebanon
7	Mohamed AbouZeid	Lebanon
8	Talal Darwich	Lebanon
9	Majeda Mofleh	Syria
10	Mohamed Manhal AlZoubi	Syria
11	Medjahed Saddek	Algeria
12	Mohamed AlMashreki	Yemen
13	Emad Saleh Ata	Yemen
14	Waleed Alshafie	Iraq
15	Nuha Khamis	Sudan
17	Imad Ghanameh	Palestine
18	Ammar Salahat	Palestine
19	Karim Ghorbani Deputy Minister of Water and Soil	Iran
20	Ronald Vargas	Rome
21	Isabel Luotto	Rome
22	Theodora Fetsi	Athens
23	Mubarak Abdelrahman Abdalla	Sudan
24	Mahassin Mohamed Husein	Sudan