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Food and Agriculture
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Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة
الغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-fourth Session

Rome, Italy, 7-11 May 2018

Results and Priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa Region

Executive Summary

During 2014–2017, FAO assisted countries in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region to achieve results in the context of agreed priorities and FAO's Strategic Framework and Medium Term Plan (MTP). FAO's strategic direction is maintained in the approved MTP 2018–2021 and the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2018–19, which set out the programmatic framework and resources for planning, implementing and monitoring results.

FAO's Strategic Programmes (SPs) guide FAO's technical work to address more complex, cross-cutting and multidisciplinary priorities in the region, including support to countries on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Strategic Programmes integrate FAO's work from global/normative activities to regional initiatives and national programmes and enable identification of relevant stakeholders to facilitate intersectoral and multistakeholder engagement and coordination. The Strategic Programmes support delivery of the Regional Initiatives, which respond to regional priorities to achieve results.

As reinforced by the Regional Conference for the Near East at its 33rd Session, during 2016–2017 FAO focused its work on three Regional Initiatives: (i) Water Scarcity Initiative; (ii) Small-scale Family Farming; and (iii) Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition, as a means to address the regional priorities and further focus FAO's work for country-level impact and for resource mobilization during 2018–2019.

The main achievements in the region during the 2016–2017 biennium include: (i) improved resilience to food security and nutrition threats through intervention to combat plant, animal and fish pests and diseases, including transboundary cases, and implementation of food security information and early warning systems; (ii) sustainable conservation of animal and plant genetic resources; (iii) reduction of food losses and waste; and (iv) development of social protection systems to increase resilience of

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small-scale family farmers. In addition, countries have been supported, towards the improvement of sustainable water resources management, climate change adaptation and drought management.

In 2018–2019, it is proposed to maintain the three Regional Initiatives with some adjustments, in line with the continuity of FAO's strategic direction aligned with the SDGs and to consolidate results achieved so far. The Water Scarcity Initiative, which additional countries are interested in joining, will place emphasis on water use efficiency and water productivity, climate change, drought management, strategic planning of water resources and sustainable water resources management. The Small-scale Family Farming Initiative will focus on strengthening producers' capacity for sustainable productivity and value chains, through farmer field schools and other means, as well as developing capacity of producers' organizations and rural institutions, supporting market access for small-scale farmers. The Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition Initiative will support development of policy and institutional frameworks in countries across the region, as well as improving access to food and nutrition security information for decision support, promoting efficient and inclusive food systems and developing household resilience.

Matters to be brought to the attention of the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference may wish to:

- Recognize the importance of the Strategic Framework in guiding FAO's technical work in order to address priorities in the region and ensuring effective delivery of results at national level;
- Recognize the work completed through the Strategic Programmes and the results achieved by FAO in 2016–2017 under the Regional Initiatives and other key areas of work in responding to the main priorities identified at the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference;
- Take note of the alignment of FAO's Strategic Objectives with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs;
- Take into account the key role of the Strategic Programmes in integrating the Organization's technical work at regional and national levels to address the challenges of multifaceted development and to provide countries with efficient and adequate support on the SDGs;
- Support the important contribution of the Strategic Programmes to the delivery of normative products and services, such as regulations, voluntary guidelines and legal instruments, at national and regional levels;
- Provide guidance on areas of regional priority for FAO's work in 2018–2019 and beyond based on major trends and challenges in the region, including the SDGs and climate change, and experience with the Regional Initiatives in 2016–2017.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. FAO's reviewed Strategic Framework¹, MTP 2018–2021 and PWB 2018–2019² were approved by the FAO Conference at its 40th Session, in July 2017. The Conference appreciated the close alignment of FAO's Strategic Objectives with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs.

2. The reviewed Strategic Framework was developed through a consultative strategic thinking process during 2016, taking into account the strong and consistent support expressed by the FAO

¹ C 2017/7 (www.fao.org/pwb)

² C 2017/3 (www.fao.org/pwb)

Governing Bodies for continuity in the strategic direction of the Organization. This process involved identification of global trends expected to frame agricultural development over the medium term³, and sectoral and regional trends arising from regional strategic reviews and deliberations of the FAO Regional Conferences⁴ and Technical Committees⁵; derivation of main challenges expected to be faced by countries and development actors in food and agriculture in the coming years; analysis of main global developments setting the overall context in which FAO operates; and the implications of these challenges and developments for FAO's Strategic Objectives in the context of FAO's basic attributes and core functions. The review also took into account the major global developments that occurred in 2015–2016, most importantly, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, and entry into force of the Paris Agreement which will provide the broad context in which FAO will operate and adapt for enhanced delivery and impact of the Organization's work.

3. The reviewed Strategic Framework provided the basis for fine-tuning the conceptual framework and theory of change of FAO's five Strategic Objectives within the context of the Organization's vision, attributes and core functions, as summarized in Figure 1. The MTP 2018–2021 and PWB 2018-2019 set out the programmatic framework and resources for planning, implementing and monitoring results through indicators and targets, including the contribution of FAO's work toward 40 SDG targets. Web Annex 1 provides an overview of FAO's Strategic Programmes including alignment with the SDGs.

4. FAO Regional Initiatives serve as a mechanism to ensure effective delivery and impact of FAO's work on the key priorities of each region contributing to the Strategic Objectives. The 2016 Regional Conference considered FAO's achievements in the region and identified priority areas to be considered for the three Regional Initiatives in 2016–2017: *Water Scarcity (WSI)*, *Small-scale Family Farming (SSFF)* and *Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition (FSN)*.

5. The WSI, which additional countries are interested in joining, places emphasis on water use efficiency and water productivity, climate change, drought management, strategic planning of water resources and sustainable water resources management. The SSFF strengthens producers' capacity for sustainable productivity and value chains, through farmer field schools and others means, as well as developing capacity of producer organizations and rural institutions, supporting market access for small-scale farmers. The FSN supports development of policy and institutional frameworks in countries across the region, as well as improving access to food and nutrition security information for decision support, promoting efficient and inclusive food systems and developing household resilience.

6. In this context, the Regional Conference provides an opportunity for Members to advise on results of, and priorities for, FAO's work in the region through FAO's Strategic Programmes. The current document is divided into two main sections:

- Section II describes how, over the 2016–2017 biennium, the Strategic Programmes helped countries to achieve results in line with agreed priorities for FAO's work in the region.
- Section III gives an overview of trends and developments in the region going forward, the regional priorities for FAO's work and how they can be addressed by the Strategic Programmes through the Regional Initiatives. It also includes a regional vision for 2018-2019 of the goals relating to the Strategic Programmes.

II. ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE REGION

7. FAO's Strategic Programmes (SPs) guide FAO's technical work to address more complex, cross-cutting and multidisciplinary priorities in the region, including support to countries on the SDGs. Strategic Programmes integrate FAO's work from global normative activities to regional initiatives and national programmes and enable identification of relevant stakeholders to facilitate intersectoral and multistakeholder engagement and coordination. The SPs support delivery of the Regional Initiatives, which respond to regional priorities to achieve results.

³ FAO 2016. *The future of food and agriculture – Trends and challenges*. Rome.

⁴ C 2017/14, C 2017/15, C 2017/16, C 2017/17, C 2017/18, C 2017/LIM/1

⁵ C 2017/21, C 2017/22, C 2017/23, C 2017/24

8. The main achievements in the region during the 2016–2017 biennium include: (i) improved resilience to food security and nutrition threats due to intervention to combat plant, animal and fish pests and diseases, including transboundary cases, and the implementation of food security information early warning systems ; (ii) sustainable conservation of animal and plant genetic resources; (iii) reduction of food losses and waste; and (iv) development of social protection systems to increase resilience of small-scale family farmers. Countries have been supported, as well, towards the improvement of sustainable water resources management, climate change adaptation and drought management.

9. The achievements relating to each Regional Initiatives (with reference to the relevant Strategic Programmes) are described below. Details on the follow-up to the recommendations of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East are provided in document NERC/18/INF/5.

A. Water Scarcity Initiative (WSI)

10. In the context of the WSI, through a multidisciplinary team and with the support of SP 2, SP4 and SP5, FAO is supporting several countries of the region in addressing sustainable water resources management with associated implications for food security. Methods and standards have been developed with governmental staff and training organized for the application of remote sensing to monitor and evaluate 'water accounting', 'water productivity' and 'drought'. To improve the sustainable management of groundwater, an integrated hydrogeological-gender diagnostic assessment on groundwater governance has been completed on aquifers in Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

11. To support the implementation of the SDG6 (target 6.4) in the region, the WSI has mobilized USD 10 million as extra-budgetary funds through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). SP2, SP3 and SP4 have provided the proper framework for this Sida Project.

12. In partnership with the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), and in synergy with SSFF (facilitated by SP2 and SP3), small-farm sustainable land-and-water productivity has been scaled up in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia under irrigated and rainfed conditions through the introduction of affordable technologies and good management practices. Over six hundred hectares, about four hundred farmers have directly benefited from this work with a yield increase of more than 20 percent, including a reduction in water use of about 25 percent (and also of seeds and fertilizers) and an increase in water productivity of about 60 percent compared with the traditional farming practices. The increase in the income of farmers has been estimated to be to the order of 20 percent for the 2016–2017 wheat cycle in Egypt. Based on these results, further scaling-up strategies and plans are being undertaken by the Ministries of Agriculture of Egypt (for the mechanized raised-bed irrigation technique) and of Morocco and Tunisia (for Conservation Agriculture practices).

13. Sustained by the Regional Collaborative Platform of the WSI, a regional work plan for an integrated agriculture-aquaculture (IAA), to produce high quality protein and fresh vegetable using brackish water in inhospitable deserts and arid lands, has been initiated to be implemented in Algeria, Egypt and Oman.

14. With the endorsement of the League of Arab States (LAS), and in partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), climate change scenario analyses for two time-horizons (baseline: 1986–2005; time-horizon I: 2016–2035; time-horizon II: 2046–2065) for Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, and for "hot-spots" at regional level, have been developed. Based on these projections, climate-change adaptation solutions for the Green Sectors of selected zones in the region have been derived.

15. In partnership with the International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA), and in synergy with FSN (SP5), the most appropriate drought-monitoring indexes for different agricultural systems have been selected for Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. This represents the first phase for the establishment of a Regional Drought Management System (RDMS).

B. Small-scale Family Farming (SSFF)

16. In the context of the Regional Initiative on SSFF, FAO conducted a series of assessments addressing trends characterizing and impacting small-scale family farmers in six countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia) and at regional level, including an assessment on the status of sex-disaggregated data and indicators for the same six countries, in addition to Iraq and Jordan. Together, these assessments provided a first-of-their-kind baseline to understand the regional dynamics, and enabled the Regional Initiative to properly design its work plan and results.

17. The Regional Initiative played an important role in social protection for small-scale family farmers through capacity building for the ministries of eight countries. More specifically, FAO supported Lebanon (Bekka and Akkar) in the establishment of a ‘Registry’ of farmers for inclusion in the National Social Security Fund which provides support to vulnerable farmers and agricultural workers through the National Poverty Targeted Programme (SP2 and SP3).

18. Youth employment diversification (on-farm and off-farm) was fostered in Tunisia through a project on job creation (e.g. in laboratory analysis, pruning, and dairy products). This project generated approximately 50 youth enterprises (25 in the Northwest and 25 in the Southeast) for a total of 400 young employees. These enterprises recorded an 85 percent retention rate in employment post-intervention and an 80 percent reduction of ‘likelihood’ to migrate. A similar project to foster youth employment was replicated in Egypt (Fayoum governorate) where 45 students from the Faculty of Agriculture (60 percent women) were empowered to develop micro-enterprises in agriculture (SP3).

19. In partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Regional Initiative has coordinated the first study for the Arab countries on the role of child labour in agriculture, commissioned by the LAS. This issue is highly pertinent in the NENA region since conflicts are increasing the number of child labourers, with around 60 percent in agriculture. A national study on child labour in agriculture has also been conducted in Lebanon. The Regional Initiative is also contributing to the 2017 Situation Report on International Migration in the Arab States (SP3).

20. Producer Organizations (POs) have been supported in Lebanon, Oman and the Sudan to make their governance more effective for delivering better services to their members. Producer Organizations have been supported in sharing experience and best practices. Specific support was provided to Egypt’s POs through an assessment of their capacity development needs, with a specific emphasis on gender roles, to Tunisia’s POs through a job creation project facilitating the establishment of 50 youth enterprises, and to Yemen’s POs through the enhancement of milk production in 85 village agricultural producer groups (SP3 and SP4).

21. Value chains and market access of small-scale family farmers have been enhanced in Yemen, on dairy products of small ruminants of 85 POs at village level (training over 11 600 women and men), in the Sudan on the analysis of value chains for small-scale fishers along the Nile River, and in Lebanon on dairy products (SP2 and SP4).

22. A Regional Gender Strategy has been developed to help mainstream gender analysis particularly on resilience to conflicts, youth, value chain development, sex-disaggregated statistics, and water governance (SP3).

C. Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition (FSN)

23. FAO contributed to improved governance capacity and policy environment for the impacts of threats and crisis to food security and nutrition in the region. Through the support of FAO, facilitated by SP1 and SP5, countries in the NENA region developed national strategies and investment plans that have strengthened their capacity for preparing, preventing and managing food security and nutrition needs in a region currently beset with protracted crises and climate change.

24. FAO has assisted NENA countries in building well-functioning Food Security Information Systems that informed evidence-based risk reduction strategies and investments. Preventive and early response actions have been made possible by early warning information established in Mauritania, the Sudan and Yemen, as well as in countries affected by the Syrian Arab Republic crisis (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syrian Arab Republic). Comprehensive assessments of agriculture subsectors enhanced Humanitarian Response Plans in areas affected by crisis. Vulnerability and resilience analysis in Jordan, Mauritania and Palestine informed resilience-based programmes.

25. Transboundary pests and diseases in plants and animals threaten food production and food security in the region. To ensure that countries are resilient to such threats, FAO sustained its efforts to strengthen surveillance, prevention and response capacity in NENA countries through updated policies, institutional capacity building, improved laboratory and diagnostic facilities and sustained extension services. Together with partner government agencies, FAO has progressed in addressing rabies, avian influenza in Egypt and Lebanon, the Rift Valley Fever (RVF) in Mauritania, foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in Jordan and the goat plague (*peste des petits ruminants* [PPR]). FAO continues to be a key player in the control and eradication of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in the region. With FAO's support, in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Sudan and Tunisia prepared national action plans on antimicrobial resistance (NAP-AMR).

26. FAO has supported countries in the management, control and eradication of plant pests and diseases, which threaten major crops in the region. Among these is the red palm weevil which has affected farming communities in Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. In these countries, extension services and local-level capacities have been improved through integrated pest management, ensuring that communities have the ability to take protective measures for their crops. Through capacity building, FAO supported Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in implementing international commitment to protect human health and the environment from the hazardous effects of chemicals and pesticides (Rotterdam Convention). In addition to integrated pest management, FAO has also facilitated the disposal of obsolete pesticides, including Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

27. FAO has contributed to improved production through sustainable means and conservation of genetic resources in the region. At national level, project conservation and sustainable use of sheep genetic resources were developed in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon using a community-based breeding programme approach.

28. FAO has facilitated dialogue and cooperation among countries in the region to promote collective responsibility and action on major environmental and agriculture-related issues. Among these, efforts to address the effects of climate change and pollution on the marine ecosystems of the region have been accelerated through a Memorandum of Understanding between FAO (on behalf of the Regional Commission for Fisheries [RECOFI]) and the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME) which was formulated and enforced at the Ninth Session of RECOFI in May 2017.

29. FAO succeeded in highlighting the issue of food losses and waste and supported countries to implement the recommendations resulting from the policy round tables on "Food Losses and Waste in the Context of Sustainable Food Systems" following the endorsed "Regional Strategic Framework for Food Losses and Waste Reduction". The issue of food losses and waste is gaining ground and has resulted in further dialogue which will inform specific country programmes.

30. FAO has supported assessing and improving sanitary and phytosanitary standards in the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and in the Sudan to meet the requirements of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) importers in an effort to enhance collaboration on intra- and interregional livestock trade and benefit from the opportunities of technology and best practices.

D. Partnerships

31. FAO has strengthened its work in partnership with other multilateral, government, civil society and, more recently, private sector organizations. Some important and strategic partnerships in the context of the three Regional Initiatives are as follows:

- In the context of the WSI, strategic partnerships were established with LAS, its Arab Ministerial Water Council (AMWC) and its specialized institutes, such as the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) and ACSAD. These partnerships are particularly valuable in addressing strategic planning of water resources management and water security in the region, as well as water use efficiency. Moreover, a partnership has been established with ICARDA to address on-farm water productivity. Another important partnership has been established with ESCWA within the domain of climate change impacts and vulnerability assessments which is complemented through cooperation with ICBA in the domain of drought management.
- Within the context of the SSFF, a regional partnership was established with the World Food Programme (WFP) on "School Meals and Social Protection in Middle East and North Africa". This partnership aims at enhancing the effectiveness and broadening the coverage and impact of school meal programmes as a key social protection instrument in support of poor and vulnerable children and marginalized communities. In addition, FAO and WFP have signed a "Regional Partnership Agreement" to enhance the collaboration at regional and country levels and support the Members in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular to achieve SDG2 (End Hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture). FAO is conducting a study jointly with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the main characteristics of Child Labour in the Arab region in the agriculture sector, including the effects of armed conflicts and displacement on child labour. The study, commissioned by LAS, is being conducted in collaboration with the Arab Council for Childhood and Development (ACCD). FAO is also working with AOAD on enhancing the date palm value chain in Arab countries.
- In the context of the Regional Initiative on FSN, FAO is working in partnership with AOAD on reducing food losses and collaborating with WFP, within the Food Security Cluster/Sector, in countries affected by crisis. Work on plant pests and diseases is being carried out with the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) in Bari and the Near East Plant Protection Organization (NEPPO).

32. Overview and assessment of results in the region at the level of Outputs, Outcomes and Strategic Objectives, are provided in Web Annex 2 - Reported contribution of results in the region to Strategic Objective Targets.

III. PRIORITY AREAS OF WORK 2018–2019 AND BEYOND

33. As the MTP 2018–2021 was being prepared in 2016, a strategic review was carried out in each region to identify the special problems and priority areas of work in the future. The review identified five trends in the NENA region: (i) conflict and upheaval and related social and economic impacts, in particular forced displacement and migration; (ii) sluggish economic growth, poor fiscal outlook and low investor confidence; (iii) rising levels of import dependence and exposure to market shocks, including dependence on energy exports for oil-producing countries in the region and consequent vulnerability; (iv) impoverishment and inequity especially for females and youth; (v) malnutrition; and (vi) transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases.

34. Given the longstanding existing challenge of the region, namely, water scarcity, and the challenges arising from the regional trends identified above, priority areas for FAO's work in 2018–2019 remain anchored in the three Regional Initiatives. Adjustments were made in the focus areas and results framework of the Regional Initiatives to reflect the trends and challenges and ensure alignment with SDG targets. These are briefly addressed below.

35. Through the WSI FAO will scale up its support to strategic planning and policies, climate change adaptation, capacity building on water accounting, water productivity monitoring, drought management and groundwater governance. Additional countries will benefit from the integrated agriculture-aquaculture (IAA) practices that started in Algeria, Egypt and Oman. FAO will support large-scale adoption and use of solar energy for irrigation in Jordan, Lebanon and Syrian Arab Republic, in addition to Egypt.

36. Under the Regional Initiative on SSFF, FAO will address small-scale family farmers' productivity in the context of climate change and access to markets; promote inclusive and sustainable agrifood value chains; support capacity building, empowerment of producer organizations, expansion and promotion of social protection and youth employment; and help build resilience of this vulnerable category of farmers to the impact of climate change.

37. Building the evidence base on the role of various typologies of smallholders in food security, economic growth and employment, and understanding the linkages between land fragmentation, aging farmer populations, social protection and migration trends will be critical inputs for sustainable small-scale agriculture development strategies. Farmer organizations and effective learning through farmer-field schools remain priorities. In extreme cases, structured support to out-migration will be needed.

38. In the context of the Regional Initiative on FSN, FAO will support the design of evidence-based risk reduction strategies and investments. The support will aim at strengthening countries' capacity on generating and using food security and nutrition information, applying disaster prevention and mitigation measures and, monitoring desert locust threat (through the Commission for Controlling Desert Locust -CRC Secretariat) and for preparedness to possible HPAI outbreaks in the region.

39. Work to build resilience for food security and nutrition will help countries cope with and limit the negative effects of conflicts, including displacement, migration and irreversible losses of social and human capital, contributing to the efforts for eradicating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by 2030.

40. The preparation of the FAO results framework for 2018–2021 aimed to sharpen the focus on the Strategic Objectives, Outcomes and Outputs through their contributions to relevant SDG targets and indicators, and to improve the quality of the results chains, so as to address the main challenges expected to be faced by countries. This will provide a clear, coherent and concrete view of FAO's contribution to support country-level implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. Taking account of the focus of FAO's work on regional priorities through the regional initiatives, the planned contribution of results in the region to Strategic Objective Output targets is presented in Web Annex 3.

Figure 1: FAO Results Framework – Main Components

