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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

## Thirty-fourth Session

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## Strengthening Gender Equality in Agriculture and Rural Development in the Near East and North Africa Region

### Executive Summary

Gender considerations are important in achieving sustainable development and food security, as reflected in global commitments to Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Agriculture and rural development rely on the participation of both women and men in food production, resource management, balancing paid work and family life, and in the design, build and maintenance of infrastructure. The FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE) has made significant progress in supporting governments in the region and raising awareness on effective tools and methods relating to gender issues in rural development and agriculture. This Information Note presents a number of gender-related achievements and on-going activities implemented by FAO and its national counterparts in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region under the Regional Initiatives and Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs).

### Guidance Sought from the Conference

A set of recommendations are put forth for consideration by the conference. Accordingly, the conference:

- takes note of the gaps in achieving gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development and the implications this has on achieving SDGs;
- supports mainstreaming gender in national interventions to ensure better impact of development initiatives;
- supports mainstreaming gender in the SDG nationalization processes;
- supports the development and implementation of a regional project to strengthen gender statistics for agriculture and rural development;

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- notes that governments are expected to make a commitment to strengthen gender statistics at national level, including allocating resources to create an enabling environment and to support the production and use of gender-related data;
- acknowledges the progress made in improving capacities for gender mainstreaming and gender analysis, and encourages further capacity building at regional and national levels in order to improve economic opportunities for rural women and men of different socio-economic conditions, and move them towards increased labour market participation and better working conditions.

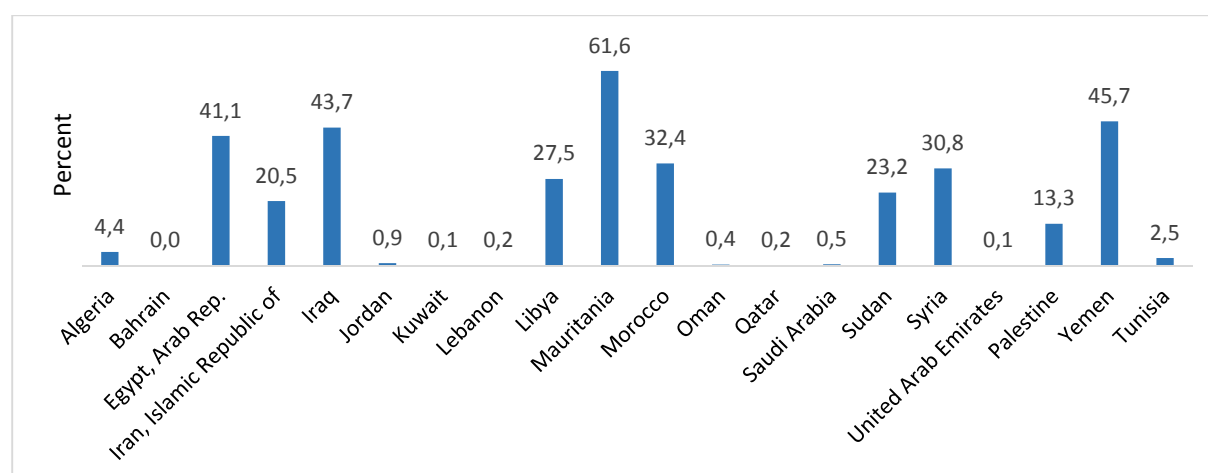
## I. INTRODUCTION

1. Governments from the NENA region recognize the importance of mainstreaming gender in their work to ensure higher impact development activities.

2. Since 2014, and as a follow-up on the recommendations of the 32nd Session of the NERC, RNE has made significant progress in supporting governments in the region and raising awareness on effective tools and methods to close the gender gap in rural development and agriculture.

3. There continues to be a pressing need to improve gender access in rural institutions, economic systems and value chains. Gender mainstreaming and the capacity for gender analysis remains relatively weak across governments, civil society and the private sector. Gender-sensitive agriculture statistics are scarce and systematic gender mainstreaming is not widespread in the agriculture and rural development sectors. Women play a strong role in the agriculture sector, but much of their work is unpaid and is not recognized or valued in national economic accounts. In countries like Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Mauritania and Yemen, agriculture employs more than 40 percent of active women (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Employment in agriculture among females (as a percent of female employment), 2017

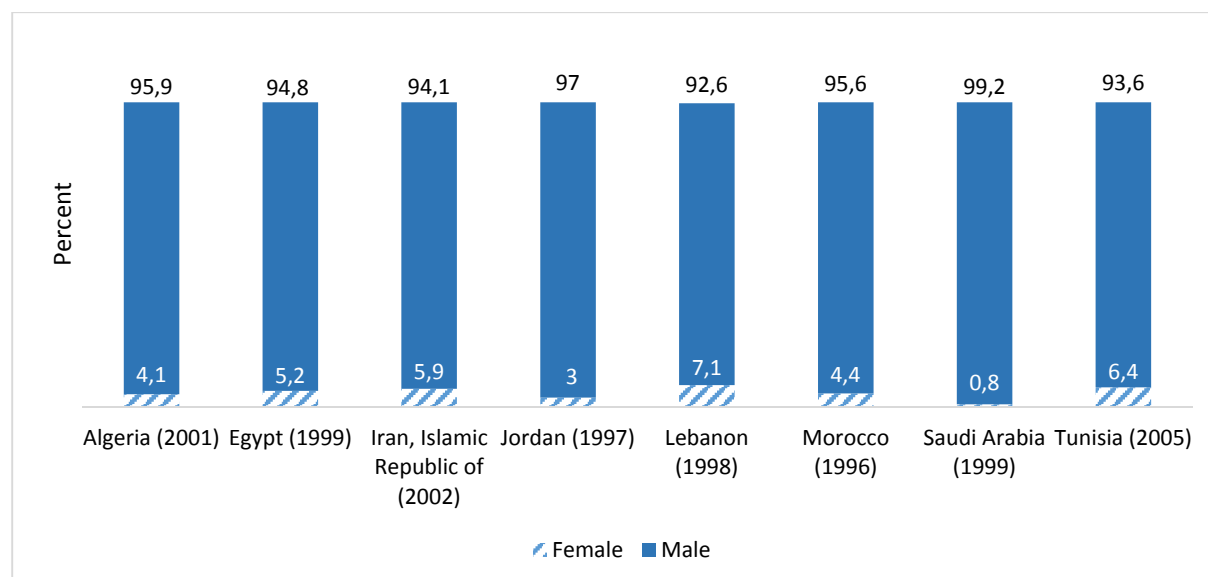


Source: World Development Indicators (based on ILO estimates)

4. A number of countries of the NENA region are experiencing significant rates of male out-migration from rural areas to cities and neighbouring countries to work as wage labourers. Within this context, the importance of rural women as food producers and care providers is increasing. However, many women continue to be disadvantaged as producers by insufficient access to productive resources and economic opportunities, as well as inadequate rural infrastructure. Figure 2 indicates that women typically own less than 10 percent of agricultural holdings. Furthermore, women's access to key services, including education, training, finance and agricultural extension, is often restricted due to disempowering social norms, as well as gender-blind planning and service delivery modalities. Despite

the heavy involvement of women in agriculture, their low paid contribution is rarely accounted for in formal statistics, and due to limited opportunities in their local labour markets, women need support for a better integration in the rural labour force.

Figure 2. Distribution of agricultural holders by sex (%)



Source: FAO Gender and Land Rights Database

5. The global commitments to Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflected the nexus between gender and rural development.. Agriculture and rural development rely on the participation of both women and men in food production, resource management, balancing paid work and family life, and in the design, build and maintenance of infrastructure.

6. In many countries of the region political instability and protracted crises constrained the provision of basic services such as education and health care and threatened livelihoods, especially in rural communities. Women in these situations are often more disadvantaged than men and in many cases are forced to shoulder additional income-generating responsibilities in addition to domestic chores.

7. This Information Note presents a number of gender-related achievements and on-going activities being promoted by FAO in the NENA region under the Regional Initiatives and CPFs.

## II. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

8. A four-year Regional Gender Equality Strategy for the NENA region 2017–2020, published in 2017 provides guidance on key regional priorities and establishes a plan of work to better address gender in agriculture and rural development. The strategy aims at enabling development practitioners to respond to current regional priorities, promote coherence and improve efficiency of gender-sensitive programming.

9. The strategy supports the development of simple and efficient approaches and methodologies to adequately address the needs of the different stakeholders and specific groups, particularly the most invisible and under-considered ones among women, men and youth. The seven focal areas of the strategy are resilience to conflict and crisis, value chain development, social protection, rural institutions, statistics, water governance and gender mainstreaming in programming. Efforts are underway to deliver strategy outputs for 2018, in line with the global priorities given to FAO by member countries, with gender as a cross-cutting theme.

10. The 32nd Session of the Regional Conference “requested Member Nations to collect, analyse and disseminate statistics that allowed accurate assessments of the situation of women in the agriculture and rural sector”, and requested FAO to “provide technical support for Member Nations of the Region in these areas”. In 2015–2016, the Regional Office of FAO assessed gender mainstreaming in the production and use of statistics on agriculture and rural development in eight member countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia. A regional synthesis report (2017) preserved these national assessments’ findings, along with lessons learned from the development of gender statistics in other regions. A regional action plan has been prepared through a consultation workshop (Tunis, September 2016) to support the production and utilization of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics in agriculture and rural development in the NENA region, and to set a roadmap and a work plan and identify related capacity building measures.

11. The Regional Office has made significant progress in ensuring gender mainstreaming in project formulation and identifying key entry points to strengthen gender inclusiveness in existing projects. It has been working with staff to improve gender outcomes in ongoing and upcoming projects and has implemented a process of review for gender responsiveness in project documents.

12. Concrete steps have been taken with government counterparts to ensure that gender is adequately addressed in the formulation of CPFs.

13. The Regional Office implemented capacity building activities in several member countries (Morocco, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia) to promote a better understanding of gender issues in agriculture and improve gender analysis and mainstreaming in projects and programmes. The audience included both FAO staff and their national counterparts. Technical officers provide support on an ongoing basis in response to continuous demands made by member countries and FAO country offices. A number of strategies, plans and frameworks are in place that provide an enabling environment for developing regional capacity in gender and agriculture mainstreaming. Central among these are FAO’s Policy on Gender Equality, the Regional Gender Equality Strategy for the Near East and North Africa 2017–2020, the Arab Gender Issues and Indicators Framework (2014), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and SDG 5.

14. The Regional Office has been providing technical advice for the formulation of gender-sensitive national and regional agriculture and rural development policies and strategies. It recommends working in partnership with governments and other United Nations agencies to develop and implement a regional programme of work to promote gender access and strengthen gender statistics for agriculture and rural development in order to meet global goals for eradicating hunger and reducing food insecurity and malnutrition. This entails increasing the availability and use of gender statistics, strengthening national and regional capacities in gender analysis and advancing gender-sensitive responses to regional economic and environmental challenges in rural areas.

### **III. SUBREGIONAL ACTIVITIES**

15. The FAO Subregional Office for North Africa (FAO SNG) is striving to reduce workload and increase incomes among women living in forest and rural areas of North Africa. This included, for example, the publication of a practical guide on improved food processing methods including oil extraction from mastic trees for use by trainers, rural women and development practitioners.

### **IV. COUNTRY-LEVEL ACTIVITIES**

16. In 2017, Country Gender Assessments were completed in Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco and initiated in the Sudan and Tunisia. Their objective is to inform FAO country-level planning and programming, including the formulation and revision of CPFs as well as any other FAO interventions at country level including project planning, policy and technical advice. The assessments will also facilitate FAO’s contribution to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework

(UNDAF) formulation and implementation with up-to-date and objective information on the situation of rural women in the country.

17. Improving access to social protection for women and men in rural areas is a key priority for many countries in the NENA region. Two social protection studies with a gender perspective were conducted in Egypt and Lebanon to identify challenges and opportunities with regard to extending social protection networks and ensuring rural women are able to benefit from national health insurance, pension and subsidy schemes.

18. Enhancing rural women's ability to access decent jobs is of critical importance across the NENA region. A project conducted in Egypt, in partnership with the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) documented women's experiences in agricultural work and identified a number of policy and programmatic options to improve women's access to secure employment and decent working conditions, which are key ingredients for reducing poverty and achieving sustainable rural livelihoods.

19. FAO RNE conducted a gender-sensitive value chain analysis on medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP) in Egypt under the Regional Initiative for Small-scale Family Farming. This generated an in-depth understanding of the MAP value chain and relevant actors, including an assessment of producer organizations (POs) and their capacity development needs, while analysing key gender specific roles, constraints and opportunities along the chain. The study proposed a joint plan of action to improve the performance of MAP value chains, strengthen the capacities of POs, and support youth and women's engagement within value chains.

20. FAO is working to increase opportunities for women and men to contribute to income-generation and dietary improvement of their households through integrated homestead farming, agro-processing and produce marketing in Rural Damascus, the Syrian Arab Republic. Support aims to strengthen resilience and crisis response as well as contribute to the economic empowerment of rural women in a conflict-affected area.

21. In the Syrian Arab Republic, work is ongoing to strengthen women's associations in food processing activities in Idleb and Aleppo to improve product quality and marketing to generate regular revenue for up to 500 women members. The targeted associations are receiving support in terms of basic vegetable processing equipment such as ovens, utensils and other necessary tools. Support is also provided to women with animal and dairy production with the overall aim of adding value and preventing waste and losses.

22. Tunisia has started the preparation of a General Agricultural Census with more focus on gender aspects, to initiate a sex-disaggregated socio-economic and livelihood analysis. Within the framework of the integration of gender considerations in the production of statistical indicators, the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries of Tunisia with the support of the FAO, intends to implement a census according to international standards and especially those established by FAO that refer to the SDGs.

23. In Yemen, FAO is providing support to improve immediate household availability of, and access to, food for households with malnourished children under the age of five and pregnant and lactating women. The programmes seeks to ensure equitable access to assistance, services, resources, and protection measures for women, girls, boys, and men, while strengthening capacity and coordination to implement effective emergency preparedness and food security-related responses.

24. To enhance livelihoods and food security of vulnerable Lebanese women, FAO provided support to more than 200 women engaged in dairy production and processing to improve the quality of milk and dairy products and reduce bacteriological contamination. Beneficiaries received new equipment and training on improved practices and techniques to increase production efficiency and meet hygiene standards. This led to a 50 percent improvement in the quality of dairy products generated by the women.