



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Towards the launch of the Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services



BACKGROUND

Extension and Rural Advisory Services (RAS) are essential to support farmers coping with prevalent challenges in the Arab Region, including scarce and fragile natural resources, high price volatility in international and domestic markets, information asymmetries, impact of climate change, and protracted crises, among others. These challenges constrain the productivity and profitability of farmers and disproportionately affect small-scale and vulnerable producers who constitute the majority of farming households in the region. Yet, despite their broad engagement in the agriculture sector, small-scale farmers represent a significant proportion of the poor living in the region.

Notwithstanding challenges, the region harbours important opportunities in terms of fertile soils, temperate climate, diverse agroecological zones and a youthful population with about 60 percent of the region's population under the age of 25. Success stories stemming from public-private partnership experiences demonstrate a vibrant and innovation-focused entrepreneurship scene honing potential for problem-solving, generating ideas and collaborations. Cooperation with regional and international development agencies and research centres plays a key role in expanding the knowledge and technology base, strengthening human and institutional capacities and developing local solutions for context-specific problems and challenges.

The urgency of advancing rural advisory services to effectively address the challenges mentioned above,

seize existing potentials, and contribute to more prosperity in rural areas has been at the centre of several consultations which have taken place at the regional level during the last couple of years. Facilitated by FAO and IFAD and informed by dedicated studies, such consultative efforts have engaged key regional RAS stakeholders, including extension policymakers, RAS experts and champions, and representatives of regional and international organisations and networks, including GFRAS. While recognising the pluralism of the service systems of the region, participants in the consultations acknowledged several factors constraining RAS. These include inadequate policy support and investments in RAS, insufficient funding, equipment and human resources, limited outreach and inclusivity, lack of focus on market orientation, and limited networking and collaboration among the diverse RAS providers within countries and across the region. The latter emerged as a priority to be urgently addressed.

From this perspective, participants in the consultations agreed on the need to establish a regional forum dedicated to advancing RAS in Arab the region by leveraging networking, information sharing, and exchange of knowledge and experience. Envisioned within the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) umbrella, the Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services (AFRAS) is the first network of its kind in the region.

AFRAS foundational meeting took place in Cairo in July 2023, engaging official representatives of

Ministries of Agriculture in 14 Arab countries¹ along with RAS champions and representatives of international and regional organisations, including GFRAS and its regional networks of Africa, North America and South Asia. In this context, participants reached a consensus on the vision, mission, values, principles and functions of AFRAS and the roadmap towards its establishment. The AFRAS vision aspires to rural advisory services that effectively contribute to sustainable inclusive agrifood systems transformation in the Arab countries. While its mission is to strengthen networking, knowledge sharing, learning, and advocate for an enabling policy and legal environment to promote innovation and modernization of extension and rural advisory services to be inclusive, gender-responsive, pluralistic, market-oriented and demand-driven.

Notably, the meeting offered an opportunity to start forming a nucleus AFRAS community which currently comprises around eighty members among policy makers, RAS experts and champions.

In collaboration with IFAD and GFRAS, FAO is supporting AFRAS' incubation process by facilitating the interaction among stakeholders at regional and country levels and by assisting the diverse technical, institutional and organisational arrangements required for its operationalisation. The official launch of AFRAS is planned for the first quarter of 2024 with a dedicated web-platform available for members to network, share knowledge and practices.

To learn more about AFRAS, kindly scan the below QR code including:

- The regional study and country policy briefs informing consultations on AFRAS:
 - » FAO. 2023. Advancing Rural Advisory Services in Arab Countries to promote market orientation and inclusive transformation – A regional study. Cairo.
 - » FAO. 2022. Advancing Rural Advisory Services to promote market orientation in Egypt – Making rural services work for small-scale farmers. Cairo.
 - » FAO. 2022. Advancing Rural Advisory Services to promote market orientation in Jordan – Making rural services work for small-scale farmers. Cairo.
 - » FAO. 2022. Advancing Rural Advisory Services to promote market orientation in Lebanon – Making rural services work for small-scale farmers. Cairo.
- A short video on AFRAS Foundational meeting held in Cairo in July 2023.
- A note detailing the outcomes of the AFRAS Foundational meeting held in Cairo in July 2023.

To join the AFRAS Community during the current inception phase please refer to the below contacts at the Regional Office for the Near East of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

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www.fao.org/neareast/action-areas/ras/en/

www.fao.org/neareast/priorities/rural-transformation/en/



Scan the QRcode to read more
information about AFRAS.

¹ Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen, Libya