

FAO Saudi Arabia Newsletter

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FAO and NCV National Park teams assess the potential ecotourism zone.

Welcome note

In this issue, we are excited to showcase the impressive achievements of the ongoing projects supported by the FAO Technical Cooperation Programme in Saudi Arabia, particularly the Sustainable Rural Agricultural Development (SRAD) project. From promoting ecotourism in national parks to enhancing gene bank management, seaweed aquaculture, rural women's entrepreneurship, and improving soil health and irrigation, the SRAD project is driving significant progress in creating a sustainable agricultural landscape. A recent seminar brought together key stakeholders to exchange knowledge on project activities and outcomes, fostering collaboration and awareness. Demonstration farms have played a vital role in showcasing innovative agricultural techniques and promoting efficient irrigation practices among farmers. Efforts to raise awareness about agri-cooperatives and empower rural women entrepreneurs have gained strong support from local cooperatives and the private sector. The recent World Bee Day celebration in AlBaha highlighted the SRAD project's role in advancing beekeeping development. We invite you to explore the inspiring stories and impactful contributions in this issue, showcasing the dedication and progress of the SRAD project and its collaborators. Enjoy reading!

Preparing ecotourism development in national parks

FAO NRM National Park team, in collaboration with NCV and UNDP, prepare ecotourism development of a national park. The main goal of this mission is to gather essential information required for the development of an ecotourism masterplan for the park, identify specific zones on the ground, and establish a solid foundation for their future development. Each zone is being carefully assessed, with sites categorized based on their tourism potential and intended use, including cultural sites within the park or in close proximity to integrate them into the planned tours. The primary tourism area with developed sites has been pinpointed, and each site is individually evaluated. Additionally, the mission is focusing on the layout of the management area, offices, main entrance, tourist reception,

tracks, footpaths, birdwatching, camping, infrastructure financing, and ensuring high-quality standards for each proposed development project.

Advanced gene bank management training



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Gene bank management training led in joint forces with ICRISAT.

SRAD project, ICRISAT, MEWA, Reef, and Seed Centre jointly organized an advanced gene bank management training. Twenty-seven national experts, including women, were trained in gene bank operation procedures, germplasm collection, technologies, and information management systems. Attending an advanced gene bank management training program enables the participants to deepen their understanding of advanced concepts, techniques, and best practices related to gene bank management, which ultimately helps them manage gene bank operations effectively.

Food loss and waste (FLW) management estimation and implementation

The Islamic Organization for Food Security (IOFS) in collaboration with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) and MEWA organized a workshop on Food Loss and Waste (FLW) management estimation and implementation, highlighting Saudi Arabia's experience. The event brought together experts and stakeholders from Arab countries to gain a better knowledge of the economic, food safety, social, and environmental consequences of FLW, as well as to share successful case studies and best practices from Saudi Arabia. The SRAD project's presentation during the workshop stressed the necessity of better post-harvest management of food commodities in reducing food loss and waste, as well as estimating and implementing food loss and waste management. Encouraging discussions and networking opportunities facilitated regional cooperation and knowledge dissemination among participating nations, culminating in a field visit to "Estidamah," which provided practical insights into FLW management practices and implementation strategies while also demonstrating Saudi Arabia's agricultural vision.

Seaweed and fisheries ecosystem management



A group of Saudi youth spread the seaweed to dry under the sun.

The SRAD project, MEWA, and the National Aquaculture Group (NAQUA) organized a hands-on training for 26 First groups of young Saudis to prepare and initiate the first seaweed aquaculture production in Naqua facilities in Saudi Arabia. Within the framework of implementing the Sustainable Rural Agricultural Development Programme, Saudi Arabia is currently working on implementing one of the initiatives that focuses on encouraging rural agricultural entrepreneurship. Investing in the training of youth in seaweed and fisheries ecosystem management not only benefits local communities and marine environments but also contributes to global efforts to achieve sustainable development goals related to poverty alleviation, food security, biodiversity conservation, and climate action.

Large-scale demonstrations farm initiative and field trials

SRAD project launched a large-scale demonstration farm to showcase techniques, facilitate hands-on learning, and promote innovative adoption in agriculture. Technical experts for rainfed cereals, subtropical fruits, roses joint forces with REEF Saudi carried out intensive field visits and selected 40 demonstration farms across Makkah, Al Baha, and Aser, targeting 10 different crops. By leveraging past pilot demonstration experiences, the project aims to outreach adoption of best practices and technologies. In collaboration with AlBaha branches of MEWA, Seed Center and Baljurashi cooperative members, the project characterizes fruit varieties and a total of 26 new varieties introduced for propagation some of which are from Italy. The field trials of improved variety for 24 sorghum and 12 millet genotypes have been established at Asir Seed Multiplication Station (ASMS) to enhance crop productivity, quality, and sustainability. These initiatives support continuous improvement and innovation in agriculture, benefiting both farmers and the industry.

World Bee Day celebration in the AlBaha region

The SRAD project participated in the World Bee Day celebration in the Al-Baha region. The Assistant Minister of MEWA and the General Director of the Ministry's branch in AlBaha graced the occasion. Dr. Hassan Al-Makrami, the National Coordinator of the SRAD Project, delivered the speech focusing on the SRAD project's contribution to support beekeeping development. The value addition and diversification training organized by the SRAD project at Riyadh was raised during the event and taken as exemplary for creating job opportunities for rural women and youth. The SRAD project booth was visited by the governor of the Al-Baha region, the assistant of MEWA, and over 100 participants. This interactive activity allows the visitors to get adequate information on the beekeeping activities of the SRAD project.

SRAD project technical support for agricultural cooperatives in Arar and AlBaha

SRAD Agri-cooperative team collaborated with MEWA, MoHRSD, and Saudi Arabia Cooperative Society Council (CSC) to organize a sectoral cooperative event in Arar, focusing on governance and business models for livestock cooperatives. Key topics included forming and registering new cooperatives, effective leadership, service provision, sustainable financing, and performance monitoring. The event involved five livestock cooperatives, four feed processing companies, an agricultural development fund, and 140 participants, including officials from MEWA, MoHRSD, and CSC. Additionally, technical advisory sessions were conducted with the Agricultural Cooperative in Baljurash, where managers received guidance on value chains, business modeling, project management, and balance scorecard strategies. The SRAD project developed Excel tools for business and project management, aiding cooperative officers in effectively overseeing diverse business units and projects.

Training and skill development programme for rural women



A group of rural women across different regions attended the skill development training for honey value addition.

SRAD project, in collaboration with the MEWA Branch of AlBaha and the REEF, conducted skill development training sessions for rural women focusing on subtropical fruit cultivation and bee product value addition. The training for subtropical fruits was organized in phases, covering entrepreneurship awareness and fruit plant propagation techniques like grafting and cuttings. Another training session centered on beekeeping value addition, showcasing the production of various bee-derived products. With 22 rural women participating, these programs aim to empower communities, enhance livelihoods, and foster agripreneurship. Participants expressed optimism about closing knowledge gaps and expanding their businesses, highlighting the diverse benefits of such training programs in promoting economic empowerment, community development, improved health, and gender equality, ultimately contributing to sustainable well-being.

Water and soil training in rainfed cereals

The SRAD project organized and delivered a training course on soil health, fertility, and irrigation. The training was attended by about 40 trainees, which included farmers and MEWA staff, of whom 10 were women farmers, at the Jazan Training Centre. The discussions and interactions were very intense and productive. Providing training on water and soil management in rainfed cereal cultivation to both farmers and experts can yield several positive outcomes such as crop yield improvement, water conservation, soil health enhancement, cost reduction, and experience exchange. Overall, providing training on water and soil management in rainfed cereal cultivation can lead to more resilient farming systems, improved livelihoods for farmers, and sustainable agricultural practices that benefit both people and the environment

SRAD project technical seminar

SRAD technical seminar was organized to share knowledge on ongoing project activities, innovative products, and results for better awareness and collaboration among the key actors of the project. The successful implementation of the Sustainable Rural Agriculture Development (SRAD) Programme of Saudi Arabia was presented on topics entitled "Innovations in National Parks Management in Saudi Arabia" and "Advancing Sustainable Coffee Production in Saudi Arabia" These contribute to harnessing opportunities for increasing agriculture productivity, management of natural resources and improvement of rural livelihoods in a sustainable manner. Organizing technical seminars for stakeholders plays a crucial role in enhancing knowledge, skills, collaboration, and innovation within project teams, ultimately leading to more effective, efficient, and sustainable project outcomes.

Pioneering research application in combatting sand encroachment in Saudi Arabia



The first 2 sets of MWAC installed in Saudi Arabia.

In strong collaboration with SIO, FAO Land Desertification Control team is working hand-in-hand to implement the first pilot project for sand dune fixation using dry palm leaves in Saudi Arabia. The project aims to reduce sand encroachment along the Ring North Highway in Al-Ahsa Governorate. This pilot project involves protecting the northern side of the SIO plantation using treated wastewater and solar energy. The technique is being applied in a 20x20 meter checkboard pattern. The project has implemented up to 30 percent of the work, with 70 percent remaining to completion. The collaboration serves as a model initiatives in sustainable land management and highlights the importance of collective action in tackling environmental challenges. Two sets of MWAC have been delivered and installed to monitor sand encroachment at the SIO sand barriers pilot site. This pioneering applied research work in Saudi Arabia marking a significant milestone in combating desertification in the region.

Empowering local communities in environmental projects

In partnership with NCVF and local environmental community groups in AlJouf, FAO NRM team has joined forces to develop four project ideas across four governorates in the AlJouf region. These projects aim to empower local communities with environmental awareness, best practices, and project management skills to reduce land degradation. The prototypes of these projects were presented to local companies during the training session, igniting significant engagement and strong involvement from both communities and the private sector in this environmental initiatives.

Empowering farmers through innovative irrigation



A group of farmers was briefed about the irrigation technologies installed in the demonstration site.

FAO-SIO project teams, focusing on "Promoting efficient irrigation and water productivity among farmers," collaborated to organize an information session on new irrigation technologies and best agricultural practices for grape cultivation. The event was held at one of the established demonstration sites owned by Ms. Moniera Sheiban in Aqiq Al-Baha. Eng. Alsamhan, the official representative of SIO, delivered the opening speech at the session, which was attended by over 40 individuals from the MEWA branch, Baljurashi Cooperative, and local farmers. The gathering facilitated a productive discussion and exchange of ideas on agricultural practices and irrigation technologies. To ensure ongoing learning and extension, the demonstration sites are open for visits, providing farmers with the opportunity to engage with the project through various communication channels.

FAO Technical Cooperation Programme in Saudi Arabia

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, under the FAO Technical Cooperation Programme, there are three ongoing projects. This includes the multicomponent project on "Strengthening MEWA's Capacity to Implement its Sustainable Rural Agricultural Development (SRAD) Programme (UTF/SAU/051/SAU)" aims to enhance the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA)'s ability to implement its Sustainable Rural Agricultural Development Programme (2019–2025). It is being carried out in collaboration with MEWA, REEF, and the National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification (NCVC). The project comprises nine components, including coffee, beekeeping, roses, sub-tropical fruits, livestock, fisheries, rain-fed cereals, value addition, and natural resources management, which covers forests, national parks, rangelands, and desertification control. Additionally, FAO and the Saudi Irrigation Organization (SIO) are implementing two projects, namely "Promoting Efficient Irrigation and Water Productivity Among Farmers (UTF/SAU/053/SAU)" and "Enhancing National Capacities for Irrigation Management (UTF/SAU/054/SAU)." The overall TCP programme aims to increase agricultural production and productivity, manage natural resources, promote diversification and income generation for smallholders, especially rural youth and women, and enhance capacity for irrigation management by promoting efficient irrigation and water productivity.

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