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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-fifth Session

Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 2-4 March 2020

Decentralized Offices Network

Executive Summary

FAO's Decentralized Offices strategic positioning has been significantly affected by a paradigm shift in the global development system and changing external landscape. FAO is actively contributing to the implementation of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the UN Development System (UNDS) repositioning, with the overall objective of reinforcing collaborative efforts and identifying greater synergies between UN partners, and especially with the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs), towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

FAO's immediate priority in the course of 2020 and beyond would be to revamp its Decentralized Offices business model in order to pursue a programmatic approach and contribute more strategically to the UN system collective response to countries' aspirations in the attainment of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. In this context, FAO's contribution to the collaborative UN development effort will focus on achieving food security, nutrition and food and agricultural systems transformation.

The upcoming UN Decade on SDG acceleration will be a critical milestone for FAO's decentralized network to support national governments across various SDGs, focusing particularly on accelerating agricultural and rural transformation to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), in line with the newly launched flagship Hand-in-Hand Initiative.

Following the subsidiarity principle, FAO aims to further increase the autonomy of its Decentralized Offices at regional, subregional and country level for decision-making over resources, staff, policies and regulations that were previously centralized, in order to shift the Organization from a centre-out approach to one driven by demands at country and regional level. Efforts have already been made to progressively increase the flexibility afforded to Decentralized Offices to manage available budgeted resources. Furthermore, this approach has been underpinned by greater delegation of authority to Decentralized Offices in various fields, including procurement and human resources, with the overall objective to ensure effective, agile and result-oriented delivery of FAO's programme of work on the ground.

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In parallel, in line with recommendations from oversight bodies, FAO has been taking consistent internal measures to strengthen oversight, transparency and integrity in Decentralized Offices. A more robust internal control and risk management system has been put in place, to ensure adequate accountability measures and increased responsibility of managers in Decentralized Offices. This shift will continue by enhancing the monitoring and evaluation function in the field, aiming to increase Decentralized Offices' capacities, efficiency and responsiveness to member countries' needs.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

- Support FAO Management's efforts towards increasing delegations of authority and decentralizing decision-making in administrative and programmatic areas, including human resources and procurement, aiming to improve overall delivery of the Strategic Results Framework and respond to the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda.
- Request FAO to further pursue the adjustment of its Decentralized Offices business models, in particular in light of the UNDS repositioning, in order to ensure greater flexibility and efficiency in the use of the Organization's existing limited financial and human resources, aiming to respond to member countries' emerging needs and priorities under FAO's Strategic Objectives and in line with the SDGs with special attention to addressing hunger and poverty in the most affected countries, prioritized by the Hand-in-Hand Initiative.
- Request FAO to continue its efforts to strengthen its technical capacities and policy integration at regional and subregional levels, to ensure FAO leadership in the region across relevant SDGs, including those under FAO's custodianship, and to contribute effectively to the new UN Cooperation Frameworks and Common Country Analysis, including through the data platform that is being established as part of the Hand-in-Hand initiative.
- Request FAO to shift towards a full programmatic approach at decentralized level to better demonstrate its valuable contributions to SDG achievement in line with recommendations of the Evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework.
- Support FAO's continued engagement in the implementation of the UNDS repositioning at regional and country levels, and provide guidance on FAO's strategic direction with regard to its value proposition in the region.
- Request FAO to evaluate, identify and seize emerging opportunities arising from the UNDS repositioning at country and regional levels, building on lessons learned and successful experiences in collaboration with other partners, especially in the RBA environment.

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I. Setting the scene: FAO's decentralization policies and external drivers

1. FAO's Decentralized Offices strategic positioning has been significantly affected by a paradigm shift in the global development system and changing external landscape. The 2030 Agenda and related transformative changes require FAO to coordinate its contributions in a multisectoral context towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the national level.
2. FAO is actively contributing to the implementation of the UN General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the UN Development System (UNDS) repositioning, with an overall objective of reinforcing collaborative efforts and working in a synergetic manner with other UN partners and especially with the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs). The ambitious UNDS repositioning process has placed a strong emphasis on UN agencies engaging in partnerships and joint planning and programming, resource mobilization and common business operations at decentralized levels, and envisages a restructuring of UN regional assets.
3. FAO is engaged in the development and roll-out of the RBA Action Plan for 2019-20, designed to operationalize the tripartite Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2018. The progress in the RBAs' collaboration at decentralized level, including on joint advocacy, analysis and planning is an important contribution to the UN repositioning implementation.
4. Growing decentralization of resource and investment mobilization efforts within the emerging development landscape is another new dimension, requiring the development of a new business model for FAO's Decentralized Offices, including a greater focus on continuing to leverage investments in support of national goals.
5. Increasing importance of the regional and subregional dimension of development cooperation requires strengthened partnerships, high-level policy capacities and technical knowledge to develop region-specific solutions and to address challenges of a transboundary nature.
6. Evolving country contexts, (with more countries graduating to middle-income and high-income economic categories) and hence changing national needs and priorities, compounded with ongoing transformations in countries' food and agricultural systems, is an important driver for country office transformation. The increasing influence of regional and subregional intergovernmental and economic integration organizations, is a new reality affecting country-level policies and donors' agendas as well as FAO's positioning at decentralized level.
7. Last but not least, major global challenges and policies shaping FAO's work in regions and countries, including *inter alia* the UN Decade of Action on the SDGs, the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (2016), the Global Compact on Migration (2018), and the future outcomes of the forthcoming UN Food Systems Summit, need to be taken into due consideration in Decentralized Offices' strategic planning and programming.

II. Common achievements among the five regions

8. In 2018-2019, FAO continued to invest in strengthening its Decentralized Offices network and its capacities across the regions, to increase the impact of its work at the country level, supporting member countries in their efforts to attain the SDGs. FAO has been pursuing a two-fold strategy that consisted, on the one hand, of strengthening FAO's collaborative efforts, capacities and leadership at country and regional level and, on the other hand, improving internal performance, decision-making systems and delivery services to ensure more integrity and transparency and to be fit for purpose for the 2030 Agenda.

III. Strengthening the capacities, leadership and partnerships at Decentralized Offices

9. Strengthening capacities: Pursuant to the guidance provided by the FAO Council at its 163rd session (2-6 December 2019), FAO will continue efforts to strengthen the work of Decentralized Offices without negatively impacting technical capacity at headquarters. This process was launched in the

previous biennium, to implement the guidance provided by the Regional Conferences in 2018 concerning the need for increased efficiency, flexibility and capacity of Decentralized Offices, and prioritized and tailored support to meet countries' specific needs. In particular, FAO started the transformation of country office business models, aiming to provide much needed flexibility for resource allocation at the country level to address emerging needs, including larger allocations to the most vulnerable countries.

10. These efforts will be further enhanced in 2020 and beyond to ensure that FAO's Decentralized Offices are adequately equipped to offer high-level technical and programming expertise and continue to adapt their respective skillsets to evolving priorities and a changing external environment. In an ever more competitive environment in the field, thinly resourced Decentralized Offices would require greater capacity and backstopping support for joint planning, programming and resource mobilization as well as partnerships in the framework of a reinvigorated UN Resident Coordinator (RC) system. Financial and human resources are provided 'on-demand' to the roll-out countries starting the new UN Cooperation Framework cycle. This support includes skilled 'FAO Surge Capacity Teams' from different levels and areas of expertise of the Organization to be timely involved, and deployed as required, during the critical steps of the preparation of the Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and the entire visioning exercise, from which FAO's Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) will be derived. The adjustment of staff profiles will be undertaken, including a skill mix exercise and analysis of gaps in terms of expertise.
11. In addition, opportunities will be explored to focus thematically the multidisciplinary teams in the subregional and regional offices to provide integrated solutions and ensure better access of countries to FAO's technical expertise, knowledge and policy support in a complementary way to the overall review of the UN regional architecture, which is proposing the establishment of issues-based coalitions. The innovative business model of Partnership and Liaison Offices (PLOs) will be further explored and expanded to interested upper- and lower middle-income countries, with stronger emphasis on their potential role as centres of excellence, including through South-South and Triangular cooperation.
12. Strengthening FAO's leadership in the UN country teams (UNCTs): As evidenced by initial lessons learned from the implementation of the UNDS repositioning in the roll-out countries,¹ in order to harvest the potential of this renewed UN partnership, FAO's Decentralized Offices need to demonstrate strong leadership capacity within the UNCTs. In particular, the new reinvigorated RC system has provided an opportunity for FAO country representatives to leverage political support from an independent and impartial RC system for the sustainable food systems, agriculture, nutrition and food security (67 percent of FAO Representatives [FAORs] consider the new leadership of the RC as being independent and impartial with regard to their interaction with UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes²).
13. Since the launch of the repositioning of the UNDS on 1 January 2019, appropriate actions have been taken and guidance designed and provided to Decentralized Offices to ensure FAO's leadership role in the process. FAOR profiles (job descriptions) were adjusted with a strong focus on Sustainable Development, especially on agriculture and food systems transformation. From 2020, FAORs are accountable for and will report to the RC on joint development results (modifications were introduced in the performance evaluation tool, PEMS). In a more strategic manner, FAO is consolidating a global knowledge management function to support country-level interventions through the targeted collection, analysis and dissemination of corporate data and statistics on measurable indicators. Special training tools are being designed to support FAORs to implement the UNDS repositioning, including through the Hand-in-Hand initiative. FAO has been more proactively engaged in leading more systematically the work of various thematic results groups and other mechanisms within UNCTs.

¹ Results received from FAO's Internal Survey on the UN reform held in October-November 2019 with participation of all Decentralized Offices

² Same as previous

14. Furthermore, FAO has substantially revised its own CPF Guidelines in order for the planning and programming instrument at country level to be fully derived from the UN Cooperation Framework, as required by the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) Guidelines.
15. FAO is also participating in the design of country-level UN Business Operations Strategies. These have the overall objective to improve efficiency, accountability and cohesion through enhanced collaboration and greater synergies between agencies' administrative services and back offices with a view to achieving overall cost savings to be redeployed in support of development initiatives towards the attainment of the SDGs. FAO is a signatory to the Mutual Recognition Statement, allowing for greater administrative cooperation across agencies, funds and programmes. These efforts complement the current vertical integration of administrative services already achieved through the FAO Shared Services Centre (SSC).
16. Defining FAO's value proposition in the UN regional architecture: Throughout 2019, FAO has been fully engaged in the work of the interagency Internal Review Team (IRT) on the UN Regional Review, which resulted in the establishment of a single Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) for each region with the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) serving as secretariat.
17. With regard to the RCP, the Organization is actively supporting the analytical and programmatic framework and advisory services, advocacy and convening functions especially for regional processes, strengthened coordination and support to UN RCs through policy work, analysis and information.
18. FAO is actively engaging in the formulation of the CCAs and is participating in the Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) missions in selected countries for further connection/integration with the new cycle of Cooperation Frameworks.
19. FAO Regional Offices are providing technical and policy assistance support to Decentralized Offices in the various steps of the formulation of the Cooperation Frameworks. Selected FAO Regional Officers have been appointed as members of the Regional Peer Support Groups (PSGs) coordinated by the newly established Regional DCO Offices, tasked to peer-review the quality of the CCAs and other parts of the Cooperation Frameworks, ensuring that FAO's comparative advantage and contribution to relevant SDG targets are clearly recognized.
20. By pursuing cost-effective, demand-driven collaboration with UN partners at the regional and subregional level, underpinned by a clear value proposition for the UN system as a whole as defined in the IRT, FAO will be better able to provide adequate responses to emerging cross-border or common development issues and priorities in the specific regional context. FAO has been supportive and committed to facilitate the proposed issue-based coalitions across various thematic clusters. FAO's regional efforts will also concentrate on improving accessibility to finance and investments through closer engagement with private sector and International Financial Institutions (IFIs).
21. Prioritizing FAO's support to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Land-locked Developing Countries (LLDCs): The FAO Director-General is placing strong emphasis on addressing the unique and complex food security and nutrition challenges of SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs. The newly established dedicated Office for SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs in FAO headquarters will coordinate and harmonize policy support to these countries, and the newly launched flagship Hand-in-Hand Initiative is serving as a platform for better facilitation and acceleration of FAO's contribution to countries in achieving SDGs 1 and 2.
22. Enhancing RBA collaboration: The ongoing repositioning of the UNDS is playing a strong catalytic role in advancing the three RBAs' cooperation at country and regional level. In response to the recommendations approved by the FAO Council at its 159th session in June 2018, there is a growing effort to make this collaboration more systematic, strategic and focused on programmatic approaches. The RBAs are demonstrating active team engagement in this process in the field and are positioning themselves as "natural allies", thus advocating jointly for placing food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture high on the UN country agenda. RBAs are more closely engaged in designing joint programmes on food, nutrition and agriculture at country level as part of the UNSDCF, including piloting of joint country plans in selected countries (Colombia, Indonesia

and the Niger). Similar joint programming and joint country plans could subsequently be envisaged in countries in other regions.

IV. Improving internal performance and oversight, decision-making systems and delivery services

23. Decentralizing decision-making and delegation of authority: Since the initial phases of decentralization, in response to decisions taken by member countries at the 163rd Session of the FAO Council and following the subsidiarity principle, the Organization has been taking continued measures to increasingly delegate authority to Decentralized Offices, especially on planning, programming and resource mobilization. Most recently, FAO has been sharpening its focus on ensuring meaningful delegation of authority in operational matters, especially on human resources management and procurement, as reaffirmed by the Evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework (2019). These efforts will continue in 2020 and beyond, with the objective to speed up FAO's delivery and avoid delays in project implementation, to meet the expectations of the 2030 Agenda and engage in joint programme implementation with other UN partners. Actions being implemented include the revision of the Non-Staff Human Resources (NSHR) policy, allowing increased decision-making authority from headquarters to the Regional Offices in various fields, including recruitment of non-staff resources and streamlining of various clearance procedures. The newly introduced revised procurement policy of FAO (Manual Section 502) allows increased delegation of authority for heads of Decentralized Offices, provided that local capacities are in place (i.e. training) and/or International Procurement Officers (IPOs) are available in the country or at subregional/regional level to support national and regional procurement actions.
24. Improving internal performance, control and risk management functions in the Decentralized Offices: In the reporting period, FAO introduced strengthened internal controls, operational management (including fiduciary risk) and risk management functions in Decentralized Offices, as recognized by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) Assessment Report 2017-2018. The full-scale implementation of risk management function roll-out in the Decentralized Offices, including more integrated and streamlined systems for planning, monitoring and reporting on risks is underway and will be completed in the course of 2020. In parallel, to increase the local capacity, FAO launched new knowledge exchange and training programmes, including temporary geographic mobility placements for Assistant FAORs, group briefings for new FAORs and cross-regional Think Labs, enabling Decentralized Offices to share experiences, good practices and solutions to common challenges across all five regions.

V. Achievements and challenges in the region

25. FAO focussed its work during 2018-19 on the challenges, priorities and direction identified by Members at the 34th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. Developments and achievements are summarized below and indicative examples are provided.

FAO's programme in the region in 2018-2019 and emerging directions

26. FAO's field programme in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region continues to grow, reaching USD 331 million in terms of new resources mobilized in 2018-19, a threefold increase since 2010-11. The level of resources mobilized through Unilateral Trust Funds (UTFs) more than doubled in 2019 (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates) compared to the annual average for the four preceding years, reflecting growing confidence in FAO's ability to provide direct support to key government programmes and priorities.
27. FAO's country, subregional and regional programming in the region is now fully aligned with government needs and priorities and their efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and achieve the SDGs. New guidelines for the preparation of FAO's CPFs were launched globally in 2019 and are being used across the region. CPFs are now fully aligned with the SDGs and, importantly, are derived fully from the integrated UNSDCF that are now being rolled out across the region. FAO has eleven CPFs in the region, three of which were finalized in 2018-2019 (a number of Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] countries and conflict-affected countries do not have CPFs):

- Current CPFs in the region: Algeria (2019-2022), Egypt (2018-2022), Iraq (2018-2023), Jordan (2017-2021), Lebanon (2016-2020), Mauritania (2017-2021), Morocco (2017-2020), Oman (2018-2022), Tunisia (2016-2020), the Sudan (2017-2020); West Bank and Gaza Strip (2018-2022).
28. The Regional Office and Subregional Offices are providing support to FAO country offices with regard to the development of UN CCAs and UNSDCFs in order to ensure that FAO's contribution is positioned effectively. UNSDCFs are being developed in *inter alia* Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic in 2020 and in Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen in 2021. FAO country teams, for example in Lebanon, are also working with counterpart Ministries to undertake strategic sectoral reviews in advance of CCA development in order to ensure that the needs and priorities of governments are reflected fully in CCAs and UNSDCFs.
 29. FAO's programmes and achievements in the region in 2018-19 build on the priorities identified at the 34th Session of the FAO Regional Conference in 2018. In addition to highlighting the technical priorities, the Regional Conference underscored the continuing need to prioritize partnerships at the decentralized level, emphasizing in this context the importance of closer collaboration with Rome-based and other UN agencies. Programmatic collaboration with UN agencies, in particular with the RBAs, is an increasingly prominent feature of FAO's work in the region. FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP) are increasingly working together, for example, in crisis-affected countries such as Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen to ensure integrated food security and livelihood support. An important indicator for FAO is the level of resources mobilized from UN-administered sources, given that this reflects, in part, FAO's contribution to integrated UN responses and programmes. Since 2014, the proportion of resources mobilized from these sources has increased almost threefold, representing less than 5 percent of total resources mobilized in 2014 to just over 20 percent in 2019. The most significant increases have been with regard to FAO's non-emergency programmes, which have seen a sixfold increase in funds from UN-administered sources since 2014, reflecting FAO's growing engagement in joint UN programming. It is expected that this trend will continue in 2020 and beyond.
 30. In line with the coherent, integrated multisectoral approaches required to achieve the SDGs, partnership is increasingly an integral component of FAO's work in the region. For example, FAO's flagship regional publication 'Near East and North Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition' was produced for the first time in 2019 as a joint publication with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP and the World Health Organization (WHO) reflecting the need for multisectoral strategic perspectives to inform FAO's policy work on food security and food systems transformation.
 31. FAO's partnership-based programming extends far beyond the UN. For example, the Organization has developed a Regional Strategic Framework for the Date Palm Value Chain with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD); worked with the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM)-Bari, AOAD, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and others to build regional capacities to respond to the red palm weevil; strengthened its programming partnership with ICARDA to extend collaboration on issues related to sustainable agricultural development and land and water resource management; and worked with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to advance the Arab Food Safety Initiative for Trade Facilitation. In September 2019, FAO collaborated with the NDC Partnership to bring more than 100 representatives from Ministries of Agriculture, Water and Environment from 14 countries in the region to a workshop in Cairo, Egypt, focussing on building technical capacities and intersectoral collaboration in the development and implementation of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) across the region. Similarly, in October 2018, an FAO-organized workshop in Khartoum, the Sudan, focused on the impact of climate change on farming systems and livelihoods in the context of agroecology and brought together representatives from 15 countries in the region (Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen). To further strengthen government capacities related to agroecology and climate change, FAO is

working with governments in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania and the Sudan to develop projects that could be financed by the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

32. FAO's programmes have continued to place emphasis on building the resilience of vulnerable communities to crisis-related and climatic shocks, covering (i) information systems (e.g. Mauritania, the Sudan, Yemen); (ii) disaster risk reduction (e.g. Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine); and (iii) transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases (e.g. Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic). Important new work has been undertaken on water management, including eight ongoing or completed assessments on the role of gender in water resource management (Algeria, Egypt, Iran [Islamic Republic of], Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia). FAO has also developed its migration-related programmes, including ongoing work in Egypt and the publication of a Regional Overview Report on Rural Migration Trends.

Heightened efficiency and effectiveness of FAO's operations across the region

33. While delivering the above-mentioned programmes, FAO continued concurrently to undertake measures aimed at improving its operational efficiency and effectiveness across the region, in line with the request of Members at the 34th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East in 2018.
34. A new organigram has been developed for the Regional Office with new functional statements. A series of standard operating procedures are being developed and implemented to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness. Particular emphasis has been given to training, to ensure that staff across the region possess the knowledge and skills needed. In 2018-19 for example, approximately 200 staff from all of FAO's subregional and country offices in the region received training on (i) internal control and financial risk management; (ii) procurement; (iii) corporate reporting for resource mobilization; (iv) Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM); (v) mobilizing resources to upscale rural social protection (RSP); (vi) cash transfers; and (vii) conflict-sensitive programming.
35. The Subregional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council States and Yemen (SNG) based in Abu Dhabi became fully operational in 2019 following the appointment of a Subregional Coordinator and the filling of other vacant positions. A new Subregional Coordinator was appointed to the Subregional Office for North Africa (SNE) in 2019, based in Tunis, and provides increasing support to partnerships and FAO's country offices across the Maghreb region. The operationalization of the Subregional Office for the Mashreq Countries (SNM), based in Beirut, has been postponed upon the request of the Government of Lebanon.
36. In 2018, FAO introduced a new Country Office Transformation model including in the NENA region. The model will provide FAO country offices with increased flexibility to ensure that staffing and capacities are better aligned to country needs, priorities and capacities, to facilitate the greater use of NSHR and encourage the career and professional development of staff, especially national staff, including increased opportunities for international positions in the future. In 2019, one Assistant FAOR from the region spent 2-3 months in another country working alongside the FAOR, sharing and learning new skills, gaining valuable international experience and helping to build the skills of national staff in the FAO country office in which he was placed.
37. Risk Management is continuously being emphasized and rigorously implemented in the region to manage risks and achieve established corporate goals with focus on (i) effective and efficient operations; (ii) safeguarding of resources against fraud, damage and harm, theft and loss; (iii) compliance with rules and regulations, and internal policies; and (iv) timely and reliable reporting.
38. In line with Organization-wide efforts to strengthen the human resources (HR) function, the Regional Office has implemented a range of measures to streamline recruitment procedures and build capacities across the region. During 2018-2019, a total of 27 staff members were recruited. This includes both Professional (23) and General Staff (4). Furthermore, measures are being taken to institute sound HR management frameworks that would be conducive to *inter alia* more effective

talent management and the effective alignment of HR capabilities to the programmatic and operational needs through sound HR planning and post-management practices. This has significantly increased the capacity of the Regional, Subregional and Country Offices in the NENA region, particularly in the area of Programme Management, Policy, Nutrition, Natural Resources Management, Plant Production and Protection, Gender and Statistics.

VI. The way forward: challenges and opportunities

39. Global dimension: Given the increasing frequency and gravity of external challenges and drivers, FAO's Decentralized Offices positioning in the medium term will require systematic review and analysis and a higher level of flexibility and adaptation, to fully respond to the expectations of Members.
40. In the 2020-21 biennium, FAO needs to pursue the following objectives to address challenges and harness new opportunities:
 1. Shift towards a fully programmatic approach at decentralized level
41. By accelerating the shift towards a fully programmatic approach and by setting more tangible programmatic objectives at the country and regional levels, FAO will be able to leverage its global policy, regulatory, scientific and technical contribution in support of the attainment of the SDG targets in line with the 2030 Agenda. This will also enable FAO to influence the UNSDCF in the areas of its core mandate. This process will be assessed in the review of FAO's Strategic Framework, envisaged to take place in 2020.³
 2. FAO's value proposition at the regional level in the context of UNDS repositioning
42. By consolidating regionalized knowledge and technical capacity as well as engaging in the proposed "issues-based coalitions" consisting of networks of UN agencies' capacities across various thematic clusters, FAO will be able to lead the UN regional response to country needs in the areas of its core mandate and improve member countries' access to FAO's regional expertise. FAO's policy integration capacities and abilities at regional level, including through innovation and analysis would be key to succeed in this important and challenging dimension. FAO's strong capacity within the Global Programme of Action on Food Security and Nutrition (GAP) which addresses the special needs of the SIDS could serve as a strong asset to leverage FAO's leadership and comparative strength in countries served by Multi-Country Offices (MCOs).
 3. FAO's leadership on food security, agriculture and nutrition at country level
43. By capitalizing on the redesigned UN Cooperation Framework cycle to increase attention at national level to food security, agriculture and nutrition agendas, FAO will be able to influence the UN agenda at the country level, gearing towards a multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral approach. Another remaining challenge is the need to tighten the alignment of FAO's results framework to the SDG indicators and draw on monitoring and evaluation capacities to strengthen FAO's country-level monitoring and reporting tools.
 4. Promoting inclusive partnerships at regional and country level
44. Promoting a strengthened and more results-oriented collaboration with other UN partners and especially RBAs, based on synergies and complementarities, is a prerequisite to address the challenges ahead and achieve the aforementioned objectives. FAO will also sharpen its focus on partnering with the private sector as well as public and private investors and on promoting innovative partnerships. The elaboration of a new vision for collaboration with the private sector, as requested by the FAO Council at its 163rd session in December 2019 (CL 163/REP paragraph

³ CL 163/4

10.b), will have significant implications for shaping new partnerships at the Decentralized Offices level.

5. Boosting operational capacity

45. As recommended by MOPAN (2017-18) and the Evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework (2019), FAO will continue to pursue in the 2020-2021 biennium further action to boost operational efficiencies through the decentralization of key management and operational processes, increased delegations of authority, improved monitoring and evaluation as well as reporting capacities at the country level, with the objective of improving overall performance and programmatic delivery.

6. Promoting innovation at decentralized levels

46. In line with the Director-General's vision, the Decentralized Offices network will be fully engaged in the FAO digitalization process and the promotion of innovations in the field to accelerate progress in delivering the 2030 Agenda. The new corporate vision will be defined by a newly established Office for Innovation at FAO headquarters, which will consolidate and strengthen FAO's innovative ethos, including innovation of mind-set, innovation of cooperation models, and innovation of application by digitalization. The Decentralized Offices network will be at the forefront of efforts to promote innovative methodologies, approaches and programmes that can be sustainably scaled up in cooperation with national governments, private sector, academia and civil society. Taking into consideration that there is no global solution to some of the challenges that we are facing today, and there is no one size that fits all, Decentralized Offices will play a valuable role in adapting innovative solutions and business models to the local context, taking into account the specific needs and demands of the countries.

47. With regard to the Regional dimension:

a. Shifting support upstream and across sectors

48. As more countries in the region graduate to middle-income status, their needs and priorities are shifting with less demand for technical assistance and more requests for policy support and advocacy to address increasingly complex and interlinked problems, and transborder challenges. The Regional Office is also shifting its focus to upstream policy support and increasing normative work. This policy and normative work needs to be tailored to match the diversity in the region and therefore Decentralized Offices require flexibility, a dynamic skills set and alternative ways of working in order for FAO to help member countries achieve their development goals.

b. New partnerships for science, technology and innovation in agriculture

49. There is great opportunity for the Regional Office to promote knowledge exchange amongst member countries through facilitating the redistribution of the benefits of innovation and technology in the region. To be more systematic and coherent, the Regional Office is developing a regional strategy to improve FAO's support to member countries to better harness digital agriculture with recommendations on the requisite technical skills and enabling environment needed for effective technical support.
50. In line with the Organization's efforts for closer collaboration with the private sector, the Regional Office and the Decentralized Offices are planning to conduct a private sector mapping exercise, which will produce tangible proposals to take forward the collaboration with concretely identified partners at the different levels. For the first time, the Regional Office formalized a Public-Private-Partnership project through bringing the Government of the United Arab Emirates as a donor to assist Liberia to promote increased resilience and sustainable income generation, food security and nutrition for rural women with Masdar (Private multinational) and FAO.

c. Developing business opportunities to invest in sustainable development

51. The Regional Office will continue to build its interactions with regional bodies to influence regional dialogue, policy frameworks and standards. Initiatives to strengthen South-South cooperation are being pursued, in line with the Hand-In-Hand Initiative. Through this modality, the Regional Office will strive to scale up experiences between the emerging economies as providers of funds and expertise to other countries in the region. Another promising opportunity is the collaboration with some countries which are not present in the region on topics of common interest such as forestry and fisheries. New funding sources will include engaging with the private sector. This will require more flexibility through further decentralization of responsibility, simplified administrative systems and a conducive environment in the Decentralized Offices as incentives to adopt new ways of working and keep abreast with the new initiatives in the Organization.

d. Expanding the Field Programme through resource mobilization

52. Resource mobilization will remain a challenge as many countries in the region have already attained middle-income status. However, through concerted efforts, the region has witnessed a significant increase in resources through tapping into new funding sources such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), GCF and blended financing, for example Agrinvest, etc. The shift in portfolio faces some new challenges notably the use of new operational implementation modalities, and constraints on capacity in the Decentralized Offices to manage the significant field programme growth. As a first step, the Regional Office and headquarters have stepped up their efforts and have conducted several trainings for the Decentralized Offices.

e. Repositioning of the UN development system

53. The Regional Office has embraced the repositioning of the UN development system as an opportunity for achieving coherence with other UN agencies around the SDG Agenda. Decentralized Offices are dialoguing with the RBAs to formulate common inputs into the UNSDCF discussions and CCA formulation. Several FAO Decentralized Offices are participating in pilot exercises on various streams of the repositioning of the UN development system. The Regional Office is gradually building capacity to help support the Decentralized Offices, for example a surge capacity team has been constituted to assist with CPF alignment to the UNSDCF. From a regional dimension, the Regional Office will continue to engage with the regional UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) Team to advance collaboration on transboundary and regional challenges and broaden FAO's leadership on analytical and normative work in mandated areas. The Regional Office in collaboration with relevant departments in headquarters will continue to actively engage to address the specificities in the region taking into account the capacity issues in the Decentralized Offices.