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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

**Thirty-fifth Session**

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**Report of the Second Regional Consultative Technical Meeting for the  
35th Session of FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC35)**

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<sup>1</sup> Rescheduled from 2-4 March, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

## I. Introductory Items

### Organization of the Meeting

1. The Second Regional Consultative Technical Meeting (RCTM – hereinafter also referred to as the ‘Meeting’) for the 35th Session of FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC-35) was held virtually using Zoom under the theme of “Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Agriculture and Food Security in the Near East and North Africa Region”. The Meeting was composed of four sessions. The first session was held on 1 July and focused on trade while the second, third and fourth sessions were held on 2, 15 and 23 July and focused on protecting and enhancing agriculture and local value chains, building resilience to multiple shocks and shaping the response, respectively.
2. The Meeting was attended by 802 participants (245 participants attended the first session, 205 attended the second session, 175 participants attended the third session and 177 participants attended the fourth session). Participants represented senior officers from the ministries of agriculture, water, environment and health from 31 countries - including 29 Members of the region, as well as Permanent Representatives of governments to FAO, FAO staff and representatives of the regional organizations, private sector and academia. The list of countries is presented in Appendix A.
3. Two Regional Technical Dialogues complemented the discussions in the RCTM. These Dialogues, entitled “One Health approach for managing animal diseases and zoonoses and the impact of COVID-19 on the livestock sector”, and “Building back better: Towards sustainable water management for food security in the Near East and North Africa region” focused on two technical issues deemed important by countries: livestock and water. Appendixes B and C provide a summary of the conclusions and recommendations from these meetings, respectively.
4. The list of documents submitted to the Meeting is presented in Appendix B and all documents are available at:  
[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dFZ9mkwyhsAVml\\_NzPtL64q1NIZkWMSJ?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1dFZ9mkwyhsAVml_NzPtL64q1NIZkWMSJ?usp=sharing)

### Opening Session

5. The Meeting was opened with statements by His Excellency Ahmed Al Bakri, Under Secretary for Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Sultanate of Oman and the Chairperson of the Regional Consultative Meeting (RCTM), Mr Yousef Juhail, Counsellor, Permanent Representative of the State of Kuwait to FAO and Chairperson of the Near East Group and Mr Abdessalam OuldAhmed, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa.
6. Mr Ahmed Al Bakri welcomed the participants, acknowledged the efforts made by the countries of the region and FAO in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted the strategic importance of the Meeting in formulating practical and innovative recommendations that would ensure effective response to and recovery from the impact of COVID-19 on Agriculture and Food Security in the region, noting that these recommendations will be presented to the Ministers of the region during the upcoming Thirty-fifth Session of the Near East Regional Conference (NERC-35). Mr Al Bakri briefed the participants on the format and the agenda of the four sessions of the Meeting and provided guidance on the use of Zoom’s tools during the Meeting.
7. After welcoming the participants, Mr Yousef Juhail highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on food security in the region, which is already facing serious challenges including conflict, water scarcity and Desert Locust outbreaks. He emphasized that avoiding a potential food crisis is a key priority

for the region. Mr Juhail encouraged participants to come-up with innovative actions to protect food systems in the region and urged FAO to increase its support to the countries of the region to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 and ensure timely recovery.

8. Mr Abdessalam OuldAhmed welcomed the participants and valued the measures applied by countries of the region to protect the agriculture and minimize the impact of COVID-19 on food security despite the numerous challenges facing the region. He briefed the Meeting on the measures applied by FAO to support countries in addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and thanked countries of the region and FAO's resource partners for their support, which enabled FAO to continue its programmes without interruption. Mr OuldAhmed reminded participants of the objectives of the Meeting, which builds on the successful First RCTM held in Cairo, Egypt, in January 2020 and intends to formulate practical recommendations to be presented to the Ministers for Agriculture during the NERC-35.

## **II. Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Issues**

### **A. First Session (1 July): Managing Trade as Key Element of the Region's Food Security Strategies**

9. Prior to the Meeting, participants received the thematic paper entitled "*Managing trade as key element of the region's food security strategies*" prepared by FAO. The paper discussed the trade and food security nexus in the region and explained the region's vulnerability to disturbances in international markets with particular focus on the vulnerabilities posed by COVID-19 pandemic. The paper proposed a set of recommendations that aimed at ensuring effective management of trade at national and regional levels given the significant importance of trade to food security in the region.
10. The Meeting took note of the messages highlighted in the presentation on "*From Containment to Consequences of COVID-19 in the Food and Agriculture Sectors in the Near East Region and North Africa Region*" made by Mr Máximo Torero, FAO Chief Economist and COVID Focal point. These messages include the following points:
  - a) The coronavirus pandemic has been a crushing one-two punch to the global economy. Although there is enough food, the pandemic poses serious threats to food security as it: (a) constraints access to food especially by the poor and in view of job losses and reduced incomes; and (b) causes a global recession;
  - b) Recovery of the global economy is expected to be slow;
  - c) Although the agriculture sector has been relatively less impacted compared to other sectors, the risk is still there both globally and in the region given its structural vulnerabilities, conflicts and high dependence on food imports. The impact is expected to be worse in countries affected by conflicts and countries experiencing structural vulnerabilities. Inequalities are expected to be exacerbated especially on gender and minorities;
  - d) We need to: (a) change policies for better mobility (e.g. health protocols including increasing COVID-19 testing at ports); (b) put in place effective stimulating packages to support smallholders (including linking food assistance to production for healthier diets); and (c) ensure effective trade. These, among others, would support immediate response, recovery and building back better.

11. The Meeting took note of the key messages that emerged from the discussion on “options for managing food import dependency, strengthen exports and intraregional trade: perspectives from countries and value chain actors”. Mr Ahmad Mukhtar, Trade Economist, FAO moderated the discussion with the following panellists; Mr Abdullah AlRabiah, Governor's Adviser, General Supervisor of Food Security Strategy Execution, Saudi Grains Authority (SAGO)- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Mr Saad Nassar, Senior Adviser to the Minister for Agriculture, Egypt, Ms Zakia Driouich, Secretary General, Fisheries Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Marine Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forest, Morocco, Mr Essa Alhashmi, Head of the Food Security Office- United Arab Emirates and Mr Mohsen Boujbel, President of the Tunisian-Spanish Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CTECI). The key highlights from the panel discussion include:
  - a) The countries represented in the panel (Egypt, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates) have applied robust measures to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on food security in general and to ensure functioning of trade in particular;
  - b) Contingency plans before COVID-19 (including diversified sources for food imports, bilateral trade agreements, appropriate policies and legislations, ensuring food safety measures and establishment of strategic food reserves), early warning systems, involvement of the private sector and timely decisions by governments have significantly contributed to reducing the risks associated with the countries' food imports dependency;
  - c) Interregional trade has strategic importance in reducing vulnerabilities to shocks in global food supply chain;
  - d) The RCTM Meeting presents an excellent opportunity to coordinate regional policies to support interregional trade, reduce barriers, and create free zones.
12. The Meeting took note of the important points raised by the participants during the discussion, the comments from the panellists and summary made by Mr George Rapsomanikis, Senior Economist, FAO Trade and Markets. The main points are as follows:
  - a) COVID-19 has impacted food systems throughout the value chain. In some countries of the region, this impact was further aggravated by other crises such as conflicts, Desert Locust, drought and floods, trade embargo and economic and fiscal crises;
  - b) All countries in the region have applied measures to reduce the effect of COVID-19 on agriculture and food security;
  - c) COVID-19 pandemic has brought the central role of smallholders in food security to the forefront and encouraged some countries to develop digital platforms to facilitate food exports and to promote e-commerce;
  - d) The importance of trade for food security in the region and the role of FAO in facilitating interregional trade; and
  - e) The need for better regional cooperation to enhance food security situation in the region.
13. In the course of its deliberations on the item, the Meeting:
  - a) Stressed the importance of agriculture and food trade for food security in the region, which imports 50 percent of the calories it consumes and where food exports represent more than 20 percent of total merchandise exports in several countries in the region;
  - b) Recognized that trade will continue to play an important role for food security and nutrition in region in view of the scarcity of water resources and of climate change;
  - c) Acknowledged the need to increase agricultural productivity wherever possible without compromising sustainability;
  - d) Recognized the measures taken by the countries in the region to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture, food security and the livelihood of vulnerable groups;

- e) Expressed concerns on the impact of COVID-19 on the vulnerability of international and national food supply chains and underscored the vulnerability of the region to shocks affecting the food supply chain and food markets
- f) Raised concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition in countries affected by conflicts, under occupation and those experiencing structural vulnerabilities and other crises;
- g) Highlighted the great potential for intraregional trade in the region in support to greater food security and nutrition.

14. The meeting then called upon countries to:

- a) Increase investments in productive sectors, especially sustainable agriculture, with particular focus on investments aiming at enhancing agricultural production and productivity, such as research and innovation to accelerate the transformation of the sector and build resilience to shocks;
- b) Integrate trade as a key part of national food security and nutrition strategies;
- c) Adopt good practices to reduce the region's vulnerability to food import shocks, including diversification of food import sources, economic intelligence to empower countries in trade negotiations, integrated food procurements, and ensuring food safety measures;
- d) Adopt trade policies that are responsive to needs of the agriculture sector and support export value chains in high value crops in which the region has comparative advantage like fruits and vegetables, olive oil, dates, etc., supporting certification and enhancing food safety;
- e) Strengthen intraregional trade through appropriate agreements and harmonized trade policies that build on the comparative advantages of each country; building capacity for complementary trade; and creating free trade zones in the region;
- f) Consider the establishment of joint regional and subregional strategic food reserves governed by clear rules; and
- g) Harmonize food standards at the regional level.

15. The Meeting also recommended FAO to:

- a) Raise the profile of trade as part of its regional priorities for the forthcoming years;
- b) Consider interregional trade as one of the topics to be discussed at the NERC-35;
- c) Provide a platform for dialogue, technical cooperation and sharing of experiences and good practices on issues related to food and agriculture trade among countries of the region;
- d) Support countries in the region in achieving harmonized standards for food safety, sanitary and phytosanitary measures as a means to facilitate agri-food trade.

## **B. Second Session (2 July) - Protecting and Enhancing Agriculture and Local Value Chains**

16. Mr Ahmed Al Bakri provided introductory remarks on the importance of sustaining agri-food value chains for building back food systems in the post-COVID-19 era. He highlighted the opportunities availed by COVID-19 to advance agriculture to lead to recovery, while moving towards transforming food systems, to be more resilient, inclusive and sustainable. Mr Al Bakri emphasized the important role of innovation and digitalization of agri-food value chains in this transition.

17. Mr Jamie Morrison, Food Systems Division, FAO made a presentation on "*Value chain, COVID and post-COVID: what needs to change and how?*" based on a thematic paper entitled "*Protecting and Enhancing Agriculture and Local Value Chains*", which was prepared by FAO and shared with participants prior to the Meeting. Mr Morrison highlighted the specific features of the agri-food

value chains in the region and the main effects of COVID-19 on different aspects of these value chains, noting that the economic recession and job losses are likely to change food consumption patterns towards more staples, which could result in higher rates of malnutrition in the medium and long-terms. He identified four areas of action to build more efficient, inclusive and resilient supply chains; namely: (a) fostering collective action to strengthen horizontal and vertical linkages; (b) creating an enabling environment for investing in innovation; (c) developing creative/inclusive financing schemes, joint investments, public infrastructure to increase return to investment; and (d) building capacity and access to services and resources of value chain firms (especially SMEs).

18. Mr Morrison highlighted the priorities related to agriculture transformation considered by FAO to build back better, which include (a) supporting more efficient logistics and storage facilities to preserve safety and quality; (b) adjusting business models to sustain and strengthen agri-food enterprises; (c) harnessing the untapped power of innovation and digital solutions; (d) strengthening smallholders' access to markets; (e) addressing the specific needs of women; (f) ensuring food safety and nutritional quality of food; and (g) reducing food loss and waste along agri-food value chains.
19. Mr Clemens Breisinger, Head, Middle East and North Africa Team, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) made a presentation "*COVID-19 and beyond: Economic impacts on the food system in Egypt and investment options for recovery*". The presentation was based on a joint assessment by IFPRI, FAO, IFAD and WFP in 20 countries including five countries in NENA region (Egypt, Jordan, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen). The presentation suggested a methodology framework with different approaches to quantify the impact of COVID-19 on specific value chains. Mr Breisinger highlighted that the assessment revealed the resilience of the agriculture sector relative to other economic sectors. As such it can be central to the economic recovery from COVID-19, particularly for women. He flagged the important role of cooperatives and producers' organizations in collective marketing, processing, and post-harvest handling activities. He indicated that all investments in agriculture yield positive development outcomes; nonetheless, there is no single investment option that could be the most effective in achieving all outcomes such as poverty reduction, GDP growth, jobs creation and nutrition. Investments in research and development (R&D) and extension would be one of the good pathways for reducing poverty. Mr Breisinger highlighted the need for enhancing efficiency of food processing, storage, cold chain and marketing infrastructure to boost value chains and make them more resilient to shocks.
20. The Meeting took note of the following key messages that emerged from the panel discussion on "*COVID-19 impact on local value chains and how countries are responding: views from the value chain stakeholders*" moderated by Ms Wafaa El Khoury, Service Chief, Europe and Central Asia, Near East and north Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean - Investment Centre, FAO and which involved six panellists (His Excellency Said al Masri, Former Minister for Agriculture, Jordan; Mr Fadia Kiwan, Director General, Arab Women Organization; Mr Radwane Arrach, Director of Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture, Maritime Fisheries, Rural Development, Water and Forests, Morocco; Mr Tarek Tawfik, Managing Director, Cairo Poultry Group, Egypt; Ms Nahla Hwalla, Professor of Human Nutrition, American University of Beirut, Lebanon and Ms Maha Mohamed Abdullah Al Balushi, Managing Director, Oman Technology Fund):
  - a) COVID-19 has demonstrated the centrality of food value chains for economic development, employment and food security. Agriculture sector has been the most resilient sector amidst the lockdown measures and will play a critical role in the recovery from the depression affecting the world and the region;
  - b) Workers in the tourism, services and transportation sectors are the most affected by the measures aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19 and the impact of these measures may result in increasing malnutrition especially in countries affected by crises;

- c) Women are disproportionately more impacted by COVID-19 given their heavy involvement in the informal sectors, the disruption of reproductive health services, increased domestic violence;
- d) The private sector plays a central role in agricultural value chains. To be well-functioning and inclusive, value chains also require a broad array of public goods and services including transportation networks, telecommunications, energy, social protection measures, storage and food processing facilities, and monetary policy that supports liquidity and credit;
- e) Technology, innovation and digitalization have a crucial role to play in accelerating value chains' development and transforming food systems. Among others, investments in technology, innovation and digitalization would help in addressing the rising cost of production caused by COVID-19 at the production-level and across value chains; and
- f) Effective transformation of the region's food systems requires investing in agri-food value chains that are efficient, inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

21. The Meeting took note of the points raised by the participants during the rich discussions as well as the summary provided by Mr Morrison. In the course of its deliberations, the Meeting:

- a) Valued the measures adopted by the governments of the region to protect local value chains. These measures included direct support to value chains of perishable products (e.g. dairy, fruit and vegetables), establishment of digital platforms and other e-agriculture innovations, as well as expansion of credits to value chains actors
- b) Recognized the relative resilience of the agriculture sector in the face of the pandemic and its potential to lead to the post-COVID economic recovery;
- c) Noted the similarities across the region in terms of the impact of COVID-19 on smallholders, markets and informal sector as well as the differences in how COVID-19 has impacted different value chains and different parts of the value chains in different countries, depending on the local context;
- d) Acknowledged the importance of engaging relevant stakeholders especially cooperatives, producers organizations, national banks and the private sector in protecting and further developing local value chains;
- e) Raised concerns on the potential impact of other crises – particularly the conflicts, economic and fiscal crises, on the functioning of agri-food value chains.

22. The meeting then called upon countries to:

- a) Prioritize the agri-food sector as a driver for economic-wide recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. Among others, this necessitates increasing investments in agriculture and food value chains especially in postharvest stages, market infrastructure, innovation, technology, extension and research;
- b) Promote value chains that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable;
- c) Take consumers' needs into account in strengthening value chains, noting that affordability and access to healthy diets are key issues for public health in light of COVID-19.
- d) Accelerate administrative reforms that facilitate agro-food Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), with particular attention to connecting the informal sector to higher-value, integrated

- value chains and by leveraging innovation and digital technologies to support access to inputs and services as well as to engage youths and reduce food loss and waste;
- e) Support collective action at producer level, by strengthening the role of cooperatives and producers' organizations, inclusive of women and men; and
  - f) Build rural women's capacity to be productive agents through innovative business models, access to land, and targeted public support, noting that cooperatives can also channel social protection to women.
23. The Meeting also recommended FAO to:
- a) Undertake a regional study to develop crops' seasonal calendars that would contribute to strengthening collaboration and trade among the countries of the region;
  - b) Support producers to meet the increasingly stringent export standards of food products;
  - c) Establish on-line platforms to share experiences and good practices on value chains among countries of the region; and
  - d) Support countries of the region in mobilizing resources for enhancing their agri-food value chains.
24. Mr OuldAhmed and Mr Al Bakri provided brief closing remarks re-emphasizing the strategic importance of strengthening local agri-food value chains using wide spectrum strategies that address several issues along the value chains as well as the investing in digitalization. They confirmed that all responses by governments in the region will be recorded and shared in the final report to be submitted to the ministers in NERC-35.

### **C. Third Session (15 July) - Building Resilience to Multiple Shocks – Addressing COVID-19 in Fragile Contexts**

25. The Chair, Mr Ahmed Al Bakri, welcomed the participants and highlighted some of the multiple risks confronting the region including conflict, transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases and natural hazards such as droughts. He indicated that seven countries of the region are experiencing food crises mainly due to conflicts, which affect – directly and indirectly, about one-third of the countries of the region. He noted that agriculture is a key driver of economic development especially under crises and highlighted that the session aimed at formulating concrete recommendations to address multiple shocks and risks in the region including COVID-19. At the end of his introductory remarks, Mr Al Bakri provided technical guidance on the session proceedings and the use of zoom, and introduced the keynote speakers.
26. His Excellency Syed Fakhar Imam, Minister for National Food Security and Research, Pakistan provided opening remarks focusing on the challenges caused by COVID-19 on the agricultural sector in Pakistan and the measures applied by the government to address these challenges. He described the multiple shocks and crises that existed before COVID-19 in Pakistan, including earthquakes, mega floods, droughts and Desert Locust invasion and other disasters. Mr Imam highlighted the additional challenges caused by COVID-19 including infections (2 percent fatality rate), deaths and increasing poverty and food insecurity among 20 – 25 percent of the population. He presented the measures taken by the government in view of the aforementioned challenges including cash grants, subsidies to smallholders and reduced interests on agricultural credit. Mr Imam called for a paradigm shift in addressing multiple shocks and building resilience of smallholders and food systems.



27. Mr Dominique Burgeon, Director of Emergency and Rehabilitation Division, FAO made a presentation on “*Addressing COVID-19 in fragile context – how to build resilience*” based on a thematic paper entitled “*Building Resilience to Multiple Shocks – Addressing COVID-19 in Fragile Contexts*”, which was prepared by FAO and shared with participants prior to the Meeting. Mr Burgeon explained that his presentation focused on severe food insecurity while the recently released SOFI 2020 discussed all types of food insecurity. He highlighted the region’s structural vulnerability with particular focus on scarcities of water and arable land and the multiple shocks facing the region that resulted in an increasing trend of food insecurity and malnutrition in the region. Mr Burgeon noted that COVID-19 came on top of these risks and has aggravated vulnerability.
28. Mr Burgeon presented the FAO response at global, regional and country levels using a twin-track approach to humanitarian assistance while building resilience. He highlighted the four pillars of FAO’s contribution to the Global Humanitarian Response Plan to COVID-19 as well as the three interrelated priorities of the resilience pillar of FAO’s Umbrella Programme (boosting resilience of smallholders to COVID-19 recovery). These priorities emphasise: (i) safeguarding the most vulnerable in rural and urban settings; (ii) promoting transformative economic recovery; and (iii) building multi-risk management capacities and institutions for resilience. At the regional level, Mr Burgeon highlighted the work of the Regional Initiative on Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition while he shared some examples of the diversified and context-specific resilience work in the countries of the region.
29. Mr Burgeon concluded his presentation by recommending a strategic shift from managing disasters to managing risks using a holistic approach and highlighted some of the key principles and examples of interventions under such an approach. Among others, the recommended approach calls for actions along the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus; ensuring social, economic and environmental sustainability; and capitalizing on innovation, partnerships and regional collaborations.
30. The Meeting took note of the following key messages that emerged from the panel discussions moderated by Mr Jean Marc Faurès, Regional Programme Leader, Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, FAO and comprising four panellists (His Excellency Ibrahim Adam El Dukheri, Director-General, Arab Organization for Agriculture Development; Mr Mahdi Dhumad Al Kaissy, Adviser, Ministry of Agriculture, Iraq; Mr Rashid Mekki, Secretary General of Higher Council for Environment and Natural Resources, the Sudan and Ms Dunja Dujanovic, Early Warning Early Action Team Leader, FAO):
  - a) While tremendous efforts have been made by governments of the region and their partner organizations to address shocks, risks and crises (such as transboundary animal diseases and plant pests), these efforts have often been fragmented and focused on symptoms. There is a need for a shift towards a holistic, multi-hazards and long-term approach that addresses the root causes. Among others, this requires working on the governance and policy frameworks, strong focus on early warning information, capacity building of all stakeholders, strategic partnerships that involve the private sector and civil society and increased regional collaboration especially on addressing transboundary risks;
  - b) Natural hazards are a growing contributor to food insecurity in the region. In addition to their short-term implications on crop and livestock, natural hazards have serious structural implications on food systems in the long-term given their impact on livelihoods’ assets, infrastructure and environment;
  - c) The impacts of climate change on an already drought-prone and water-scarce region could have devastating impacts particularly in the agriculture sector where unsustainable agriculture practices and energy-intensive water desalination for irrigation contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, resilience building efforts should emphasize sustainability and act on the energy-food-water nexus;
  - d) Although Disaster Risk Management (DRM) has increasingly become part of national strategies in most countries, it has not been fully mainstreamed within the agriculture sector. Such

mainstreaming is highly needed in the region making use of advanced technologies and innovation;

- e) An important aspect to building resilience is shielding vulnerable populations from the shocks that are known and can be predicted based on information and evidences. Increased ability to predict natural and man-made shocks combined with early anticipatory actions can foster the shift from reactive to proactive approaches to build resilience;
- f) Building resilience that withstands all overlapping risks requires investment in building capacity of institutions to govern risks, use of digital innovations to inform early warning and anticipatory actions, safeguarding vulnerable populations through social protection and crop and livestock insurance. There are some good experiences in the region and beyond on some of the aforementioned aspects, which need to be further supported and scaled-up;

31. In the course of its deliberations and rich discussion by participants, the Meeting:

- a) Valued the measures adopted by the governments of the region to protect the most vulnerable populations and smallholders against the social and economic impacts caused by COVID-19;
- b) Recognized that COVID-19 is just one additional shock and the likelihood of recurrence of similar or other shocks is high, thus the importance of building resilient food systems and agriculture communities;
- c) Recognized the need to strengthen sharing of learning and best practices on managing multiple risks among the countries of the region;
- d) Acknowledged the importance of strong regional cooperation to establish regional multi-hazards early warning systems, address transboundary risks, manage shared resources such as transboundary water and foster solidarity and support to the most needy populations in countries affected by crises;
- e) Noted the serious implications caused by the recent economic and fiscal crises in a number of countries of the region on the national economies, agriculture sectors and smallholders;
- f) Raised concerns on the increasing trends of acute food insecurity in the region especially in countries affected by conflicts.

32. The Meeting took note of the summary of the discussions provided by Mr Shukri Ahmed, Deputy Strategic Programme Leader, Resilience, FAO who emphasized the following: (a) the need for a strategic shift to managing risks rather than disasters by reducing vulnerability and exposure; (b) managing risks holistically necessitates focusing on multiple hazards along multiple sectors; (c) the central role of information, evidences, early warning and anticipatory actions to this approach; and (d) the need to apply principles that create an enabling environment, embrace the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, ensure sustainability, uphold the humanitarian principles, capitalize the use of innovation and technology and strengthen partnerships;

33. The meeting then called upon countries to:

- a) Revisit national agricultural policies and strategies to ensure they are addressing the increasing need to build the resilience of agricultural-based livelihoods and food systems;
- b) Apply a holistic approach to managing multiple risks in a coherent and proactive manner that addresses the root causes of vulnerability and exposure while responding to subsequent disasters and crises;
- c) Mainstream Disaster Risk Management in agriculture;
- d) Adopt and expand measures that have proven successful to manage multiple risks such as: (i) multisectoral coordination and policy coherence in risk governance for resilience; (ii) multi-hazards

- early warning systems linked to anticipatory early actions; (iii) social protection and safety-nets, and (iv) crop and livestock insurance,
- e) Strengthen regional collaboration in addressing transboundary risks;
  - f) Consider the establishment of a Regional Emergency Fund governed and managed by the countries of the region;
  - g) Establish a regional multi-hazards early warning system with the technical support of FAO and other regional stakeholders; and
  - h) Strengthen regional collaboration and collective investments in agriculture in different countries of the region based on their comparative advantages.

34. The Meeting also recommended FAO to:

- a) Support vulnerable smallholders (farmers, herders and fishers) affected by COVID-19 and other shocks;
- b) Increase its support to contain Desert Locust and other transboundary plant pests and animal diseases;
- c) Develop a regional strategy, in close consultation with governments of the region, to build resilience to multiple shocks in a manner that supports the strategic shift from managing disasters to managing multiple risks in a holistic and coherent manner;
- d) Strengthen the ongoing support to countries to further contribute to building resilience to multiple shocks with particular focus on: (i) facilitating and sharing learning, stimulating collective actions; (ii) generate evidences in support of national and regional policies; (iii) piloting interventions with high potential to stimulate systemic changes towards building resilient agricultural livelihoods and food systems; and (iv) developing regional multi-hazards early warning systems; and
- e) Support countries of the region in mobilizing resources for building resilience to multiple shocks.

35. Messrs. OuldAhmed, Juhail and Al Bakri provided brief closing remarks at the end of the session. They re-emphasized the critical needs for building the resilience of livelihoods and food systems in the region, valued the deliberations and outcomes of the session, thanked the participants for their active participation in the three thematic sessions and invited the participants to the fourth session on 23 July, which was being convened with a focus on discussing priorities of the region in view of the outcomes of the three thematic sessions as well as other inputs such as the FAO Umbrella Programme for COVID-19 .

#### **D. Fourth Session (23 July) - Building Back Better: Shaping the Response**

36. The Chair, Mr Ahmed Al Bakri, welcomed the participants, thanked Mr Juhail for his efforts in serving the countries of the region during his tenure as Chairperson of the Near East Group and welcomed Mr Abdel Wahab Mohamed Hegazy, Permanent Representative of the Sudan to FAO, the newly elected Chairperson of the Near East Group. Mr Al Bakri recalled the focus and the main outcomes of the three previous RCTM sessions and highlighted the objectives of the fourth session that focus on: (a) identifying regional priorities to accelerate response and recovery from COVID-19; and (b) identify the role of FAO in supporting countries in implementing these priorities. He recognized FAO's efforts in developing a global Umbrella Programme and articulating potential regional priorities, which were shared with participants prior to the meeting. Mr Al Bakri concluded his opening remarks by providing guidelines to participants on the use of Zoom during the session;

37. Ms Beth Bechdol, FAO Deputy Director-General presented the FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Umbrella Programme, noted that building back better is the only option in view of the current and future impact of COVID-19 and highlighted the inclusive process followed in developing the programme that included (a) wide consultation at all levels within FAO as well as

consultations with national governments, development partners, private sector and other key actors; and (b) analysis of FAO's capacity and the potential value added of these priorities to FAO ongoing work. Ms Bechdol presented the following seven priorities of the aforementioned programme:

1. Global Humanitarian Response Plan: Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and safeguarding livelihoods in food-crisis contexts.
  2. Data for Decision-making: Ensuring quality data and analysis for effective policy support to food-systems and Zero Hunger;
  3. Economic Inclusion and Social Protection to Reduce Poverty: Pro-poor COVID-19 responses for an inclusive post-pandemic economic recovery;
  4. Trade and Food Safety Standards: Facilitating and accelerating food and agricultural trade during COVID-19 and beyond;
  5. Boosting Smallholder Resilience for Recovery: Protecting the most vulnerable, promoting economic recovery and enhancing risk management capacities;
  6. Preventing the Next Zoonotic Pandemic: Strengthening and extending the One Health approach to avert animal-origin pandemics; and
  7. Food Systems Transformation: Building back better during response and recovery.
38. Ms Bechdol indicated that the FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Umbrella Programme was discussed with national governments and global stakeholders via a virtual Zoom meeting held on 14 July 2020. The initial estimated budget of the programme is about USD 1.2 billion and FAO is preparing detailed proposals (action sheets) for each of the seven priorities, which will be shared via an open platform that would strengthen transparency and also promote the much needed partnerships not only to respond to and recover from COVID-19 but also to achieve the SDGs.
39. Mr Jean-Marc Faurès, Regional Programme Leader, FAO delivered a presentation on "*A Regional Agenda to Respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Build Back Better to Achieve the SDGs*". He highlighted some of the impacts caused by COVID-19 at the global and regional levels noting that the pandemic may increase the number of hungry people in Western Asia and North Africa by five to seven million in 2020. Mr Faurès highlighted the objectives of the Agenda/ Regional Priorities that aim at (a) providing immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis; (b) supporting recovery in the medium term; and (c) building back better in the longer term. He noted that these objectives must be considered within the broader goal of transforming the region's food systems to achieve the SDGs.
40. Mr Faurès presented the following ten areas for priority action in the region, which are closely linked to the seven priorities of the corporate FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Umbrella Programme outlined above: (1) data, modelling and analysis; (2) social protection targeting smallholders and rural poor; (3) keeping local value chains alive; (4) supporting rural institutions; (5) digital agriculture; (6) competitive value chains and agribusiness; (7) One Health and preventing zoonotic pandemics; (8) enhancing trade resilience and food safety; (9) rural women's economic empowerment and youth employment; and (10) building sustainability: addressing water scarcity, land degradation and climate change. Immediate humanitarian interventions are embedded within the relevant priorities above. The indicative budget required by FAO for the ten areas of priority actions is USD 212.8 million (USD 40.7 million for the immediate response, USD 87.5 million for supporting recovery and USD 84.6 million for building back better).
41. Mr Faurès concluded by presenting the alignment of the new set of priorities with the four regional long-term priorities to transform the food systems, which were discussed and endorsed in the First RCTM held in Cairo, Egypt in January 2020. (i) rural transformation and efficient value chains for youth employment and women empowerment; (2) food systems for healthy diets; (3) greening agriculture - addressing water scarcity and ensuring environmental sustainability and climate action; and (4) building resilience to multiple shocks, protracted crises and emergency situations. He

stressed that the ten areas of priority actions are highly consistent with the aforementioned regional long-term priorities and noted the need to further strengthen the focus on enhancing trade resilience and empowering rural women economically in the four long-term priorities. The FAO long-term regional priorities and the emergent COVID-19 response and recovery plan must be implemented through support for policies, institutions, collective action, investment, innovation, partnerships and engagement with the private sector.

42. The Meeting took note of the following key messages that emerged from the panel discussions on “*Country perspectives: what priorities to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and build back more resilient and sustainable agriculture and food systems*”. The panel was moderated by Mr Serge Nakouzi, Deputy Regional Representative, FAO and comprised of four panellists (Mr Shaaban Salem, Head of the Economic Affairs Sector, Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, Egypt, Ms Faten AlKhamassi, Institute for Research and Higher Education, Tunisia, Ms Nada Frihat, Head of the Organizations Section - Directorate of Partnership and International Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture, Jordan and, Mr Abdelkarim Laham, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, Syrian Arab Republic).
- a) The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to changing the world’s view of agriculture from looking at it from the narrow perspective of its contribution to GDP to a sector that is strategically important in ensuring food security - especially at time of global crises, while contributing to ensuring employment, economic recovery and long-term economic growth. In countries affected by protracted crises such as the Syrian Arab Republic, the panel reaffirmed the importance of the agriculture sector in contributing to food security, supporting livelihoods and leading the country’s economic recovery;
  - b) The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that short value chains are less dependent on imported inputs and more resilient to global shocks than value chains involving a large number of actors across different countries. This calls for a new approach to self-reliance in a region that is highly dependent on food imports;
  - c) Countries in crises have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Despite the efforts of the national governments and other stakeholders, the needs are still huge and require special attention from FAO and other development partners;
  - d) The region should re-think its food systems. In doing so, it should prioritize investing in innovation - especially in short and more resilient value chains, agro-ecology and agro-industry; fostering multi-actor governance systems by strengthening the links between government, private sector and civil society as well as reforming legislations to enable such governance systems; developing value chains within different macro-economic frameworks; revisiting and ensuring sustainability while pursuing competitiveness; and
  - e) The priorities of FAO’s COVID-19 Response and Recovery Umbrella Programme as well as the areas of priority actions at regional level are both highly relevant and consistent with the needs and priorities of the countries of the region. Ranking of these priorities according to importance differ among countries depending on national contexts. Nonetheless, there was a consensus among members of the panel on the importance of the cross-cutting approaches needed for the implementation of these priorities such as regional collaboration and knowledge sharing, especially on interregional trade, transboundary pests and diseases, innovation (including technologies, digitalization and processes), good governance and partnerships.
43. In the course of its deliberations and rich discussion by participants, the Meeting:
- a) Thanked FAO for its support to the countries of the region during the COVID-19 crisis;
  - b) Highlighted the importance of including measures that support sustainable management of water resources as part of the regional priorities;

- c) Recognized the need for special attention to support countries experiencing protracted crises and those affected by multiple shocks;
- d) Stressed the importance of responding to the specific needs of rural women who were already under economic stress even before COVID-19;
- e) Confirmed the high relevance of the seven priorities of the FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Umbrella Programme and the regional priority actions to the needs of the countries in the region;
- f) Requested FAO to finalize the Regional COVID-19 Response Plan on the basis of the proposed regional priority actions and, considering the deliberations of this meeting, present it to the NERC for endorsement;
- g) Confirmed interest to join the Hand-in-Hand Initiative launched by FAO;
- h) Valued the Regional Consultative Technical Meeting as a mechanism of wider consultation, knowledge sharing and regional collaboration to address the impact of COVID-19 and other common challenges facing the region.

44. The meeting then called upon countries to:

- a) Consider the establishment of a Regional Fund to accelerate food systems and agriculture's transformation in the region by promoting innovation, fostering women economic empowerment and youth employment;
- b) Promote and strengthen regional collaboration among countries of the region especially with regard to interregional trade, joint investments in agriculture based on countries' comparative advantages and addressing transboundary issues like pests and diseases; and
- c) Reiterated the importance of instituting the RCTM as a Preparatory Committee of the Regional Conference in-line with the recommendations of the first RCTM meeting.

45. The Meeting also recommended FAO to:

- a) Consider the suggestions made by countries of the region in finalizing the Agenda/COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan;
- b) Increase its support to countries in crises and countries facing multiple risks; and
- c) Strengthen its work in support of women's economic empowerment.

### **III. Concluding Session**

46. Messrs. OuldAhmed, Khair and Al Bakri provided closing remarks at the end of the Fourth Session of the Meeting;
47. Mr Ould Ahmed thanked Mr Juhail for his valuable contributions to FAO work in the region during his tenure as Chairperson for the Near East Group and congratulated Mr Khair for his election as Chairperson of the Near East Group wishing him all success in his new role. He thanked the Sultanate of Oman and Mr Al Bakri for Chairing the Meeting in an effective manner to achieve its objective. Mr Ould Ahmed also thanked all participants, presenters, panellists and those who intervened in the four sessions of the Meeting. He reconfirmed that all points raised have been captured and will be reflected in the report of the Meeting, which will be presented at the NERC-35.
48. Mr Ould Ahmed then presented a brief summary of the main points that emerged in the four sessions of the Meeting emphasizing the following points:

- a) Throughout the four sessions, there was consensus on: (a) the strategic role of the agriculture sector in responding to and recovering from COVID-19; (b) the need for a strategic shift towards comprehensive food security policies and strategies in the region that reflect the important role of food trade to food security in the region, which necessitates revisiting the existing policies and strategies at national and regional levels; and (c) the need to increase public, private and blended investment in agriculture;
  - b) The need to develop sustainable value chains taking into account: (a) the role of consumers in contributing to the identification of these value chains; (b) the importance of linking the informal sector with these value chains; and (c) the huge social and economic benefits of engaging women and youth in value chains;
  - c) Social protection could play an important role in reducing the vulnerability of smallholders, women and other disadvantaged groups;
  - d) Innovation can play a significant role in accelerating agriculture transformation. The regional fund proposed in the fourth session could stimulate remarkable changes in this regard;
  - e) Countries experiencing protracted crises and those highly vulnerable to multiple risks require special attention and support;
  - f) The need for strategic shift towards managing multiple risks in a coherent and comprehensive approach, which necessitates good risk governance, evidence-based early warning systems complemented by early anticipatory actions; and
  - g) All participants agreed with the FAO priorities at corporate and regional levels. FAO will incorporate the comments that emerged from the fourth session of the Meeting into the regional response and recovery plan.
49. Mr Khair thanked the Sultanate of Oman, FAO, Mr Al Bakri and Mr Ould Ahmed for organizing a successful Meeting despite the challenges posed by COVID-19. He thanked Mr Juhail for his contributions as Chairperson of the Near East Group. Mr Khair valued the selection and logical sequence of the topics discussed at the Meeting, which contributed to the success of the Meeting. He stressed the importance of regional collaboration among the countries of the region and confirmed the commitment of the Near East Group to support the implementation of the outcomes of the meeting as well as to follow-up on the issues that emerged from the Meeting with FAO as well as with other Rome-based Agencies and countries of the region.
50. Mr Al Bakri appreciated the level of participation in the four sessions of the Meeting and, indicated that the Meeting had achieved its objectives and concluded with a comprehensive response and recovery plan for the region that reflects the needs and priorities of the countries. He confirmed that the report of the Meeting will be presented to and discussed at the ministerial meeting in NERC-35. Mr Al Bakri thanked Members, participants and contributors of the four sessions of the Meeting. He thanked Mr Ould Ahmed and the entire FAO team involved in the organization of the Meeting.

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## Appendix A: List of Countries that participated in the Meeting

### I. Member Nations in the FAO Near East Region

1. Afghanistan
2. Algeria
3. Azerbaijan
4. Bahrain
5. Cyprus
6. Djibouti
7. Egypt
8. Iran (Islamic Republic of)
9. Iraq
10. Jordan
11. Kuwait
12. Kyrgyzstan
13. Lebanon
14. Libya
15. Malta
16. Mauritania
17. Morocco
18. Oman
19. Pakistan
20. Qatar
21. Saudi Arabia
22. Somalia
23. the Sudan
24. Syrian Arab Republic
25. Tajikistan
26. Tunisia
27. Turkmenistan
28. United Arab Emirates
29. Yemen

### II. Observe Members

1. Canada

### III. Permanent Observers

1. Palestine



## **Appendix B: Findings from the Regional Technical Dialogue on “One Health approach for managing animal diseases and zoonosis and the impact of COVID-19 on the livestock sector”**

### **Background**

1. More than 60 percent of human infectious diseases and 75 percent of emerging ones, have their origin in animals. The Near East and North Africa (NENA) region, situated in the crossroad between three continents, is exposed to several transboundary animal diseases (Foot-and Mouth disease, Pest of small ruminants, Lumpy Skin disease) and zoonotic diseases (Rift valley fever, Highly pathogenic Avian Influenza, Rabies, MERS-CoV, Brucellosis, Bovine Tuberculosis).
2. Livestock contributes between 30 to 80 percent to agriculture GDP in the NENA region and it is the main source of incomes for vulnerable populations in rural areas. Whereas zoonotic diseases represent a direct threat to human health, livestock diseases have devastating impacts on animal productivity and production, trade, animal products, therefore on the economic development of the region. Climate change, increased animal-human interactions, land use and human encroachment increase the risks of outbreaks and the zoonotic spillover of diseases from animals. In the NENA region, preventing zoonotic pandemics and the “One Health” activities are identified as priority actions of the Regional Strategic Response to the COVID-19 crisis. The meeting focused on the “One Health” approach for managing animal diseases and zoonoses under the impact of COVID-19.

### **Date, place and organizational arrangements**

3. The meeting took place virtually on 20 July 2020 from 11am – 1pm (Cairo time). Mr Yahya Al Mawli, Director of Animal Wealth, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Sultanate of Oman chaired it. Mr Abdessalam OuldAhmed, Regional Representative of FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, introduced the meeting and highlighted the importance of a One Health approach in Transboundary Animal and zoonotic diseases control. Dr Keith Sumption, Chief Veterinary Officer at FAO, delivered the keynote speech on “*Challenges of main TADs in the Near East and North Africa and Zoonotic diseases in times of COVID-19*”.
4. The situation of emerging zoonotic diseases and options for their control were updated by Mr Abdelhakim Mr M. Ali, Chairperson of General Organization for Veterinary Services and CVO, Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation from Egypt, on Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Mr Ali Aldoweriej, Director General of Animal Health from Saudi Arabia, gave an update on the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), and Mr. Ibrahim Eldaghayes, on behalf of the Director-General of the National Center for Animal Health from Libya, on Rift Valley Fever (RVF).
5. Ms Irene Hoffmann, FAO-CBDC, Secretary of the Commission for Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, discussed the important role of biodiversity. She stressed how the One Health approach plays a vital role in biodiversity conservation and should help integrating biodiversity at national level among key ministries. She mentioned that the FAO Commission for Genetic Resources is developing a report on state of world genetic resources for food and agriculture and is planning to organize a dialogue on biological diversity.
6. The presentations were followed by a facilitated discussion on options for ensuring One Health approach under the pressure of COVID-19 implications where all countries and invited organizations such as WHO-EMRO, AOAD, GCC-EWC exchanged their views about issues and priorities for action. The impact of COVID-19 and the need of strengthening One Health with increased collaboration and coordination in control measures were highlighted. Concluding remarks were given by the Chair stating that the priority in the region is preventing, detecting and responding to pandemics at the animal source with a One Health approach.

**Main findings and recommendations**

7. The meeting resulted in the following findings and recommendations:

***Recommendations to countries:***

- a) Establish One Health platforms in collaboration with relevant stakeholders on emerging infectious diseases control and antimicrobial resistance;
- b) Strengthen laboratory capacities for early detection and rapid response to emerging infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance;
- c) Invest in veterinary education to reinforce workforce capacity in surveillance and response to combat emerging infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance; and
- d) Foster Policy Advocacy and enabling implementation.

***Recommendations to FAO:***

- a) Support countries in their efforts to strengthen coordination among all stakeholders in animal-human-ecosystem interface (Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Environment);
- b) Assist countries in developing comprehensive national One Health Action Plans in collaboration with WHO, OIE, AOAD, GCC and UMA;
- c) Support the strengthening of laboratory capacities for early detection and rapid response to emerging infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance;
- d) Support countries in improving intersectoral collaboration through coordination of Animal Health and Human Health activities in Zoonotic diseases, Food Safety, Antimicrobial Resistance and Environment;
- e) Support countries in the design and implementation of national veterinary strategies in areas of biosafety, biosecurity, quarantine systems, veterinary public health and animal health services to combat emerging infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistance;
- f) Support countries in the implementation of targeted capacity development programmes;
- g) Support countries in strengthening research on emerging zoonotic diseases especially on COVID-19 and the role of animals; and
- h) Support countries in promoting livestock and animal products value chains to overcome the impact of COVID-19 and ensure Food Security.

## **Appendix C: Findings from the Regional Technical Dialogue on “Building back better: Towards sustainable water management for food security in the Near East and North Africa Region”**

### **Background**

1. COVID-19 has highlighted the vulnerability of the Near East and North Africa region in terms of food security and its heavy dependence on food trade. Water is the main limiting factor for achieving high food self-sufficiency levels, and the countries of the region increasingly rely on food imports to satisfy their food requirements. In many countries of the region, crop yields have increased, resulting from the adoption of modern irrigation systems, changing cropping patterns and enhanced on-farm management. However, while increasing water productivity is viewed as a strategic goal in many countries, observations have shown that without a better control of water withdrawal and in the absence of clear water allocation regimes that are guided by resources sustainability, efforts towards higher water productivity tend to result in unsustainable increase in water demand.
2. The meeting intended to seize the opportunity offered by the COVID-19 crisis to highlight the chronic development challenge of water scarcity within the prospects of “building back better”. A combination of measures to enhance food security through higher water productivity within water resources sustainability limits, intraregional trade collaboration, investment in alternative technology like desalination and wastewater treatment, as well as the adoption of climate smart agriculture, are among the options that were offered for discussion in order to help move the region towards a sustainable and resilient development pathway.

### **Date, place and organizational arrangements**

3. The meeting took place virtually on 21 July 2020 from 11am – 1pm (Cairo time). It was chaired by Mr Hamdan Salem Al-Wahaibi, Assistant Director General of the Research Center of Agriculture in Oman.
4. The meeting was introduced by Ms Sasha Koo, Deputy Director, Land and Water Division, FAO, who presented a series of options and policies for sustainable water management. Mr Pasquale Steduto, Senior Water Adviser (FAO) gave a keynote presentation on the theme “COVID-19 as a trigger to streamline water management towards sustainability”.
5. The presentation was followed by a Panel Discussion, moderated by Mr Jean-Marc Faurès, Regional Programme Leader, Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, FAO and comprising five panellists: Mr Hazim El-Naser, Chairperson of the Middle East Water Forum, Jordan; Ms Akissa Bahri, Secretary of State for Water Resources, Tunisia; Mr Waleed Zubari, Professor, Water Resources Management Programme, Arabian Gulf University – Bahrain; Mr Hamed Suliman Al-Dhuhli, Director of Soil and Water Research Center - Oman; Ms Roula Majdalani, Leader of the Climate Change and Natural Resources Sustainability Cluster, ESCWA. The Panel Discussion was followed by a Facilitated Discussion where all countries could exchange their views about issues and priorities for action. Mr Mohamed Al-Hamdi, Senior Land and Water Officer at the FAO Regional Office provided a summary of the main elements of the meeting.

### **Main findings and recommendations**

6. The meeting discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on agriculture and food security in the Near East and North Africa region, with the objective of seizing the opportunity offered by the COVID-19 crisis to highlight the chronic development challenge of water scarcity within the prospects of “building back better”. The meeting started with a global view on the impacts of water scarcity on socio-economic development, and how the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is supporting the enhancement of water management

through various initiatives, activities and projects under the framework of SDG 6. Various issues of relevance to the region were highlighted, including:

- a) Similarities and differences between the current COVID-19 pandemic and the 2007-2008 Food Crisis, and lessons learned in terms of linkage between water and food security;
  - b) The implications of the crisis and of the country responses on water availability, and the need to manage water within sustainable limits;
  - c) The relevance and importance of non-conventional water;
  - d) The need to consider trade and incorporating virtual water as part of the region's food security equation, with a focus on intraregional trade to contribute to food security; and
  - e) The importance of dialogue and cooperation to include institutional coordination and policy coherence between the water-agriculture sectors and collaboration within countries and among the development partners.
7. The panel and open discussion stressed the need for adaptive groundwater governance, including effective allocation mechanisms to achieve sustainable water use while considering subsidies, monitoring technologies, institutional setups, climate smart agriculture, and building on successes like in the case of Jordan and the groundwater contracts in Morocco.
8. The following issues were also discussed:
- a) The need to consider food security and water security objectives in a coordinated way and to acknowledge the region's limitations in terms of food production;
  - b) The potential offered by the use of non-conventional water to reduce pressure on fresh water resources and the need to incorporate them within integrated management plans;
  - c) The potential for industrial farming including hydroponics and the importance of considering the reduction of food loss and waste as part of the food security solution;
  - d) The opportunities offered by technologies like desalination, solar powered systems, but also technologies for better monitoring, planning and management of water use like remote sensing and water accounting;
  - e) The importance to consider water quality and reduction in pollution as a critical element to be addressed;
  - f) The need to incorporate small-scale farmers in programmes to enhance water management at farm level through promoting, strengthening and empowering appropriate institutional set-ups, including cooperatives and water user associations; and
  - g) The substantial impact of climate change on water in the region, and the need to develop adaptation programmes in agriculture that mainstream climate impacts and enhance the resilience of agricultural systems, including financing modalities that move attention to grants more than loans.