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Thirty-seventh Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

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Egypt	Morocco	Türkiye
Iran, Islamic Republic of	Oman	Turkmenistan
Iraq	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
Jordan	Qatar	Yemen

Date and place of the Sessions of the FAO Regional Conferences for the Near East

First	- Cairo, Egypt, 2-14 February 1948
Second	- Bloudane, Syria, 28 August – 6 September 1951
Third	- Cairo, Egypt, 1-9 September 1953
Fourth	- Damascus, Syria*, 10-20 December 1958
Fifth	- Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of), 21 September – 1 October 1960
Sixth	- Tel Amara, Lebanon, 30 July – 8 August 1962
Seventh	- Cairo, Egypt**, 19-31 October 1964
Eighth	- Khartoum, Sudan, 24 January – 2 February 1967
Ninth	- Baghdad, Iraq, 21 September – 1 October 1968
Tenth	- Islamabad, Pakistan, 12-22 September 1970
Eleventh	- Kuwait, Kuwait, 9-19 September 1972
Twelfth	- Amman, Jordan, 31 August – 9 September 1974
Thirteenth	- Tunis, Tunisia, 4-11 October 1976
Fourteenth	- Damascus, Syria, 9-16 September 1978
Fifteenth	- Rome, Italy, 21-25 April 1981
Sixteenth	- Nicosia, Cyprus, 25-29 October 1982
Seventeenth	- Aden, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, 11-15 March 1984
Eighteenth	- Istanbul, Türkiye, 17-21 March 1986
Nineteenth	- Muscat, Oman, 13-17 March 1988
Twentieth	- Tunis, Tunisia, 12-16 March 1990
Twenty-first	- Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of), 17-21 May 1992
Twenty-second	- Amman, Jordan, 3-6 July 1994
Twenty-third	- Rabat, Morocco, 26-29 March 1996
Twenty-fourth	- Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, 21-25 March 1998
Twenty-fifth	- Beirut, Lebanon, 20-24 March 2000
Twenty-sixth	- Tehran, Iran (Islamic Republic of), 9-13 March 2002
Twenty-seventh	- Doha, State of Qatar, 13-17 March 2004
Twenty-eighth	- Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, 12-16 March 2006
Twenty-ninth	- Cairo, the Arab Republic of Egypt, 1-5 March 2008
Thirtieth	- Khartoum, the Republic of the Sudan, 4-8 December 2010
Thirty-first	- Rome, Italy, 14-18 May 2012
Thirty-second	- Rome, Italy, 24-28 February 2014
Thirty-third	- Rome, Italy, 9-13 May 2016
Thirty-fourth	- Rome, Italy, 7-11 May 2018
Thirty-fifth	- Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 21-22 September 2020 (virtual)
Thirty-six	- Baghdad, Iraq, 10- 13 January 2022 (virtual); and 7-8 February 2022 (hybrid)
Thirty-seventh	- Amman, Jordan, 5-8 February 2024 (virtual); and 4-5 March 2024 (hybrid)

*Known as the United Arab Republic from 01/03/1958

**Known as the United Arab Republic until 02/09/1971

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SUMMARY OF MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Matters for the Attention of the Council

- *The Strategic Framework, priorities, and results in the region (Paragraph 44).*
- *Decentralized Offices network (Paragraph 45).*
- *Update on the implementation of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy (Paragraphs 46-51).*
- *Update on the implementation of FAO Strategy on Climate Change (Paragraphs 52-53).*

Matters for the Attention of the Conference

- *Accelerating Transformation of Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa (Paragraphs 11-13).*
- *Summary of the Recommendations of Regional Commissions and Major Meetings in the Near East (Paragraphs 14-22).*
- *Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa (Paragraphs 23-25).*
- *Enabling Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Transformation in the Near East and North Africa (Paragraphs 26-30).*
- *Accelerating Transformation Towards Sustainable Markets, Trade and Consumption (Paragraphs 31-34).*
- *Greening Agriculture: Towards Transformation to Efficient and Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems (Paragraphs 35-38).*
- *Anticipatory Action to address the impacts of compounded crises (Paragraphs 39-43).*

I. Introductory Items

Organization of the Meeting

1. The 37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) was organized in two parts: the Senior Officers Meeting (SOM) from 5 to 8 February 2024 and the Ministerial Session from 4 to 5 March 2024. The SOM was organized virtually, and the Ministerial Session was conducted in-person with virtual participation.

2. The Meeting was attended by 335 participants. Participants represented ministers, deputy ministers, and senior officers from the ministries of agriculture, water, environment and health from 19 countries – including 17 Members of the region, as well as permanent representatives of governments to FAO, FAO staff and representatives of regional organizations, the private sector, civil society and academia.

Opening Session and Inaugural Ceremony

3. The Director-General, Dr QU Dongyu, delivered a statement to the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East at the inaugural ceremony of the Ministerial Meeting, which may be found at: <https://www.fao.org/about/meetings/regional-conferences/nerc37/documents/en/>.

4. H. E. Dr Bisher Khasawneh, Prime Minister of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan attended the inaugural ceremony of the Ministerial Meeting and delivered a statement to the Regional Conference, which may be found at: [Speech of the Prime Minister At the Opening of the 37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East](#).

5. The Senior Officers Meeting was opened with statements by H.E. Eng. Khaled Hneifat, Minister for Agriculture of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Chairperson of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East, and Mr Abdulkhalek Elwaer, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa.

6. Mr Elwaer welcomed the participants and thanked them for their attendance. Mr Elwaer highlighted the importance of the meeting and its role in setting the stage for the Ministerial Session to be held from 4 to 5 March 2024. Mr Elwaer underscored the relevance of the theme of the Session, in light of the current challenges that the region is facing, including climate change, conflicts and scarce water resources that resulted in increased dependency on food imports and vulnerability to the spikes in food prices with their pronounced effect on the accessibility and affordability of marginalized groups. Additionally, Mr Elwaer outlined FAO's efforts in working with Members to mitigate these challenges and stressed the need for making concerted, collaborative efforts to accelerate the transformation of agrifood systems. Mr Elwaer thanked H.E. Eng. Khaled Hneifat for accepting to chair the 37th Session of NERC.

7. H.E. Eng. Khaled Hneifat welcomed the participants and thanked FAO for having Jordan as host to NERC. H.E. Eng. Khaled Hneifat highlighted the challenges in the achievement of sustainable agrifood systems amid the scarce natural resources base and sociopolitical conflicts that characterized the region.

Election of the Chairperson, Vice Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur

8. The Regional Conference elected Dr Nizar Haddad, Director-General of the National Agriculture Research Centre, Jordan, as Chairperson of the SOM and Mr Zaid Al-Ani, Counsellor, Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in Rome, as Rapporteur.

9. The Regional Conference elected H.E. Eng. Khaled Hneifat, Minister for Agriculture of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as Chairperson of the Ministerial Meeting.

Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

10. The Regional Conference adopted the Provisional Agenda and Timetable with the addition of an item related to the situation in Gaza related to food security and related matters under the mandate of

the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in alignment with the decision as adopted by the 174th Session of the FAO Council, requested by the Near East Regional Group.

II. Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Matters

A. *Accelerating Transformation of Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa*

11. The Regional Conference took note of the presentation delivered by FAO on Item 5 “Accelerating Transformation of Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa”.

12. The Regional Conference:

- a. stressed the need for increasing production and productivity;
- b. stressed the importance of equitable access of smallholder farmers to agricultural inputs, resources, goods and services, not only access to food and healthy diets;
- c. highlighted that when discussing access as one of the 4 A’s¹, it should not just be about access for consumers but also access for producers to materials and markets so that they can be better integrated into food systems;
- d. confirmed that strengthened regional integration is an important goal as no one country can achieve food security and nutrition on its own;
- e. recognized the need to make agrifood systems more sustainable;
- f. expressed concerns about the impact of climate change and stressed the need for resilient and sustainable agrifood systems and food supply chains;
- g. stressed the need to have an inclusive and sustainable agrifood system, taking into account sustainable management of natural resources, including forests and rangelands;
- h. stressed the importance of promoting regional collaboration, including promoting interregional trade;
- i. emphasized that access should also include access to factors of production, especially land and water, and not only access to food;
- j. stressed the need to facilitate cooperation and collaboration with civil society, as civil society can play an important role; and
- k. underscored the need to promote the exchange of knowledge and innovative solutions to common problems, information among countries and information on projects/initiative related to agrifood systems carried in each country.

13. The Regional Conference called upon countries to:

- a. focus on the mentioned accelerators for the transformation of their agrifood systems;
- b. harness the potential of inter- and intraregional cooperation in agriculture, food security and nutrition and related issues, by increasing trade and investment; and
- c. revisit their fiscal and financial systems and allocations in the agriculture and food sectors, in order to reorient them towards transforming agrifood systems.

¹ Availability, Access, Affordability, and Adequacy.

B. Summary of the Recommendations of Regional Commissions and Major Meetings in the Near East

14. The Regional Conference reviewed the Report of the Regional Commission for Fisheries, took note of the Report and the presentation on the Commissions for controlling the Desert Locust in the Central and Western Regions and the Report of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission.

15. Members took note of the key messages that emerged from the Report of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission including:

- a. supporting countries in strengthening their forest and rangeland monitoring systems to measure agrosilvopastoral, social, economic and environmental values in response to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as other pledges, such as the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework;
- b. supporting the UN Declaration of 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists;
- c. supporting countries to contribute to conserving and restoring biodiversity while improving nutrition, food security and livelihoods through the identification of opportunities, challenges and specific technical support requirements for the sustainable use of non-wood forest products (NWFPs) and pastoral value chain; and
- d. accelerating action on the ground for combatting desertification and restoring ecosystems.

16. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:

- a. support countries in terms of resource mobilization and facilitating access to sources of climate finance; and
- b. continue supporting Members with the formulation and implementation of development projects that integrate natural resources and strengthen cross-sectoral work to combat desertification in the region.

17. The Regional Conference reviewed the Report of the Regional Commission for Fisheries and noted FAO's efforts in support of the concerned countries; strongly supported the establishment of the regional Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Aquaculture and Fishery Organization (RAAFO), and called upon the concerned countries to collaborate on promoting this establishment, in coordination and alignment with existing efforts by other entities, such as the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (PERSGA).

18. Regional Conference took note of the of the Regional Consultative Technical Meeting (RCTM), organized virtually from 23 to 25 October 2023, presented by Mr Ayman Omer, Senior Field Programme Officer and Delivery Manager of Regional Priority 4 (Resilience), FAO, who highlighted the objective of the meeting, outlined its outcomes and featured the following key highlights:

- a. the increasing impact of conflicts on all aspects of food security and nutrition;
- b. the region's vulnerability to external shocks in light of increased food imports;
- c. the need for a holistic approach to address the region's interconnected challenges;
- d. the importance of providing food security-related data analytics for policy and strategic directions;
- e. the significant role of trade, investment and innovation in boosting food security;
- f. the importance of regional collaboration in addressing common and transboundary issues;
- g. the strategic relevance of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative to the region; and
- h. the importance of ensuring synergies among the four Regional Priorities of FAO.

19. The Regional Conference took note of the 5th Meeting of the High-Level Joint Water-Agriculture Technical Committee (HLJTC) of the League of Arab States, held in Cairo on 1 November 2023, presented by Mr Mohamed AlHamdi, Senior Land and Water Officer, FAO. Mr AlHamdi outlined the mandate of the HLJTC, which is to enhance policy coherence/convergence/coordination between water and other sectors and enhance the Science-Policy Interface Work Modality. Mr AlHamdi highlighted the main points of the 5th Meeting of HLJTC Action Plan, which include:

- a. the implementation of the Action Plan of the Cairo Declaration;
- b. guidelines on water allocation for agriculture;
- c. non-conventional water resources; and
- d. cross-sector data requirements.

20. The 32nd Session of the Commission for controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC) and the 10th Session of the Commission for controlling the Desert Locust in the Western Region (CLCPRO) resulted in 39 agreed recommendations, including encouraging Members to regularly prepare, activate and continuously update national Desert Locust action and emergency plans and to provide the Commission's Secretariat with the latest update. Members, especially the breeding countries, need to institutionalize all the units/centres/departments/directorates operating for the Desert Locust control and grant them administrative and financial autonomy with a sufficient annual operational budget, in order to enable them to conduct various Desert Locust control operations.

21. The Regional Conference took note of the key messages which emerged from the update on the Desert Locust upsurge in the region and the efforts made to address it.

22. The Regional Conference called on countries to consider the importance of taking preventive measures and to invest more in combatting the Desert Locust to prevent the dangerous consequences and risks of its spread across the region and beyond.

C. Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa

23. The Regional Conference took note of the document *Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa region* prepared by FAO.

24. The Regional Conference highlighted the importance of women's empowerment and gender equality for food security and nutrition, and encouraged countries, when appropriate, to utilize the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) *Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition*, and stressed the importance of:

- a. enhancing women's and girl's resilience in areas affected by conflict and climate change as they are disproportionately affected;
- b. addressing the gender gap in accessing and benefitting from productive resources, training, income generating opportunities, innovation and technologies;
- c. facilitating access to markets and finance to strengthen women-led micro- and small-scale enterprises in the agrifood sector and address gender disparities in bank account ownership;
- d. addressing land tenure disparities by strengthening gender-sensitive policy and legal frameworks; and
- e. developing programmes that enable gender- and age specific rural transformation, promote more opportunities of decent rural employment for women, and reduce women's burden in unpaid domestic activities.

25. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:

- a. support countries in collecting sex- and age-disaggregated data, and expanding evidence on women's contribution to agrifood systems in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region,

focusing on women, youth and people with disabilities' access to resources, goods and services; and

- b. support countries in reducing gender digital gap in order to support women's participation in the digitalization and transformation of the agrifood sector.

D. Enabling Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Transformation in the Near East and North Africa

26. The Regional Conference took note of document *Enabling Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Transformation in the Near East and North Africa* prepared by FAO.

27. The Regional Conference emphasized:

- a. the importance of ensuring inclusivity for achieving rural transformation, noting the several challenges affecting the region, including poverty and unemployment, climate change, migration, instability, wars and conflict;
- b. that rural transformation requires addressing inequalities and their underlying causes across the dimensions of gender, economic class, ethnicity and location;
- c. that enhancing social security is key to enabling farmers to work decently;
- d. the importance of addressing land tenure and land titles and fragmentation deriving from inherited land and facilitating access of small producers to land resources;
- e. the importance of developing value chains and investing in human capital of rural communities to promote sustainable rural transformation and rural development;
- f. that the region is characterized by persisting urbanization, with large farms increasing while small farms disappearing. Targeted policies, incentives and tailored support are needed to address the specific needs of small-scale farmers across the rural-urban continuum;
- g. that targeted strategies are needed to support small-scale farmers' capacity development along with interventions fostering value addition and marketing, rural finance and encouraging diversification and off-farm enterprises;
- h. that interventions on rural transformation require a clear definition of rural areas, of farmers and rural people, reflecting the evolving socioeconomic trends and precise targeting criteria;
- i. that innovation was highlighted as a key lever for rural transformation, provided it meets small-scale farmers' needs and demands;
- j. that collective actions emerged as key, especially through the role of cooperatives supporting small-scale farmers in service delivery and in accessing resources. The discussion pointed to the opportunity of taking advantage of the circular economy; and
- k. that rural transformation should preserve biodiversity and natural resources. Biodiversity is key to food security, and empowering small-scale farmers and investments are needed in that regard. Small-scale farmers can add value to their products by using production techniques that do not affect biodiversity. A case in point is the beekeeping sector, which offers viable market opportunities, yet it requires a well-preserved biodiversity.

28. The Regional Conference acknowledged the establishment of the Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services (AFRAS), launched during SOM, as a platform for regional exchange, networking and advocacy for advancing rural advisory services as catalyst for inclusive rural transformation.

29. The Regional Conference called upon countries to:

- a. further strengthen capacities of women in accessing resources, markets, assets and capacity-building programmes, highlighting gender equality and equity in national institutional frameworks and agricultural programmes and strategies;

- b. encourage diversification of rural activities including extension services and transformative agriculture to build more sustainable and resilient rural communities, while making sure to preserve and leverage biodiversity, and pursue targeted investments in these sectors; and
 - c. foster targeted policies that tackle inequalities in rural transformation, enabling small-scale and vulnerable farmers of different ages and gender to improve their livelihoods and work decently.
30. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:
- a. support countries in building a more enabling environment helping cooperatives and producers' organizations to better play their role in empowering small-scale producers, and facilitating their access to the markets, resources including land innovative capacity-building programmes, as well as to decision makers;
 - b. generate evidence-and-gender-disaggregated data to inform inclusive and equitable policies and strategies that tackle rural poverty and inequalities;
 - c. develop capacities and multistakeholder processes to shape conducive policies and holistic interventions;
 - d. support the development of programmes to accelerate inclusive rural transformation, leveraging innovation, support market-oriented farming, entrepreneurship, technology and digital solutions, and access to finance, services and markets;
 - e. leverage the opportunities that the circular economy can offer to enhance rural livelihoods; and
 - f. facilitate networking, knowledge sharing and multistakeholder cooperation at regional and country levels, including by supporting the Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services.

E. Accelerating Transformation Towards Sustainable Markets, Trade and Consumption

31. The Regional Conference took note of document *Accelerating Transformation Towards Sustainable Markets, Trade and Consumption* prepared by FAO.
32. In particular, the Regional Conference took note of the following:
- a. the importance of regional and international trade as an enabler for food security and nutrition;
 - b. the importance of coherent approaches and the significance of mainstreaming nutrition goals into national agrifood system policies, programmes and strategies;
 - c. the need to develop robust infrastructure and logistic systems, including transportation, storage and cooling;
 - d. the need for repurposing and targeting the existing agricultural support and subsidies towards more efficiency, equity, resilience and sustainability by strengthening climate smart agricultural practices, applying a variety of input options, delivering training on proper agronomic practices, and the adoption of technology;
 - e. the importance of strengthening rural-urban linkages by encouraging coordination with municipalities;
 - f. the importance of endorsing the *Guidelines for action on food loss and waste reduction in the Near East and North Africa* and the recommendations for their implementation in national food loss and waste reduction strategies and action plans;
 - g. the importance of giving priority to agrifood systems' interventions and cross-sectoral programmes through investments for improved food security and nutrition; and
 - h. market information tools and platforms available in FAO, as well as the analytical products produced by the Organization, can facilitate informed policy decisions by Members.

33. The Regional Conference then called upon countries to:
- a. strengthen coordination for improving farmers' integration in domestic, regional and international markets by promoting the harmonization of regulatory systems and food safety standards;
 - b. adopt and strengthen policies to encourage transformation in production and consumption for healthy diets, and develop institutional settings that effectively analyse and act on vulnerabilities in the agrifood system;
 - c. support increasing wheat production and maximize the benefits arising from the technologies made available along with developing seed industry and other infrastructure;
 - d. harmonize trade regulations to promote regional trade, particularly in food security commodities; and
 - e. support the food security observatories at country, subregional and regional levels, established by FAO.
34. The Regional Conference also recommended FAO to:
- a. develop and generate for knowledge products, information and exchange, timely, reliable, accurate and user-friendly data and analytics;
 - b. support Members in developing their market information and intelligence systems, including preparing dashboards of food security indicators; and
 - c. continue providing technical support to Members to develop/strengthen nutrition policies.

F. Greening Agriculture: Towards Transformation to Efficient and Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems

35. The Regional Conference took note of document *Greening Agriculture: Towards Transformation to Efficient and Climate Resilient Agrifood Systems* prepared by FAO.
36. The Regional Conference:
- a. recognized the increasing efforts to secure financing for adaptation, which involves leveraging international climate finance mechanisms and fostering partnerships to support sustainable agriculture projects;
 - b. emphasized the importance of empowering women in rural areas, and their role in ensuring inclusiveness in natural resources management and contributing to achieving the SDGs;
 - c. underscored the need to find a mechanism whereby the financial instrument on loss and damage takes into consideration the agricultural sector, ensuring that parties will have the benefits of this instrument;
 - d. stressed the importance of pasture and rangelands in terms of biodiversity preservation, soil and water conservation, and preventing soil erosion, as well as the role of forestry which, despite being scarce in the region, has a significant role in biodiversity conservation and livelihoods support;
 - e. underscored the need to adopt innovative technologies and practices, including climate-smart agriculture, precision farming and digital agriculture solutions, enhancing productivity, resilience and sustainability; and
 - f. highlighted the importance of developing and implementing policy frameworks that support greening agriculture and facilitate the mainstreaming of sustainable practices into national policies and decision-making processes.

37. The Regional Conference then called upon countries to:
- a. consider establishing adequate agreements on transboundary water between countries to secure equitable water shares, particularly for downstream nations such as Egypt, Iraq and Syrian Arab Republic, which are adversely affected by reduced river flows;
 - b. utilize the potential of native plant species for the restoration of degraded lands, due to their high adaptative capacity and resiliency to climate change; and
 - c. join the *COP 28 UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food System, and Climate Action*, launched by the United Arab Emirates at the 28th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 28) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
38. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:
- a. support countries in mobilizing international finance to support the transition to sustainable, climate-resilient agricultural systems; this includes leveraging the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility, accessing climate finance mechanisms, and investing in sustainable infrastructure and practices;
 - b. further strengthen regional and international collaboration in sharing knowledge, best practices and innovations in sustainable agriculture and natural resource management; this includes engaging in multilateral frameworks to address collectively climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation; and
 - c. support countries, subject to available extra-budgetary resources, in investing and improving knowledge on decarbonization scenarios for forests, agrosilvopastoral systems and also the wetlands in the region.

G. Anticipatory Action to address the impacts of compounded crises

39. The Regional Conference took note of document *Anticipatory Action to address the impacts of compounded crises* prepared by FAO.
40. The Regional Conference:
- a. noted that long-term stresses and recurrent shocks in the region and their compounded impacts on food security and nutrition establish the need for strategic need for anticipatory actions for predictable hazards;
 - b. stressed the importance of information, climate data and early warning systems in informing well targeted anticipatory actions;
 - c. recognized the need to contextualize anticipatory actions, especially in contexts affected by compounded risks, noting the importance of conflict-sensitive anticipatory actions and interventions that contribute to peace;
 - d. noted that in conflict-affected contexts, anticipatory actions to protect agriculture livelihoods and food security should support both host and displaced populations;
 - e. highlighted the need to strengthen human and financial capacities, along with institutional frameworks for effective implementation;
 - f. highlighted the importance of collaborative work across sectors and between regional countries, especially around monitoring surveillance of transboundary risks and early warning; and
 - g. encouraged learning from experience and regional coordination.
41. The Regional Conference called upon Members to:
- a. fully integrate anticipatory action in disaster risk management and climate change adaptation policies at the national level;

- b. enhance hazard-specific and multi-hazard risk information systems, and establish early warning systems that are complemented by anticipatory action triggers;
 - c. enhance technical national and regional platforms to build collaboration and facilitate and strengthen multi-risk governance at scale;
 - d. allocate forecast-based and flexible financial resources for timely and appropriate anticipatory actions;
 - e. establish a regional disaster preparedness and emergency trust fund; and
 - f. establish a regional fund to address transboundary pests and diseases.
42. The Regional Conference requested the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development to integrate disaster risk reduction in the organization's priorities.
43. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:
- a. mainstream anticipatory action in emergencies and resilience programmes;
 - b. advocate for anticipatory financing at regional/country level, including through using evidence-based data on the benefits of anticipatory action;
 - c. build Members' capacity in developing anticipatory actions, including for multi-hazard monitoring, triggers and protocols;
 - d. technically support countries in establishing early warning systems, surveillance capacities and observatories;
 - e. promote and facilitate knowledge sharing among countries on risk governance, early warning and anticipatory action;
 - f. ensure coordinated actions within and across sectors and at all levels; and
 - g. engage with the Arab Coordination Mechanism on Disaster Risk Reduction through the League of Arab States.

III. Programme and Budget Matters

A. The Strategic Framework, Priorities, and Results in the Region

44. The Regional Conference:
- a. took note of FAO's work and results achieved under the Regional Priorities in the 2022-2023 biennium, representing the first biennium under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31;
 - b. appreciated efforts towards restructuring the Regional and Subregional Offices, and the creation of a dedicated Strategy and Policy Unit;
 - c. appreciated FAO's response to the priorities identified by the 36th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East, including under key corporate strategies and initiatives, including the Hand-in Hand Initiative, the One Country One Priority Product and the 1000 Digital Village Initiative;
 - d. reaffirmed the high relevance of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative to the region, and acknowledged the potentials of the Initiative in promoting investments in support of agrifood systems transformation, through global, regional and country-led Investment Fora;
 - e. acknowledged the importance of the continued delivery of normative and knowledge products and services, such as regulations, voluntary guidelines, legal instruments, studies at national and regional levels, and policy dialogue based on evidence;
 - f. appreciated FAO's work on strategic foresight and efforts to incorporate forward-looking analysis into its programming, particularly in the context of uncertainties stemming from climate change, conflicts and the chronic scarcity of land and water in the region;

- g. highlighted the relevance of strategic foresight for undertaking Common Country Analyses and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks;
- h. urged FAO to fully incorporate the Biennial Theme 2024–25 “Water resources management for the four betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”;
- i. encouraged FAO to strengthen implementation support through innovative approaches and initiatives such as data analytics and capacity development in transforming agrifood systems;
- j. endorsed the four Regional Priorities for the 2024-2025 biennium based on key trends, issues and challenges in the Near East and North Africa region. Further appreciated the addition of the Programme Priority Area “Blue Transformation” in Regional Priority 1; and
- k. appreciated the strategic initiatives by FAO, such as the Regional Leadership Development Academy, and the analytical work in form of regional and subregional observatory on food security and nutrition, and country-level food security monitoring dashboards.

B. Decentralized Offices network

45. The Regional Conference:
- a. appreciated the update on Decentralized Offices with a proposed way forward to strengthen the Organization’s work at country level, in response to guidance from the Governing Bodies;
 - b. endorsed the overarching guiding principles of tailoring the proposed approach to countries’ evolution, specificities and needs; building in flexibility, agility and strengthened capacity; reflecting modern ways of operating and delivering; implementing changes in a progressive manner; and maintaining the overall regional budgetary allocation to the FAO Country Office network;
 - c. supported proposed measures and models to adjust the FAO Country Offices to better respond to Members’ expectations for FAO’s support and delivery under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and beyond, such as by providing the FAO Representative in Egypt with an additional capacity as “Deputy Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa”. The terms of reference will define the duties and responsibilities of the FAO Representative, ensuring the effective delivery of the country’s needs, as established in the Country Programming Framework; and
 - d. requested FAO to proceed with a transparent consultation process with countries for the progressive implementation of the proposed arrangements.

C. Update on the Implementation of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy

46. The Regional Conference took note of the implementation of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy (the Strategy) in the region as a key tool to support the delivery of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, and support Members to harness science and innovation to realize context-specific and systemic solutions for more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

47. The Regional Conference noted:
- a. the mission, vision and guiding principles of the regional strategy and the consultative process that underpinned its development and endorsement in the context of NERC 36;
 - b. that FAO works at the interface of science and innovation and capacity building for actors in the region, and that the Strategy is based on three pillars: strengthening science- and evidence-based decision-making; supporting innovation and technology at regional and country level;
 - c. the implementation of the Strategy regional action plan with its focus on the generation of evidence, development of analytical and decision support tools and the establishment of thematic technical networks and platforms;

- d. the relevance of regional cooperation on science, innovation and digital technologies harnessed through regional dialogues and knowledge sharing and of inter-agency cooperation including for the mapping and assessment of technologies that are viable for small-scale producers and for the development of digital and e-agricultural strategy and joint application; and
- e. the efforts in enhancing access to and use of innovative technologies by agrifood systems actors, particularly young agripreneurs, nurturing effective partnerships and collaborative initiatives.

48. The Regional Conference valued FAO's focus on science, innovation and digitalization in support of agrifood systems transformation, in line with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, the *four betters* and the Organization's flagship initiatives, including One Country One Priority Product, the Green Cities Initiative and Reducing Food Loss and Waste.

49. The Regional Conference emphasized the importance of supporting countries, including through initiatives such as the Farmer Observatory, the development of agricultural strategies, the promotion of digital literacy and development of mobile applications accessible to farmers.

50. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to continue monitoring, learning, adapting and refining the implementation of the Science and Innovation Strategy to reflect the context-specific needs of countries.

51. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to enhance its work on the issues of One Health and antimicrobial resistance (AMR), in collaboration with regional and international partners.

D. Update on the Implementation of FAO Strategy on Climate Change

52. The Regional Conference called upon countries to:

- a. align the outcomes of the United Framework Convention on Climate Change COP 27 and COP 28 with ongoing United Nations processes towards a programmatic approach, particularly that of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and food systems national pathways integrated in climate action;
- b. invest in building capacities of agricultural sectors stakeholders – national institutions, civil society, women's groups and farmers' organizations – on climate change impacts and solutions, enhancing their engagement with national climate change planning processes, including National Adaptation Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions and Long-Term Strategies;
- c. use FAO's tools and knowledge for the implementation of climate change actions in agricultural sectors that transform agrifood systems to become more sustainable, resilient to climate stress and shocks, and a viable source of livelihoods, especially for smallholder farmers faced with short- and long-term changes in temperature, precipitation and the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events; and
- d. adopt a systematic programming approach to climate finance by strengthening coordination between agricultural sectors towards whole-of-government, evidence-based national climate change actions.

53. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:

- a. continue to advocate for the strategic inclusion of agrifood systems in climate solutions in global climate fora, ensuring climate action is inclusive and responsive to all segments of the society including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, marginalized communities and the most vulnerable;
- b. continue supporting countries to mobilize technical and financial resources towards climate-resilient agrifood systems, including support to assess climate-related loss and damage; and
- c. support countries in capacity building and knowledge exchange in partnership with regional institutions, drawing on new and enlarged networks and partnerships with climate change and food systems actors, such as the civil society and the private sector.

E. Building Resilience through Transforming Agrifood Systems

54. The Regional Conference:
- a. recognized the region's chronic vulnerability to shocks and stresses mainly caused by the region's fragile agrosilvopastoral and natural ecosystems, heavy dependence on food imports, and high population growth, among others;
 - b. distinguished that climate-related hazards are the most frequent hazards, while conflict remains the hazard with the most impact and continues to be the main driver of food insecurity in the region;
 - c. recognized that smallholder farmers who depend on rainfed agriculture and the urban poor are most affected by overlapping shocks including conflict and climate-related hazards; and
 - d. recognized that the Regional Priority on building resilience (RP4) through its five strategic action areas contributes towards sustainably improving food security in the region.
55. The Regional Conference called upon countries to:
- a. adopt a holistic approach to build resilience and proactively manage agrifood systems' risk, including through:
 - i. establishing or strengthening a multi-hazard set-up that cuts across different ministries and entities involved in agriculture and food sectors;
 - ii. formulating effective, evidence-based, inclusive (including gender, youth and most vulnerable groups) and risk-informed policies, strategies and plans;
 - iii. establishing or strengthening actionable early warning systems complemented with triggers for anticipatory action;
 - iv. establishing flexible financing mechanisms for timely and appropriate anticipatory actions; and
 - v. expanding the coverage and effectiveness of social protection systems, as well as crop and livestock insurance systems, ensuring that they are shock-responsive, gender- and age-, nutrition- and risk-sensitive.
 - b. adopt a One Health approach to effectively manage biological hazards and risks within and across the human-animal-plant sectors;
 - c. reinforce regional collaboration to address transboundary pests and diseases, and to promote peace and stability in the region; and
 - d. establish regional disaster preparedness and emergency trust fund.
56. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:
- a. generate evidence to inform holistic management of multiple risks; and
 - b. pilot and promote innovative approaches and practices for effective management of multiple risks, including those related to disaster risk reduction and climate-smart agriculture good practices on-farm and off-farm including early warning systems, anticipatory actions, conflict-sensitive and peace-responsive programming, shock-responsive, gender-age-nutrition and risk-sensitive social protection and crop and livestock insurance.

F. The ongoing serious situation in the Gaza Strip, the escalation in the Red Sea and the subsequent consequences on the regional and global chain of food supplies

57. Following a request by the Near East Regional Group, the Regional Conference agreed to discuss the item on the situation in Gaza, the escalation in the Red Sea and the subsequent consequences on the regional and global chain of food supplies in the region.

58. The Regional Conference:
- a. recognized the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian territory particularly in the Gaza Strip, which has deteriorated the agricultural sector and prevented the distribution of aid and goods to civilians causing the acute food insecurity leading to famine;
 - b. recognized that imposed war and blockade, against the civilian population in Gaza, are the main drivers of high levels of destruction and deterioration of the agriculture sector (as a source of local food production) and acute food insecurity in the Gaza Strip for 2.2 million inhabitants representing the whole population in the strip;
 - c. noted that this has significantly restricted humanitarian space, has limited the flow and distribution of humanitarian aid and goods into the Gaza Strip, and that the risk of famine will increase for each day that the current conflict and restricted humanitarian aid persist;
 - d. highlighted the significant damage to croplands and agri-infrastructure across all governorates, causing loss of production and income losses of up to 72 percent for agriculture-dependent households;
 - e. recognized that the occupation practices in the West Bank, including denied access to agricultural land, controlling borders, land confiscation, destruction of agricultural assets and controlling water resources alter the ability of enhancing food security for the Palestinians;
 - f. highlighted that the hostilities in the Red Sea have disrupted international trade, delaying the delivery of food and basic products, increasing trade costs and prices of goods in the region; and
 - g. recognized the regional interface between conflict and food security, noting the ongoing wars and conflicts and food insecurity.
59. The Regional Conference also noted that FAO:
- a. provides time-critical assistance and vital support to affected communities through agriculture, fisheries and livestock-related interventions, and this assistance can enable local production of highly nutritious foods that cannot be imported as food aid, as well as contribute towards the reduction of dependence on food aid;
 - b. has the expertise to gather information such as damage and loss assessments, which disaggregate the impacts of war and conflict on food security in the region, including trade and the functioning of agrifood systems; and
 - c. plays within its mandate, an important role in supporting the future rehabilitation needs in the Gaza Strip.
60. The Regional Conference called upon FAO to:
- a. continue, within its mandate, the provision of technical assistance and agricultural inputs;
 - b. work collectively with the international community to address the deterioration of health, nutrition, food security and mortality through restoration of health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and the provision of safe, nutritious, sufficient food to the whole population in Gaza;
 - c. continue, within its mandate, its assessment of the ongoing situation in Gaza and its impact on the right to food;
 - d. utilize international instruments and voluntary guidelines to ensure the right to adequate food and support to affected populations; and
 - e. support the reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts in Gaza, when political solutions have been found.
61. The Regional Conference called upon countries to:
- a. collectively call for a ceasefire, cessation of hostilities and stop all forms of violence towards affected and displaced people of Palestine through a Ministerial Declaration and the collective use of all diplomatic, political and logistical means;

- b. strongly and jointly advocate for the opening of humanitarian corridors to enable the flow of aid into Gaza and the West Bank and for international laws to be implemented; and
- c. take collective measures to help the Palestinian people.

G. Global and Regional Food Security Outlook

62. The Regional Conference took note of and appreciated the content of document *Global and Regional Food Security Outlook* prepared by FAO.
63. The Regional Conference noted that:
- a. the high population growth, low productivity and heavy dependence on food imports are the main drivers of the region's structural vulnerability to shocks; and
 - b. multiple challenges are faced by the region, which are hampering the achievement of food security and nutrition objectives.
64. The Regional Conference called upon countries to:
- a. adopt a holistic approach to build resilience, including through multi-sectoral set-up and policy coordination, early warning systems linked to anticipatory actions, shock-responsive social protection programmes and agricultural insurance systems;
 - b. strengthen national capacities in statistics, data collection and analysis, market monitoring and food security assessment to inform policy decision processes and timely interventions; and
 - c. strengthen regional collaboration, including through the establishment of a regional disaster preparedness and emergency trust fund and promotion of peace in the region.
65. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:
- a. continue to support Members through timely reports and analysis of the food security and nutrition situation in the region, in particular through the Regional Leadership Development Academy and Regional Observatory and country-level dashboards; and
 - b. enhance analytical and technical support to countries for early warning and adaptation plans in food security situations in countries affected by conflicts.

H. Financing to end hunger for today and tomorrow (SDG 2)

66. The Regional Conference took note of the document *Financing to End hunger for today and tomorrow (SDG 2)* prepared by FAO.
67. Regional Conference called upon countries to:
- a. work towards repurposing agricultural domestic support and food subsidies to ensure more cost-effective and efficient agrifood systems, and target more nutritious foods and agricultural products that have a less impactful environmental footprint;
 - b. foster innovative finance mechanisms, such as loss guarantees for lenders or insurers, impact investments in social innovation, results-based financing, green bonds, debt swaps, advance market commitments (contract farming), impact investment funds, innovative finance hubs, incubators, accelerators, compulsory charges and taxes, awards and prizes, development bonds and carbon-emissions trading; and
 - c. acknowledge the need for increased private, public-private blended finance and new scaled-up innovative financial mechanisms.

68. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:
- a. further advocate for investing concessional capital from official development assistance (ODA) and international financial institutions to mitigate investment risk and create new investment opportunities, complementing investment capital with concessional capital, innovative finance mechanisms that can help address the funding shortage in the NENA food systems and improve food security and nutrition;
 - b. support countries in their efforts to develop innovative financial mechanisms;
 - c. present innovative financial mechanisms through the Near East and North Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2024; and
 - d. promote multilateral partnerships to combat the current increasing trend of prevalence of undernourishment in the region and triple burden of malnutrition.

I. How to fight against Food Loss and Waste

69. The Regional Conference took note of the document *How to fight against food loss and waste* prepared by FAO.
70. The Regional Conference called upon countries to:
- a. acknowledge the importance of food loss and waste reduction for the transformation of agrifood systems in the region;
 - b. acknowledge the importance of integrating food loss and waste in agrifood systems pathways and strategies on food security and nutrition, climate change and investment; and
 - c. to endorse the *Guidelines for action on food loss and waste reduction in the Near East and North Africa*, as a tool for development of national food loss and waste strategies and action plans.
71. The Regional Conference recommended FAO to:
- a. assist countries in food loss and waste reduction to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs in the region;
 - b. support NENA countries vulnerable to disruptions of global supply chains to adopt efficient and sustainable production and consumption practices to reduce food loss and waste; and
 - c. continue to assist in overcoming challenges like data scarcity and lack of knowledge in fostering information exchange and a conducive environment to reduce food loss and waste.

IV. Other Matters

72. Four side events were held in conjunction with the Senior Officers Meeting of the 37th Session of the Near East Regional Conference: i) Presentation of the FAO RNE Strategic Support through the initiatives of Regional Observatory and Leadership Academy; ii) Integrated and Nexus Approaches to Coping with Water Scarcity; iii) Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) and Illuminating Hidden Harvest (IHH) in SSF; and iv) AFRAS.

73. The Regional Conference agreed to incorporate summary reports of the side events, as part of this Report, in Appendix D.

V. Concluding Session

A. Ministerial Declaration

74. The Regional Conference reviewed and endorsed the Draft Ministerial Declaration, as reproduced in Appendix A, presented to the Ministers at the Ministerial Session, held from 4 to 5 March 2024, in Amman, Jordan.

B. Closing Remarks

75. Mr Elwaer and Dr Haddad provided closing remarks at the end of the Meeting.

76. Mr Elwaer thanked the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, H. E. Eng. Hneifat, Minister for Agriculture, and Dr Haddad, Director-General of the National Agriculture Research Centre, for chairing the Meeting in an effective manner to achieve its objective. He also thanked all participants, presenters, panellists and FAO's teams for their valuable contributions that led to the success of the Meeting and congratulated the participants on the rich discussions. Mr Elwaer recalled the Senior Officers to brief the Ministers on the proceedings and outcomes of the Meeting to inform their preparations for the Ministerial Session of NERC 37.

77. Dr Haddad appreciated the level of participation during all sessions of the Meeting and indicated that the Meeting had achieved its objectives, and concluded with a comprehensive set of recommendations, which will be presented to the Ministers during the Ministerial Session of NERC 37. He thanked the Director-General of FAO, Mr Elwaer and the entire FAO team involved in the organization of the Meeting.

78. Participants expressed their appreciation to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and FAO for the efficient arrangements, preparation and organization of the Meeting.

C. Date and Place of the 38th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East

79. The Regional Conference welcomed the offers from Lebanon and Syria to host the 38th session of the Regional Conference and invited the Near East Regional Group to FAO to consider the matter and decide on the next host of the Regional Conference in consultation with FAO.

Appendix A: Ministerial Declaration

37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

Ministerial Declaration

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation of the Near East, assembled at the 37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East held in Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on 4 and 5 March 2024:

Deeply concerned about the deteriorating security situation in the region and the resulting food security and nutrition crisis, particularly in Gaza, Sudan, Yemen, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon;

Extremely concerned with the deteriorating humanitarian situation, the forced displacement of the population in the Gaza Strip, the use of food, water and energy as weapons of war, the blockage of humanitarian aid, the destruction of the agriculture sector and related livelihoods and infrastructure resulting in severe food insecurity leading towards famine;

Called upon for an immediate cease fire in Gaza;

Expressed strong support for the decision adopted by the FAO Council at the 174th Session regarding the situation in Gaza related to food security and related matters under the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO);

Express solidarity with our brothers and sisters facing the devastating situation due to the war in Gaza and conflicts in other member countries;

Emphasized the importance of promoting peace in the region;

Noted with deep concern the ever-increasing trends of hunger, acute food insecurity and malnutrition in the region documented in FAO's flagship publication *The State of Food Security in the Near East and North Africa Region*. These alarming trends reflect the region's structural vulnerability and significant challenges resulting from conflicts, social unrest, huge dependency on imported food, financial and economic crises, resulting in high food inflation, and multiple, colliding and overlapping shocks;

Continue working to support Members in addressing water scarcity, drought, desertification and adopting integrated and sustainable water management approaches and the use of non-conventional water resources;

Noted with concern the exacerbation of challenges posed by climate change, water scarcity, soil erosion, erratic weather patterns resulting in decreasing agriculture productivity;

Acknowledged the need and enhanced focus towards accelerating the transformation of the agrifood systems of our region to be more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable; that address the current and future challenges facing the region and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals;

Underscored the central role and huge potential of smallholders, women, youth and their associations, in transforming agrifood systems for better production, better nutrition, better environment and better life, leaving no one behind;

Emphasized the importance and need to develop analytical systems for food security monitoring, reporting and evidence-based policy-making;

Noted and complementing the efforts deployed by various governments in mitigating the challenges posed by food prices inflation, currency devaluations, food supply chain disruptions and shrinking fiscal spaces for subsidizing agriculture and food;

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations of the FAO Conference for the Near East:

1. **Congratulate** Dr QU Dongyu for his election to the second term for the position of Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and his commitment to reinforce

and reinvigorate FAO as a dynamic, agile and technically competent specialized development agency;

2. **Support** the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31 that calls for the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment* and a *better life*; leaving no one behind towards accelerated progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;
3. **Endorse** the four Regional Priorities for FAO’s programme 2022–31, which reflects strategic areas to support countries in the region in transforming their agrifood systems within the umbrella of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31; noting that the four Regional Priorities underscore strategically important issues for the region including supporting inclusive and rural transformation in a manner that empowers youth and women, addressing food insecurity and the triple burden of malnutrition, promoting trade, tackling root causes of vulnerabilities in the region by emphasizing climate change, water scarcity and sustainable management of natural resources, building resilience and managing risk through a proactive and holistic programmatic approach;
4. **Endorse** the restructuring of the regional, sub-regional and country offices of FAO in Near East and North Africa, and enhanced support for member countries in areas of Strategy and Policy;
5. **Commend** the efforts of FAO in producing timely data and analytical reports on the status of agriculture and food security in the region, such as the country and regional dashboards and policy bulletins, and in designing and implementing programmes that address the identified challenges and respond to countries’ priorities;
6. **Support** FAO’s corporate initiatives on One Country One Priority Product, Hand-in-Hand and 1000 Digital Villages and commit to support their implementation in our countries, as appropriate;
7. **Welcome** FAO’s initiatives at the regional level to strengthen policy and leadership capacities for transforming agrifood systems in the region through establishing a Regional Leadership Academy on Agrifood Systems Transformation, a Regional Observatory on Food Security and Nutrition; the establishment of an Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services and a Regional One-Health Platform, and a renewed focus on the use of trade, investment, science, innovation, and technology as enablers for food security;
8. **Commit** to work towards the transformation of our agrifood systems through the adoption of inclusive, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches, involving agrifood systems actors and their representatives, civil society, academia and the private sector;
9. **Commit** to pursue integrated strategies for inclusive rural transformation to expand decent rural employment, especially for youth and women, through territorial development approaches and considering the priorities of the Regional Action Plan for the UN Decade of Family Farming;
10. **Commit** to mainstreaming agroecology, sustainable agricultural practices and other innovative approaches, including climate-smart agriculture, conservation agriculture and others, in our national policies, strategies and investment plans to boost their adoption by farmers, contribute to the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration and enhance the productivity, resilience and income of small-scale farming in a sustainable way;
11. **Commit** to enhance focus on utilizing regional resources and increase intra-regional trade and investment for increased food security;
12. **Appreciate** the host countries for the organization of the UNFCCC COP 27 in Egypt and COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates, highlighting agriculture and food security as the main issues in the agenda of these fora, and noted the *COP28 UAE Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action*, which affirms the profound potential of agriculture and food systems to drive powerful and innovative responses to climate change, and to unlock shared prosperity for all;
13. **Commit** to support the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for successful hosting of the COP 16 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD);

14. **Urge** countries and partners, including international financial institutions, the private sector, FAO and other UN bodies, to secure greater investments, including through innovative financing mechanisms, in support of the efforts to transform the region's agrifood systems;
15. **Resolve** to find collective and urgent solutions to mitigate the challenges faced by member countries, particularly due to the crises in Gaza, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and Lebanon;
16. **Agree** to continue working together to address water scarcity, drought, desertification and adopting integrated and sustainable water management challenges and the use of non-conventional water resources;
17. **Express gratitude** to His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein, the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and H. E. Eng. Khalid Hneifat, Minister for Agriculture, Jordan, for the generous hospitality and successful organization of the 37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East;

Amman, 5 March 2024

Appendix B. Annotated Agenda

Senior Officers Meeting

5-8 February 2024

I. Introductory Items

- 1) **Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable**
- 2) **Election of the Chairperson, Vice Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur**
- 3) **Statement by the FAO Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa**
- 4) **Statement to the Senior Officers Meeting by the Chairperson of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East**

II. Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Matters

- 5) **Accelerating Transformation of Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa**

The importance of transforming agrifood systems to embed more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable systems that promote better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind, has been acknowledged as being pivotal for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. As countries from the region recover from the adverse implications of the global challenges that have prevailed in recent years, the need to embrace a policy framework and action plan that would secure the acceleration of transforming the regional agrifood systems so as to attain sustainable agriculture and food security amidst the poly-crises facing the region is becoming increasingly crucial. Building on the outcomes of the 35th and 36th Sessions of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC), the deliberations at NERC 37 would seek to forge a regional understanding and define an action plan, with shared ownership and support towards the implementation of actions to accelerate such transformation. The discussion would focus in this context on FAO's global and regional framework, programme and priorities to this end.

- 6) **Summary of the Recommendations of Regional Commissions and Major Meetings in the Near East**

Presentation of the conclusions and recommendations of the FAO Regional Commissions in the Near East with regard to i) policy and regulatory matters; and ii) programme and budget matters. This includes regional fora such as the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) and the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC). Updates from relevant regional meetings such as the High-Level Joint Water-Agriculture Technical Committee of the League of Arab States will also be presented for information.

- 7) **Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa**

Although there has been major progress, there are still main gaps that hinder women's participation in the agrifood systems. This information note provides an overview of the gender dynamics that characterize agrifood systems in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region and highlights the main gaps that, in some cases, prevent women from fully contributing to and benefiting equally from, rural transformation and agrifood systems development. By providing an update on FAO's work on gender equality and women's empowerment, the note outlines promising approaches and interventions that have the potential to be replicated and scaled up. Finally, it proposes a set of actions for the way forward, emphasizing the need for integrated and systemic approaches to tackle the underlying causes of gender

inequalities, rooted in discriminatory social norms and practices, and perpetuated by gender-blind structures, legal and policy frameworks.

8) Enabling Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Transformation in the Near East and North Africa

Rural transformation is the process whereby rising agricultural productivity, increasing commercialization, diversification, access to services, and decent employment and voice in policymaking lead to improved rural livelihoods. Transformative processes pursued by FAO, therefore, span across the rural urban continuum, addressing sustainable value chains and agribusinesses; decent work and youth empowerment; effective and responsive rural advisory services; collective action, sustainable intensification, and digital innovation, with inclusivity and gender equality underpinning every endeavour. The paper advocates for systemic approaches that leverage multisector and multistakeholder processes across the pillars of policy, investments and finance, governance, institutions, human capital, and partnership, for more inclusive and sustainable transformation.

9) Accelerating Transformation Towards Sustainable Markets, Trade and Consumption

A sustainable and well-integrated ecosystem of sustainable agrifood markets, trade and consumption can provide a food-secure future and healthy diets for all in the NENA region. It is, however, imperative to design and internalize the enabling policy framework that leads towards acceleration of the transformation for sustainable agrifood markets through resilient food supply chains, trade through enhancing intraregional trade, and consumption through ensuring access to and encouraging healthy diets for all. This paper provides the elements required for such transformation and the needed areas of focus and investments.

10) Greening Agriculture: Towards Transformation to Efficient and Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems

Transforming food systems requires urgent attention to addressing the drivers of natural resources degradation that threaten agricultural productivity, such as water scarcity, land, forest and soil degradation, loss of biodiversity and unsustainable management practices, all of which are expected to intensify under the deepening effects of climate change. This paper advocates for the shift to sustainable production systems while simultaneously engaging in policy processes and inclusive, long-term planning for climate resilient agroecosystems.

11) Anticipatory Action to address the impacts of compounded crises.

The NENA region is characterized by a combination of structural vulnerabilities and exposure to natural and human-induced hazards that make the region extremely prone to the compounded impacts of shocks, stresses, and crises. Moreover, climate change, conflicts, political instability, demographic pressures, degraded natural resources and heavy dependence on food imports are serious long-term stresses that further aggravate risks and vulnerabilities and weaken existing capacities. Combined with the increasing frequency and severity of climate-change related events, water scarcity, economic instability and conflict, the threat to food insecurity in the region cannot be underestimated. This paper calls for wide adoption of holistic and multi-hazards anticipatory action systems in the NENA region within the overarching framework of effective and proactive disaster risk management.

12) Farmers Field Schools (FFS) portfolio in the region.

Short video on the regional event on Farmers Field Schools (FFS) and the concerted efforts to support the growing portfolio of FFS in the region that is attentive to the implementation of Farmers as Innovators for Resilient Agro-Ecosystems ([FAIRE] – Reimagining and Modernizing FFS) – one of the 12 new Value Added Impact Areas (VAIAs) aiming to provide innovative support to farmers in coping with current and emerging challenges.

III. Programme and Budget Matters

13) The Strategic Framework, Priorities, and Results in the Region

The Regional Conference will consider how FAO activities have addressed previously agreed regional priorities during 2022-2023 and moving towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment* and a *better life*, leaving no one behind. The Regional Conference will also provide guidance on areas of regional priorities for the coming biennium (2024-2025) and beyond, based on the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.

The discussion will be informed by the results of FAO's work in the region, the Medium-Term Plan (Reviewed) 2022-25 and Programme of Work and Budget 2024-25 approved by the FAO Conference in July 2023.

14) Update on the Implementation of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy

The FAO Science and Innovation Strategy (the Strategy) has been developed through an extensive and inclusive consultation process launched in September 2021. The Strategy is designed as a key tool to support the delivery of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and aims to support Members to harness science and innovation to realize context-specific and systemic solutions for more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment* and a *better life*, leaving no one behind, in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The presentation will provide an overview of the Strategy's regional implementation plan in NENA and will highlight major events that took place in the region, emphasizing key findings and recommendations, with a focus on leveraging the power of digital innovation and technologies, especially for small-scale producers to build their resilience to climate shocks, improve productivity, foster the sustainable use of natural resources, and enhance their livelihoods.

15) Update on the Implementation of the FAO Strategy on Climate Change

Climate Change is one of the most important externalities that the world is facing in general, but the NENA region has witnessed the negative impact of climate change much harder. FAO has developed the Strategy on Climate Change, in order to deal with this challenge and manage the transformation of agrifood systems in a climate resilient manner. This session will highlight the main aspects and implementation cases for the FAO Strategy on Climate Change.

16) Financing to end hunger for today and tomorrow (SDG 2)

The progress on achieving SDG 2 cannot be termed as satisfactory. It is not foreseen, with the current state of affairs, to achieve the SDG 2 by 2030. One of the major hurdles, identified by a wide set of stakeholders, is the lack of availability and access to required financing for SDG 2. This session will explore the challenges and opportunities, particularly the pathways to ensure the availability of and access to financing to end hunger for today and tomorrow.

17) Building Resilience through Transforming Agrifood Systems

FAO is working to support Member Nations in transforming their agrifood systems towards more resilience. This is even more imperative in the NENA region, where multiple factors have negative effects on resilience of agriculture, food security and livelihoods. This session will highlight the policy pathways and best practices for building resilience through agrifood systems transformation.

18) The ongoing serious situation in the Gaza Strip, the escalation in the Red Sea and the subsequent consequences on the regional and global chain of food supplies

19) Global and Regional Food Security Outlook

This session will present the global and regional food security outlook based on the short-, medium- and long-term scenarios, as per the FAO Outlook Report. The need for having proper foresight and trend analysis is imperative for effective and timely policy design and implementation for ensuring food security.

20) How to fight against Food Loss and Waste

Food Loss and Waste represents a significant challenge to global and regional agrifood systems. There have been numerous efforts towards mitigating food loss and waste, but still about one third of the food is either lost or wasted in the NENA region. This session will share the best practices and policy pathways to fight against food loss and waste, through designing and implementing enabling policy framework and adopting behavioural practices and changes for consumption of food.

21) Decentralized Offices network

Ongoing efforts to improve and strengthen the work of FAO's Decentralized Offices network in the region will be reviewed and recommendations formulated to enhance the Organization's effectiveness and efficiency at regional and country levels.

IV. Other Matters**22) Any other matters****23) Review of the Ministerial Declaration****24) Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers' Meeting**

Ministerial Session

4-5 March 2024

- 25) **Statement by the FAO Director-General**
- 26) **Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council**
- 27) **Statement by the Chairperson of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East**
- 28) **Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)**
- 29) **Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Organizations**
- 30) **Statement by the Spokesperson of the Private Sector**

V. Ministerial Roundtables

Countries will be given the opportunity to discuss the regional priorities and explore how they articulate with FAO's vision of supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life*, leaving no one behind. Each of the "betters" will be used as an entry point for a facilitated discussion among ministers.

- 31) **Ministerial Roundtable I: Enabling Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Transformation in the Near East and North Africa**

A facilitated discussion around the regional priority dedicated to rural transformation, territorial development, digital innovation, extension and advisory services, and decent employment, its achievements during the last biennium, the way forward and its linkages to the better production and better life components of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.

- 32) **Ministerial Roundtable II: Accelerating Transformation Towards Sustainable Markets, Trade and Consumption**

A facilitated discussion around the regional priority dedicated to food security, healthy diets, food systems, markets and trade and the enabling policies, its achievements during the last biennium, the way forward and its linkages to better nutrition and better environment components of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.

- 33) **Ministerial Roundtable III: Greening Agriculture: Towards Transformation to Efficient and Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems**

A facilitated discussion around the regional priority dedicated to green recovery, water productivity, governance, nature-based solutions and climate change actions, its achievements during the last biennium, the way forward and its linkages to the better production and better environment components of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.

- 34) **Ministerial Roundtable IV: Anticipatory Action to address the impacts of compounded crises [proposed by SOM -including the situation in Gaza].**

A facilitated discussion around the regional priority dedicated to building and strengthening resilience and response actions, its achievements during the last biennium, the way forward and its linkages to the better production and better life components of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.

35) **Ministerial Roundtable V: Foresight Drivers and Triggers relevant to the NENA region.**

FAO is systematically engaging in foresight activities at corporate, regional, sub-regional, and country levels for the transformation of agrifood systems, using the experience gained during the Corporate Strategic Foresight Exercise (CSFE) 2020-22 and its findings, portrayed in the recent FAO flagship report, *The future of food and agriculture – Drivers and triggers for transformation (FOFA-DTT)*.

The FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa region (FAORNE), with the support of the team of the Policy Intelligence Branch - Global Perspectives (PIB-GP) in the FAO Agrifood Economics and Policy Division (ESA), along with the Office of Strategy, Programme and Budget (OSP), the Office of Innovation (OIN), and the broader FAO Foresight Network, has recently embarked upon the Regional Foresight Exercise (RFE).

This session is aimed at sharing the insights and goals to be obtained from regional experts during the RFE expert consultation:

- present historical trends and projections of key variables for priority Drivers in the Region and related weak signals;
- present regionalized FOFA-DTT scenarios, regional challenges, and triggers for transformation;
- discuss and obtain insights on strategic policy options and regional investment priorities; and
- gather feedback to validate current findings and enrich the final version of the RNE-RFE first phase Report.

VI. Special Events

36) **Science, Innovation and Digitalization to accelerate Transformation of Agrifood Systems**

This is a facilitated discussion around the need for innovative policies, organizational processes, and practices; research and science- and evidence-based technological solutions; and the need for effective cooperation and partnerships to address the complex and emerging issues in the region. There are numerous initiatives in the region that harness the potential of technologies and digital agriculture to address the challenges faced by smallholder farmers. Yet, various constraints hamper the widescale application and benefits. These are primarily related to digital literacy, the rural and gender-digital gap, affordability and access to digital technologies and information, institutional capacities, quality, relevance, and sustainability of digital services, and the enabling ecosystem.

37) **Transforming Agrifood Systems in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)**

Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) are priority countries for FAO. The FAO Director-General made it clear that the Organization is working to further strengthen its support to SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs by becoming the first specialized agency in the UN system to establish an office exclusively focused on addressing these countries' needs and interlinked challenges. Offering a platform to discuss how to harness the potential of the SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs in the Near East region for agrifood systems transformation will help scale up resilience for more sustainable and inclusive development.

38) **FAO Flagship Initiatives**

The session will discuss FAO Flagship Initiatives such as One Country One Priority Product (OCOP), Digital Villages Initiative (DVI), Blue Transformation, Regional Academy and Observatory, Foresight Exercise with a view of identifying their importance for the region.

39) **Regional Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum**

In collaboration with the host country and Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Investment Forum, the session will focus on the implementation of the Hand in Hand Initiative in the Region and the results of the HIH Investment Forum

40) **Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration**

- 41) **Adoption of the Report of the Regional Conference**
- 42) **Date and Place of the 38th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East**

Appendix C. Timetable**Senior Officers Meeting****5-8 February 2024****Monday, 5 February – Day 1****Morning (10.00-12.30 hours)**

	Agenda Item	Item N°	Document N°
10.00 hours	Opening of the Senior Officers Meeting		
	Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable	1	NERC/24/1/REV1 NERC/24/INF/2/REV1
	Election of the Chairperson, Vice Chairpersons and Appointment of the Rapporteur	2	
	Statement by the FAO Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa	3	
	Statement to the Senior Officers Meeting by the Chairperson of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East	4	NERC/24/INF/6

Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Matters

11.00 hours	Accelerating Transformation of Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa	5	
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Afternoon (14.00-16.30 hours)

14.00 hours	Summary of the Recommendations of Regional Commissions and Major Meetings in the Near East	6	NERC/24/INF/11
15.30 hours	Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Systems in the Near East and North Africa	7	NERC/24/INF/28

Tuesday, 6 February – Day 2**Morning (10.00-13.00 hours)**

	Agenda Item	Item N°	Document N°
10.00 hours	Enabling Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Transformation in the Near East and North Africa	8	NERC/24/4
11.30 hours	Accelerating Transformation Towards Sustainable Markets, Trade and Consumption	9	NERC/24/5

Afternoon (14.00-17.00 hours)

14.00 hours	Greening Agriculture: Towards Transformation to Efficient and Climate- Resilient Agrifood Systems	10	NERC/24/6
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15.30 hours	Anticipatory Action to address the impacts of compounded crises	11	NERC/24/7
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Wednesday, 7 February – Day 3

Morning (10.00-13.00 hours)

	Agenda Item	Item N°	Document N°
	Programme and Budget Matters		
10.00 hours	The Strategic Framework, Priorities, and Results in the Region	13	NERC/24/2-3
	Decentralized Offices network	20	NERC/24/8
11.20 hours	Update on the Implementation of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy	14	
	Update on the Implementation of the FAO Strategy on Climate Change	15	
	Financing to end hunger for today and tomorrow (SDG 2)	16	NERC/24/INF/19
12.10 hours	Building Resilience through Transforming Agrifood Systems.	17	NERC/24/11
	Global and Regional Food Security Outlook	18	NERC/24/10
	How to fight against Food Loss and Waste	19	NERC/24/9

Afternoon (14.00 – 17.00 hours)

14.00 hours	Side Event: Presentation of the FAORNE Strategic Support through the initiatives of Regional Observatory and Leadership Academy
15.30 hours	Side Event: Integrated and Nexus Approaches to Coping with Water Scarcity

Thursday, 8 February – Day 4

Morning (10.00- 13.00 hours)

10:00 hours	Side Event: Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) and Illuminating Hidden Harvest (IHH) in SSF
11:30 hours	Side Event: The Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services (AFRAS)

Afternoon (14.00-16.30 hours)

	Agenda Item	Item N°
14.00 hours	Any other matters	21
	Review of the Ministerial Declaration	22
	Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting	23

Ministerial Session 4 - 5 March 2024

Monday, 4 March – Day 1

Morning (09.00-12.00 hours)

	Agenda Item	Item N°	Document N°
09.00 hours	Inaugural Ceremony		
	Statement by the FAO Director-General	24	NERC/24/INF/4
	Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council	25	NERC/24/INF/5
	Statement by the Chairperson of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East	26	NERC/24/INF/6
	Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)	27	NERC/24/INF/7
	Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Organizations	28	NERC/24/INF/8
	Statement by the Spokesperson of the Private Sector	29	NERC/24/INF/9
	Round Table Discussions		
10.30 hours	Ministerial Round Table I: Enabling Inclusive and Sustainable Rural Transformation in the Near East and North Africa	30	

Afternoon (13.00-16.00 hours)

13.00 hours	Ministerial Round Table II: Accelerating Transformation Towards Sustainable Markets, Trade and Consumption	31	
14.30 hours	Ministerial Round Table III: Greening Agriculture: Towards Transformation to Efficient and Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems	32	
16.00 hours	Regional Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum	38	

Tuesday, 5 March – Day 2

Morning (11.00-13.30 hours)

11.00 hours	Ministerial Round Table IV: Anticipatory Action to address the impacts of compounded crises.	33	
12.30 hours	Ministerial Roundtable V: Foresight Drivers and Triggers relevant to the NENA region	34	NERC/24/INF/29

Afternoon (15.00-17.30 hours)

Ministerial Special Events.			
15:00 hours	- Science, Innovation and Digitalization to accelerate Transformation of Agrifood Systems	35	
	- Transforming Agrifood Systems in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)	36	
	- FAO Flagship Initiatives		
	- Regional Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum	37	

		38
17.00 hours	Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration	39
	Adoption of the Report of the Regional Conference	40
	Date and Place of the 38th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East	41
	Closure of the Regional Conference	

Appendix D. Summary Reports of Side Events

Side Event 1: Presentation of the FAO RNE Strategic Support through the initiatives of Regional Observatory and Leadership Academy

Mr Ahmad Mukhtar, Senior Economist, FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa (FAO RNE) presented the strategic initiatives of FAO RNE, undertaken by the Strategy and Policy Unit.

Regional Leadership Development Academy

The FAO Regional Leadership Academy (RLA) is a strategic programme developed by FAO RNE. It is a Leadership and Policy training centre for agriculture and related public sector officials, offering cutting-edge research on regional trends and needs in agriculture and collaborating with other regional educational and research institutions, and think tanks on strategic issues related to agriculture. RLA's purpose is to equip the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region decision-makers with the skills, capacity and confidence needed to transform complex food systems. Through its strategic governance it will empower regional leaders to tap into existing FAO RNE resources and expertise to design localized solutions for food systems transformations. RLA will empower NENA region experts to create access to power, resources and mandate the need to co-create the case for – and the data and evidence required – for governance reform. RNE developed also a Political and Economic Resilience Indicator (PERI); which indicates a positive correlation between nations exhibiting high political-economic resilience and those demonstrating strong food security metrics. This nexus highlights the need for a holistic policy to include water stress and agricultural trade capacity to address food security concerns. Key leaders from NENA region attended a 5-day RLA Workshop in November 2023 in the United Arab Emirates, where the FAO-Cambridge Collaboration on RLA was launched.

Food Policy Monitoring Bulletin

The aim of the bulletin is to strengthen policy monitoring in the NENA region. Each edition focuses on a Regional Priority. The bulletin tracks food prices and crop prospects on a quarterly basis, highlights key policy developments in the region. RNE monitors in great depth regional policy developments and provides more than 100 policies feed into the FAO Food and Agriculture Policy Decision Analysis tool.

Food Price Monitoring and Analysis Tool

As part of RNE's continued efforts to strengthen monitoring of the region's agrifood systems, a regional version of the Food Price Monitoring and Analysis (FPMA) Tool has been developed. It provides recent food and commodity prices at country and subnational level. It allows comparisons across markets, commodities and seasons.

Jordan Food Security Dashboard

It gives an essential overview about the food security situation in Jordan and provides forecasts based on advanced econometric modelling and artificial intelligence (AI). It provides a country profile (population, land use and agricultural production), food balances, nutrition (such as calorie intake, hunger risks, prices and costs [seeds, fertilizers, fuel]), agricultural production (including crop yield, livestock and water use linked to the FAO Water Productivity Open-access portal tool) and long-term scenarios for climate and demography. The dashboard gives various alerts, including affordability and increasing prices, and it provides comparisons among regional countries and the world.

Regional Trade Map

NENA countries depend largely on trade to meet their food requirements; however, there is huge, untapped potential in regional trade. The main goal of developing the Regional Trade Map was to show the untapped potential, enabling countries to exploit it. It also provides different trade indicators for countries and subregions, such as the revealed comparative advantage, relative trade advantage, export intensity index, markets ranking. It includes 23 product groups, including different agricultural and food products, beverages and fertilizers.

Subregional Observatory

The unique feature of the Subregional Observatory, which uses machine learning algorithms, is that it presents food -security related data in an understandable format, forecasts the future state of indicators

(state of undernourishment, per capita consumption and gross production value) and provides alerts based on the forecasts. It focuses on six categories: food security, consumption, production and trade, investment, food prices and sustainability. The Observatory imputes missing data to improve forecasting. The Observatory uses vector auto-regressive (VAR) model for forecasting. The Machine learning algorithm XGBoost Regressor is used for forecasting refinement. The data in the Observatory is updated on a daily basis. It gives regional- and country-level snapshots, including food supply, production, undernourishment, anaemia, average dietary energy adequacy, latest consumer price index, and producer price index.

Discussion and Recommendations

All participants who intervened emphasized the importance and the excellence of the tools. The Chairperson (Jordan) suggested to cover also fertilizers in the Regional Trade Map. The Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (Mr Osama Rayis) underlined the importance of data and AI, which have the power to completely change the mindset of researchers and decision-makers. Mr Maged Mahmoud (independent expert) highlighted the need to consider energy and fuel consumption in agriculture in the tools. Ms Samia Akroush emphasized the need for a more detailed analysis at subnational level.

The participants appreciated these analytical tools and termed these as very useful for policies and enabling framework for transforming their agrifood systems.

In closing, the Assistant Director-General, Mr Abdulhakim Elwaer underlined that the new innovative tools are based on the needs of Members to set up their strategies and policies in agrifood systems transformation. RLA provides capacity building for that, while the online tools give real-time data and analytics to develop evidence- and science-based strategies and policies. He agreed that there is a need for more granular and precise data at the subnational level.

Side Event 2: Integrated and Nexus Approaches to Coping with Water Scarcity

The Side event on “Integrated and Nexus Approaches to Coping with Water Scarcity” was held on the 7 February 2024, in conjunction with the Senior Officers Meeting of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East.

The side event involved panellists from different backgrounds, who provided their reflection on the Water-Energy-Food (WEF) Nexus to cope with water scarcity and achieve sustainable development, and aimed at addressing sustainable WEF Nexus approaches and practices at farm, country, and regional levels, and exploring innovative financing modalities to support Nexus efforts, contributing to the establishment of resilient water and food systems in the NENA region.

In his opening remarks, Mr Abdulhakim Elwaer, Assistant Director--General, FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, presented the critical situation of water scarcity in the region, with limited access to fresh water affecting food security. He stressed the need to build farmers’ resilience to face the challenges related to climate change and drought. He emphasized the importance of establishing mechanisms and practices related to sustainable WEF Nexus. He informed the audience on the fact that FAO RNE has been working on water scarcity for many years and is collaborating with different Regional Offices by providing lessons learned from the NENA region. FAO RNE has mobilized financial resources to support the implementation of the Water Scarcity Initiative activities in collaboration with international organizations.

Water Energy and Food Security Nexus

The FAO Land and Water Division presented “A pragmatic approach to manage WEF Nexus”, which highlighted the main following points:

- a. Water requirements for human use is 2 000 litres per day to produce food in order to provide energy. Approximately 30 percent of energy is consumed in food production and supply chain. Irrigated farms, fertilizers and pesticides contribute to high usage of water. Solar powered irrigation systems play a regulator effect on water withdrawal, but water accounting and irrigation monitoring are critical to avoid over abstraction.

- b. FAO's nexus approach is based on balancing the goals and interests of different resources users, while maintaining the integrity of the ecosystem. It looks at components such as goals of the exercise, drivers and stakeholder analysis.
- c. WEF nexus is implemented through building evidence, developing scenarios and designing response options, noting that stakeholders dialogue is central to this approach.
- d. Emphasizing stakeholder dialogue is crucial to align with national strategies and policies and advocate for mutually agreed-upon frameworks, such as water balance for effective water use.
- e. FAO supports countries in integrated water resources management, conceptual framework on integrated land and water management, global dialogue on water tenure, and support national water roadmaps toward 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Egyptian Ministry of International cooperation presented "Egypt's Nexus of WEF from pledges to implementation of the Nexus of Water Food and Energy (NWFE)" and highlighted the main following points:

- a. The Launch of Presidential initiatives following the COP. One of them is on Sharm El-Sheikh guidelines on equitable financing aiming at translating the different agreements into projects.
- b. The guidelines promote three dimensions: country ownership, access to climate finance and governance.
- c. The NWFE programme is implemented at national level where nine projects related to WEF Nexus were identified with possibility of replicability in developing and least developed countries.
- d. Twenty-six projects, including mitigation, adaptation and resilience to climate change projects along with nine projects that specifically target water, food and energy sectors.
- e. Two projects are implemented under the food pillar: craft and crown. They focus on irrigation, agriculture and sea-level rise. The water pillar focuses on water desalination using renewable energy and scaling up solar pumping for irrigation.

Main outcomes of the side event

During the panel discussion, participants recognized the importance of the WEF Nexus approach, their role in improving agricultural productivity to enhance farmers' resilience, and the role of linking energy with water and agriculture. They highlighted that Nexus activities are implemented by many Near East countries, including with the support of international and regional organizations.

Participants recognized the importance of creating an enabling environment for the joint planning and implementation of WEF Nexus activities and encouraged countries to:

- a. Adopt more synergies between sectoral ministries on designing national strategies related to WEF Nexus, including the establishment of relevant coordination mechanisms involving all concerned stakeholders.
- b. Benefit from the different capacity building programmes implemented by FAO on WEF Nexus.

Side Event 3: Illuminating Hidden Harvests: the contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development.

Small-scale fisheries account for at least 40 percent of global capture fisheries production and employ over 90 percent of those operating in capture fisheries globally. When taking into account also the 53 million people in subsistence fisheries and all household members related to small-scale fisheries, almost 500 million people globally depend, at least partially, on small-scale fisheries for their livelihoods, and even more people for food security and nutrition.

These numbers are the result of the [Illuminating Hidden Harvests](#) global initiative of FAO, [Duke University](#), and [WorldFish](#) to generate and disseminate new evidence about the importance of small-scale fisheries to inform policy and practice. A major output is the *Illuminating Hidden Harvest: The contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development (IHH)* report, which assessed the current environmental, economic, gender, food security and nutrition, and governance dimensions of small-scale fisheries, globally. Over 800 authors and experts worldwide contributed to the report. In many countries achieving the SDGs will not be feasible without ensuring a sustainable future for small-scale fisheries.

Small-scale fisheries are therefore an integral part of FAO's Blue Transformation Roadmap which sets out the vision for achieving sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for better nutrition, better production, a better environment and a better life. The *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication* (SSF Guidelines) are one of the key reference documents of the Blue Transformation, and have been embraced around the world as guiding framework for action since they were endorsed by the FAO Committee on Fisheries ten years ago.

Pathways to fully realize the contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development include new ways of characterizing small-scale fisheries, improving how related data and information is collected and analysed, and taking action for transformational change, within and beyond the fisheries sector.

In relation to data and information, IHH country-cast studies conducted in the region, for example in Egypt, provided the opportunity to gain a better in-depth understanding of the contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development at national level, but also showed that major challenges in relation to data availability for the subsector exist and need to be addressed.

In relation to transformational action, participatory approaches to small-scale fisheries development can provide important results, as demonstrated by the empowerment of women in fish processing and marketing in Oman, who improved their capacities to engage in markets and the fair distribution of benefits along the value chain.

Political will is key to sustaining Blue Transformation in the long term and the comprehensive Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, which is grounded in the SSF Guidelines, provides an important concrete commitment in this regard. The SSF Forum, established under this plan, is an important space for small-scale fisheries actors to collectively learn and develop capacities around key priorities identified by themselves.

Recommendations for follow-up

- Identify and address existing challenges to further improve small-scale fisheries data collection and analysis capacities in the region, taking a broader, multi-disciplinary approach that includes among other nutritional aspects, governance and gender.
- Explore the use of the IHH country case study approach and related tools for follow-up action on the ground, including by providing these tools in relevant languages for the region.
- Promote the direct empowerment and engagement of small-scale fisheries actors along the value chain, for example women in value chains, and fishers in co-management, building on existing good examples.
- Foster political commitment in support of small-scale fisheries and in line with the SSF Guidelines, as provided by the example of the Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, at regional and national level.
- In order to protect the small-scale fisheries sector and preserve their source of income and food, the conference calls on member states in the region to join the Port State Measures Agreement to combat Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Side Event 4: The Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services (AFRAS)

The Side Event was dedicated to the official launch of the Arab Forum for Rural Advisory Services (AFRAS), a collaborative network for advancing extension and rural advisory services across Arab countries. AFRAS actively engages in fostering networking, knowledge sharing, and learning among Rural Advisory Services (RAS) stakeholders from different sectors. AFRAS places a strong emphasis on creating inclusive, gender-responsive, pluralistic, market-oriented and demand-driven systems, underscoring its commitment to catalysing positive change and sustainable development in rural communities.

Upon request by AFRAS' stakeholders, FAO, in collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Global Forum on Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS), has been supporting AFRAS' incubation process by facilitating the interaction among stakeholders at regional and country levels, as well as supporting the diverse technical, institutional and organizational arrangements required for its launch.

Officially opened by FAO and IFAD, the launch event introduced the consultative process that has led to AFRAS establishment, including the regional study "Advancing rural advisory service in Arab countries to promote market-orientation and inclusive transformation", and three regional consultations which brought together policymakers and representatives of regional and international organizations.

The launch event also introduced the institutional structure of AFRAS and its web-based platform and featured key messages from members of the AFRAS community. Participants' interventions highlighted the importance of engaging stakeholders at national and regional levels to expand the AFRAS community, taking note of the pluralism of the service system. They also highlighted the need for AFRAS to adopt a lean, agile and informal institutional format, and the importance of benefitting from FAO and IFAD's support for AFRAS' operationalization. Participants endorsed AFRAS and its contribution as a lever for inclusive and sustainable rural transformation at country and regional levels.

Participants in the event recognized the importance of AFRAS as a first-of-its-kind initiative in the region and commended FAO for its efforts towards its establishment and operationalization. The following is a summary of the discussions.

- a. AFRAS emerged as both a social and institutional innovation, serving as a vehicle for rural transformation leveraging the power of collective action.
- b. AFRAS is a dream come true for many champions of Rural Advisory Services (RAS) in the region, emphasizing the role of multi-stakeholder approaches to deliver rural advisory services to reduce redundancy, give the common language and address challenges including lack of expertise in RAS.
- c. IFAD reiterated its engagement and commitment in AFRAS for more effective, pluralistic and market-oriented systems. Stressed that this endeavour builds on the efforts of GFRAS and that, thanks to GFRAS, it was possible to impact RAS in 40 countries. As Arab countries were isolated from GFRAS, IFAD believed in the critical role of RAS and market connectivity of rural populations. AFRAS was established with a wealth of insights and experiences.
- d. The importance of RAS in the portfolio of FAO was underscored, with AFRAS representing a transformative step to bringing innovation and technology in the hands of farmers. Recognizing RAS as fundamental to the transformation of food systems, AFRAS can provide a window to access the latest innovations and learning. FAO has been supporting GFRAS since 2011. It will extend to support to AFRAS. Innovation as a catalyst of positive change, innovation leads the way in transforming agri-food systems.
- e. Noted that with AFRAS the regional network of GFRAS includes 18 networks. AFRAS has a lot of experience to contribute to GFRAS, noting the diversity of the region and its youthful population. Recognized the work of champions who have brought forward the process.
- f. Highlighted the importance of RAS to tackle the challenges affecting rural areas and food systems in general, particularly by enhancing the smallholders to access to RAS. Importance of developing public policies in RAS and extensions. The plurality of actors need framework to work collaboratively and in a coordinated session. Importance of engaging the youth.
- g. AFRAS can leverage the link between the extension sector and the cooperative sector leveraging its potential to advance RAS. Women should be given greater importance.

- h. In this area, we suggest dealing directly with professional structures such as associations, cooperatives, and PO, under which their members and clients include small farmers who are in dire need of continuous information, guidance, and training in order to establish sustainable, reliable agriculture in light of climate change and water scarcity. The current situation requires greater efforts, and in this context, we call on the AFRAS community to get to know more about the members, to know what each individual within it can offer for the benefit of the group, and the necessity of exchanging experiences, opinions, and suggestions.
- i. We all know that agricultural extension plays a pivotal role in rural transformation and the development of agricultural systems, and there is no doubt that this forum will help accelerate the transfer of technology, agricultural expertise, and success stories to stakeholders, benefiting from technological development in the field of communication, information, and artificial intelligence.
- j. The current situation requires greater efforts, and in this context, we call on the AFRAS community to get to know more about the members, to know what each individual within it can offer for the benefit of the group, and the necessity of exchanging experiences, opinions, and suggestions.
- k. Regional organizations including ACSAD and AOAD extended support to this initiative and assured that the momentum will be maintained. Salah Al Din Bekkaly Yekhlef from Morocco commended the major achievement and pledged to extend all the support.
- l. AFRAS is an example of collective action and it is important that AFRAS receives the institutional support it needs as a multistakeholder transformative initiative.
- m. A suggestion to utilize the usage of social media to brand, connect, and allow AFRAS to become a hub for extension and RAS agents in the region. As we have in our network 4000+ member in our group.