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Organización de las  
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Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة  
الأغذية والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

# CONFERENCE

**Forty-third Session**

**Rome, 1-7 July 2023**

**Report of the 36th Session of the Regional Conference of the Near East (Baghdad, Iraq, Senior Officers Meeting 10-13 January and Ministerial Meeting 7-8 February 2022)**



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

NERC/22/REP

# REPORT

Baghdad, Iraq

10-13 January

7-8 February  
2022

(Hybrid)

## **Thirty-sixth Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East**

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*FAO Member Nations in the Near East Region*

Afghanistan	Kuwait	Saudi Arabia
Algeria	Kyrgyzstan	Somalia
Azerbaijan	Lebanon	Sudan
Bahrain	Libya	Syrian Arab Republic
Cyprus	Malta	Tajikistan
Djibouti	Mauritania	Tunisia
Egypt	Morocco	Turkey
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, Turkey, 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 (virtual); 2022 and 7-8 February 2022 (hybrid)

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\*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

#### *Senior Officers Meeting*

- *Regional results, priorities, the four betters, and the Sustainable Development Goals (Paragraphs 60 and 61-63)*
- *Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPoW) 2022-25 for the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (Paragraph 66)*
- *Update on the development of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy (Paragraph 70)*
- *Update on the development of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change (Paragraph 75 (b))*

#### *Ministerial Session*

- *Date and Place of the 37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (Paragraph 105)*
- *Election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East (Paragraph 106)*

### Matters for the Attention of the Conference

#### *Senior Officers Meeting*

- *Transforming agrifood systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Near East and North Africa (Paragraphs 16 and 17)*
- *Summary of the recommendations of regional commissions (Paragraphs 24 and 25)*
- *Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in the Near East and North Africa (Paragraphs 28 and 29)*
- *Rural transformation for youth employment and income – Innovation as an accelerator for agrifood systems transformation (Paragraphs 34 and 35)*
- *Transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all – Making trade work for food security and nutrition in the Near East and North Africa (Paragraphs 40 and 41)*
- *Greening agriculture: Towards sustainable recovery and climate change action – Accelerating action to address climate change (Paragraphs 47 and 48)*
- *Building resilience for food security and nutrition – COVID-19 and the resilience of the region's agrifood systems (Paragraphs 53 and 54)*

#### *Ministerial Session*

- *Ministerial Round Table I: Food security and healthy diets for all for better nutrition and a better life (Paragraphs 95 and 96)*
- *Ministerial Round Table II: Building resilient rural communities for better production, a better environment and a better life (Paragraphs 99 and 100)*
- *Ministerial Round Table III: Green recovery and climate action for better production and a better environment (Paragraphs 103 and 104)*

## **Organization of the Conference**

1. The 36th Session of the Near East Regional Conference (NERC 36) was organized in two parts: a virtual Senior Officers Meeting from 10 to 13 January 2022, and a Ministerial-level Meeting held in hybrid modality from 7 to 8 February.
2. NERC 36 was convened in hybrid modality on an exceptional basis, and without creating a precedent, in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health concerns, with some representatives attending in person in Baghdad, Republic of Iraq, and others participating virtually. This followed consultations by the Director-General with the Chairperson of NERC 36, the Government of the Republic of Iraq, and the Near East Regional Group.
3. The Ministerial Session, hereinafter referred to as “the Ministerial Session”, was attended by 491 participants, including 25 ministers and deputy ministers, of which 16 participated physically and nine (9) participated virtually. Participants included delegates from 24 Members of the region (out of 30), and three (3) Observers, as well as permanent representatives of governments to FAO, representatives from United Nations, regional intergovernmental organizations, private sector, civil society organizations and academia. The list of countries that participated in the Regional Conference is available on the NERC 36 webpage at: <https://www.fao.org/3/cb8646t/cb8646t.pdf>.

## **Senior Officers Meeting**

### **I. Introductory Items**

#### **Opening Session**

4. The Senior Officers Meeting (SOM), hereinafter referred to as “the Meeting”, was opened with statements by Mr Abdul-Hussein on behalf of the Chairperson of NERC 36, and Mr Abdulhakim Elwaer, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa.
5. Mr Abdul-Hussein welcomed the participants and provided a briefing on the format and Agenda of the Meeting, as well as guidance on the use of Zoom tools during the Meeting.
6. Mr Abdul-Hussein extended gratitude to the Sultanate of Oman for hosting the 35th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC 35), and to Dr QU Dongyu, FAO Director-General, for the excellent preparations for NERC 36 as well as for FAO’s support to the countries of the region to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mr Abdul-Hussein highlighted the alarming increase in the trends of hunger, acute food insecurity and malnutrition in the region, which necessitates an urgent and radical transformation of the agrifood systems in the region to be more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable. Mr Abdul-Hussein explained that the outcomes of the Meeting will be presented to the Ministers in their upcoming meeting in Baghdad, Iraq, to inform their deliberations and decisions. He emphasized the importance of the Meeting and urged the participants to actively participate in all sessions.
7. Mr Elwaer welcomed the participants and noted the critical timing of the Meeting, adding that NERC 36 was the first Regional Conference since the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 was adopted. He highlighted the growing challenges facing the region, including climate change, conflict and protracted crises and the COVID-19 pandemic, and emphasized the urgent need for extraordinary actions towards transforming agrifood systems in the region as put forth by FAO’s Director-General. Mr Elwaer indicated that the region will host the next two United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conferences of the Parties in Egypt (COP 27) and the United Arab Emirates (COP 28), which offers opportunities to accelerate the efforts of the region towards climate change mitigation and adaptation. Mr Elwaer highlighted that the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 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, and the four regional priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa (NENA). He committed FAO’s

support to the countries of the region in order to accelerate the transformation of the region's agrifood systems.

### **Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable**

8. The Meeting endorsed and adopted the Agenda (*Appendix A*) and Timetable.
9. The documents submitted to NERC 36 are listed in *Appendix B*, and the statements are available at: <https://www.fao.org/3/nh884en/nh884en.pdf>

### **Designation of the Deputy Chairperson**

10. The Meeting designated His Excellency Saif Mohammed Al Shara, Deputy Minister for Food Diversity, Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, United Arab Emirates, as the Deputy Chairperson for NERC 36.

### **Designation of the Rapporteur**

11. The Meeting designated Mr Hadi Hashim, Director of the Marketing and Prices' Monitoring Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Iraq, as the Rapporteur.

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

### **A. Transforming agrifood systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Near East and North Africa**

12. This introductory session set the stage for the discussions throughout the Meeting. Mr Ismail Serageldin, Emeritus Librarian of Alexandria, Founding Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina (BA) and former Vice President of the World Bank, delivered a keynote speech focusing on the priorities for agrifood systems transformation in the region. In his speech, Mr Serageldin welcomed FAO's diagnosis of the challenges facing NENA countries in achieving food security and eliminating rural poverty and the four regional priorities. He emphasized the need for large-scale transformation, a shift toward science-based policies and evidence-based regulations and a renewed focus on reducing the widening spatial and income inequalities across the region. Moving forward, approaches like climate smart agriculture can support increased productivity, enhanced resilience and reduced emissions. Advancements in technology (including artificial intelligence, biotechnology and Information and Communication Technology [ICT]) can improve the quantity and quality of agricultural output while utilizing less resources, reducing food loss and waste, and increasing time and labour efficiency, while engaging a younger generation of farmers.

13. Mr Elwaer moderated a panel discussion with the participation of Ms Saadia Abderma, President of the Regional Association of Women Farmers in Morocco, Mr Fadi Jabr, General Secretary of the Arab Federation for Food Industries, Mr Ghazi Faiq Haji, Director-General of Planning and Follow-up in the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

14. The Meeting took note of the key messages that emerged from the panel discussion, including the following:

- a) FAO regional priorities were identified following an inclusive and multi-stakeholder process, and these priorities reflect the realities and strategic needs of the region, and offer a solid framework to transform agrifood systems towards achieving the SDGs in the region.
- b) The private sector, in particular the food industries, have a very important role to play in making the region's agrifood systems more sustainable, more resilient, more inclusive and more efficient, and to provide better nutrition for all.
- c) There is concern that the region may have reached a tipping point in terms of the degradation of its natural resources, as well as an understanding that radical changes are needed in the interaction between agriculture and the environment, moving from agriculture as a cause of

degradation towards a situation where agriculture becomes a central part of the solution towards a more sustainable future.

- d) Producers are at the centre of any process of transformation and need to be equipped with the knowledge, capacities and the right type of incentives that allow them to play an active role in the transformation of the region's agrifood systems.

15. The Meeting took note of the key messages that emerged from the plenary discussion triggered by the question, "how can FAO help accelerate the necessary transformation of the region's agrifood systems"? In the course of its deliberations on the item, the Meeting:

- a) stressed the importance of scaling up nutrition-sensitive, gender inclusive and sustainable agriculture practices, building on successful examples such as those supporting rural women to cultivate nutritious, water efficient crops as a means to create vital livelihood opportunities, improve nutrition outcomes and strengthen women's effective engagement in agrifood systems;
- b) recognized that in addition to agriculture production, food processing and packaging has significant ramifications on food quality and safety, and the sustainability of agrifood systems;
- c) acknowledged the urgency of action needed to combat climate change and resource degradation, including a paradigm shift in the agrifood sector and greater awareness on sustainable food consumption patterns among the region's population;
- d) acknowledged the importance of a paradigm shift in policies for significant transformation of agrifood systems;
- e) expressed concern over the high levels of food loss and waste which constitute a burden for the region's scarce natural resources, while highlighting the growing inequality in access to food;
- f) highlighted the importance of territorial approaches in managing diverse agriculture systems and promoting social innovation at local scales to ensure food is sufficient in both quality and quantity; and
- g) underscored the institutional capacity, data and evidence gaps in the region, for agriculture-related policy issues.

16. The Meeting then called upon Members to:

- a) consider establishing strategic food reserves of up to three months as an important tool for ensuring food security and resilience in the face of crises and shocks and given the current high levels of import dependency;
- b) strengthen the provision of extension and information services, based on science and research, to enable the adoption of innovative techniques and technologies that can increase sustainability and productivity of agriculture, reduce production costs, as well as improve the efficiency of post-harvest processing, marketing and logistics;
- c) increase support to agrifood micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and the development of rural-urban linkages to meet urban food demand while creating decent livelihood opportunities in rural areas, especially for young people; and
- d) pursue integrated policies and the large-scale investments needed to create the enabling conditions for a thriving agrifood sector, including adequate investments in infrastructure such as storage, facilities and transportation.

17. The Meeting also recommended FAO to:

- a) support countries in framing a regional agrifood systems transformation agenda that is in line with national aspirations and visions, and the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31;
- b) strengthen the design, implementation and adoption of water, energy, food nexus approaches and integrated water management as a critical priority for NENA countries facing the effects of climate change. This includes optimization of fertilizer and pesticide use, irrigation efficiency, selection of water efficient crops and use of hydroponic systems; and

- c) strengthen efforts to address growing spatial, gender and socio-economic disparities and inequality, in particular through the adoption and scaling of innovative and inclusive approaches and technologies.

## **B. Summary of the recommendations of regional commissions**

18. Mr Alaa Azouz, Head of the Agricultural Extension Sector, Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, Egypt, and Chairperson of the Near East Forestry and Range Commission (NEFRC), and Mr Ali Mohamed Al Shaikhi, Director-General of the Fish Resources Department, Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Chairperson of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) presented reports of the NEFRC and RECOFI, respectively. Mr Mamoon AlSarai Alalawi, Secretary of the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region, provided an update on the status of the Desert Locust upsurge in the region, and Mr Mohamed Al Hamdi, Senior Water Officer, FAO, presented for information purposes the outcomes of the High-Level Joint Water-Agriculture Technical Committee of the League of Arab States.

19. The 25th Session of NEFRC was organized virtually from 19 to 21 October 2021 and hosted by Egypt. The Session included a high-level panel on strengthening regional cross-sectoral dialogue on agriculture and forestry matters. The Meeting took note of the key messages which emerged from the Report of the Commission, including;

- a) The recommendations for NERC 36 to:
  - (i) acknowledge the importance of interactions between agriculture and forestry for sustainable development and to consider food security, agriculture, rangeland, forestry and other aspects of rural development in an integrated manner;
  - (ii) address cross-sectoral forestry/rangelands and agrifood systems matters at the next NERC as an agenda item; and
  - (iii) improve interactions between NEFRC and NERC Members, including Rome-based delegations, with a view to strengthening cross-sectoral policy dialogue and to ensure that important regional forestry/rangelands matters are integrated in the themes of the Regional Conferences.
- b) The recommendations for the Committee on Forestry (COFO) to:
  - (i) strengthen its cross-sectoral work through activities aimed at halting land degradation and deforestation, and promoting sustainable agriculture, rangeland, and forest management in ways that lead to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems; and
  - (ii) extend and strengthen its work on rangelands.
- c) The call upon countries to:
  - (i) promote efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems that contribute to sustainable forest and land management;
  - (ii) strengthen the institutional mechanisms for silvopastoral and agroforestry approaches in integrating livestock management in forest- and tree-based production systems;
  - (iii) bring their forest and rangeland related climate concerns to the attention of the NERC and request that it recognize the role of forests and rangelands in policies and programmes that combat climate change; and
  - (iv) increase knowledge of forests by updating national land cover maps and conducting National Forest Inventories.

20. The 11th Session of the Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) was held virtually from 25 to 27 October 2021. The session was attended by 40 participants, from seven of the eight RECOFI member countries, namely, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the Regional Organization for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME),

the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the FAO Secretariat.

21. The Commission (i) reviewed and valued the progress made during the period 2020-2021; (ii) decided to increase the annual member's contribution from the current USD 5 000 to USD 25 000 on an *ad interim* basis and until further decision on RECOFI contributory system and scale; (iii) adopted RECOFI's Programme of Work for the biennium 2022-2023 with an estimated budget for activities of USD 206 000; and (iv) underscored a number of key matters, including:

- a) The importance of the Regional Aquaculture Information System and the need for regular updates of the system, including through integrating data from the Minimum Data on Aquaculture and Capture Fisheries, providing regular updates on the implementation of relevant RECOFI recommendations.
- b) The significance of close collaboration among RECOFI's member countries, including on issues related to trade and marketing as well as between RECOFI and its member countries to strengthen RECOFI and facilitate its effective support to Members.
- c) Oman called on RECOFI member countries to join in fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and specifically to become party to the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing (PSMA).

22. The Meeting 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, including:

- a) The successful control of the ongoing Desert Locust upsurge in the Arabian Peninsula and the Greater Horn of Africa, which started in 2019, and the valued collective efforts made by governments, FAO and partners, which enabled effective control of the ongoing Desert Locust upsurge.
- b) The preparations for the upcoming meetings of the two Desert Locust Commissions (the 32nd Session of the Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in the Central Region of the Near East and Horn of Africa [CRC] that will take place in Jeddah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in February 2022 and the 10th Session of the Desert Locust Commission for the Western Region [CLCPRO] to be held in Algiers, Algeria, in May 2022).

23. The Meeting took note of the key outcomes from the third meeting of the High-Level Joint Water-Agriculture Technical Committee of the League of Arab States (LAS), including the strategic importance of strengthening the coherence and coordination between water and agriculture sectors, and enforcing the science-policy interface through the collection and dissemination of data, studies and consultations with various stakeholders.

24. The Meeting then called upon Members to:

- a) adopt the recommendations from the Regional Commissions;
- b) support, further strengthen and empower the national Desert Locust Control units, including through appropriate legislations, financial and human resources; and
- c) strengthen political commitment and leadership at the ministerial level to boost synergy and coordination and exchange of experience and expertise.

25. The Meeting also recommended FAO to:

- a. expedite the establishment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Aquaculture and Fisheries Organization (RAAFO); and
- b. continue supporting the Commissions through technical support, partnerships with technical and financial institutions and capacity building to enable the effective implementation of their action plans.

### **C. Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in the Near East and North Africa**

26. Prior to the meeting, participants received an information note on "Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in the Near East and North Africa". The information note discussed the main gender inequalities that hinder inclusive and sustainable transformation of the region's agrifood systems,

provided a summary of FAO's work on gender equality and rural women's empowerment, and proposed a set of recommendations that call for transformative approaches to address the unequal social norms and relations that characterize the agrifood systems in the region.

27. The Meeting took note of the key messages which emerged from the panel discussion, moderated by Ms Valentina Franchi, FAO Gender Specialist. The interventions from the panellists, namely, Ms Laura Tashjian, CARE Armenia, Ms May Traboulsi, Rural Delights Cooperative, Lebanon, and Mr Walid Saleh, Chief Technical Adviser, FAO Yemen, highlighted examples of transformative and innovative gender equality interventions implemented in the region, and validated the recommendations presented in the above-mentioned information note. The key highlights from the panel discussion include:

- (a) The importance of approaching gender equality and women's empowerment through a systems approach and as integral elements of rural transformation and development.
- (b) The importance of context specific and gender disaggregated data and statistics in understanding the contribution of women in the agriculture sector and to inform decision-making.
- (c) Women have considerable potential to contribute when given access to opportunities, the necessary tools and platforms to engage in the entirety of the development process.

28. The Meeting called upon Members to:

- a) adopt policy and legal frameworks that:
  - (i) ensure women's equal entitlements, access to and control over assets – particularly land, resources and services;
  - (ii) enhance women's opportunities for decent employment and entrepreneurship in agriculture and rural areas;
  - (iii) reduce the gender digital divide to allow women to equally participate in and benefit from the increasing digitalization of agrifood systems; and
  - (iv) foster policy coherence and prioritize cross-sectoral matters that systematically address the underlying causes of gender inequality.
- b) continue investing in the generation and dissemination of data and statistics disaggregated by gender, age and other relevant social dimensions to quantify the gender gaps in agriculture, monitor progress over time and report on SDG indicators and targets related to gender and food systems, such as SDG 5, indicators 5.a.1 and 5.a.2 on women's ownership of land; and
- c) reduce women's excessive burden of work, by providing appropriate technologies, services and infrastructure.

29. The Meeting recommended FAO to:

- a) strengthen the adoption of holistic gender-transformative approaches that include gender- and age-sensitive analyses to inform policies and programming, extension and community mobilization methods that promote behavioural change towards equal power and gender relations and tailored capacity development interventions for government authorities and institutions, organizations and service providers working in the agriculture sector to promote women's equal participation in agrifood systems; and
- b) expand the implementation of gender-responsive projects and programmes that acknowledge women and men's specific roles and needs in the agriculture and rural sector, and that provide equal access to opportunities for socio-economic empowerment to all population groups.

#### **D. Rural transformation for youth employment and income – Innovation as an accelerator for agrifood systems transformation**

30. Prior to the Meeting, participants received the two documents entitled "Rural transformation for youth employment and income" and "Digital innovation strategy for the Near East and North Africa", which were prepared by FAO. The documents discussed the need for an inclusive rural transformation

framework to reduce inequalities and safeguard livelihoods through more sustainable and efficient agrifood value chains and the importance of leveraging digital technologies in this pursuit. The two documents proposed sets of recommendations to Members and FAO that aim at strengthening FAO's work on rural transformation in the NENA region, in line with the priorities and needs expressed by the 35th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East.

31. Ms Dalia Abulfotuh, Economist, FAO, presented an integrated programme of work for rural transformation, embodying six interrelated response options that address the challenges and opportunities as well as the setbacks brought about by COVID-19. These responses are: (i) adopting territorial approaches to development; (ii) promoting inclusive digital innovation; (iii) strengthening producer organizations, extension and advisory services; (iv) sustainably intensifying agricultural production; and (v) developing competitive and inclusive value chains and agribusinesses, and (vi) enabling decent employment for rural youth and women.

32. The Meeting took note of the key messages which emerged from the panel discussion moderated by Mr Jean Marc Faurès, Regional Programme Leader, FAO, with the following panellists: Mr Mohamed Bachri, Director of Strategy and Partnerships, National Agency for the Development of Oasis and Argan Zones (ANDZOA), Morocco; Ms Dina Najjar, Gender Scientist, International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA); Sheikh Saed Al Kharusi, Oman Farmers' Organization; and Mr Ramy Boujawdeh, Deputy General Manager, Berytech. The key highlights from the panel discussion include:

- a) Territorial approaches to rural transformation bring together different sectors. They are based on the three main pillars of sustainability: social (investing in human capital and rural services, including financial services), economic (making territories attractive through the development of inclusive value chains) and environmental (with a focus on water, land and biodiversity).
- b) Inclusive rural transformation rests on the equitable engagement of men and women alike and providing equal opportunities.
- c) Working on gender norms is critical to strengthen gender equality in agriculture given the fact that agriculture is the largest employer of women in most of the countries of the region.
- d) Innovation and technology can help to accelerate agrifood systems transformation to become more inclusive and more sustainable, provided that no one is excluded from access to digital infrastructure and new technologies. This requires a conducive environment, including the establishment of public sector strategies and investments that foster private initiatives, research and development, and the modernized extension services, making best use of advances in ICT.
- e) Countries of the region should invest in the promotion of agricultural innovation (including digital, institutional, and social innovation), empowerment of producers' organizations and modern, market-oriented advisory and extension services. Countries should also aim at promoting economic inclusion pathways and gender-transformative approaches for increasing decent and green job opportunities that are attractive to youth and women by encouraging investments in human capital, infrastructure and services and leveraging public-private partnerships in the development of more efficient and inclusive value chains.

33. In the course of its deliberations on the item, the Meeting:

- a) stressed the need for empowering women as a driver for inclusive rural transformation, building their capacities in agro-processing and artisanal works and recognizing the actual and potential role they play in rural communities;
- b) recognized the great potential of youth in agriculture and the need for greater support to draw educated youth into the sector, engage rural youth into decent on- and off-farm employment, and overcome the setbacks youth faced during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- c) welcomed the formulation of a regional digital innovation strategy and encouraged FAO to accelerate its support for the digitalization of agriculture, considering the priorities and digital environment of countries in the region.

34. The Meeting called upon Members to:
- a) mobilize public and private investments in local infrastructure and public services to catalyze private investment as well as ensure integrated rural development;
  - b) pursue integrated strategies for inclusive rural transformation based on the principles of territorial development, adopting multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches, and considering the priorities of the Regional Action Plan for the UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028;
  - c) mainstream agroecology, climate smart agriculture and other innovative approaches in national policies, strategies and investment plans to enhance the productivity and income of small-scale farming in a sustainable way;
  - d) promote more inclusive and more sustainable agrifood value chains and provide technical, policy and investment support mechanisms to strengthen agri-entrepreneurship, particularly among youth and women;
  - e) develop realistic, time bound and resource-efficient action plans to improve rural infrastructure, services, digitalization and connectivity for small-scale producers, their organizations and value chain actors and to modernize extension and rural advisory services; and
  - f) strengthen gender-responsive social protection systems and the coverage of social insurance to agrifood systems workers and ensure universal access to social assistance for the rural poor.
35. The Meeting recommended FAO to:
- a) support Members in pursuing inclusive rural and agriculture transformation through sustainable intensification and value chain development, in particular for small-scale producers;
  - b) assist Members through the development of digital transition, including digital innovation strategies, technology and pilots to be implemented at the country level that are inclusive and responsive to small producers' needs;
  - c) support Members in promoting collective action and strengthening producer organizations, including women and youth associations and cooperatives;
  - d) support the advancement of extension and advisory services as pluralistic and market-oriented systems with an emphasis on inclusivity, gender-responsiveness, innovation and digitalization; and
  - e) support Members in mobilizing resources and investments and building strong human capital.

#### **E. Transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all – Making trade work for food security and nutrition in the Near East and North Africa**

36. Prior to the Meeting, participants received two documents entitled “Transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all” and “Update on FAO’s work in nutrition”, which were prepared by FAO. The documents discuss the need for transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets by: (i) fostering an agrifood systems approach; (ii) utilizing trade, investment and technology as enablers for food security and better nutrition; (iii) mainstreaming nutrition in food production and consumption-related policies and incentive mechanisms; (iv) ensuring food safety and quality; (v) reducing food loss and waste; and (vi) adjusting the business models of agri-enterprises and improving access to inputs, finance and markets, especially for those who are currently at a disadvantage, such as rural women and youth, migrants and refugees.

37. Mr Ahmad Mukhtar, Senior Economist, FAO, delivered a presentation affirming that the NENA region is heavily dependent on imported food to meet the needs of a growing population. By 2030, the region will meet 63 percent of its caloric demand through imported food. Trade, therefore, plays a key role in meeting the food security and nutrition needs of the region and needs to be recognized and internalized in relevant policies as an enabler for food security and enhanced nutrition.

38. The Meeting took note of the key messages which emerged from the panel discussion moderated by Ms Sariyya Bunyatova, Head of the Division of Trade Regulation at the Ministry of Economy, Azerbaijan; with the panellists: Ms Sara Ashour, Trade Policy Analyst, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Egypt; Mr Saad Hatem Mohammed, Senior Economist, Ministry of Agriculture, Iraq; Ms Fatma Brahim, Head of Unit, Ministry of Trade and Export Promotion, Tunisia; and Mr Manzoor Ahmad, former Ambassador of Pakistan to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and former Director of the FAO Liaison Office in Geneva. The key highlights from the panel discussion include:

- a) COVID-19 has highlighted the region's dependency on food imports. Better preparedness with regional solutions could have helped to enhance food security in the region in such uncertain times.
- b) The links between trade and food security are inherently complex, with trade affecting all dimensions of food security and nutrition, often with differential effects across sectors and population groups.
- c) There is a need to incentivize private sector investments in strengthening national and regional agriculture as well as food markets and value chains. The role of science, innovation and on- and off-farm technologies is also vital in ensuring sustainable growth in domestic food production, availability and access to healthy and safe food.
- d) Many countries in the NENA region specialized mostly in forward linkages and raw materials supply. Future regional plans can focus more on encouraging investment and specializing in high regional value added nutritious agro-industrial projects such as the dairy sector, juices and infant food.
- e) Food loss and waste is a serious problem in the region that requires collective effort and evidence-based strategies throughout the value chains.
- f) Experiences show that market-distorting interventionist policies to insulate domestic markets do not work. The subsidies given for maintaining huge stocks can be better spent on improving seed quality and connecting farms to markets.
- g) NENA countries can better position themselves in negotiating free trade agreements with the food security objectives in mind by rationalizing their domestic tariffs. Without doing so, such agreements result in trade diversion rather than trade creation.
- h) The Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement (GAFTA) involves most countries in the Arab world and liberalizes trade between these countries. However, obstacles such as restrictions on trade and other restrictions such as sanitary measures, as well as the heterogeneity among countries and poor infrastructure, have affected intraregional trade in the region.
- i) Instability in conflict-affected countries greatly affects the internal and external agricultural marketing due to the continuation of conflicts. The deflation of local currency and the low per capita income affects the ability of vulnerable populations to obtain healthy food due to the rising prices of food, especially grains.

39. In the course of its deliberations on the item, the Meeting:

- a) acknowledged the efforts of FAO in furthering the agrifood systems transformation in the region through innovative and inclusive approaches;
- b) highlighted the role of the private sector, investments in agriculture and the need to enhance access to on- and off-farm technologies for agrifood systems; and
- c) identified several policy priorities for transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all in the region, including through:
  - (i) increased economic integration and intra-regional trade, taking advantage of complementarities of the countries and enabling an optimal use of the limited natural resources, noting that trade policy coordination and the harmonization of standards are critical;
  - (ii) diversification of the sources of imports;
  - (iii) policies that promote healthy diets; and
  - (iv) adoption of digital tools (e.g. electronic certificates such as e-Phyto) and institutional innovations.

40. The Meeting called upon Members to:
- a) consider adopting a Regional Agrifood Systems Transformative Agenda with a focus on achieving more efficient, inclusive, resilient, sustainable and nutrition-sensitive agrifood systems to reduce hunger, poverty and socio-economic inequalities and eliminate all forms of malnutrition at subnational and national levels and request FAO to support its implementation;
  - b) develop, with the support of FAO, a national policy environment for using trade, investment and technology as enablers for developing regional and national markets and agrifood value chains that promote availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy diets for all, with specific focus on marginalized communities and the urban poor;
  - c) promote, with the support of FAO, consumer dietary practices, competencies and skills for achieving healthy diets from sustainable agrifood systems; and
  - d) help, with the support of FAO, the private sector in adjusting their business models in order to encourage and respond to consumer preferences for healthy diets.
41. The Meeting recommended FAO to:
- a) support Members of the region in their efforts to transform agrifood systems, including through:
    - (i) facilitating the exchange of knowledge, regional policy dialogues and advocacy work; and
    - (ii) supporting Members in furthering their national level implementation of the recommendations outlined in paragraph 32.
  - b) enhance its focus and work on supporting Members to use trade, investment and technology as enablers for agrifood systems transformation and achieving food security; and
  - c) address the knowledge gap on relevant sanitary and phytosanitary areas that are essential for effective trade.

## **F. Greening agriculture: Towards sustainable recovery and climate change action – Accelerating action to address climate change**

42. Prior to the Meeting, participants received two documents entitled “Greening agriculture: Towards sustainable recovery and climate change action – Accelerating action to address climate change” and “Climate finance in the Near East and North Africa”, prepared by FAO. The documents discussed the critical sustainability issues that threaten food security and have detrimental effects on the region’s terrestrial and marine ecosystems, including in land, water, biodiversity and marine and aquatic resources, and highlighted the vulnerability to climate change and the need to ensure that recovery from COVID-19 is based on sustainable management of these resources to sustain rural livelihoods.

43. Mr Abdel Hamied Hamid, Senior Forestry Officer, FAO, delivered a presentation highlighting natural resource degradation challenges associated with current unsustainable agricultural practices and emphasized the need to shift to more sustainable, inclusive and resilient agrifood systems if the countries of the region are to achieve food security and achieve the SDGs. As a follow up, Ms Theresa Wong, Natural Resources Officer, FAO, emphasized FAO’s support to countries in accessing funds for financing climate change adaptation and mitigation. She highlighted the need to build country capacities to improve their access to these funds.

44. The Meeting took note of the six priority action areas of greening agriculture highlighted in Mr Hamid’s presentation: (i) enhance water productivity and governance; (ii) reduce land and soil degradation, and enhance sustainable land management and governance mechanisms; (iii) promote nature based solutions and recycling; (iv) scale up landscape restoration and conservation of biodiversity; (v) adopt an ecosystems approach to fisheries and aquaculture; and (vi) scale up climate change adaptation and mitigation actions.

45. The Meeting took note of the key messages which emerged from the panel discussion moderated by Ms Domitille Vallee, Chief Technical Adviser, FAO, with the following panellists: Ms Samia Maamer, Ministry of Agriculture, Tunisia; Mr Rajab Abdel-Azim, First Undersecretary, Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egypt; Mr Ahmed Hussain Tali, Ministry of Agriculture, Iraq;

Mr Ahmed Alzabi, Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, United Arab Emirates. The key highlights from the panel discussion include:

- a) Numerous initiatives on sustainable agrifood systems and mitigating the challenges associated with water scarcity, depletion of natural resources and climate change exist in the region. Scaling up these initiatives requires adopting appropriate policies and regulations, promoting institutional networks, establishing effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and capitalizing on research and education to build awareness and generate knowledge.
- b) The role of innovation and technology as accelerators is pivotal in supporting the shift to more sustainable agrifood systems.
- c) It is strategically important to take concrete actions at all levels, from the national to farm, to address water scarcity, promote the adoption of sustainable practices and strengthen climate actions for building economically viable green value chains that provide resilient livelihoods while ensuring resilient agrifood systems.
- d) The region has distinct opportunities to scale up the implementation and financing of climate action in agrifood systems, and enhancing the engagements with global processes under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including on reporting and monitoring of national climate commitments. These opportunities include hosting of the United Nations COP 27 in Egypt in 2022, and COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2023, as well as the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change.
- e) The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030 provides a good opportunity for the countries in the region to enhance their capacity, build partnerships and mobilize investments to implement large-scale restoration programmes aiming at reversing the current trends in natural resource degradation in the region.

46. In the course of its deliberations on the item, the Meeting:

- a) stressed the importance of striking a balance between the expansion in agriculture and water availability;
- b) recognized the linkages between deforestation and land degradation including flood risks that are accentuated by climate change and called for large scale restoration work;
- c) acknowledged that organic agriculture can provide several opportunities for sustainable change, however, development of policies and regulations is needed;
- d) underscored the need to strengthen regional collaboration to manage transboundary waters in support of food security;
- e) expressed concerns over the difficulties encountered by countries in general and for civil society organizations in particular to access climate finance, and stressed the need to build the capacities in designing projects and programmes that enhance the resilience and adaptive capacity of agrifood systems to climate change; and
- f) highlighted that the region is highly affected by drought and the impacts of climate change, and that COP 27 and COP 28 will provide a strong opportunity to raise awareness on this issue at a global level. Coordinated efforts from countries and a common plan is needed.

47. The Meeting called upon Members to:

- a) create a regional mechanism to monitor the impacts of climate change on agriculture and food security in the region;
- b) ensure that recovery programmes move away from the current situation where agricultural practices have led to land and water degradation, biodiversity loss and continued conversion of fragile natural ecosystems;
- c) accelerate coordination between water, food security, climate and environmental policies, acknowledging the limited water availability and the fragility of the region's ecosystems, and strengthening regional coordination mechanisms; and
- d) seize the opportunities provided by the global movement under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration for increased restoration actions.

48. The Meeting recommended FAO to:
- a) continue work to support Members in addressing water scarcity issues and adopting integrated and sustainable water management approaches and the use of non-conventional water resources within the framework of the FAO-RNE Water Scarcity Initiative;
  - b) develop programmes addressing climate change issues affecting agriculture and food security in the region, support countries in monitoring climate change effects by creating an appropriate mechanism for monitoring, increasing access to funds and implementing climate change adaptation actions;
  - c) support countries to benefit from the opportunity of hosting COP 27 and COP 28 in the region, by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, respectively, and assist them in highlighting climate change issues in the region and addressing related challenges;
  - d) support Members in their efforts towards the transformation of aquatic food systems; and
  - e) support Members to enhance biodiversity conservation and to mainstream biodiversity and climate change in their national policies, programmes and actions across the agricultural sectors.

### **G. Building resilience for food security and nutrition – COVID-19 and the resilience of the region’s agrifood systems**

49. Prior to the Meeting, participants received two documents entitled “Building resilience for food security and nutrition” and “COVID-19 impact and response in the Near East and North Africa”, prepared by FAO. The documents discussed the main long-term stresses and recurrent shocks in the region and their impact on the region’s agrifood systems, food security, nutrition and livelihoods, and provided insights and learning thus far about the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The two documents proposed sets of recommendations that aimed to proactively manage these shocks and stresses and build resilient agrifood systems through adopting a holistic risk management approach.

50. Mr Ayman Omer, Senior Field Programme Officer, FAO, highlighted the drivers of the region’s structural vulnerability to disasters. The compounded impacts of various natural and man-made hazards, including the COVID-19 pandemic, to the region’s food security and nutrition further strengthen the imperative to adopt a holistic approach to risk management.

51. The Meeting took note of the key messages which emerged from the panel discussion moderated by Mr Nasredin Hag Elamin, Representative, FAO Egypt, with the panellists: Ambassador Shahira Wahbi, Disaster Risk Reduction Coordinator, League of Arab States; Mr Mahdi Al Kaisey, Advisor to the Minister for Agriculture, Iraq; and Mr Ali Daoudi, Deputy Director of the Doctoral Training and Scientific Research, National School of Agronomy, Algeria. The key highlights from the panel discussion include:

- a) The structural vulnerability of the region is mainly due to the interconnected and reinforcing relationship between climate change, water and productive land scarcity in the area which is aggravated by population growth.
- b) The importance of building the capacities of countries to minimize the impact of crises through actions such as maintaining production capacities in urban and rural areas, stockpiling of food and production inputs, adequate market infrastructure, strengthening information systems and anticipatory actions.
- c) The importance of further understanding the risks associated with the agriculture sector by understanding the cost of impacts and specific actions across the interconnected elements in the agrifood systems.
- d) Disaster risk reduction (DRR) is a common concern across the region which requires a common vision and a comprehensive approach to disaster and risk management, including specific actions on food crises.

52. In the course of its deliberations on the item, the Meeting:

- a) expressed concerns about the increasing trends of hunger, acute food insecurity and malnutrition in the region, which reflect the region's structural vulnerability and significant challenges resulting from colliding and overlapping shocks including conflict, climate extremes and transboundary pests and diseases;
- b) noted with concern the ever-evolving, complex, serious and unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of life, globally and in the region;
- c) valued the efforts of governments and agrifood sector actors in the region that enabled agrifood systems to withstand the shocks triggered by the pandemic;
- d) noted with concern the extraordinary challenges facing some countries of the region due to various drivers including conflicts, social unrest, and financial and economic crises;
- e) underscored the need to balance long-term with short-term interventions, stressing the importance of addressing the root causes of various risks;
- f) noted with concern the significant threat of transboundary plant pests and animal diseases to the region's food security, requiring coordinated efforts and a dedicated regional trust fund to enable effective management through preparedness, early and anticipatory actions and timely response;
- g) underscored the importance of shifting from managing disasters to proactively managing risk using a holistic approach;
- h) underscored the importance of building capacities of countries to adopt conflict sensitive programming approaches guided by the "Do no harm" principles and others; and
- i) recognized that comprehensive plans and strategies must be backed by commitment and political will from all actors.

53. The Meeting called upon Members to:

- a) adopt a holistic and multi-hazard approach for agrifood systems' risk management, 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 thematic and multi-hazard early warning systems; and
  - (iv) expanding the coverage and effectiveness of social protection systems as well as crop and livestock insurance systems, ensuring that they are shock-responsive as well as gender, age, nutrition and risk-sensitive.
- b) integrate resilience building as a key pillar of national food security strategies and plans;
- c) adopt a One Health approach to effectively manage biological hazards and risks within and across the human-animal-plant and environment sectors;
- d) strengthen regional collaboration to address transboundary pests and diseases, including through the establishment of a regional trust fund;
- e) allocate adequate resources for holistic risk management into agrifood systems, including for the actions herein proposed; and
- f) increase investment in science and research targeting the development, dissemination and adoption of innovations (technological, institutional, social, financial and policy) to strengthen resilience.

54. The Meeting recommended FAO to:

- a) generate evidence to inform holistic management of multiple risks;
- 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;

- c) support Members of the region, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, in formulating and implementing One Health strategies, plans and programmes and addressing transboundary pests and diseases;
- d) support regional DRR mechanisms such as the Arab Coordination Mechanism for DRR (League of Arab States) and the Arab Network for Monitoring Natural Disasters (Arab Organization for Agricultural Development);
- e) build the capacities of the countries of the region in holistic approaches for managing risks and strengthening resilience; and
- f) increase resource mobilization efforts to support high quality resilience building programmes.

### **III. Programme and Budget Matters**

#### **A. Regional results, priorities, the four betters, and the Sustainable Development Goals**

55. Prior to the Meeting, participants received the document entitled “Priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa region under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31”, which was prepared by FAO.

56. Ms Beth Crawford, Director, Office of Strategy, Programme and Budget, FAO, presented the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and outlined the four betters - better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life. The Strategic Framework supports 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.

57. Ms Crawford emphasized the importance of localizing the Strategic Framework to respond to regional and country priorities and contexts through the regional priorities, UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and FAO Country Programming Frameworks.

58. Mr Jean Marc Faures, Regional Programme Leader, FAO, presented an overview of FAO results achieved over the last biennium at regional, subregional and country level, including progress made in implementing key FAO initiatives launched by the Director-General such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and the 1000 Digital Villages Initiative.

59. Mr Jean Marc Faures also presented the priorities guiding FAO’s programme of work in the region over the coming biennium, and confirmed the alignment of identified priorities to the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.

60. In the course of its deliberations on the results and priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa region, the Meeting:

- a) noted the major achievements of FAO’s work at the regional and country levels, including the significant growth in the field programme and the results of the four regional priorities at the regional and country levels;
- b) appreciated the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, which is guided by 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 and the effort to localize the Strategic Framework in the specific conditions, needs and priorities of Members in the region;
- c) acknowledged the steps taken by FAO toward orienting its programme of work in the countries of the region to better contribute to agrifood systems’ transformation and the SDG targets related to food and agriculture. This includes the focus on four interconnected regional priorities, the introduction of new working modalities and innovative initiatives at the regional and country levels;
- d) noted with appreciation the focus of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 on a series of ‘accelerators’ to fast-track progress and maximize efforts in meeting the SDGs, and the keenness to mainstream and intensify the application of technology, innovation and data,

and bring greater focus on strengthening governance, human capital and institutional development in all its interventions;

- e) stressed the importance of ensuring that key regional challenges such as local and transboundary plant and animal pests and diseases, water scarcity, uptake of innovation and technology, including in data collection and management, strengthening agrifood value chains, mainstreaming regional trade and support to small producers are duly taken into consideration in the regional programme of work; and
- f) underscored the need to develop broad partnerships, bringing together governments, the private sector, civil society, producer organizations and cooperatives, academic and research institutions as well as development partners towards achieving the commonly agreed goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and addressing regional transboundary concerns. The Regional One Health Platform planned by FAO would provide an excellent opportunity to further consolidate the partnership between FAO and a wide range of relevant actors.

61. The Meeting endorsed the proposed programme of work under the four regional priorities, the accelerators and cross-cutting themes, and FAO corporate strategies and initiatives, as well as the proposals to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the Regional Office.

62. The Meeting then called upon Members and FAO to work together towards achieving the objectives set in the programme through strengthened cooperation, a well-articulated strategy to foster multi-stakeholder partnerships and the progressive transition from a project approach to a programmatic approach.

63. The Meeting also called upon FAO to further strengthen and consolidate partnerships with civil society organizations, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in the region in support of the FAO Strategic Framework.

## **B. Multi-Year Programme of Work 2022-2025 for the Regional Conference for the Near East**

64. Mr Serge Nakouzi, Deputy Regional Representative, FAO, gave an overview of the Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPoW) for the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East for the period of 2022-2025, which outlines the overall objectives, results and mechanisms underlying the operations of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East for the coming years.

65. The MYPoW is in line with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and the core objective to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of FAO through new ways of working, including strengthening results-based management and engaging in partnerships.

66. The Meeting supported the endorsement of the MYPoW 2022-2025.

## **C. Update on the development of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy**

67. Prior to the Meeting, participants received the document entitled “The outline and roadmap of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy”, which was prepared by FAO.

68. Ms Ismahane Elaoufi, FAO Chief Scientist, provided an update on the development of the new FAO Science and Innovation Strategy, highlighting that the Strategy would be a key tool to implement the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 with the goal for FAO to provide global leadership and support its Members in harnessing science and innovation to realize context-specific, sustainable and systemic solutions for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind. Ms Elouafi indicated that the Strategy had a broad scope that included all sectors and areas of agrifood systems and all types of science and innovations, including local, traditional and indigenous knowledge. The Strategy is being developed through an inclusive and transparent process that engages key actors and it focuses on three pillars: (i) strengthening science- and evidence-based decision-making; (ii) supporting innovation and technology at the country level; and (iii) reinforcing FAO’s capacities to better serve its Members. The 168th Session of the FAO Council welcomed the Strategy and provided guidance to inform its development.

69. The key highlights from the discussion that followed the presentation include:
- a) The Strategy should consider country and local specificities.
  - b) The starting point for promoting science and innovation in the region should be a realistic analysis of each country as there are many differences and disparities among countries.
  - c) There are similarities among countries, so strengthening cross-country research and innovation would increase efficiency and enable better sharing of knowledge and information across borders.
  - d) Special attention must be given to small-scale producers, including with regard to increasing their productivity.
  - e) Countries in the region require support in the process of innovation to develop locally appropriate innovations.
  - f) FAO Country Offices should play a major role in the implementation of the Strategy.
  - g) There is a lot of innovation, but such innovation is not being used to achieve its full potential, therefore the focus should be on supporting existing innovations to scale up and scale-out.
  - h) Access, transfer of technology and intellectual property rights are key issues.
  - i) Water scarcity and food safety are among the key challenges for the region.
70. The Meeting welcomed the proposed outline and roadmap of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy and commended the suggested inclusive process.
71. The Meeting then called upon Members to provide inputs and feedback during the consultation process that reflects the region's priorities.
72. The Meeting also recommended that FAO consider certain elements in the Strategy, including the specificities of local contexts and disparities between the countries in the region, facilitate access and technology transfer, in particular intellectual property rights, capitalize on local knowledge and pay attention to the role of small producers, women and youth.

#### **D. Update on the development of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change**

73. Prior to the Meeting, participants received the document entitled "Update on the development of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change", which was prepared by FAO
74. Mr Zitouni Ould-Dada, Deputy Director, FAO Office of Climate, Environment and Biodiversity, provided an update on the development of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change, highlighting that the recent evaluation of FAO's contribution to climate action (SDG 13) called for a new Strategy to scale the Organization's action on climate change and better align the Strategy with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as well as other key FAO Strategies. The outline of the new Strategy describes FAO's vision, impact and pillars for climate action. The new Strategy is being developed in an inclusive and consultative manner. Two informal consultations were organized with FAO Members and the outline of the Strategy was presented in the recent Sessions of the FAO Programme Committee and the Council in November-December 2021. The development of the draft Strategy is ongoing, as well as consultations through the five Regional Conferences and FAO Regional Offices. The final draft Strategy will be considered for approval at the 169th Session of the Council in June 2022. The Meeting is an opportunity to give guidance on the development of the new Strategy from the perspective of the region.
75. During the course of its deliberations, the Meeting:
- a) highlighted the significant impact of climate change in the region, reaffirming that some countries are among those who will see their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declining by 2050 due to the impacts of climate change;
  - b) welcomed the development of the new Strategy on Climate Change through an inclusive process;
  - c) emphasized the role of science, technology and innovation in addressing the impact of climate change on agrifood systems, especially through effective climate change adaptation measures; and

- d) affirmed that the organization of the UNFCCC COP 27 in Egypt and COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates would mark an important milestone for the region.

76. The Meeting called upon Members to:

- a) participate actively in the regional consultation on the Strategy on Climate Change to provide inputs on regional and country needs and priorities on climate change and agrifood systems; and
- b) capitalize on COP 27 and COP 28 to accelerate concrete actions to tackle the impacts of climate change that represent a major threat to the region.

77. The Meeting recommended FAO to:

- a) consider the importance of regional and local contexts, situations and needs in finalizing the Strategy on Climate Change; and
- b) support Members in the region to proactively prepare for COP 27 and COP 28 in a manner which maximizes the benefits to the countries of the region in accessing climate finance and in updating and implementing their climate commitments, including their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), in agrifood systems.

## **IV. Concluding Session**

### **A. Ministerial Declaration**

78. The Meeting reviewed the draft Ministerial Declaration, the text of which is outlined in *Appendix D*, and recommended it be endorsed by the Ministers of the region.

### **B. Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting**

79. The Meeting reviewed and adopted the Report of the Meeting as presented by the Rapporteur, and recommended presenting a brief summary of the report at the Ministerial Meeting of the NERC 36.

### **C. Closing Remarks**

80. Messrs Elwaer and Abdul-Hussein provided closing remarks at the end of the Meeting.

81. Mr Elwaer thanked the Government of Iraq and Mr Abdul-Hussein for chairing the Meeting in an effective manner to achieving 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 urged the Senior Officers to brief the Ministers on the proceedings and outcomes of the Meeting to inform their preparations for the Ministerial Meeting of NERC 36.

82. Mr Abdul-Hussein valued 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 would be presented to the Ministers during the Ministerial Meeting of NERC 36. He thanked Mr Elwaer and the entire FAO team involved in the organization of the Meeting.

83. Participants expressed their appreciation to the Government of Iraq and FAO for the efficient arrangements, preparation and organization of the Meeting.

84. Participants reiterated the importance of certain issues discussed during the Meeting, including:

- a) the increasing trends of food insecurity and malnutrition in the region, despite all efforts, which necessitate concrete actions from all stakeholders;
- b) the strategic importance of regional collaboration, especially on trade, transboundary pests and diseases, investments, sharing of knowledge and good practices (especially in relation to addressing the challenges caused by COVID-19 on agrifood systems), contributions to setting global standards related to food security and nutrition, and South-South Cooperation; and

- c) the significance of strengthening partnerships among governments, civil society organizations, the private sector and regional and international organizations, including FAO.

## **Ministerial Session**

### **V. Introductory Items**

#### **Statement by the Director-General**

85. Dr QU Dongyu, Director-General of FAO, extended his gratitude to the Government and to the people of Iraq for hosting NERC 36 in extremely difficult conditions. He also extended his gratitude to His Excellency Saud Al Habsi, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Sultanate of Oman for his commitment and efficient Chairpersonship of NERC 35, and to all Ministers, delegates and participants of NERC 36. The Director-General highlighted the serious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on all sectors, including food and agriculture, the slow and challenging recovery and the lessons offered by the pandemic, including the centrality of the sustainable development goals, the importance of our agrifood systems, and the need to transform these systems towards increased sustainability, resilience and efficiency.

86. The Director-General outlined the vision for transforming FAO into a more agile, effective and efficient organization to better serve Members with greater dynamism. He highlighted the main elements of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, which 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. The Director-General stressed that the four regional priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region respond to the needs of the region expressed during the wide consultation process with the countries, and are fully aligned with the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. He reaffirmed his full commitment to following up on the recommendations emanating from the Regional Conference.

#### **Statement by the Prime Minister of Iraq**

87. His Excellency Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, Prime Minister of Iraq, welcomed participants, and noted the opportunity of the Regional Conference for the Near East to build peace and partnerships among countries in the region. He highlighted the significant and historic role of agriculture in Iraq and the region as a whole. He stressed that climate change, water scarcity, drought, desertification and conflict are among the major strategic challenges facing the region and, recognized that addressing these challenges requires strong partnerships and regional collaboration that builds on complementarities, especially on transboundary issues. His Excellency Mustafa Al-Kadhimi appreciated the excellent collaboration between Iraq and FAO, and thanked FAO for its remarkable contributions to the development of Iraq. He noted the strategic importance of the Regional Conference in setting the vision and strategic directions for FAO's work in the region, wished participants a successful Regional Conference, and encouraged them to actively contribute to its deliberations.

#### **Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council**

88. Mr Hans Hoogeveen, Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, emphasized the unique role of the Regional Conference in defining FAO policies and priorities for the region, and urged Members to adopt transformative change through transformative actions by making the region's agrifood systems more sustainable, resilient, inclusive and efficient, and to provide better nutrition for all to achieve the SDGs by 2030. He recalled the outcomes of the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 and the role of the Coordination Hub hosted by FAO in the follow up process, which will be directed to accelerate the progress towards achieving the SDGs, including through the development and

implementation of national pathways and coalitions of action, through the provision of technical assistance at the country level, and through science- and evidence-based support to policy-making.

### **Statement by the Chairperson of the 36th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East**

89. His Excellency Muhammad Karim Al-Khafaji, Minister for Agriculture of Iraq, welcomed participants and noted the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including on the working modalities of the Regional Conference. He highlighted the challenges facing the region including conflict, climate change, water scarcity and transboundary pests and diseases, and stressed the role of the Regional Conference in setting directions to address these challenges. His Excellency Muhammad Karim Al-Khafaji noted the progress made since NERC 35, and summarized the key recommendations emerging from the Senior Officers Meeting including the recommendations related to the four regional priorities under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. He thanked the Sultanate of Oman for the excellent Chairpersonship of NERC 35, and Dr QU Dongyu, for excellent preparations for NERC 36 as well as for FAO's support to the countries of the region. He concluded by urging Members to work together with FAO and major stakeholders to accelerate efforts to overcome challenges and transform the region's agrifood systems.

### **Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)**

90. Mr Gabriel Ferrero, Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), highlighted the role of CFS as an intergovernmental and multistakeholder policy platform on food security and nutrition, the synergy between FAO and CFS, and the relevance of the CFS work to the region. He encouraged Members to continue utilizing CFS outcomes in the formulation of their national policies, strategies, legislations, and regulatory frameworks. He also encouraged Members to support the development of new CFS Guidelines and Policy Recommendations on Gender, Youth, Data and Inequalities, to be discussed by Members of the Committee during 2022-2024.

### **Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Organizations**

91. Ms Razan Zuayter, President of the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature (APN) and Founder of the Arab Network for Food Sovereignty (ANFS), summarized the views of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) building on the outcomes of CSOs' consultations meeting held virtually on 30 and 31 January in preparation for the Regional Conference and attended by 52 organizations. Ms Zuayter highlighted the need to enhance sustainable local food systems and regional integration for food security and sovereignty. She emphasized the strategic importance of cultivating essential food crops such as wheat to build resilience against the multiple stresses including conflict, climate change and COVID-19, and recommended stronger engagement of independent regional CSOs in the process.

### **Statement by the Spokesperson of the Private Sector**

92. Mr Ayman Sejiny, Chief Executive Officer, the Islamic Cooperation for Development of the Private Sector (ICD), encapsulated the outcomes of the private sector's consultation meeting held virtually on 3 February in preparation for the Regional Conference. He highlighted the important roles of the private sector in food security, agriculture and economic development. Mr Sejiny welcomed FAO's keenness to strengthening its partnership with the private sector, as evidenced by the development of the FAO strategy for private sector engagement as well as the aforementioned consultation, to accelerate the transformation of the region's agrifood systems while creating job and business opportunities, promoting innovations and enabling rural transformation. Mr Sejiny called for open dialogues and stronger partnerships between the public and private sectors as well as CSOs, and encouraged FAO to facilitate such dialogues and partnerships.

## VI. Round Table Discussions

### A. Ministerial Round Table I: Food security and healthy diets for all for better nutrition and a better life

93. The Ministerial Session reviewed the documents entitled “Transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all” and “Update on FAO’s work in nutrition”, and noted the messages from the documents presented by Mr Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, FAO.

94. The Ministerial Session:

- a) acknowledged the efforts of FAO in furthering the transformation of the region’s agrifood systems through innovative and inclusive approaches;
- b) emphasized the strategic need for policies that promote healthy diets for all;
- c) highlighted the importance of increasing public and private investments in agriculture, and the important role of the private sector especially in promoting innovations and enhancing inclusive access to technologies;
- d) noted the strong and complex links between trade and food security, especially in the region given its high reliance on food imports;
- e) underscored the significance of food loss and waste in the region, which necessitates collective effort and evidence-based strategies throughout the value chains; and
- f) noted with concern the rising levels of malnutrition, overweight and obesity in some countries, especially among youth, and the continuing high prevalence of undernutrition in countries affected by conflicts.

95. The Ministerial Session encouraged Members to:

- a) adopt a Regional Agrifood Systems Transformative Agenda with a focus on achieving more efficient, inclusive, resilient, sustainable agrifood systems that enable healthy diets for all to reduce hunger, poverty and socio-economic inequalities and eliminate all forms of malnutrition at subnational and national levels;
- b) develop national policy environments for using trade, investment and technology as enablers for developing regional and national markets and agrifood value chains that promote availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy diets for all;
- c) promote consumer dietary practices, competencies and skills for achieving healthy diets from sustainable agrifood systems;
- d) strengthen interregional trade building on the comparative advantages of each country; and
- e) support the private sector in adjusting their business models in order to encourage consumer consumption of healthy diets and respond to consumer preferences for healthy diets.

96. The Ministerial Session requested FAO to:

- a) support Members in their efforts to transform agrifood systems, including through facilitating the exchange of knowledge, regional policy dialogues and advocacy work as well as the implementation of the recommendations outlined in paragraph 17;
- b) support Members to use trade, investment and technology as enablers for agrifood systems transformation and achieving food security;
- c) address the knowledge gap on relevant sanitary and phytosanitary areas that are essential for effective trade as well as food safety measures; and
- d) support Members in their Food and Nutrition Education strategies to address malnutrition in all its forms, with a focus on school-aged children and youth.

### B. Ministerial Round Table II: Building resilient rural communities for better production, a better environment and a better life

97. The Ministerial Session reviewed the documents entitled “Rural transformation for youth employment and income” and “Building resilience for food security and nutrition”, and noted the messages from the documents presented by Ms Ismahane Elouafi, Chief Scientist, FAO.

## 98. The Ministerial Session:

- a) noted with concern the increasing trends of hunger, acute food insecurity and malnutrition in the region, which reflect the region's vulnerability and significant challenges resulting from colliding and overlapping shocks including conflicts, climate change and extremes, COVID-19, financial and economic shocks, and transboundary pests and diseases;
- b) valued the efforts of governments and agrifood sector actors in the region that enabled agrifood systems to withstand the shocks triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- c) noted the importance of investing in rural areas and reducing the inequalities between urban and rural areas, as well as tackling social and gender inequalities within rural areas;
- d) emphasized the strategic importance of shifting from managing disasters to proactively managing risk using a holistic approach;
- e) underscored the importance of regional collaboration in addressing transboundary risks;
- f) stressed the need to adopt targeted multisectoral and territorial approaches for transforming agrifood systems to enable healthy diets for all, and be more sustainable and resilient while closing spatial, gender and income disparities; and
- g) highlighted the importance of promoting science, innovation and technology and mobilizing public and private investments in rural areas, including infrastructure and agribusinesses in a way that is inclusive and ensures no one is left behind.

## 99. The Ministerial Session encouraged Members to:

- a) adopt a holistic and multi-hazard approach for agrifood systems' risk management, including through:
  - (i) integrating resilience building as a key pillar of national food security strategies and plans;
  - (ii) establishing effective multi-hazard governance mechanisms;
  - (iii) developing inclusive and evidence-based risk management policies;
  - (iv) developing hazard early warning systems;
  - (v) expanding the coverage and effectiveness of shock and gender responsive social protection systems, and crop and livestock insurance systems; and
  - (vi) integrating consumer awareness and behaviour change as a driver for transforming agrifood systems;
- b) promote territorial approaches to rural development to capitalize on local resources, assets and institutions;
- c) promote more inclusive and more sustainable agrifood value chains and provide technical, policy and investment support mechanisms to strengthen agri-entrepreneurship and enhance the income of small-scale producers in an inclusive and sustainable way with due attention to women and youth;
- d) support small producers by strengthening producer organizations, upgrading rural advisory and extension services, and building capacities to integrate sustainable agriculture practices to boost income and productivity and overcome growing scarcity of natural resources, especially water;
- e) intensify efforts to bridge disparities by facilitating women's access to resources, services and income as a driver for inclusive rural transformation;
- f) invest in the promotion of agricultural innovation as well as improved access to education and training for youth;
- g) prioritize actions and interventions targeting school-aged children and youth for promoting changes in dietary practices;
- h) adopt a One Health approach to address biological hazards; and
- i) strengthen regional collaboration to address transboundary pests and diseases, including through the establishment of a regional trust fund.

## 100. The Ministerial Session requested FAO to:

- a) support Members in pursuing inclusive rural transformation, and the development of integrated and gender-responsive policies and strategies to ensure agriculture sustainability,

- productivity and economic inclusion, leveraging innovation and technology and mobilizing necessary investments;
- b) support capacity building in the region, generate evidence to inform holistic management of multiple risks, and promote innovative approaches and practices for effective management of multiple risks, including those related to disaster risk reduction, climate change and conflict-sensitive and peace-responsive programming;
  - c) support, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the formulating of One Health strategies, plans and a Regional One-Health platform;
  - d) support Members in pursuing inclusive rural and agriculture transformation through territorial approaches, with a focus on small-scale producers including through South-South and Triangular Cooperation and intra-regional collaboration and exchange;
  - e) assist Members through the development of digital transition, including digital innovation strategies, technology and pilots;
  - f) support Members in promoting collective action and strengthening producer organizations, including women and youth associations and cooperatives and develop effective, efficient and inclusive rural services in particular market oriented and research-based extension and advisory services;
  - g) support Members in making agrifood value chains more competitive and efficient through the adoption of technologies and innovations to upgrade postharvest infrastructure and reduce food loss and waste while providing decent employment for women and youth; and
  - h) increase resource mobilization efforts to support high quality resilience building and rural transformation programmes.

### **C. Ministerial Round Table III: Green recovery and climate action for better production and a better environment**

101. The Ministerial Session reviewed the documents entitled “Greening agriculture: Towards sustainable recovery and climate change action – Accelerating action to address climate change” and “Climate finance in the Near East and North Africa”, and noted the messages from the documents presented by Ms Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, FAO.

102. The Ministerial Session:

- a) recognized the challenges brought about by the unsustainable practices resulting in widespread land and water degradation, biodiversity loss, deforestation, desertification, depletion of aquatic and marine resources and increased flood and drought risks accentuated by climate change, and called for sustainable management of natural resources and large scale restoration interventions for achieving sustainable and resilient agrifood systems;
- b) acknowledged the importance of interactions between agriculture and forestry for sustainable development, and to consider food security, agriculture, rangeland, forestry and other aspects of rural development in an integrated manner;
- c) welcomed that two countries of the region will host the upcoming United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties - COP 27 in Egypt in 2022, and COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates in 2023, which present opportunities to scale up the implementation and financing of climate actions in agrifood systems, and enhancing the region’s engagements with global processes under UNFCCC;
- d) underlined the role of innovation, data and information, digitalization, solid and robust policies and institutions and partnerships; and
- e) underscored the need to strengthen regional collaboration to manage transboundary waters in support of food security and to strike a balance between the expansion in agriculture and water availability.

103. The Ministerial Session encouraged Members to:

- a) accelerate coordination between water, plant production and protection, food security, climate and environmental policies, acknowledging the limited water availability and the fragility of the region’s ecosystems, and strengthening regional coordination mechanisms;

- b) ensure that recovery programmes move away from the current situation where agricultural practices contributed to land and water degradation, biodiversity loss and continued conversion of fragile natural ecosystems;
- c) establish a regional coordinated programme to address climate change and a mechanism to monitor the impacts of climate change on agriculture and food security in the region; and
- d) seize the opportunities provided by the global movement under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration to increase restoration actions in the region.

104. The Ministerial Session requested FAO to:

- a) continue supporting Members in addressing water scarcity in the region and adopting integrated and sustainable water management approaches within the framework of the FAO-RNE Water Scarcity Initiative and the Global Programme on Sustainable Dryland Agriculture;
- b) develop and implement regional programmes that address climate change affecting agriculture and food security in the region, including in the context of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change;
- c) support Members to benefit from the opportunity of hosting COP 27 and COP 28 in the region;
- d) support Members to enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, ecosystem restoration and to mainstream biodiversity and climate change in their national policies, programmes and actions across the agricultural sectors;
- e) promote sustainable agriculture, rangeland, and forest management in ways that lead to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems; and
- f) support Members in their efforts towards the transformation of aquatic food systems.

## **VII. Other Matters**

### **A. Date and Place of the 37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East**

105. As there were no official candidatures that had been presented to host the 37th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East in 2024, the Regional Conference called upon the Near East Regional Group to discuss and agree on the date, place, Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the 37th Session in consultation with the Director-General prior to the end of the year 2022.

### **B. Election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East**

106. The Ministerial Session postponed the election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East until the host of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East is identified.

### **C. Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration**

107. The Ministerial Session adopted a Ministerial Declaration, the text of which is presented in *Appendix C*.

### **D. Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting**

108. The Ministerial Session adopted the report of the Senior Officers Meeting (SOM) held virtually during the period from 10 to 13 January 2022, which was presented to the Ministerial Meeting by Mr Hadi Hashim, the Rapporteur of the SOM.

109. The Ministerial Session endorsed the recommendations of the Senior Officers Meeting including those related to the Priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa region under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, FAO results in the Near East and North Africa – 2020-21, and the Multi-Year Programme of Work 2022-2025 for the Regional Conference for the Near East.

## **VIII. Concluding Items**

### **Adoption of the Report**

110. The Ministerial Session adopted the report as presented by the Rapporteur.

### **Closure of the Regional Conference**

111. Dr QU Dongyu, Director-General of FAO, expressed his heartfelt thanks to the Government and people of Iraq, His Excellency Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, Prime Minister of Iraq, and His Excellency Muhammad Karim Al-Khafaji, Minister for Agriculture of Iraq, for hosting NERC 36. He also extended his gratitude to the participants, and congratulated them on the success of NERC 36. The Director-General highlighted that NERC 36 is a historical Regional Conference in many ways; noted that it is the first Regional Conference for the Near East to be held in the region after twelve years, and one of the most important international UN conference in Baghdad. He emphasized that agrifood systems should and must play a decisive role in the rejuvenation of the region, and stressed the need to reduce inequalities between cities and rural areas, between women and men, and between the rich and the poor in a holistic and inclusive manner that brings all stakeholders together. The Director-General underscored the strategic importance of helping farmers with enabling policies, responsible investment, innovation and science, and information technology including digital technology and big data. He urged participants to accelerate agrifood systems transformation through their ownership, political commitment, and action plans, and called for collective actions to support the vulnerable, the regions and Members who need most support.

112. On behalf of the Government of Iraq, His Excellency Muhammad Karim Al-Khafaji, Minister for Agriculture, thanked the Director-General, the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, the FAO Office in Iraq and the participants for their positive contributions, which had led to the success of the 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East. He then declared the session closed.

113. Participants expressed their heartfelt appreciation to the Government of Iraq and FAO for the efficient arrangements, preparation and organization of the 36th Session of the Regional Conference.

## **Appendix A. Agenda**

### **Senior Officers Meeting**

10-13 January 2022

#### **I. Introductory Items**

- 1) Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable
- 2) 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 36th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East

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

- 5) Transforming agrifood systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Near East and North Africa
- 6) Summary of the recommendations of regional commissions
- 7) Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in the Near East and North Africa
- 8) Rural transformation for youth employment and income – Innovation as an accelerator for agrifood systems transformation
- 9) Transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all – Making trade work for food security and nutrition in the Near East and North Africa
- 10) Greening agriculture: Towards sustainable recovery and climate change action – Accelerating action to address climate change
- 11) Building resilience for food security and nutrition – COVID-19 and the resilience of the region's agrifood systems

#### **III. Programme and Budget Matters**

- 12) Regional results, priorities, the four betters, and the Sustainable Development Goals
- 13) Update on the development of the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy
- 14) Update on the development of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change

#### **IV. Other Matters**

- 15) Multi-Year Programme of Work 2022-2025 for the Regional Conference for the Near East
- 16) Any other matters

17) Review of the Ministerial Declaration

18) Adoption of the Report of the Senior Officers Meeting

### **Ministerial Session**

7-8 February 2022

19) Statement by the Director-General

20) Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

21) Statement by the Chairperson of the 36th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East

22) Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

23) Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Organizations

24) Statement by the Spokesperson of the Private Sector

### **V. Round Table Discussions**

25) Ministerial Round Table I: Food security and healthy diets for all for better nutrition and a better life

26) Ministerial Round Table II: Building resilient rural communities for better production, a better environment and a better life

27) Ministerial Round Table III: Green recovery and climate action for better production and a better environment

28) Date and place for the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East

29) Election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the 37th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East

30) Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration

31) Adoption of the Report of the Regional Conference

## **Appendix B. List of Documents**

### **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Title</b>
NERC/22/1	Provisional Annotated Agenda
NERC/22/2	FAO results in the Near East and North Africa – 2020-21
NERC/22/3	Priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa region under FAO’s Strategic Framework 2022-31
NERC/22/4	Rural transformation for youth employment and income
NERC/22/5	Transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all
NERC/22/6	Building resilience for food security and nutrition
NERC/22/7	Greening agriculture: Towards sustainable recovery and climate change action
NERC/22/8	The outline and roadmap of the “FAO Science and Innovation Strategy”
NERC/22/9	Update on the development of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change
NERC/22/10	Multi-Year Programme of Work 2022-2025 for the Regional Conference for the Near East

### **INFORMATION ITEMS**

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Title</b>
NERC/22/INF/1	Provisional Timetable
NERC/22/INF/2	Provisional List of Documents
NERC/22/INF/3	Statement by the Director-General
NERC/22/INF/4	Summary of the recommendations of regional commissions
NERC/22/INF/5	United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration
NERC/22/INF/6	Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council
NERC/22/INF/7	Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)
NERC/22/INF/8	Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Organizations
NERC/22/INF/9	Statement by the Spokesperson of the Private Sector
NERC/22/INF/10	Update on FAO's work in nutrition

NERC/22/INF/11	Outcomes of the UN Food Systems Summit and implications for the Near East and North Africa
NERC/22/INF/12	Update on implementing FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative in the Near East and North Africa
NERC/22/INF/13	Digital innovation strategy for the Near East and North Africa
NERC/22/INF/14	Climate finance in the Near East and North Africa
NERC/22/INF/15	Biodiversity mainstreaming in the Near East and North Africa
NERC/22/INF/16	COVID-19 impact and response in the Near East and North Africa
NERC/22/INF/17	Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in the Near East and North Africa
NERC/22/INF/18	The state of food security in the Near East and North Africa
NERC/22/INF/19	Update on the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy – Information Note 1 – December 2021
NERC/22/INF/20	Update on the development of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change – Information Note 1 – December 2021
NERC/22/INF/21	Statement by the Chairperson of the 36th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East
NERC/22/INF/22	Information note

### Appendix C. Ministerial Declaration

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, assembled at the 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East hosted by Iraq in hybrid modality on 7 and 8 February 2022;

**Noting with deep concern** the increasing trends of hunger, acute food insecurity and malnutrition in the region documented in FAO's flagship publication *Near East and North Africa - Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021*. These alarming trends reflect the region's vulnerability and significant challenges resulting from conflicts, social unrest, huge dependency on imported food, financial and economic crises and multiple colliding and overlapping shocks;

**Noting with deep concern** the ever-evolving, complex and unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of life, globally and in our region;

**Noting with deep concern** the challenges facing some countries of the region due to various drivers, including climate change, water scarcity, land degradation, loss of biodiversity as well as poor diets and a surge in non-communicable diseases;

**Acknowledging** the urgent need for a radical transformation of the agrifood systems of our region to be more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable, which address the current and future challenges facing the region and accelerate progress towards many of the Sustainable Development Goals;

**Underscoring** the central role and huge potential of smallholders and their organizations, women and youth in transforming agrifood systems;

**Emphasizing** the significant importance of promoting peace in the region;

**Noting and complementing** the extraordinary efforts put in place by the governments of the region in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges through a combination of innovative measures and initiatives.

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

1. **Commend** Dr QU Dongyu for the initiatives undertaken since his election to the position of Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in June 2019 and his commitment to reinforce and reinvigorate FAO as a dynamic, agile and technically equipped United Nations specialized agency;
2. **Support** the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, which 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 under FAO's programme of work, 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 approach;

4. **Commend** the efforts of FAO in producing timely data and analytical reports on the state of agriculture and food security in the region and in designing and implementing programmes that address the identified challenges and respond to countries' priorities;
5. **Welcome** the development of the FAO Strategies on Science and Innovation, and on Climate Change, responding to an urgent need in the NENA region for action against climate change, and for science and innovation to accelerate agricultural productivity and sustainability;
6. **Welcome** FAO corporate initiatives such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, the 1000 Digital Villages and One Country One Priority Product, and commit to support their implementation in our countries as appropriate;
7. **Commit** to work towards the transformation of our agrifood systems through the adoption of inclusive, multisectoral and multistakeholder approaches, involving agrifood system actors and their representatives, civil society and the private sector;
8. **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;
9. **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 on Ecosystem Restoration and enhance the productivity, resilience and income of small-scale farming in a sustainable way;
10. **Welcome** the organization of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP 27) in Egypt and COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates and resolve to use the opportunity to accelerate climate action in support of sustainable agrifood systems in our region, making best use of climate finance;
11. **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;
12. **Confirm** our commitment to further strengthen regional collaboration to effectively address common challenges, including through our joint efforts to establish a Regional Trust Fund to manage transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases; and
13. **Express gratitude** to His Excellency Mustafa Al Kadhimi, Prime Minister of Iraq, to the Government of Iraq and His Excellency Muhammad Karim Al Khafaji, Minister for Agriculture of Iraq, for the excellent organization of the 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East.

Baghdad, 8 February 2022