

# FAO Saudi Arabia Newsletter

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A group of researchers monitoring the improved varieties field trial in Jazan.

## Welcome Note

Greetings! This month, we are pleased to share some of the top results of the Sustainable Rural Agricultural Development (SRAD) project activities in Saudi Arabia. These include the successful farmer-led demonstration of sesame, field trial of improved sorghum and millet varieties, scaling up of coffee nurseries in Jazan, initiation of seaweed production in Red Sea locations, establishment of a fruit-drying solar tunnel facility for value addition, and the development of a business model for an agricooperative. In addition, the team participated in national and international forums on agroforestry, sustainable agriculture, and the Tanween Mega Challenge's food security track for refugees. The SRAD team also welcomed the Lead Technical Officer to the project sites to meet with partners and stakeholders. We hope you enjoy reading and find inspiration from the impactful work being done across various sectors.

### Successful adoption of good practices and field trials of improved rainfed cereals

The SRAD-introduced good practices and water management technologies for sesame production have been successfully adopted by the lead farmer, Hasan Habibi, at the demonstration farm in Damad, Jazan. This has led to an increase in production and expansion of cultivation area. Additionally, the team has undertaken widespread knowledge dissemination through onsite visits and social media channels. The rainfed cereal team, in collaboration with the Rainfed Cereal Research Unit of Agricultural Research Center (ARC) in Jazan, is closely monitoring the field trials of approximately 40 improved varieties received from ICRISAT at selected sites, and the results are promising thus far.

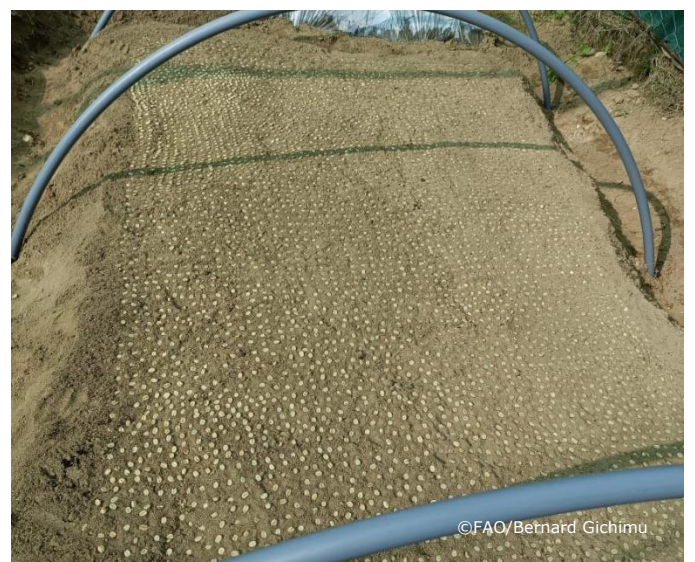
### Solar tunnels for fig drying technology to Jazan Agricultural Marketing Cooperative

SRAD project has delivered a solar drying tunnel for figs to the Jazan Agricultural Marketing Cooperative in Abu Areesh, Jazan. Introducing new technologies, establishing agricultural businesses, creating jobs, and reducing losses are key responsibilities of the SRAD project. The tunnel has the capacity to dry 500–600 kilogrammes of figs in one batch,

requiring six to eight days for the process. By effectively harnessing the greenhouse effect, the structure utilizes solar energy to raise the temperature inside the tunnel, aided by an airflow gradient created by exhaust fans powered by solar panels. The dried figs not only command higher prices in the market, but also make use of B and C grades of fruit, thereby expanding the availability window for figs.

### Produce 60 000 high-quality coffee seedlings in four months

SRAD coffee team initiative involved planting 20 kilogrammes of high-quality coffee seeds, aiming to yield approximately 60 000 coffee seedlings for distribution to farmers. The innovation introduced the use of PVC pipes and clear polythene to expedite germination, as well as the combination of peat moss with sandy soil to enhance drainage and reduce damping-off disease. This innovative process is expected to produce ready seedlings for planting within four to five months, completing the entire process within seven months. This represents a significant improvement over traditional methods, which typically took up to two years for many farmers to achieve similar results.



Coffee seeds planted in Jazan nurseries.



## Seaweed production in Jeddah and Farasan Islands



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Installation of seaweed nursery.

SRAD fisheries team conducted training to introduce the first installation of seaweed facilities in the Farasan Islands, which has garnered significant interest from young women and teachers at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University. This interest has led to the initiation of seaweed pilot projects. The installation of the first seaweed nursery in Saudi Arabia has sparked small-scale seaweed production operations, involving *Gracilarias* and *Sarconema* species, in both Jeddah and the Farasan Islands. Additionally, the second installation of a seaweed tubular net system at the facilities of the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture (MEWA) in Jeddah has been completed, with the selection of *Gracillaria* species for cultivation.

### Lead Technical Officer visit SRAD project in Jazan

SRAD Lead Technical Officer (LTO), Mariam Rezaei visited SRAD project activities in Jazan during her mission to Saudi Arabia and had a few meetings with the project beneficiaries and stakeholders. She engaged with the local authorities and expressed her high appreciation of the ongoing work in the field, which included touring a coffee demo farm in Al Adayer, the jasmine demo farms in Abu Areesh, the livestock model farm, the rainfed cereal breeders at the ARC and the Coffee Cooperative of Jazan. Additionally, the LTO and SRAD team had a meeting with the Jazan Coffee Cooperative, where they were briefed on the cooperative's activities and learned about collaborative initiatives between FAO and the coffee cooperative.

### SRAD cooperative supports development of cooperative business models

SRAD cooperative team supported the Agricultural Cooperative Society of Baljurashi, AlBaha, in developing innovative business models. Twelve male and female employees participated and collaborated to develop a preliminary business plan for the training facility, fruit cooperative, and the coffee city. Each business unit is positioned to manage smaller projects that support larger ones. Additionally, the cooperative team introduced cooperative management, financial projection tools, and business planning during the training.

### Tanween Mega Challenge

Tanween Mega Challenge, organized by the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra) with the participation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and FAO, focused on addressing the "Design Solutions for Refugees Challenge." The initiative aimed to raise awareness and promote sustainable food security practices and capacities for refugee communities. The challenge brought together more than 100 participants from various industries to address issues related to production and biodiversity faced by refugees in Tongogora camp in Zimbabwe, and Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi. From FAO Saudi Arabia, Mona Dawelbait and Zunita Zubir served as mentors, supporting and guiding participants in developing innovative solutions for food security and sustainable agriculture.

### UN Media Workshop

The UN Media Workshop, organized by the United Nations in Saudi Arabia, gathered over 100 participants, including local and regional journalists, media outlets such as CNN, and communication and partnerships teams from UN agencies.

During the workshop, Hasan AlMakrami, FAO National Professional Officer, presented Technical Cooperation Programme and the SRAD project, which was well-received and sparked an engaging discussion on strategies to empower women's involvement in agriculture and natural resource management.

### Strengthening the implementation of forest resource assessment initiatives

A 4-day National Forest Inventory Workshop was held in AlBaha, co-organized by the General Directorate of Forests, National Center for Vegetation Cover Development, with technical support from the SRAD Natural Resources Management (NRM) team. The workshop aimed to strengthen national capacity for the preparation of forest inventories and provided training in theoretical and practical tree measurements, sampling and other methodologies, data collection, and the use of geographic information systems. The training also focused to develop comprehensive knowledge and build skills to address the financial, social, and methodological challenges of the National Forest Inventory Programme. The workshop was attended by 35 male and two female participants, empowering them to contribute effectively to the advancement of forest inventory practices and related initiatives in Saudi Arabia.



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SRAD NRM team with the participants of the NFI field workshop in AlBaha.

### Participation in international forums and conferences on food security, sustainability and food systems

SRAD actively participated presentations at several international and national events organized this month. Elaine Springgay, Forestry Officer at FAO-HQ, took part in the National Workshop on Agroforestry and Ecotourism. Kakoli Ghosh, SRAD Chief Technical Adviser, delivered presentations at the Second International Conference on Food Security and Environment Sustainability organized by King Faisal University in Al Hasa, and at the First International Forum on Sustainable Agriculture organized by Estidamah in Riyadh. Abdullah Alhendi participated in the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology conference in Jeddah on the Future of Food Systems, while Ayman Omer, Programme Director, delivered a speech at the Jazan Investment Forum. Additionally, Jeremiah Njeru, CTA NRM and Kakoli, along with Ayman, participated in the Project Management Training course organized by FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa, aimed at strengthening result-based management of FAO projects.

### Strengthening MEWA's Capacity to implement its Sustainable Rural Agricultural Development (SRAD) Programme (UTF/SAU/051/SAU)

In the framework of the FAO Technical Cooperation Programme, this project is strengthening the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA) capacity to implement its Sustainable Rural Agricultural Development Programme (2019–2025). The project is being implemented with MEWA, Reef and National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification (NCVC) in nine components across Saudi Arabia, i.e., coffee, beekeeping, roses, sub-tropical fruits, livestock, fisheries, rain-fed cereals, value addition and natural resources management covering forests, national parks, rangelands and controlling desertification. The main objectives of the project are to increase production and productivity while managing natural resources, promote diversification and income generation for smallholders, in particular rural youth, and women.

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