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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Thirty-sixth Session

10-13 January 2022 and 7-8 February 2022

**Priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa region under the
FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31**

Executive Summary

The 42nd Session of the FAO Conference unanimously approved the Strategic Framework 2022-31. The strategic narrative guiding the Strategic Framework is supporting the Agenda 2030 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. The 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East is called to localize the Strategic Framework considering the specific conditions, needs and priorities of the Members in the region.

In 2022-23, seven major trends will affect food security and agriculture in the Near East and North Africa (NENA): (i) the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic consequences; (ii) instability, protracted crises and conflicts leading to increased poverty, hunger and food insecurity; (iii) population growth and rapid urbanization with close to stagnant food production; (iv) rapid growth of overweight and obesity across the region; (v) increasing divide between living conditions in rural and urban areas; (vi) extreme water and land scarcity and degradation of natural resources; and (vii) climate change and increasingly frequent and intense disasters and shocks.

FAO's work in the region will focus on supporting countries in transforming their agrifood systems to address the above challenges and accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It will do so by addressing the four Regional Priorities using the 20 Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) of the Strategic Framework 2022-31. These four Regional Priorities, already endorsed by the 35th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East, are the result of extensive consultations with countries and regional stakeholders.

- **Regional Priority 1: Rural transformation and inclusive value chains for youth employment and income:** enhancing productivity and income, focusing on youth employment and women empowerment to close the rural/urban divide.

- **Regional Priority 2: Food security and healthy diets for all:** focusing on trade, enabling policies, food safety and quality, food loss and waste, and advocacy for nutrition.
- **Regional Priority 3: Greening agriculture:** addressing water scarcity and ensuring environmental sustainability and climate action.
- **Regional Priority 4: Building resilience to multiple shocks and stresses.**

To accelerate progress and maximize efforts in meeting the SDGs, FAO will mainstream and intensify the application of technology, innovation and data, and bring greater focus on strengthening governance, human capital and institutional development in all interventions. It will also ensure that the three cross-cutting themes of gender, youth and inclusion will be systematically mainstreamed across its programmes.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to call upon Members to:

- a) Take note of the efforts to localize the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 through the four Regional Priorities.
- b) Endorse the proposed programme of work under the four Regional Priorities, 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.

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Introduction

1. The 42nd Session of the FAO Conference endorsed the [Strategic Framework 2022-31](#), which guides all of FAO's work as called for in the Basic Texts and approved the budgetary appropriations for the 2022-23 biennium.¹ The strategic narrative guiding the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 is supporting the Agenda 2030 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.

2. FAO will implement the Strategic Framework through 20 Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), which articulate FAO's thematic, technical comparative advantage and competency to deliver (see Annex 1). The *four betters* and 20 PPAs are anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Organization will use a systems approach, considering social, economic and environmental development dimensions and addressing the relevant trade-offs. Action at country level is at the core of the transformative nature of Agenda 2030, and the PPAs act as a pathway towards achieving the SDGs in alignment with national priorities.

3. The four cross-cutting accelerators, technology, innovation, data and complements (governance, human capital, and institutions), focus efforts in all of FAO's programmatic interventions to fast-track progress and maximize prospects for contributing to the SDGs, while minimizing trade-offs. The cross-cutting themes of gender, youth and inclusion are embedded across all of FAO's work to operationalize the principle of leaving no one behind.

4. Two new Strategies on Science and Innovation and Climate Change are being developed to support the implementation of the Strategic Framework 2022-31, and provide guidance respectively on: coherence and alignment of Member-led initiatives for impact at country level through better use of science and innovation; and strengthened support to countries in their raised ambitions on climate action and achievement of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

5. In the 2022-23 biennium, FAO will continue to maximize impact at the country level through other key corporate initiatives. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative is FAO's evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development in support of the SDGs. The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme aims to mitigate the immediate impacts while strengthening the longer-term resilience of livelihoods, moving towards a green recovery, building to transform the agrifood systems, and appeals for immediate-, medium- and longer-term actions to prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis.

I. Context

6. The Near East and North Africa (NENA) region is home to 419 million people, with 40 percent of the population living in rural areas. Agriculture contributes an average of 11 percent of the region's GDP (excluding the oil-rich countries) and provides 18 percent of employment. The region is the world's most land- and water-scarce, where per capita availability of agricultural land averages around 1.1 ha, and per capita water availability is 12 percent of the global average. With increasing conflict, the region has suffered a setback in its fight against hunger. After years of progress, today one in every eight people goes to bed hungry each night. In addition, the region suffers from alarming problems of overweight and obesity, in particular among children and women. For adult women, overweight and obesity rates in the NENA region are higher than any other region.

¹ C 2021/REP, paragraphs 61-70 and Conference Resolution 8/2021

7. The NENA is a region of strong contrasts. The countries are very diverse in their capacities, resources and needs. The region is home to some of the wealthiest countries in the world as well as some of the Least Developed Countries.

8. An important factor of contrast that cuts across these categories is the level of political stability. Many countries are affected by protracted crises and conflicts in. Countries dynamics, challenges and needs are substantially affected by their status and require adapted response.

9. FAO's programme in the region reflects these diverse needs and proposes actions that cut across the wide range of situations.

a) Challenges and opportunities for *better production*

10. Water scarcity and climate change are the most fundamental challenges to the achievement of many SDGs, including SDG 2, in the region. Water scarcity is the limiting factor for agricultural production in the NENA region and the driver of the region's dependency on food imports. Climate change further exacerbates problems of land and water scarcity and degradation, and its impact on water is projected to be the largest in the world, with some projections indicating a possible reduction in the region's gross domestic product (GDP) by 6-14 percent by 2050.

11. The agriculture sector contains two strongly contrasted components: a high value, commercial, export-oriented agriculture, and a huge traditional smallholder agriculture sector largely reliant on rainwater. Smallholders face the challenge of poor resource endowment, above all the scarcity of water and the scantiness and unreliability of precipitation. Market linkages tend to be weak with a large amount of subsistence farming.

12. This smallholder sector has been relatively neglected in public policy and investment. Levels of public investment in research and producer services for what are seen as intrinsically low-yielding smallholder systems are particularly low. Public spending on rural infrastructure and services is typically only a fraction – sometimes as little as one twentieth - of spending per head on urban areas. These are major causes of low agricultural productivity, growing rural-urban divide and youth migration to cities.

13. Productivity is especially low and stagnating in the rain-fed smallholder systems that grow cereals and horticultural crops as a diversification strategy to lower their risk, ensure a minimum income and provide for direct consumption. Lack of investment and innovation to enhance productivity and sustainability of their systems lowers their degree of specialization and quality of their farming practices, which in turn lowers yields of both their horticultural and cereal crops. During 2010-2016, the region's wheat yield averaged 2.2 tonnes/ha and oil seeds yield 0.9 tonnes/ha, and both were lower than the global average of 3.2 tonnes/ha for both crops. Agricultural productivity growth rates are also stagnating in the region, and the small growth seen at the regional level is almost entirely due to better use of water in production of high-value crops in Egypt.

b) Challenges and opportunities for *better nutrition*

14. Many of the region's agrifood systems are neither inclusive nor sustainable. The region suffers from the triple burden of malnutrition: undernutrition (measured by stunting, i.e., low height for the age, and wasting, i.e., low weight for the age), micronutrient deficiencies (i.e., less than adequate levels of minerals and vitamins in diets), and over-nutrition (over-weight and obesity). An appreciation of the severity of the nutrition-related health problems in the region can be obtained from the following: 20 percent of men and 35 percent of women are obese, 12.5 percent of the population is diabetic, over 35 percent of women are anaemic, and over 20 percent of children under five are stunted. Respective global averages are 11, 15 percent, 8.8, 30, and 22 percent, respectively. Notably,

hunger, micronutrient deficiency and obesity often occur at the same time in various countries of the region.

15. Food security has improved in many of the countries of the region, but since 2014 the situation in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and conflict-affected countries is alarming. Countries with conflicts have almost five times more hungry and malnourished people (25.2 percent of the population) than the countries without conflict (5.2 percent of the population) in the region.

16. Food availability is an important dimension of food security in the region. The region is heavily dependent on food imports, which are likely to continue to rise in the future. No country in the region approaches self-sufficiency in cereals, and most countries in the region import a large share of their food needs. The food production and consumption gap is expected to increase as a result of water scarcity, climate change and increasing demand from a growing and more urbanized population. The status of the region as a net food importer is therefore not expected to change. Thus, the challenge for the region rests on how to use its natural and economic resources in the most effective and sustainable manner while ensuring food and nutrition security for its people. The region has yet to develop a comprehensive framework to manage international trade in food, particularly resilient supply chains for imported food.

17. Food safety and quality is becoming an increasingly important issue in the region, in relation both to public health and to enhanced trade opportunities and deserves particular attention.

c) Challenges and opportunities for a *better environment*

18. Agriculture is the largest user of the region's increasingly scarce natural resources and contributes to land and water degradation and biodiversity loss. Countries in the NENA region are diverse in terms of natural features including topography, climate, soil, vegetation, and populations and culture. Yet these countries share one thing in common, they are all located in the most land and water scarce region of the world. The forthcoming Report on the State of Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture in the NENA Region outlines important challenges that the region as a whole is facing in the lead up to 2030 and beyond.²

19. Drivers of land and water resource use are primarily due to a rapid population increase that occurred in the past 70 years. High population growth and urbanization aggravate already fragile resources impacting available land and water resources. The world population increased three times since 1950, but the population in the NENA region grew six-fold. In 2020, there were 419 million inhabitants in the NENA region and this is expected to keep rising to reach over 633 million by 2050.

20. Scarcity and degradation of land, water and agrobiodiversity, individually and in combination, are among the most important risks to food security, nutrition, productivity and overall well-being of the region's population. Projections indicate that the NENA region is likely to be the only region in the world where harvested areas will actually shrink due to limitations imposed by water availability and soil degradation keeping the region increasingly dependent on food imports through 2050. Human-use and climate change-induced impacts on forest loss and land degradation, waste, chemical contamination, reservoir sedimentation and urban sprawl have the potential to lower the region's GDP by 2.1 percent to 6 percent.

21. Climate change projections indicate higher temperatures and decrease in rainfall (although not in all areas of the NENA region), more drought and an increase in extreme events. Climate change vulnerability is high, with NENA being the most arid region in the world. Despite the impacts that climate is bringing to the farming systems, it does not yet receive adequate attention.

d) Challenges and opportunities for a *better life*

22. Disasters, emergencies and protracted crises affect several countries of the region. Conflict, and environmental hazards are among the biggest drivers of hunger and malnutrition, costing lives, decimating livelihoods, restricting people's future life-opportunities and driving displacement and migration within and outside the region. Many rural communities in the region lack the technical and institutional capacities and means to anticipate, prevent, prepare for, respond to, cope with and recover from shocks and crises.

23. Across the region, there are declining incentives and reasons to stay in rural areas: a history of poor basic services (including health, education, and communications), low exposure to and opportunities for innovation, ever-greater pressures on natural resources, limited investment in productive infrastructure and value chains, and limited long-term employment opportunities. For many people, particularly the young, the pull of urban areas is far stronger than that of rural areas. In conflict affected contexts forced migrants tend to gravitate toward urban areas where they are more likely to access services and assistance.

24. Small-scale family farmers in the NENA region contribute to more than 80 percent of agricultural production, but national priorities generally do not reflect their important contribution to the social and economic development of the countries. Low public investments in agriculture and in the rural areas have resulted in a growing divide between rural and urban areas in terms of income, and to the migration of rural youth to cities in search of better economic opportunities. Youth unemployment averages over 20 percent and has been constant for the last 20 years. For women, unemployment is only part of the problem. Despite women's employment in the sector of 4 to 40 percent, they face unequal access to resources as they own only about 7 percent of the agricultural land. In contexts of conflict, women, youth and marginalized groups face even greater challenges in securing decent employment highlighting the critical importance of a humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus approach.

25. With little capital and few assets, deploying inherently risky and low-yielding production systems and possessing limited technical and institutional capacities, small producers and other rural poor lack the means to boost their productivity and income and are always at risk of crises and shocks, especially in conflict affected countries.

II. Priority areas of work in 2022-23

Regional Priorities

26. Building on the above analysis of the challenges and opportunities, four major priorities emerge for FAO to organize its support across countries in the NENA region and maximize its impact over the next 10-15 years. These four priorities were endorsed as the framework for FAO action in the region by the 35th Regional Conference for the Near East and are described below. These priorities are mutually dependent and inseparable. Just as the challenges and risks facing the food security and natural resources in the region are inter-related, priorities are also inter-related, and interventions made under one Regional Priority will impact the others. An integrated approach, cutting across these priorities, is therefore needed to achieve the necessary transformation of the region's agrifood systems. The Regional Priorities are fully aligned with the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) defined in the Strategic Framework and the Medium Term Plan. Annex 1 provides details on the PPAs.

Regional Priority 1: Rural transformation for youth employment and income

27. Regional Priority 1 brings together key elements of *a better production* and *a better life*, focusing on more productive and rewarding agricultural production, enhancing access of small scale

producers to productive resources and innovation and focusing on youth employment and women's empowerment. The table below presents the regional areas of emphasis associated with the PPAs of *better nutrition* and *a better life*.

Regional Priority 1: Rural Transformation – Link with the Strategic Framework and PPAs

Programme Priority Areas (PPAs)	SDG Targets	Regional Areas of Emphasis
BP1 Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	2.3, 2.4	Promote sustainable intensification of crop, livestock and fish production
BP4 Small-scale producers' equitable access to resources	1.4	Develop competitive and inclusive value chains and agribusiness Support producers' organizations and agricultural services
BP5 Digital agriculture	1.4, 5.b, 9.c, 17.8	Promote digital innovation and extension
BL1 Gender equality & rural women's empowerment	5.a	Promote rural women empowerment
BL2 Inclusive rural transformation	10.1, 14.b	Promote rural youth employment Adopt a territorial approach to rural development, invest in basic infrastructure

28. This priority will help FAO provide its support to Members to better respond to challenges posed by:

- High rural unemployment and youth migration to cities: 7.9 percent of rural population and over 20 percent of rural youth unemployed, the latter fuelling massive youth migration to cities, with higher unemployment among women than men; and
- High rural poverty and growing rural-urban divide: 40 percent of the region's population is rural, 67 percent of its poor, and 84 percent of the acutely poor, live in rural areas; low rural wages which average 1/3 of urban wages.

29. To address these challenges, interventions must aim at raising incomes (especially for smallholders) through the implementation of policies and the strengthening of institutions that support the development of market-oriented agriculture for smallholders and better integrate smallholders, in particular women, in profitable value chains such as fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices, and support their participation further along the value chains through enhancing the capacity of producers and their associations. Such interventions should support action towards boosting the productivity of small-scale producers through sustainable intensification of crops, livestock and fish production, the promotion of digital agriculture and value chains, research and development (R&D), modern extension and advisory services, reducing agricultural risk and fostering access to credit. They should also aim at increasing living standards and farm- and non-farm job opportunities that are attractive to youth by encouraging investments in infrastructure and services and by facilitating rural entrepreneurship and the establishment of small businesses, including hydroponics, aquaculture, organic farming, protected agriculture and agritourism.

30. Finally, these interventions should strengthen capacities of small scale producers to participate in intra-regional and international trade by identifying barriers and opportunities, and the policies and actions that will facilitate trade.

31. Enhancing sustainable rural transformation and agribusiness competitiveness may be achieved through territorial or localized planning. Such an approach could be a critical part of the broader

framework aiming at improving infrastructure and rural services to enhance market access; creating off-farm employment opportunities; providing better social protection to help vulnerable populations; strengthening local governance and institutions; and ensuring access to land and other natural resources.

Regional Priority 2: Food security and healthy diets for all

32. Regional Priority 2 is fully aligned with *better nutrition*, focusing on food security in all its dimensions, improved nutrition, and the associated elements of trade and food safety, adding a specific focus to address the nutritional needs of a rapidly growing urban population. Regional Priority 2 is the backbone of the agrifood systems approaches that underpins the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and the regional programme as a whole. The table below presents the regional areas of emphasis associated with the PPAs of *better nutrition* and *a better environment*.

Regional Priority 2: Food security and healthy diets for all - Link with the Strategic Framework and PPAs

Programme Priority Areas (PPAs)	SDG Targets	Regional Areas of Emphasis
BN1 Healthy diets for all	2.1, 2.2	Promote healthy diets and food diversification
BN2 Nutrition for the most vulnerable	2.1, 2.2	Revise food security policies and subsidies
BN3 Safe food for everyone	2.2	Enhance food safety and quality
BN4 Reducing food loss and waste	12.3	Reduce losses and waste along the value chain
BN5 Transparent markets and trade	2.b	Secure food import, promote export and intra-regional trade
BE4 Achieving sustainable urban food systems	2.1	Promote urban agriculture and green cities

33. This priority will help FAO provide its support to Members to better respond to challenges posed by:

- the growing divide between food supply and demand, driven by population growth and rising incomes in the face of limited natural resources (water and land);
- the growing problem of overweight and obesity, malnutrition and poor food safety and quality, in particular in urban areas.

34. To address these challenges, the interventions will aim at adopting an agrifood systems approach to food security and nutrition. Transforming agrifood systems to deliver healthy diets will improve people's health, reduce the economic risks associated with growing dependence on food imports, and enable an increasingly urbanized region to meet the food and nutrition requirements of its growing population.

35. Interventions will focus on making trade work for food security, nutrition and economic development; developing economically efficient national food security strategies, including through the modernization and strengthening of food markets; developing measures to manage the risks of import dependence and reducing exposure to global market prices; encouraging diversification of production and public-private partnerships towards healthier diets and on strengthening national capacities to improve food quality, food safety, traceability and the detection of contaminants, and promoting public and private investments in agrifood systems.

36. This priority also seeks to enhance the consumption of nutritious foods, and prevent malnutrition especially in contexts of crisis, by reforming food subsidy policies, raising awareness about healthy diets, fostering consumer protection systems, encouraging appropriate food labelling policies and combating food loss and waste. These interventions will focus specifically on developing more sustainable and healthier urban food systems.

Regional Priority 3: Greening agriculture: addressing water scarcity and ensuring environmental sustainability and climate action

37. Regional Priority 3 embraces the full range of challenges addressed by *a better environment*, and links them strongly with elements of *better production* to foster a transformation towards sustainable agriculture. The table below presents the regional areas of emphasis associated with the PPAs of *a better environment* and *better production*.

Regional Priority 3: Greening agriculture - Link with the Strategic Framework and PPAs

Programme Priority Areas (PPAs)	SDG Targets	Regional Areas of Emphasis
BP1 Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	6.4	Enhance water productivity and governance
BP2 Blue transformation	14.4	Adopt an ecosystem approach to fisheries and aquaculture
BE1 Climate change mitigation & adapted agrifood systems	2.4, 13.2	Climate change adaptation and mitigation actions
BE2 Bioeconomy for sustainable food and agriculture	12.2, 12.4, 12.5	Promote nature-based solutions and recycling
BE3 Biodiversity & ecosystem services for food and agriculture	2.5, 15.1, 15.3	Reduce land and soil degradation (including soil pollution) Scale-up landscape restoration and conservation of biodiversity Adopt an ecosystem approach to fisheries and aquaculture

38. This priority will help FAO provide its support to Members to address the following challenges:

- NENA is the world's most water-scarce region, with water scarcity growing and its quality deteriorating; less than 5 percent of the region's land is arable, and degradation is growing;
- nearly 3000 species are under threat; its forests are shrinking and its rangelands degrading; and climate change is further exacerbating the situation;
- agriculture is both a cause and a victim of the degradation of the region's natural resources and producers need to be put at the centre of the restoration process that underpins this priority.

39. The interventions aim at protecting and restoring natural resources for enhanced productivity, sustainability and resilience; combatting deforestation; preventing over-grazing of rangelands; conserving biodiversity, encouraging sustainable land management practices; preventing water degradation through use of appropriate technologies, innovations and policies, promoting more efficient irrigation techniques and practices, as well as reuse of treated water effluents; encouraging water-reuse and promoting good agricultural practices to better manage agrochemicals. These actions are in line with the goals of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), for the

implementation of which FAO acts as a co-leader along with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

40. To achieve this, what is needed is a paradigm shift towards sustainable agriculture. Such paradigm change requires improving the governance of natural resources by harmonizing policies and actions across relevant agencies; promoting equitable access to and encouraging community-based management of natural resources; increasing allocation of resources to science and innovation; enhancing synergies of natural resource-related actions among public, private, civil society, and the region; removing policies and subsidies that lead to misuse of natural resources and encouraging sustainable use through appropriate pricing and incentives; promoting land consolidation to reduce impact of land fragmentation on natural resources in the framework of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT); and strengthening capacities in data collection, analysis and sharing to improve decision-making.

Regional Priority 4: Building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations

41. Regional Priority 4 aligns both with the resilience and emergency response agendas associated with *a better life*, as well as with the response to the challenges associated with transboundary plant pests and diseases of *better production*, with a focus on environmentally sustainable pest control practices (*a better environment*) and combating malnutrition in conflict or crisis contexts as a part of *better nutrition*. The table below presents the regional areas of emphasis associated with the PPAs of *better production*, *a better environment*, *a better life* and *better nutrition*.

Regional Priority 4: Resilience to multiple shocks - Link with the Strategic Framework and PPAs

Programme Priority Areas (PPAs)	SDG Targets	Regional Areas of Emphasis
BP 3 One health	1.5; 3.d; 15.8	Enhance One Health approach to address transboundary pests and diseases
BE2 Bioeconomy for sustainable food and agriculture	12.2, 12.4, 12.5	Sustainable pest control practices and combatting antimicrobial resistance
BL3 Agriculture and food emergencies	2.1; 2.2; 16.1	Provide immediate support to crisis-affected households
BL4 Resilient agrifood systems	1.3; 1.5	Strengthen risk information and early warning systems Reduce risks and vulnerability Enhance the quality and impact of resilience programmes
BN2: Nutrition for the most vulnerable	1.3, 2.1, 2.2 3.1, 3.2	Provide immediate support to crisis-affected households to reduce malnutrition

42. This priority acknowledges the structural vulnerability and multiple shocks confronting the countries of the region, and the specific challenges of countries affected by crises and conflicts. It will help FAO provide its support to Members to address the following challenges:

- all countries of the region are affected, to varying degrees, by multiple shocks and stresses of various origins that directly affect agrifood systems and the livelihoods of their actors;
- about 30 percent of the region's population is affected by conflict, where the proportion of hungry and malnourished people is five times higher than in non-conflict countries;

- smallholders in many parts of the region are extremely vulnerable: with little capital and few assets, they lack the means to deal with shocks and crises.
43. To address these challenges, the interventions will focus on five areas for action.
- i. Understanding multiple risks through supporting countries to establish agroclimatic, disaster and crisis risk information systems and to manage, analyse, interpret, disseminate, publish, and make use of data generated for risk-informed decisions and actions; including through multi-hazard early warning systems linked to anticipatory/early actions; damage and loss assessment and damage and loss information systems; multi-risk and vulnerability assessments; resilience measurements and social, economic and environmental risk and conflict analyses.
 - ii. Promoting disaster risk reduction policies and regulations focusing on building resilient agriculture and food systems; developing institutional capacities; and contributing to the regional resilience agenda, including through contributions to the efforts by the League of Arab States related to Ending Hunger; and support parliamentarian networks on issues related to building resilience to multiple shocks and stresses as well as regional contribution to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and other relevant global and regional agreements.
 - iii. Reducing risks and vulnerabilities, through the adoption of interventions at farm and landscape level and along the food value chain; the use of innovative approaches to risk and vulnerability reduction measures including shock-responsive social protection and risk transfer systems such as crop and livestock insurance; and supporting the integration of multiple risk reduction measures within FAO programmes in conflict affected areas.
 - iv. Adopting a One Health approach against biological threats to address risks that originate at the animal-human-ecosystem interface, involving human, animal and plant health, Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and food safety. The approach is key for effective management of biological hazards and risks that threaten the food chains. It requires strong regional and multistakeholder collaboration given the transboundary nature of animal and zoonotic diseases and plant pests and diseases.
 - v. Enhancing anticipatory actions, emergency preparedness and response to shocks and crises, strengthening emergency preparedness (contingency planning) and mechanisms to provide anticipatory actions; strengthening the quality of emergency response programmes including through supporting and building capacities, and applying the principles of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Accelerators and cross-cutting themes

44. In order to accelerate progress and maximize efforts in meeting the SDGs and to realize the *four betters*, FAO will apply four cross-cutting accelerators in all programmatic interventions to accelerate impact while minimizing trade-offs:
- i. *Technology* for sustainable agrifood systems can be defined as the application of science and knowledge to develop techniques to deliver a product and/or service that enhances the sustainability of agrifood systems. Access and use of technologies must be available and affordable to all, being mindful of possible risks of increasing inequality, market concentration and contributing to the degradation of natural resources. The Regional Technical Platform on water scarcity is an example of FAO's work towards best practices and the use of appropriate technologies to address some of the region's pressing issues.
 - ii. *Innovation* is a central driving force for achieving a world free from hunger and malnutrition, and includes technological, social, policy, institutional and financial innovations. Innovation can be defined as doing something new and different like solving an old problem in a new way, addressing a new problem with a proven solution, and/or bringing a new solution to a new problem. The region has invested substantial efforts in innovation over the last two years and will continue to focus its attention on innovative approaches in support of more efficient,

- inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems in the region. In particular, a Regional Strategy for digital innovation has been developed and offers a framework for FAO action in the region, which will align with FAO's corporate Strategy on Science and Innovation.
- iii. *Data* products contribute to strengthening evidence-based decision-making, and include the development of methods, standards and frameworks, and also the collection, processing and dissemination of data, together with required capacity building and partnerships. FAO invests substantial efforts in the region to support better statistics, in particular those associated with the SDG indicators. It also provides up-to-date information on food security, nutrition, and the state of natural resources for food and agriculture, as highlighted in the forthcoming reports on the State of Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture in the NENA Region and the Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in the NENA Region. FAO is also embarking on the establishment of a regional food security and nutrition observatory that will bring together all existing data, through tailored analytics, in a dashboard that will support regional action towards agrifood system transformation.
 - iv. *Complements (governance, human capital and institutions)* are necessary and complementary dimensions of effective collective action at all scales, considering in particular that while technology and innovation have achieved important progress over the last decade, many stakeholders remain excluded from their benefits. An example of FAO's work in the region is the ongoing work on enhanced water governance, through the drafting of guidelines for water allocation and the piloting of innovative groundwater governance approaches. FAO is also planning to establish a Regional Leadership Academy to strengthen capacities in leading the agrifood systems transformation.

45. The **cross-cutting themes** of Gender, Youth and Inclusion, are critical areas identified to be taken into account across all of FAO's programmatic work in order to ensure the achievement of the UN programming principle of leaving no one behind, as reflected in FAO's strategic narrative.

46. Youth employment and women empowerment have been identified as priorities for FAO regional programmes and are therefore the backbone of Regional Priority 1 on rural transformation. Specific efforts are being made to foster the involvement of the youth in agrifood system transformation through the development of attractive new opportunities along the value chain. Women empowerment is seen as a condition to achieve the foreseen transformation in rural areas.

FAO's corporate strategies and initiatives

47. FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative strives to facilitate agrifood system transformation and sustainable rural development accelerated through targeting the poorest and the hungry, differentiating territories and strategies, and bringing together all relevant dimensions through analysis and partnerships. FAO will continue to facilitate partnerships and provide advanced geo-spatial modelling and analytics through the Hand-in-Hand Geospatial Platform, to identify the biggest opportunities to raise the incomes and reduce the inequities and vulnerabilities of rural populations. Three countries in the region have embarked in the Hand-in-Hand Initiative (Yemen, Syria and the Sudan). Approaches are tailored to country specificities and it is expected that in the forthcoming biennium the Initiative will be able to accelerate progress towards addressing the needs of the poorest and the hungry. The Initiative also contributes to FAO's efforts to promote territorial approaches to rural transformation.

48. In September 2021, FAO launched its *Global Action on Green Development of Special Agricultural Products: One Country One Priority Product*, aiming to develop green and sustainable value chains for Special Agricultural Products (SAPs). SAPs include various agricultural products with unique qualities and special characteristics associated with geographical locations and cultural heritages, which can significantly contribute to ensuring food security and healthy diets, supporting farmers' livelihoods and economic growth while protecting the environment and biodiversity. Globally Important Agriculture Heritage Systems (GIAHS) have been identified in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates where FAO will work with local counterparts to conserve sensitive landscapes while fostering sustainable production of SAPs.

49. FAO's 1000 Digital Villages Initiative (DVI) aims to convert 1000 villages across the world into digital hubs - with the aim of supporting the transformation of agrifood systems. Furthermore, FAO is operationalizing the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture to provide a venue for dialogue, policy-making and strengthening of the linkages between agriculture and digital economy fora, supporting governments to enhance the benefits of digital agriculture and leapfrog by learning from their peers, while addressing potential concerns. In the NENA region the DVI has been rolled out in seven countries through the Regional Innovation Flagship (RIF). The activities combine digital literacy training, working with partners to strengthen digital infrastructure, creating an enabling regulatory environment through national e-agriculture strategies and the development of digital tools and services in the fields of e-finance, agriculture extension and marketing.

III. Towards a reinvigorated business model

50. In order to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness of its action, the Regional Office has engaged in a series of actions organized around a theory of delivery. Areas for action have been identified and organized around strategic positioning, operational capacity and cross-cutting delivery capacities.

Strategic Positioning

51. FAO in the region will improve adoption, ownership and implementation of the four regional priorities. This includes the organization of the regional programme around the four regional priorities and organizing technical teams across the region in support of the regional priorities and action areas. It implies carrying out a skill-mix review to ensure that FAO can deliver on the four priorities and support country programmes with sufficient expertise in emerging areas requesting technical support.

52. FAO in the region will also foster policy dialogue, knowledge exchange and partnerships on priority areas of action across the region and sub-regions. This implies reviewing, broadening and strengthening of partnerships and regional networks to include civil society organizations, academia, think-tanks and specialized regional institutions, in line with the new FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021-25. It also includes the need to reinforce regional capacity for knowledge management.

Operational Capacity

53. The focus will be on making FAO's operations more efficient and effective in support of country programmes, improving business management at regional level and taking advantage of progresses at corporate level, capitalizing on "One FAO", and developing Standard Operating Procedures and Key Performance Indicators. The region will also support ongoing efforts towards Country Office transformation based on more delegation of authority to the country level and more flexible resource allocation mechanisms.

Cross-Cutting Delivery Capacities

54. FAO will seek to further develop technical and managerial capacities across the region, including implementing capacity building programmes focused on internal processes and workflow; emphasizing soft competencies when recruiting new staff; innovation; and improving information exchange and collaboration between staff at all levels in the region. It will also strive to improve the

visibility of the Organization and support Country Offices in better communicating FAO work through investment in communication capacities.

I. ANNEXES

A. Annex 1

The Four Betters and 20 Programme Priority Areas (PPAs)

PPA	Outcome Statement	SDG Targets
BETTER PRODUCTION	<i>Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, through efficient and inclusive food and agriculture supply chains at local, regional and global level, ensuring resilient and sustainable agrifood systems in a changing climate and environment</i>	2.3, 2.4, 6.4, 14.6, 14.7, 14.b, 15.2
BP1: Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	Sustainable crop, livestock and forestry production systems that are productive, resilient, innovative and competitive, and create integrated entrepreneurial and business opportunities, inclusive of small-scale and vulnerable producers, supported through enabling technologies and policies	2.3, 2.4, 6.4, 15.2
BP2: Blue transformation	More efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable blue food systems promoted through improved policies and programmes for integrated science-based management, technological innovation and private-sector engagement	2.1, 2.2, 14.2, 14.4, 14.6, 14.7, 14.b, 14.c
BP3: One Health	Strengthened and better performing national and international integrated One Health systems for human, animal, plant and environmental health achieved through improved pest and disease prevention, early warning and management of national and global health risks, including AMR	1.5, 3.d, 15.8
BP4: Small-scale producers' equitable access to resources	Enhanced equitable access of small-scale producers and family farmers to economic and natural resources, markets, services, information, education and technologies ensured through improved policies, strategies and programmes	1.4, 2.3, 2.4, 9.3
BP5: Digital agriculture	Accessible digital ICT technologies to enhance market opportunities, productivity and resilience integrated into agrifood systems policies and programmes, with particular focus on ensuring affordable and equitable access of poor and vulnerable rural communities	1.4, 5.b, 9.c, 17.8
BETTER NUTRITION	<i>End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition in all its forms, including promoting nutritious food and increasing access to healthy diets</i>	2.1, 2.2, 2.c, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 12.3
BN1: Healthy diets for all	The right to adequate food established and transition towards healthy diets for national populations prioritized in integrated institutional, policy and legal environments that ensure and incentivize engagement of consumers and the private sector	1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 12.8, 14.b
BN2: Nutrition for the most vulnerable	Identifying and ending food insecurity and malnutrition for the most vulnerable individuals in all contexts made the specific focus of targeted policies, strategies and programmes developed and implemented by countries	1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2
BN3: Safe food for everyone	Integrated, multisectoral food safety policies and legislation across national agrifood systems adopted and implemented by governments, and capacities and awareness of value chain operators and consumers enhanced.	2.1, 2.2, 3.2
BN4: Reducing food loss and waste	Clear, specific and contextualized roadmaps to prompt and enable all actors in the food supply chain, the food environment and at consumer level to reduce food loss and waste put in place and implemented by governments and intergovernmental organizations	2.1, 2.2, 12.3
BN5: Transparent markets and trade	Improved market transparency and equitable participation in markets, global value chains and international trade achieved through policy coordination and human and institutional capacities for evidence-based decision-making	2.b, 2.c, 10.a, 17.11

PPA	Outcome Statement	SDG Targets
BETTER ENVIRONMENT	<i>Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and combat climate change (reduce, reuse, recycle, residual management) through more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems</i>	2.5, 12.2, 12.4, 12.5, 13.2, 14.3, 14.4, 15.1, 15.3, 15.4
BE1: Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems	Transformation and resilience of agrifood systems to achieve sustainability and Paris Agreement goals enabled through the establishment and implementation of climate-smart agricultural practices, policies and programmes	2.4, 13.1, 13.2, 13.b, 14.3
BE2: Bioeconomy for sustainable food and agriculture	A bioeconomy that balances economic value and social welfare with environmental sustainability promoted through formulation and implementation of integrated evidence-based policies and practices in micro and macro environments, using technological, organizational and social innovations	12.2, 12.4, 12.5
BE3: Biodiversity and ecosystem services for food and agriculture	Biodiversity for food and agriculture maintained and sustainable use, conservation and restoration of marine, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, and their services promoted through adoption of targeted policies and practices	2.5, 14.4, 15.1, 15.3, 15.4, 15.6
BE4: Achieving sustainable urban food systems	More efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban and peri-urban agrifood systems transformation that addresses urban poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, enables healthy diets and catalyses inclusive and sustainable rural transformation while safeguarding the underlying natural resources base, promoted through the adoption of supportive policies and programmes, and the initiation and scaling-up of actions and investments by national and local stakeholders	1.1, 2.1, 11.a, 12.1
BETTER LIFE	<i>Promote inclusive economic growth by reducing inequalities (urban/rural areas, rich/poor countries, men/women)</i>	1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 2.3, 2.a, 5.4, 5.a, 10.1, 10.2, 16.1
BL1: Gender equality and rural women's empowerment	Women's equal rights, access to, and control over resources, services, technologies, institutions, economic opportunities and decision-making ensured, and discriminatory laws and practices eliminated, through gender-responsive policies, strategies, programmes and legal frameworks	2.3, 5.4, 5.a, 5.c
BL2: Inclusive rural transformation	Inclusive rural transformation and revitalization of rural areas ensuring equal participation of, and benefits to poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups accelerated through implementation of targeted policies, strategies and programmes	1.1, 8.3, 8.5, 10.1, 10.2, 10.7, 14.b
BL3: Agriculture and food emergencies	Countries facing, or at risk of, acute food insecurity provided with urgent livelihood and nutrition assistance and, adopting a humanitarian-development nexus and its contribution to peace approach, their populations equipped with appropriate capacities to better withstand and manage future shocks and risks	1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 16.1
BL4: Resilient agrifood systems	Resilience of agrifood systems and livelihoods to socio-economic and environmental shocks and stresses strengthened through improved multi-risk understanding and effective governance mechanisms for implementation of vulnerability reduction measures	1.3, 1.5, 2.4
BL5: Hand-in-Hand (HIH) Initiative	Agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development accelerated through targeting the poorest and the hungry, differentiating territories and strategies, and bringing together all relevant dimensions of agrifood systems through analysis and partnerships	1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.a, 10.1, 10.2
BL6: Scaling up investment	Transformation towards sustainable agrifood systems with large-scale impacts on reducing inequalities and eradicating poverty and hunger accelerated through increased public and private investment, and improved capacities to leverage future investments	1.b, 2.a, 10.1, 10.2, 10.b, 17.5