

43rd Session of the Conference

Introduction to Item 11.5: Report of the 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

I am pleased to present the salient highlights of the report of the 36th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC 36). The Conference was comprised of a virtual Senior Officers Meeting, which took place from 10 to 13 January 2022, followed by a hybrid Ministerial Meeting which took place on 7-8 February 2022 in Baghdad, Iraq.

The Senior Officers Meeting focused on four central Regional Priorities: (i) Rural transformation for youth employment and income; (ii) Transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all; (iii) Greening agriculture; and (iv) Building resilience for food security and nutrition. The Ministerial Meeting was divided into three ministerial roundtables, which explored the linkages between the four Regional Priorities and the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. I would like to take this opportunity to summarize the key outcomes in relation to global policy and regulatory matters, for the attention of the Conference.

Very briefly, under the theme of rural transformation for youth employment and income, the Regional Conference emphasized the importance of sustainable agriculture intensification and value chain development, in particular for small-scale producers and youth. FAO and Members were called upon to strengthen producer organizations and enhance pluralistic and market-oriented rural advisory and extension services. In addition, FAO and Members were recommended to increase investment in agri-entrepreneurship opportunities for youth and in agriculture innovation and digitalization in line with the FAO Science and Innovation Strategy.

Under the second theme of transforming agrifood systems to promote healthy diets for all, the Regional Conference requested FAO and Members to pursue trade, investment and technology as enablers of a Regional Agrifood Systems Transformative Agenda. Emphasis was also placed on integrating consumer awareness and behaviour change as a driver for achieving healthy diets and sustainable agrifood systems.

Under the third theme of greening agriculture, the Regional Conference called upon Members and FAO to accelerate coordination between water, food security, climate and environmental policies and to benefit from the opportunity of hosting the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) 27 and COP 28 to create appropriate mechanisms for monitoring, funding and implementing climate response actions in the context of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022-2031. The Regional Conference called for leveraging the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration for increased restoration actions, sustainable agriculture practices and the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation.

Under the fourth theme of resilience for food security and nutrition, the Regional Conference called upon Members and FAO to pursue holistic and multi-hazard risk management. This includes early warning systems, social protection programmes and crop and livestock insurance that are shock-responsive as well as gender, age, nutrition and risk-sensitive. Members, with the support of FAO, were requested to strengthen regional collaboration to address transboundary pests and diseases, including through the establishment of a regional trust fund and adoption of a One Health approach.

Across the Regional Priorities, gender-transformative approaches, gender- and age-sensitive analysis and increased capacities to mainstream gender were highlighted by the Conference as key prerequisites for inclusive agrifood system transformation.

Finally, the recommendations from the Regional Commissions were endorsed with additional requests to strengthen the national Desert Locust Control units and expedite the establishment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Aquaculture and Fisheries Organization (RAAFO).

Thank you and I am happy to respond to any queries you may have.

Mr Mithaq Abdul-Hussein Obaid, Chairperson of the Senior Officers Meeting of the 36th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East.