

## **165th Session of the Council**

### **Item 7.5 - Report of the 35th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East**

I am pleased to present the salient highlights of the report of the thirty-fifth session of the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC35) convened virtually from 21 to 22 September 2020.

It is important to note that the Regional Conference was organized as a Ministerial-level Meeting only whereby the accustomed Senior Officers Meeting was replaced with two Regional Consultative Technical Meetings (RCTMs). This novel approach was welcomed by Members as an important means to enhance multi-stakeholder consultation and interactive dialogue across the region.

The Regional Conference discussions focused on i) transforming food systems to achieve the SDGs and respond to the impacts of COVID-19; ii) FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative, which was endorsed by member countries as a timely, country-driven and innovative initiative that is much needed in the region; and iii) the adoption of the reports of the first and second Regional Consultative Technical Meetings (or RCTMs).

The first RCTM took place in January 2020 prior to the widespread outbreak of COVID-19 and addressed the theme of "Transforming Food Systems to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)." This was followed by a second RCTM organized in July 2020 on "Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Agriculture and Food Security in the Near East and North Africa Region."

I would like to take this opportunity to summarize the key outcomes related to programme and budget matters for the attention of the Council.

The documents on the Decentralized Offices Network and Multi-year Programme of Work were circulated to Member States for their consideration through a written correspondence procedure. Accordingly, the Regional Conference supported FAO's efforts towards decentralizing decision-making in administrative and programmatic areas, including human resources and procurement aiming to improve overall delivery of the Strategic Results Framework and achievement of the SDGs. FAO was called upon to strengthen its technical capacities and policy integration to seize emerging opportunities arising from the UNDS repositioning at country and regional levels and refine its value proposition vis a vis other partners and Rome-based agencies.

The Regional Conference further endorsed the revision of the Multi-year Programme of Work 2018-21 for the Near East Conference.

The results and priorities for FAO in the Near East and North Africa region were discussed through first and second RCTMs. The Regional Conference endorsed the four suggested regional priorities encompassing (i) rural transformation for youth employment and income, (ii) developing food systems that promote food security and healthy diets for all, (iii) greening agriculture through addressing water scarcity, ensuring environmental sustainability and climate action and (iv) building resilience to protracted crises and emergency situations. Key cross cutting issues were highlighted including the importance of gender mainstreaming, partnerships, data and evidence generation and resource mobilization.

The Regional Conference also endorsed the twelve regional priority areas for action under the Regional COVID-19 Response Plan, which are closely aligned to both the corporate FAO Covid-19 Response and Recovery Umbrella Programme and aforementioned regional priorities.

Notably, the Regional Conference affirmed the importance of regional and global solidarity in responding to COVID-19, and requested FAO to develop a plan of action based on the proposed priorities and to pursue resources mobilization efforts by working with countries towards the establishment of a Regional Solidarity Trust Fund to combat COVID-19 and build more resilient food systems.

Finally, as there were no official candidatures that had been presented to host the 36th Session of the Regional Conference for the Near East, the Conference called upon the Near East Regional Group to discuss and agree on the date, place, Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the 36<sup>th</sup> Session, in consultation with the Director-General, prior to the end of the year 2020.

Thank you.

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