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AGRICULTURE, LAND AND WATER USE COMMISSION FOR THE NEAR EAST (ALAWUC)

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Progress Report on the Implementation of the Decision to Establish the Near East Regional Animal Health Commission

CONTENTS

Page

A. INTRODUCTION

1. The natural resources for agriculture in the Near East are limited. Except for Sudan and Turkey, there are very limited land reserves remaining for horizontal expansion in arable agriculture. Yield increase and increased cropping intensity are the only avenues still open. However, the fact that 66 percent of the agriculturally-suitable areas are permanent pastures, indicates a reasonable potential for livestock production when compared to crop production in the Region. In addition, most of the land classified as waste and barren, about 57 percent of the total land area, is classified as rangeland and provides significant feed resources to the nomadic and trans- human livestock populations.

2. The livestock sector, in particular sheep and goats, plays an important role in the national economy of the Region countries. The percentage of the Gross National Product (GNP) generated from agriculture in the high-income countries of the Region varies from 1 to 4 percent and in the low-income countries varies from 23 to 55 percent (as in the case of Somalia). Based on FAO projections, about 30 percent of the gross value of agricultural output of the Region was provided from livestock production in the year 2000.

3. Livestock products make an important contribution to the diet of both rural and fast growing urban populations. The average protein content is higher than that found in Sub-Saharan Africa or the Far Eastern diets, with meat and milk forming a substantial component. However, these relatively high levels of consumption are supported by substantial imports of animals and their meat from outside. Of particular note here is the substantial imports of small ruminants for the major Muslim festivals (Ramadan & Eids). Therefore if productivity can be improved; there should be a scope for import substitution for the Region as a whole.

4. From the regional perspective, animal production was coming under extreme pressure and it cannot cope with local demands. Its role of providing enough animal protein was diminishing due to many factors including:

- *The ever increasing population of the Near East Region*
- *The shrinking of the traditional pasture land*
- *Recurrent of drought in the area*
- *Outbreaks of transboundary animal diseases*

Remedy of the first three factors, and indeed others, would be the duties of individual states, to a certain extent; while the last factor was, without doubt, a regional problem and would involve the neighbouring states. It would be an obligation for the states involved to join forces in order to control and prevent these animal diseases out-breaks.

B. PREVIOUS REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

5. Regional co-operation in the field of animal disease control is not developed to the necessary extent. However, a few specific cases where regional cooperation has produced satisfactory results in terms of controlling or eradicating diseases are mentioned below:

- **The Near East Animal Health Institutes (NEAHI)**

6. In 1962, the Near East Animal Health Institutes Project (NEAHI) was established in Beirut, with five participating countries supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

- **The Near East Production and Health Development Centre (NEADEC).**

7. In 1967, NEAHI was expanded to eight participating countries and began to concentrate on strengthening national laboratory diagnostic services, training of laboratory and field staff, improving standards of biological production and seeking solutions to special problems caused by animal diseases. In 1973, the Center expanded its scope to include animal production and established the Near East Production and Health Development Centre (NEADEC). In June 1975, participating governments took over financial responsibility from UNDP and requested FAO assistance in the development of a Multi-Donor Trust Fund project.

- **West Asia Rinderpest Eradication Campaign Coordination (WARECC)**

8. It covered 11 countries in the Near East Region. WARECC had a most important coordinating role during its life from 1989 to 1994; after which there has been no clear regional co-ordination mechanism towards the final eradication of rinderpest from the Region.

- **The Screw-worm Emergency Center for North Africa (SECNA)**

9. In late 1988, the presence of the New World Screw-worm (NWS) was reported in Libya. This was the first report of NWS fly outside the Americas, where it is considered one of the most destructive livestock pests. After an FAO mission had confirmed the presence of an established infestation of NWS, the Government of Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, with assistance from FAO and UNDP, initiated an intensive surveillance, prevention and control programme. National veterinary service personnel in the Front Line States were trained to identify the fly's larva and treat cases. The eradication programme using Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) went into effect as of December 1990. The last myiasis case was detected on April 7, 1991 and the last fertile female fly captured was in April 27.

- **The Middle and Near East Regional Animal Production & Health Project (MINEADEP)**

10. This Regional Project covered 16 countries and was funded by a Trust Fund to which all participating countries contributed. Its objectives were to cover both animal production and animal health aspects. Unfortunately, this project was terminated following the Gulf war.

C. TRANSBOUNDRY ANIMAL DISEASES PROGRAMMES

11. Most of the countries in the Region import both live animals and animal products, either from countries within or from outside the Region; a situation that would require applying strict animal quarantine measures. Since the livestock sector already faces the problem of increasing demand; therefore it would become more acute if it sustains losses through rises in animal disease. Even if this sector managed to improve; the transboundary animal diseases can make it untradable commodity and, furthermore, will have a devastating impact on the household supply of animal protein. Animal health, transboundary animal

diseases, livestock trade, import of livestock products, quarantine and zoonotic diseases are therefore becoming hot issues with the decision-makers in the Region. Indeed in some cases these issues have become national issues. Rinderpest, Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD), Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Rift Valley Fever (RVF), Old World Screwworm (OWS), Brucellosis, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) for example, have become regular topics for the agenda, not only in meetings between Chief Veterinary Officers (CVO's), but at higher level meetings even between heads of states.

12. FAO/ **EMPRES** was conceived and implemented in 1994 to strengthen FAO's role in championing the goal of enhanced world food security, through focusing on the prevention of transboundary animal diseases and plant pests. The EMPRES-Livestock vision is: "to promote the effective containment and control of the most serious epidemic livestock diseases, as well as newly emerging diseases by progressive elimination on a regional and global basis through international co-operation involving early warning, early/rapid reaction, enabling research and co-ordination". Thus while the prime thrust of the EMPRES-Livestock component is on rinderpest, it also addresses other diseases of importance to this Region, including Foot-and Mouth–Disease (FMD), Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP), Rift Valley fever (RVF), lumpy skin disease, and Newcastle disease of poultry.

13. **RADISCON**. The Regional Animal Disease Surveillance and Control Network project, was a joint FAO/IFAD endeavour targeted at 29 countries, including 22 countries from the RNE Region, and aims to promote animal disease surveillance within and amongst countries. The project is assisting each individual country to establish its own National Animal Disease Surveillance System (NADSS). Communication between participating countries can take place electronically, where possible, using Internet/ electronic mail facilities.

14. **Phase II RADISCON** is the *"REGIONAL ANIMAL DISEASE SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL NETWORK FOR NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST"* and a project proposal has been submitted to donors for funding. The program will build on the achievements of the first phase of RADISCON through:

(One) the increased understanding of in-country and regional priority disease situations through practical use of surveillance techniques and information technology; and

(Two) enhanced exchange of disease information and networking in the Region. It has to be pointed out that AHC-NENA and RADISCON will work together in a complementary pattern. Copies from RADISCON Phase II project document could be acquired from AHC-NENA.

15. The International Organization of Epidemiology (**OIE**) Regional Commission for the Middle East is based in Beirut, Lebanon and deals with epidemic animal diseases and livestock trade. However, not all RNE Countries are members in the OIE Regional Commission. FAO and OIE complement each other's functions, and cooperate at the regional level.

16. The European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (**EU-FMD**) was created in 1954 under FAO auspices. Although its geographical covering does not extend to the Middle East and North Africa (except for Turkey); the Commission has gained experience in FMD control and wishes to support any initiative aiming to a better control

of FMD in the Region. This was expressed at the 63rd session of the Executive Committee, held in Sithonia, Greece, in November 1999.

D. ANIMAL DISEASE SITUATION IN THE REGION

17. The following are examples of main areas in which regional co-operation can be expanded and provided:

- **Foot- and-Mouth Disease (FMD) and Bovine Spongiform Ecephalopathy (BSE).** An Information note (NERC/02/INF/5) has been submitted to the 26th Regional conference.

- **Rinderpest**

18. This disease is perhaps the most serious cattle plague that caused some severe famines due to cattle and buffalo populations that were destroyed. In the recent past, countries of the Region repeatedly suffered severe epidemics of rinderpest emanating from South Asia. The last of these started in 1969 when a pandemic swept through Iran to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea affecting most countries in the Region. Another destructive outbreak occurred in the Arabian Peninsula in 1985 and the disease persisted in some countries until late 1990s with occasional introductions from outside. However, countries in the Region have made such significant progress in rinderpest eradication in recent years that FAO through GREP is forming a view that the disease is now absent from the Middle East and North Africa. In the Near East Region, rinderpest is believed to still be persisting only in southeastern Sudan and southern Somalia.

19. The focus of FAO support has been to assist countries in monitoring mass vaccination programmes for several years. These programmes have been highly successful and the outbreaks of rinderpest in several Member countries (e.g. Iraq, Egypt, UAE, Mauritania and Yemen) have been now eliminated. Vaccination has now been stopped in most countries of the Region. The current focus is in assisting countries to monitor the control of the disease (freedom from Rinderpest) through adherence to the OIE Rinderpest Pathway. Work is being undertaken to gain rinderpest freedom for Sudan through and FAO TCP project which aims at improving Rinderpest surveillance, identifying and removing any remaining foci of the disease. Similar work is being carried out in Yemen through and FAO TCP project.

20. The Fourth EMPRES Expert Consultation held in Rome in May 1999 endorsed the concept of a five year “GREP Framework for Intensified Action” which had been formulated to guide actions for the final elimination of the last few foci of rinderpest persistence. This represents very real and tangible progress. At present, the information available to the FAO/GREP Secretariat suggests that these last remaining foci are centred in Pakistan and Afghanistan, southern Somalia and southern Sudan. In addition, the disease was suspected from clinical reports in Yemen in July 1999; although the disease has not been confirmed in the laboratory since 1995. Recent analysis of field reports has further cast some doubt on the validity of the rinderpest suspcition in 1999. Furthermore recent FAO investigation has failed to uncover any evidence for residual rinderpest in the Yemen. There is also growing a confidence that the rinderpest focus which affected the “Kurdish Triangle” (involving Turkey, Iraq and Iran), which persisted possibly until as late as 1996; has been eliminated.

- **Peste Des Petits Ruminants (PPR)**

21. This disease, also known as goat plague, is a disease of increasing importance in Africa and Asia, wherever small ruminants (Sheep&Goats) form an important component of agricultural feed production. It can affect some antelope, as reported in zoological garden collections of wild small ruminants, including oryx, gazelles and ibex. The disease extends through most of the states of west, central and east Africa, reaching eastward through western and southern Asia.

22. The disease is a serious problem for the Region and its incidence is likely to increase in the future. PPR is also a cause for concern regarding food security and international trade. FAO has supplied PPR diagnostic kits and antibody detection kits to national veterinary laboratories in many member states. This disease was dealt with under a number of FAO TCP projects in the Region.

- **Trypanosomosis**

23. This disease in only prevalent in Sudan and Somalia and continued to be a considerable problem for these two member States. Support currently focuses on area-wide control and eradication strategies utilizing the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT) as part of the Integrated Pest Management Approach.

- **Brucellosis**

24. Both Brucella Abortus and Brucella Melitensis occur throughout the Region . Brucellosis is the single most disease effecting both animal and human health. FAO has provided diagnostic kits to many Member States (Sudan, Yemen, Jordan, Algeria, and Morocco) to study disease incidence. Despite the involvement of the RADISCON project (IFAD-funded, FAO-implemented) in putting forward proposals for co-ordinated disease control; Brucellosis still has implications on human health in the Region.

- **Rift Valley Fever (RVF), Newcastle Disease (ND) and African Horse Sickness (AHS)**

25. These three diseases are also common in most Arab Countries but their occurrence is either sporadic (RVF, AHS) or within defined farming systems (ND in village poultry). Regarding RVF and AHS, diagnostic kits have been developed and made available.

26. In the case of Newcastle Disease, a current research programme is carried out in 12 countries including four Arab League States. The programme has clearly identified the disease as major constraint to village poultry production.

27. Rift Valley Fever (RVF) has caused some consternation in recent years, with epidemics in Somalia (1998) and Saudi Arabia/Yemen (2000). This has led to the imposition of regional trade bans.

28. A Consultative Meeting of Experts was held by FAO and UNDP at the FAO headquarters, Rome, in May 2001. Six International Experts on RVF plus invited observers discussed issues directed to improve the management of the risk to man and livestock, which is posed by Rift Valley Fever. The main objective of the meeting was to develop guidelines to reduce the risk of RVF transmission from animals to man and between animal populations.

29. The natural history of RVF and its potential distribution inside and outside of Africa today were reviewed and discussed. The techniques available for assessing the risk of

RVF including the recent innovative early warning techniques using satellite imagery and ground truth surveillance systems using mosquito population biology, sentinel herds and serology were appraised. The meeting then discussed how these and other techniques, such as vaccination, could be used to reduce the risk of disease. It is hoped that these discussions will contribute to an eventual normalization of trade in the wake of the recent epidemic affecting the Region countries.

30. Saudi Arabia has allocated 1 million dollar for the surveillance of Rift Valley in the country (over 1.5 years) and asked FAO to propose a workplan of activities to use these funds. FAO/EMPRES has been requesting to make a proposal. TCP/YEM/8923, dealing mainly with rinderpest surveillance was also extended to cover RVF.

- **The Old World Screw-worm (OWS)**

31. During September 1996, wound myiasis of livestock was recorded in Iraq. At the FAO Collaborating Centre on Myiasis, causing insects and their Identification, which is based at the Natural History Museum (NHM)in London; some sample cases were confirmed as being due to larvae of the Old World screw-worm fly (OWS), Chrysomya bezziana. Throughout its natural range in Asia and Africa, the OWS is the most important myiasis producing fly. Females lay their eggs at the edges of wounds or body orifices and the emerging larvae feed on the underlying living tissues.

32. Through an ongoing IAEA technical co-operation project entitled ”Integrating the Sterile Insect Technique Into an Area-Wide Approach Against the Old World Screw-worm Fly” (RAW/5/008); a regional effort is underway in collaboration with AGA and Arab Organization for Agriculture Development (AOAD). Recently an “International Conference OWS Control in the Middle East”, was held in Bahrain. The experts of FAO/IAEA/IFAD presented a joint paper entitled” Towards a Sustainable Management of the OWS Threat in the Middle East” in this conference. It was agreed that, future operations to control OWS in the Middle East would be coordinated between FAO,IAEA and AOAD. A first consultation meeting among the technical representatives of these three organizations was held in June 2001 at the AOAD in Khartoum and <u>the second meeting was planed at RNE-Cairo in January 2002</u>.

E. ANIMAL HEALTH COMMISSION FOR THE NEAR EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (AHC-NENA)

33. A proposal for the establishment of a Regional Animal Health Commission for the Near East was submitted to the 25th FAO Near East Regional Conference held in Beirut, Lebanon in March 2000.

34. The proposal was accepted and unanimously approved by the Conference, in which 22 countries of the Region participated, and twelve Ministers of Agriculture were in attendance.

35. Immediately following the Conference, the role of Interim Secretary for the Commission was assumed by the Regional Animal Production and Health Officer for the Near East, Cairo to oversee the procedure of establishing the Commission. The role of the Interim

Secretary will cease when the Commission is fully established and a permanent Secretary for the Commission is appointed. The duties of the Interim Secretary are:

- *Prepare the Preamble for the Commission*

- *Prepare the ground for the Commission's establishment by visiting the Region countries, utilizing mass media and by personal communication.*
- *Establishing an internet base for the Commission*
- *Promoting the Commission through the publication and distribution of manuals and other FAO publications and CD ROM's.*
- *Reporting to the 26th FAO Near East Regional Conference on the progress made towards establishment of the Commission.*

- **The Preamble**

36. The proposal for the Commission was submitted to the FAO Legal Office to produce a correct draft Preamble to be discussed with animal health specialists in the Region, at conferences, meetings, with Chief Veterinary Officers and others interested in livestock production, health and trade. Regional organizations including the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, (AOAD), Gulf Co-operation Council, (GCC), and OIE will also be consulted and their views will be sought before the completed Preamble is officially submitted to the Member States for verification. It should be pointed out, that the FAO Legal Office recommended that the Commission be named the "Regional Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa" in order to accommodate the inclusion of the North African countries. It is hoped that eventually all 29 countries of the Region will be members of the Commission.

37. Attachment 1 is a draft of the Preamble. Please send any comments to the Interim Secretary for the Animal Health Commission for the Near East and North Africa, (AHC-NENA).

- **Groundwork preparation**

38. The Interim Secretary has participated in many television and radio interviews to highlight the importance of establishing the Commission for the Region. The recent media interest in BSE and FMD has given rise to many opportunities for this.

39. During the 25th Arab Veterinary Conference held in Cairo, Egypt in May 2001, the need for an Animal Health Commission for the Near East was discussed at roundtable meetings. The Conference strongly supported the establishment of a Commission in its recommendations.

40. Whenever the Interim Secretary, or his colleagues from AGAH, Rome, visited countries as part of their normal routine duties: they took every opportunity to raise the matter of the establishment of the Commission with senior officials.

- **Establishing a Network**

41. An e-mail list has been established for AHC-NENA, and to date is comprised of more than 180 addresses including FAO and UNDP offices in the Region. The majority of the Chief Veterinary Officers, (CVOs) in the Region, associate regional organisations and senior livestock specialists are listed. Over 160 AHC-NENA circulars have been sent out on the Internet. All are related to animal diseases within the Region or diseases of wider significance such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy BSE or Rift Valley Fever RVF.

The information is as up to date as possible and is derived from a variety of sources, including animal health networks, media, personal communications, FAO, OIE etc.

42. The Commission is about to establish its own web site at >www.AHCNENA.net<. The web site will be organised by FAO Legal Office which is responsible for all of FAO's websites. Steps have also been taken to co-ordinate the establishment of a web site for livestock production in the Arab Region with AOAD.

- **Commission Publications and Meetings**

43. Many FAO publications relating to relevant animal diseases have been produced by the Regional Office in Cairo and distributed within the Region. The first Manual on Vaccine Production for the Region has been produced and was well received, and as a result, a second manual on the subject is now in preparation. Whenever publications or CD ROMs are available, this is detailed in the AHC-NENA circulars and requests for the materials are welcomed and usually dispatched through the FAO pouch.

44. The 2nd Roundtable Meeting on FMD, including eight countries, will be organised by AHCNENA in Cairo, is planned for October, 2002.

- **AHC-NENA Ownership**

45. It is hoped that this brief summary and the attachment will put ALAWUC members in the picture regarding the establishment of AHC-NENA and any comments and suggestions regarding the Preamble are welcomed. It is to be remembered that the sole purpose of AHC-NENA is to benefit the Region at a time when animal disease and health are of major concern to all, both producers and consumers.