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NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION

TWENTY-FIRST SESSION

THIRD NEAR EAST FORESTRY WEEK

Amman, Jordan, 26 - 30 January 2014

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT IN THE NEAR EAST

SECRETARIAT NOTE

I. Background

1. Since the late 1970's, FAO has assumed a leading role among intergovernmental organizations in the fields of sustainable mountain development, watershed management and forest hydrology and in 1992 was appointed Task Manager for Chapter 13 of Agenda 2: "Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development".
2. Over time, FAO has progressively built up a conceptual and operational framework that links watershed management (WM) to sustainable mountain development and forest hydrology and since Rio 1992, FAO has implemented 53 WM projects in 41 countries, combining sustainable natural resources management (e.g. afforestation, terracing) and livelihoods strengthening with work at the political level (e.g. legislation and institutional development).
3. Based on its mandate, in 2002-2003 FAO facilitated a global review of the current status and future trends of integrated and participatory watershed management and identified the paradigm, approach and methods for a [new generation of watershed management programmes and projects](#) which is currently being tested and implemented at the field level.
4. In the context of Rio+20 the leading role of FAO in sustainable mountain development and watershed management was renewed and strengthened, and largely as a result of joint efforts by FAO and Mountain Partnership Members, three paragraphs on mountains were included in the final document, [The Future We Want](#).
5. At its 145th session, the FAO Council endorsed the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Report of the 21st Session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) (24-28 September 2012), where one of the key themes was "Forests, trees and people together in a living landscape: A key to rural development". FAO was requested to promote the sustainable management of forests and trees in an integrated approach across the landscape, such as watershed management, and:
 - engage in more cross-cutting and inter-departmental work to support integrated approaches; and continue engagement with the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration; and

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- promote their integration into agriculture and other land use systems, where appropriate.

II. Concept development: Watershed management to reduce water scarcity in Near East and North Africa (NENA) Region

6. Among the most arid zones on the planet, the NENA Region will be further facing a severe growth/increase of water scarcity driven by key factors such as demographic growth, urbanization expansion and overall development, additionally exacerbated by the negative impact of climate change and the considerable water quality degradation.

7. In the Region agriculture is the largest water user of all sectors, abstracting about 80 percent of all the available water resources. Thus, the competition for water utilization by various users (urban, agriculture, industry and environment) will be considerably amplified and transboundary issues will add strains to the pursuit of sustainable management of water resource. Thus, water is the natural resource that most of all limits the social and economic development of the NENA Region.

8. If a sound plan of water resources management is not developed and implemented, the future development of the Region, including food security and livelihoods, will be seriously jeopardized with severe consequences on the already shaking social, economic and political stability.

9. The achievement of effective and sustainable management of land and water resources requires integrated approaches that work at a landscape level, such as watershed management. FAO's new Strategic Framework highlights this urgency and requests to further develop the *Water Scarcity Initiative* in the NENA Region along with another initiative on food security and nutrition.

10. Watershed management and sustainable mountain development are necessary to address these challenges. In regions with dry climates mountains cover 30 percent of the area but contribute 67 percent of the discharge whereas the role of forests and trees in regulating and filtering freshwater flows plays even a stronger role here.

11. Watershed management is a suitable planning approach to achieve the goals of the water scarcity initiative in NENA as it allows for the integrated organization of a variety of land-uses - forestry, pasture and agriculture. It adopts a landscape approach, which allows for maximum efficiency in the use of natural resources when based on a land suitability analysis and a multi-stakeholder planning process. In addition, watershed management contributes considerably to the creation of local resilience against climate change as well as provides adaptation options.

12. Focusing on people's participation and upstream-downstream linkages, watershed management offers a platform to develop Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes as well as adequate tools and alternative policy options that create additional income for rural populations as well as marketing opportunities for local products.

13. Capacity development is one of the pillars in watershed management and will allow partners in the Region to document, support and up-scale existing knowledge and best practices on management systems for land and water. Combining production and conservation activities while looking at different land-use systems, watershed management can also play a role in, or provide alternatives for the transition to sustainable intensification of agriculture in NENA.

III. Points for consideration

14. The two years pilot phase have been successful, both in Morocco and Mauritania, in:
- a. identifying ways to break the vicious circle of desertification and land degradation and to reduce poverty and food insecurity, by merging indigenous and scientific knowledge with technology;

- b. raising awareness of upstream/downstream watershed linkages;
 - c. building capacity to deal with watershed management issues among local institutions and technical services; and
 - d. mobilizing political and financial support at national and regional level.
15. Upon request of the governments of Morocco and Mauritania, a project from the technical cooperation programme (TCP) has been developed in November 2013 to support the transition to a second phase of the development programme. It is expected to conclude in July 2014 with a submission of a second phase project proposal.
16. Based on the existing networks of watershed management institutions and groups that exist globally, the Commission could discuss further ways to strengthen watershed management initiatives in the region, support the implementation of the above TCP and discuss resource mobilization strategies for the implementation of OUBAME's second phase.
17. Recalling the roles of watershed management in reducing water scarcity and improving food security in the Region the Commission may wish to recommend FAO's country presence and project implementation capacity be aligned as closely as possible to the implementation of the new Strategic Framework and the work of other partners.
18. The Commission may wish to consider what watershed management may be suited in 2014-2015 other regional activities under FAO's Strategic Objectives.
19. The Commission may also wish to discuss member countries' adherence to the Mountain Partnership and benefit of its support in advocacy, brokering initiatives, capacity development and communications.