



**Sub-regional Seminar on Policy and
Programmatic Actions to Address High Food
Prices in the
Oriental Near East, Gulf Cooperation Council
Countries and Yemen**

9 – 10 May 2011, Amman, Jordan

FAO Regional Office for the Near East

Cairo, Egypt



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Introduction to the Sub-Regional Seminar

Background

1. The sub-regional seminar for the Oriental Near East (SNO) and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Yemen (SNG) was held in Landmark Hotel in Amman, Jordan on May 9 and 10 2011. The event was part of a series of seminars organized by FAO in all FAO sub-regions, aimed at assisting governments of Member countries in designing their immediate actions in response to the current food price crisis, as well as understanding the role of long term measures and actions to achieve food security in the long run.
2. The high food prices have become an increasingly important global issue in the past four years. Starting in 2007-2008, commodity prices, and particularly prices of cereals, have soared to levels much higher than historical levels. Although they have subsided in 2009-2010, cereal prices have remained above the pre-2007 levels. During 2010-2011, another peak in sugar and vegetable oil prices have affected food and agriculture markets. High and volatile prices are expected to continue in the near future.
3. While several reasons have contributed to the soaring food prices, their impacts have been felt in a similar fashion across many countries. Net buyers of food, and particularly the urban poor have been affected negatively by the increase in food prices, jeopardizing food security. On the other hand, some producers have benefited from the high prices, and investments in agriculture have increased during recent years and are expected to grow in the next few years.
4. These impacts have spurred a number of policy actions in the SNO and SNG countries, to primarily address the immediate impacts of the food prices, and to dampen negative impacts on consumers. Most of these responses have been ad-hoc, without concrete programmatic action and planning, due to the sudden nature of the increase in prices, as well as the difficulty to address the issues in the long run, given the many challenges that the countries are facing, *inter alia*, fiscal pressures, high import dependency, scarcity of land and water resources and political uncertainty. Results of these actions have been mixed, but in most cases, need to be better evaluated and designed given that food prices are expected to stay at higher levels with continuing volatility in the near future.
5. The sub-regional seminar for high food prices in the SNO and SNG region was motivated by the need to take stock and exchange experiences with the various policy actions taken by the countries. Nine of the twelve countries in the two sub-regions were represented in the seminar, including Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. In addition, representatives of international financial institutions, regional intergovernmental organizations, development partners, and civil society organizations were also present.

Objectives and Expected Impact, Outcomes and Outputs

Objectives

6. The regional seminar was aimed at exploring ways in which governments of member countries in the sub-regions can be assisted in their efforts to identify and design immediate policies as well as developing long term programmatic actions. The specific objectives of the seminar were as follows:
 - Provide an opportunity for two policy decision-makers from each country - , one from a line ministry in charge of agriculture, and the other from ministries such as finance, planning or Prime minister's office - to exchange country experiences in dealing with the 2008 food crises and the recent increases in food prices
 - Raise awareness of the various policy and programmatic actions, within the context of the high and volatile prices and the sub-regional challenges and priorities at national and regional level
 - Brief participants on FAO's "Guide for policy and programmatic actions at country level to address high food prices"
 - Identify future actions and the process to design, coordinate and implement appropriate policy and programmatic actions as well as the updating and sharing of information on price changes, policy measures and results
 - Map a way forwards to facilitate access to possible support for actions envisaged by participating countries.

Expected Impact

7. Governments design policies that better address rising food prices that threaten consumers and at the same time provide opportunities for producers and/or exporters. Awareness of long term measures and their role in mitigating negative impacts of future price shocks.

Expected Outcomes

- Participants use and disseminate knowledge gained from the seminar in policy dialogue to design measures to address high food prices at country level
- Participants engage at country level with development partners to seize opportunities for collaboration and support discussed during the seminar
- Countries adopt appropriate policy actions and long term measures to cope with the high food prices
- Minimization or mitigation of negative impacts of high food prices on vulnerable populations.

Expected Outputs

For participating countries:

- Participants are exposed to the FAO Guide and exchange with their peers and other stakeholders on measures for addressing high food prices
- They are better informed on opportunities for collaboration and support from development partners
- Participants have prepared a list of next steps to be implemented once back in the country to launch policy dialogue and mobilize development partner support.

For FAO and development partners:

- FAO and development partners are better informed on the situation and needs of participating countries to address high food prices
- FAO prepares a seminar report with the list of next steps
- FAO collects questionnaires on the situation and measures taken in participating countries to be conducted before the start of the seminar.

Structure of the Sub-Regional Seminar

8. The seminar was organized and implemented by FAO Regional Office for the Near East, including the FAO sub-regional offices for SNG and SNO and the Initiative on Soaring Food Prices (ISFP) Secretariat in coordination with other FAO technical divisions. Experts from the FAO RNE, the Agricultural Development Economics Division (ESA), Trade and Markets Division (EST), Policy and Programme Development Support Division (TCS) and the Investment Center (TCI) as well as regional experts from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Arab Planning Institute (API), the Arab Monetary Fund, the Alternate Representative of the US Mission to UN Agencies in Rome, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) made presentations during the seminar to set the stage for further discussion, inform participants of existing programmes and support mechanisms.
9. The two-day seminar was structured around the short and long term issues, in tandem with the twin-track approach to food security, to address both the immediate nature of the policy actions and responses and the longer term issues including opportunities for investment. There were four main parts to the seminar: presentations by resource persons, plenary and break-out group discussions, reflections from development partners, and conclusions. Presentations on the first day set the stage on the global and regional trends of issues related to high food prices, followed by an overview of smallholder responses to high food prices, as well as immediate policy actions by countries. The participants then broke out into three country groups as follows: Group A (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq), Group B (Egypt, Jordan, Iran), and Group C (Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain). Other participants were free to join any of the groups.
10. Each of the nine countries in the seminar was represented by at least two representatives; one senior Ministry of Agriculture official and one senior official from another relevant ministry. Prior to the meeting, RNE distributed questionnaires to be completed by each country on its experiences with high food prices, the commodities concerned, the government priorities, policies and action programmes, implementation problems and constraints, and support needed. The questionnaire was helpful to prepare for the consultation and effectively present their countries' priorities and perspectives in break-out groups sessions.

Perspectives on the Sub-regional Seminar

11. The seminar was addressed by the Minister of Agriculture of Jordan Mr. Sameer Habashneh and Mr. Saad Al-Otaibi, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East. The Jordanian Minister of Agriculture highlighted the need for long term strategies for increased investment and research in agriculture in the region, along with appropriate technical strategies to boost agriculture production to help sustainably deal with high food prices. He also stressed the importance of regional cooperation. The need for improved regional cooperation was a common theme repeated throughout the seminar in relation to various activities (trade, information, human resources and technology).
12. The FAO Assistant Director -General for the Near East drew attention to the need for countries to take quick and suitable steps in facing the food price crisis while at the same time guaranteeing long term food security. He called attention to the FAO publication “Guide for Policy and Programmatic Actions at Country Level to Address High Food Prices”, which contains a directory of policy and program actions available to member countries and which can help countries in designing their policy actions. Mr. Al Otaibi also highlighted the role of the Regional Priority Framework for the Near East countries (RPF), endorsed by the member countries in the 30th Near East Conference (NERC 30) in assisting countries in their longer term programmatic actions for sustainable food security.
13. The presentations and discussions during the seminar were geared toward actions and responses, in order to facilitate the identification of areas of FAO assistance and support from development partners. The challenge of cushioning the immediate negative impacts of high and volatile food prices on consumers, while maintaining a profitable and productive agriculture sector articulated the need of countries and the sub-region. The seminar concluded with action areas to be addressed as follow-up to be discussed at country level and also to be carried to the Committee on Food Security representatives are looking at the appropriate technical and policy responses to minimize future vulnerability to high and volatile food prices, strengthen safety nets and increase domestic agriculture production.
14. Mr Moujahed Achouri, the Deputy Regional Representative for the Near East, Head of the Multidisciplinary Team for Oriental Near East, and FAO Representative in Egypt made a brief presentation to the participants to highlight the motivation for the seminar, its objectives, and expected impacts and outputs. He mentioned that the seminar will ultimately help pave the way for needed support for countries in developing policies/actions that better address the repercussions of rising food prices on the various stakeholders.

Summary of Presentations and Discussions

Global and Regional Trends in Food Prices (Session 1)

15. The first presentation in Session 1 provided an overview of the global situation on food prices during 2007-10 and of key short-run and long-run drivers of the high food prices. It also reviewed policy responses at the global level which are currently being discussed. This presentation thus provided the background for discussing issues at the regional and national levels.
16. The second presentation in Session 1 gave a synopsis of price trends of major food items in the Near East region. The prices of wheat, meat, cooking oil and other food prices both at country and regional level were analyzed from 2005 to 2008 for comparison reasons but highlighted more on the high price surge of 2008. In addition, it was elaborated that the price trends of food in the Near East was consistent and comparable to the global trends at any given year. This confirms that the prices in international markets pass through to domestic consumer prices.
17. Finally, the impact of high food prices on poverty and undernourishment was examined and demonstrated that high food prices heaved more people below the poverty line and increased the proportion of undernourished people in the region. In this context it was shown that at least 25% price increases of major food items will increase the number of undernourished people in the Near East region by 2.8 million people.
18. In the subsequent discussions, participants raised a number of issues related to soaring food prices and their implications and made some suggestions. These covered the role of rules-based trade and price stabilization policies, biofuels and the link between energy and food prices, speculative activities of investment funds, and the role of monopolistic global food markets. The participants also underscored the need for quality data on prices and other agricultural statistics and information.

Short-term responses to high food prices- an assessment of the food crisis of 2007-2008 and lessons learned (Session 2)

19. The first presentation gave an overview of macroeconomic implications and related policy responses. Higher food prices lead to higher inflation, which severely affects the poor as they typically spend large shares of their incomes on food. Higher food prices also increase the cost of imports and thus contribute to a deterioration of the external current account balance. There are also negative budgetary implications in the countries of the region that rely on untargeted subsidies to insulate domestic markets from price swings.
20. Generally, countries should pass through food price increases and avoid discretionary policies, while protecting the poor through targeted and cost effective social safety net programs. The first best response for governments is therefore to scale up existing cash or near-cash transfer schemes,

and provide indirect income support to vulnerable households, for example by scaling up school feeding programs or reducing/waiving user fees for public services that cater mostly to the poor. While tax and tariff reductions or subsidies on essential food items can be used in some cases when no better targeted safety net instruments are available, any measures that limit the pass-through of international food prices should be selective and time-bound. Overall, the key challenge for the region is to develop more targeted income support instruments that can be used to provide cost-effective protection to vulnerable groups against food price volatility without distorting relative price signals that are important to trigger desirable demand and supply responses.

21. The second presentation highlighted the negative impacts of high and volatile food prices on food security at both national and household levels in the sub-region. Inflationary pressure and food trade deficit increase at national level, while poor households suffer from undernourishment and reduced spending on basic services such as education and health services.
22. Short-term measures to improve national food security include modernizing procurement systems with the help of electronic tending or bidding, mitigating price risks through the use of futures contracts and options, reducing supply risks using strategies such as bonded warehouse (warehouses in which dutiable goods such as grain are stored without paying duties pending their re-export or release and payment of import duties), signing bilateral agreements with exporting countries, and improving information on crop supply, demand, stocks and export availability. At household level, short-term measures such as country-wide consumer support schemes in the form of food and fuel subsidies as well as tariff and tax reduction on food items are commonly applied in the sub-region. However, universal subsidies are costly, and often distort the market and benefit the well-off. Safety net programs such as targeted cash transfers do not distort commodity markets, have lower administrative costs, and allow beneficiary sovereignty over what is purchased. Cash transfer programs could also be contingent on school attendance to address education and nutrition problems simultaneously.

Long-term challenges and measures to address high food prices (Session 4)

23. The first presentation in this session addressed the long term challenges of the region, and the need to address core issues in agriculture along with short term measures, in order to mitigate future shocks and their negative impacts. The unprecedented increase in agricultural investment driven by the 2007-2008 food price crisis and the positive impact of high food prices on producers and food retailers due to the commodity boom was also addressed, giving an assessment of capital stock in the region and the need for additional agricultural investment. The region lags behind other regions in terms of agricultural productivity, and investments in agriculture, both public and private, have been low in the past. More than 90% of all international agriculture investment in the region has historically come from other countries in the region. Recent evidence shows that agricultural investments will continue to grow in the next few years, not only by large international companies but also by small domestic investors. Most countries in the region need policies and strategies to ensure that investments continue to increase in a manner which can effectively address the long term challenges and help overcome food insecurity in the long run.

24. In the ensuing discussion, the participants articulated the importance of capturing the positive momentum brought about through high food prices which has made agriculture an attractive sector for investors and stressed the need for regional efforts in promoting investments. In this regard, reference was made to the Regional Investment Forum, which was endorsed in NERC 30, as a mechanism to exchange best practices, develop effective policies, address food security challenges and ensure responsible investments.
25. The second presentation of this session addressed the long term issues related to food security. A steady increase in the demand for food, feed, fiber and fuel (because of population growth, income rise and urbanization) against uncertain and variable supply (due to land and water constraints, climate change and high cost of fuel) is likely to sustain food prices at high and variable levels in the foreseeable future. Supply problems in the international markets are also expected to be adversely affected by declining and variable stocks and market distortions stemming from panic buying, export banning and speculative activities.
26. On the supply side, long-term strategies in the region need to focus on increasing food availability and access by growing more food on less land and with less energy and water and without further harming the natural environment. Enhancing research and development, along with measures aimed at addressing price volatility and high cost of production, is critical in improving incentives for food producers and value chain operators. The contributions of new innovations such as biotechnology and nanotechnology in ensuring sustainable improvement in yield and productivity need to be explored. On the demand side, family planning services (to curb high population growth) and social protection programs would have a significant long-term food security and nutrition benefits.
27. Regarding longer term strategies to address high food prices, one specific suggestion made was for FAO to explore the feasibility of establishing food stocks at the regional level for the two sub-regions. In addition, participants also noted the efforts being made to improve market intelligence and information sharing on factors behind the high price (e.g. stocks), and called upon FAO and others to assist the countries and regional bodies in similar schemes. A third specific proposal was on promoting regional value chains in food products.

Development Partner Programs and Initiatives (Session 5)

28. Several development partners made presentations to inform participants of their work program and specific initiatives, activities or projects undertaken in relation to the high and volatile food prices and food security.
29. The first presentation in this session focused on selected IFAD experiences, including the *sanadiq* in Syria, refinancing facilities, equity financing and the new Yemen country programme which is valued at USD 120 million and co-financed with strategic partners, managed by a public-private partnership. This programme focuses on economic opportunities in selected value chains (coffee,

honey, horticulture, fish products, natural stone, textiles). These examples were useful to understand the ongoing contribution of IFAD at country level as well as to highlight potential areas of support for countries through IFAD.

30. The United Nations (UN) High Level Task Force (HLTF) presented the revised Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA) which presents two sets of actions to promote a comprehensive response to the global food crisis. The first set focuses on immediate needs of vulnerable populations, the second set builds on resilience and contributes to global food and nutrition security. The HTLF was established by the UN Chief Executives Board in April 2008, which, under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General, the Task Force brings together the Heads of the UN specialized agencies, funds and programmes, as well as relevant parts of the UN Secretariat, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Trade Organization. The primary aim of the Task Force is to promote a comprehensive and unified response to the challenge of achieving global food security, including by facilitating the creation of a prioritized plan of action and coordinating its implementation. The CFA is a framework that sets out the joint position of HLTF members, and aims to be a catalyst for action by providing governments, international and regional organizations, and civil society groups with a menu of policies and actions from which to draw appropriate responses

31. The AOAD introduced its main programmes and assignments aimed at Arab cooperation in facing world food crises. The presentation provided information on the main elements of AOAD's *Strategy for Sustainable Arab Agricultural Development (2005–2025)* (SAAD) which has seven programme areas. The participants were also briefed on the Emergency Arab food security programme to extend over 20 years and which will focus on increasing production capacities of Arab countries in the short term for several commodities including (grains and cereals, sugar crops, oilseeds, dates, olives and animal products), moving toward broader development areas in the medium to long term.

32. The Alternate Permanent Representative of the US mission to the UN Agencies in Rome offered a briefing on current actions being taken in Rome at the UN food and agriculture agencies, as well as efforts by the U.S. with its global food security strategy -- "Feed Future." Following just days after Secretary Clinton addressed diplomats and senior UN officials in Rome on the topic of global food security, participants were pleased to receive links to her speech and to information about U.S. efforts to promote maternal and child nutrition through the "Standing Up Nutrition: 1,000 Days" campaign. Similar interest was shown to FAO's joint work with the OECD and other agencies on food price volatility, including a paper on the topic to be presented in June to G-20 agriculture ministers in France.

Presentation of the FAO Guide on Policy and Programmatic Actions

33. In 2007, international food prices began to soar, and by mid-2008, they had reached their highest level in 30 years. Some governments responded to the food price crisis in haste, putting in place

measures such as export bans, which often made the situation worse. Countries have taken some steps towards addressing the issue, particularly measures aimed at reducing the impact on consumers. Some of these decisions (e.g. export bans) have had dramatic consequences on world prices and have exacerbated the problem for importing countries, which is why it is so important to consider carefully the implications, both domestically and internationally, of any decision taken by a country.

34. Given these circumstances, FAO felt it would be timely to publish an updated guide for country level action that would review the pros and cons of various policy and programmatic actions that countries could use to address high food prices, as well as their likely impact at country and household level. A brief presentation was made to introduce the document¹ and participants received a copy of the guide.
35. The guide addresses the conditions under which policies and programmes are best adapted. And, it cautions against measures which may appear useful in the short term but which could have harmful longer-term effects or become difficult to remove, thus turning into a constraint, once the situation becomes more “normal”.
36. This guide is designed for those involved in developing action plans to address the current issue of high food prices, and it is divided into three parts. The first part provides background information on the context, purpose, audience and structure of the guide. The second part provides some essential remarks on processes that lead to decisions on actions to be taken as well as on the analytical underpinning required to ensure that instruments used are well adapted to the specific conditions within the country. The third part looks at instruments that could be used to immediately address high food prices. They are classified by the domain of intervention (macro-economy, trade, measures in favour of consumption and of production).
37. It should be noted that the instruments are reviewed in isolation. It therefore has the limitation of not focusing on possible synergies or contradictory effects that some instruments may have if used simultaneously in a country. It also does not examine the regional or global level effects of policies implemented at the national level.

¹ The guide can be downloaded in Arabic and English from the following sites:

Arabic: http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ISFP/ISFP_AR-Web_2_.pdf

English: http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ISFP/reviseISFP_guide_web.pdf

Short-term policy actions taken by governments in response to the food crisis

38. Most countries in the region implemented a variety of social safety net and other policy and programmatic actions in order to address the immediate impacts of the food crisis. The programs ranged from direct cash payments to all citizens to food subsidies and increase in wages of public employees and include the following specific programs:
- Cash payment to farmers (Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia)
 - Increase public sector wages (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq)
 - Land rent ceiling (Saudi Arabia)
 - Ban on grain exports (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria) export ban of other foodstuffs such as tomatoes and live animals e.g. sheep (Syria only)
 - Import tax removal (Jordan, Egypt)
 - Reduction of imports duties on basic food custom tariffs on foodstuffs (Syria, Lebanon)
 - Reinforce decision which sets ceilings on profit margins for wholesalers and retailers sales (Lebanon)
 - Stop export subsidies program (Lebanon)
 - Agricultural credits : Rescheduling of loan repayments (Syria); Subsidize interest loans (Iraq, Jordan)
39. Subsidies to producers and consumers and were policy actions commonly implemented by most countries in the region. The following provide a list of actions taken by the countries in the region.
- Increase producer prices: government purchased yield from famers at prices higher than international prices Syria (Wheat, barley, rice, sugar beet, cotton) , Iraq (wheat, barley, rice, sugar, sugar beet dates)
 - Minimum guaranteed prices for farmers (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Yemen, Oman)
 - Bread subsidy (Egypt) wheat and wheat flour subsidies (Lebanon)
 - Increase subsidies in consumer prices for sugar and rice (Syria)
 - Fix consumer prices for bread (Lebanon, Syria)
 - Expanding program for distribution of sugar and rice to poor households (Syria)
 - Direct cash payments to all consumers (Iran)
 - Input subsidies (Jordan, Egypt, Iran)
 - Distribution of seed and fertilizer (Iran, Oman)
40. Land acquisition abroad to produce food is another strategy adopted by many of the oil exporting countries in the region to improve national food security. Some countries have established funds to encourage and support investments abroad. The decision of Saudi Arabia to phase out wheat production by 2016 was supported through the King Abdullah Initiative for Foreign Investment in Agriculture mobilizing \$800 million in support of foreign investment abroad. Other funds include \$1 billion from the Qatar to support investments abroad. Grains stockholding in Syria was seen to have assisted substantially in dealing with food price volatility in 2007-08.
41. Several constraints faced by countries in implementing these actions were also discussed during break out discussions. In implementing short term measures, the most cited constraints were:
- budget constraints, infrastructure and institutional constraints, non-availability of stocks,

- lack of coordination between various institutions involved in the implementation of short term policies,
- cross- border smuggling due to consumer and producer price differentials arising from subsidies (eg. in the case of Syria, Iraq and Lebanon).

Countries also mentioned the importance of longer term clear strategies and relationships with partners, given the concerns of long term national food security for most of the countries in the region.

Outcome of working group discussions on next steps

42. The second day working group discussions focused on three major areas to identify the way forward and next steps, based on the discussions of the two days. The three questions each working group discussed were (i) how can regional cooperation be strengthened? (ii) how can FAO and other organizations assist countries? (iii) what kind of support can countries in the region provide for regional and country level actions/programmes?
43. Strengthening regional cooperation was seen as crucial in dealing with internal food price volatility. The following are necessary actions for strengthening regional cooperation.
- Strengthening Research & Development (R&D) and study possibility/feasibility for the creation of a Regional R&D Fund
 - Sharing information and exchanging experiences in the field of agricultural policies
 - Organizing a Forum on Agricultural Investment in the Region
 - Enhancing intra-regional trade and improve trade integration
 - Creating regional buffer stocks /strategic food grain reserves
 - Establishing an Early Warning System at the regional level
44. How FAO and other organizations can assist:

FAO

- Conduct necessary studies for the establishment of an Early Warning System at the regional level / Creation of databases for historical data records (prices, supply, production)
- Providing assistance in capacity building and information networks
- Research and studies in the field of water
- Intensify meetings between experts and specialists
- Focusing on small and medium-sized projects targeting farmers
- Further contribute in the transfer of experiences and success stories among the regions
- Support, upon request, individual countries in organizing national stakeholders workshops to discuss high food price issues.
- Prepare a proposal to activate the Near East and North Africa Regional Network for Agricultural Policies (NENARNAP) / Seek funding from Arab and International Funds.
- Update the “FAO Guide for Policy and Programmatic Actions” to include lessons learned from countries in the region in responding to food price volatility.

ICARDA, ACSAD, FAO

- Increase funds allocated to research mainly in topics related to water management, production of seeds / agricultural inputs
- Conduct necessary studies related to the creation of a Regional R&D Fund

- Activate Regional Networks for Research in order to foster closer cooperation among the Research Institutes

FAO, AAAID, Arab Funds & other concerned organizations

- Conduct preparatory thematic meetings, e.g. legislative and regulatory frameworks relating to foreign investments, best practices and lessons learned from previous foreign investments in agriculture in the region..
- Prepare related technical papers to be presented/discussed in the Forum.

FAO, AOAD & other concerned organizations

- Conduct necessary feasibility studies for the establishment and management of regional buffer stocks.

45. How can the countries of the region provide financial and/or human resources support for programmes of benefit to the region:

- Member States committing their contributions to International Organizations
- Common agricultural investment
- Providing support through regional and national funding institutions and commodity funds
- Providing technical expertise (exchange of experts and sharing of experiences)

Summary Conclusions of the Sub-Regional Seminar on Policy and Programmatic Actions

46. The seminar, part of several seminars in regions around the world, and the second in the Near East Region, provided ample opportunity for participants to exchange country experiences and discuss emerging policy issues, in light of high food prices and the major challenges facing the region/sub-region. The participants learned about the policy responses to the 2007-2008 food crisis and shared the implications of these policies and the difficulties faced in their design or implementation. The participants were briefed on the FAO “Guide for policy and programmatic actions at country level to address high food prices”.

47. Attendance to the seminar was high, with representation from 9 of the 12 countries, and representatives of NGOs, more than 10 regional organizations, (UN) Secretary General’s High Level Task Force (HLTF), private sector and development agencies. The outcome of the seminar was very satisfactory, where the main objectives of the seminar were accomplished in the two days, namely, i) to take stock of the food price situation at the country level, ii) discuss the experiences and lessons from the previous food price crisis of 2007-08 for better policy-making, iii) share information on policies and programme interventions initiated by the governments in the region, iv) identify potential policy and programmatic options to address the high food price issue and v) discuss opportunities for collaboration with development partners. In addition, the seminar prepared the ground for launching a policy dialogue in each country and identifying support required from development partners.

48. The first set of presentations and discussions provided an overview of the global situation on food prices during 2007-10 and of key short-run and long-run drivers of the high food prices. It also reviewed policy responses at the global level, thus providing the background for discussing issues at the regional and national levels. The focus of discussions on the first day was on impacts of high food prices, at macroeconomic level and household level, focusing on short term policy responses to cushion the impact of high food prices for consumers and producers. The second day focused on long term issues, starting with a review of the major challenges in the region and long run measures, including agricultural investments, to address these challenges and reduce vulnerability in the long-run.
49. In the subsequent discussions, participants raised a number of issues and made some suggestions. These covered the role of rules-based trade and price stabilization policies, biofuels and the link between energy and food prices, speculative activities of investment funds, and the role of concentrated global food markets.
50. The recommendations made by participants for needed policy actions included:
- improving information and statistics in the region in terms of availability and quality
 - establishing early warning systems
 - stressing agricultural research, particularly in grains
 - activating and updating existing policy networks and put more emphasis on policy assistance
 - coordinating and encouraging investment in agriculture.
51. One specific suggestion made was for FAO to explore the feasibility of establishing food stocks at the regional level for the two sub-regions. In addition, participants also noted the efforts being made to improve market intelligence and information sharing on factors behind the high price (e.g. stocks), and called upon FAO and others to assist the countries and regional bodies in similar schemes. A third specific proposal was on promoting regional value chains in food products. The participants expressed interest in a regional conference on investment as well as repeating these types of seminars at national level to ensure the inclusion of more national level stakeholders.

Next steps

52. This seminar constitutes the beginning of a process. The primary aim was to exchange experiences from the 2007-08 food price crisis and to become better acquainted with the pros and cons of various measures that were taken. The seminar was meant to complement ongoing efforts at national, regional and sub regional level and facilitate dialogue between countries and the international community. The outcomes of this seminar, along with the seminar held in Tunis, will be presented at the Regional Meeting of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and provide the basis for further policy discussions in the region.
53. The aim of the final session of the seminar was to consolidate the major issues and problems faced in the various policy and programmatic actions that governments can take. Based on this participants reflected on next steps that could be taken at country level. Given the limited time of

the seminar, it was difficult to identify detailed next steps that countries will take. The next steps defined can thus be modest in nature requiring further follow-up.

54. Based on the discussion, next steps at country level may include activities such as:

- organizing national consultations and seminars, using existing consultative mechanisms if available, to raise awareness among stakeholders and build human and institutional capacities to deal with food price volatility;
- reflection and discussion with relevant government ministries on necessary adjustments that can be made in ongoing policies and programmes;
- identification of key priority areas needing technical assistance and organizations that can provide this;
- identification of project and investment needs;
- identification of additional funding needs and ways of enhanced cooperation with the international donor community;
- assessment of areas of regional and sub regional cooperation;
- identification of capacity building needs.

ANNEX 1



LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

**Regional Seminar on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address
High Food Prices in the Near East Region”
9-10 May 2011 Landmark Hotel
Amman, Jordan**

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ANNEX 2

Regional Seminar on Policy and Programmatic Actions to Address High Food

Prices in the Near East Region

9 – 10 May 2011, Amman, Jordan

Agenda

Day 1: Monday 9 May 2011	
8:30-8:50	Official Opening Remarks Minister of Agriculture, Jordan (HE Sameer Habashneh) FAO Assistant Director General and Regional Representative (Saad Al Otaibi)
9:10-9:30	Introduction and objectives of the seminar (Moujahed Achouri/FAO Regional Office for the Near East (RNE)) Procedures and organization of the seminar (Facilitator)
9:30-10:00	Session 1: Overview of global and regional trends in food prices Overview of global and regional trends in food prices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Global trends Ramesh Sharma/FAO Markets and Trade Division (EST)) ▪ Regional developments and broad outline on the thematic approach to address high food prices in the region (Nasredin Elamin and Mohamed Barre/ FAO RNE)
10:15-10:45	Coffee break
10:45-12:00	Session 2: Short-term responses to high food prices- an assessment of the food crisis of 2007-2008 and lessons learned (Presentations followed by brief discussions) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Macroeconomic and trade implications (Ramesh Sharma/FAO EST and Gazi Shbaikat/ IMF Resident Representative for Iraq and Yemen) ▪ Implications on food security and vulnerability in the short run (Mulat Demeke/FAO Agricultural Development Economics Division (ESA)) ▪ Tracing Impacts on Smallholders and short term coping mechanisms (Ibrahim El Dukheri/ FAO/RNE) ▪ Summary of the short term issues and responses (Facilitator)
12:00-13:00	Plenary Discussion on Session 2: Macroeconomic and short term measures/actions to address high food prices
13:00-14:30	Lunch
14:30-16:00	Session 3: Parallel group discussions on participating country current situation, past experiences, and actions for addressing short-term impacts of high food prices. Selected topics for discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recent food price developments for major agricultural commodities ▪ Current supply situation for major agricultural commodities ▪ Type of policy, programmatic and other measures taken ▪ Lessons learned, main issues and constraints
16:00-16:15	Coffee Break
16:15-17:30	Group presentations and plenary discussion of findings from Session 3 on review of past experiences, and short term actions to address high food prices. Examples of selected country experiences.

Day 2: Tuesday 10 May 2011	
9:00-9:10	Review of day 1 and agenda for day 2
9:10- 10:30	<p>Session 4: <i>Long-term challenges and measures to address high food prices.</i> (Presentations followed by discussions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investments in agriculture in the context of regional challenges and priorities (Aysen Tanyeri-Abur/FAO RNE) ▪ Long –term implications of high food prices on food security and measures to mitigate negative impacts in the long-run (Mulat Demeke /FAO ESA and /Ibrahim El Dukheri/FAO RNE) ▪ Trade and regional cooperation (Ramesh Sharma/FAO EST) ▪ Summary and challenges in the long run (Facilitator)
10:30-11:00	Coffee break
11:00 –11:30	Plenary Discussion on Session 4: <i>Long-term implications and relevant measures/actions to address high food prices</i>
11:30-12:00	<p>Session 5: <i>Views of IFIs and multilateral agencies on the situation in the sub-regions and to explain what financing instruments they have to support immediate actions</i> (Omer Zafar/IFAD Country Program Manager Jordan, Gazi Shabaikat/IMF, and others)</p>
12:00-12:30	<p>Session 6: The way forward: Institutional and Process dimensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Short discussion of FAO Policy Guide on Programmatic Action focusing on Regional level (Jacques De Graaf/FAO Technical Cooperation Department) ▪ Follow-up actions and institutional process (Gunther Feiler/FAO Technical Cooperation Department)
12:30-14:00	Lunch
14:00 -15:00	<p>Session 7: <i>Parallel group sessions to discuss and generate recommendations on:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ step to be undertaken to launch dialogues on policies ▪ programmatic actions at the country level ▪ existing process and suggested improvements to mobilize support from development partners, including feedback from countries on how they benefited from donor programs and actions ▪ priority policy options to address price increases and volatility <p>measures to improve information flow and sharing in the region</p>
15:00-16:00	Group presentations and plenary discussion of findings from Session 7 on short term actions to address high food prices. Examples of selected country experiences.
16:00– 16:30	Coffee Break
16:30-18:00	<p>Final Session: <i>Conclusions and recommendations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of list of next steps to be implemented once back in the country to launch policy dialogue and mobilise development partner support ▪ What are some national needs for support to this process and to address the food crisis? ▪ What do development partners offer? ▪ What can be done at regional/subregional levels? ▪ Workshop evaluation- Summary and main outcomes