



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC-32)

Since it was designated FAO's highest governing body at the regional level in 2009, the Regional Conference for the Near East, like all regional conferences, has acquired a strategic importance in setting the FAO agenda worldwide. Priorities defined by the NERC member countries for the development of the agriculture and the enhancement of food security in the region are brought to the attention of the highest governing bodies of FAO and feed into the roadmap of the Organization's work and mission in the region.

Like every regional conference, the Regional Conference for the Near East meets in regular sessions every two years. To date, NERC has met in thirty one sessions, the last of which was held in 2012 in Rome. The 32nd session will take place from 24-28 February 2014 at FAO in Rome, Italy.

The Thirty Second Session of NERC (NERC-32)

Enhancing food security and nutrition, improving water management and the role of women in agriculture are the key issues in opening the way for resilient and sustainable development in the Near East and North Africa Region.

During NERC-32, FAO and member countries from the Near East and North Africa will combine forces to identify joint actions and initiatives that can contribute to reach these challenging goals.

Governments, civil society organizations and other stakeholders will be provided with a forum to consult and deliberate on issues that matter the most for food security and the agricultural development of the member countries and their populations.

2014 is the International Year of Family Farming. NERC-32 will seize the opportunity to highlight the crucial contribution that small scale farmers make to the development of the agriculture and the rural sectors in the region.

Priority issues tabled for discussion during NERC-32

■ Regional cooperation to harness resilience and improve the state of food and malnutrition in the NENA region

The number of chronically undernourished people in the NENA region in 2010-13 remains high at 79.4 million. At the same time the so called "double burden of malnutrition" has continued to accelerate with 24.5 percent of children under five being stunted and nearly one quarter of the population becoming obese. Conflicts and civil insecurity have worsened the situation, and represent the driving factor of food insecurity in the region during 2012-13.

NERC-32 will discuss the structural and emerging challenges for food security in the region and will address the necessary elements to develop a regional food security strategy for the Near East and North Africa.

The conference will call on member countries to work together in a coordinated manner for building effective and resilient food security and nutrition institutions, markets and production systems.

■ How can cooperation among NENA countries help reduce food loss and waste?

Food production in the NENA region is limited, mainly due to a scarce natural resource base, especially with regard to land and water. This structural limitation is aggravated by the challenge of feeding a fast growing population that is increasing at a rate that makes it second highest in the world.



For a region that depends on food imports to meet its food needs, the problem of food loss and waste is critical: losing and wasting food reduces food availability and also wastes natural resources used in the production of food that is lost. Food loss in the region varies among commodities but reaches an average high that ranges from 30 to 40 percent. Reducing food loss and waste represents thus the most efficient and feasible approach to increasing food availability and security among NENA countries.

In response to the NERC-31 recommendation to reduce food loss and waste in the region by 50 percent within 10 years, NERC-32 will discuss a Regional Strategic Framework for the Reduction of Food Loss and Waste.

Countries from the region will be invited to discuss and endorse this Regional Strategic Framework, to collaborate with FAO and relevant stakeholders in the development of evidence-based national action plans to implement it, and to give high priority to investment for improving food chain efficiency.



■ **Working together to improve water management in the NENA countries: The Water Scarcity Initiative**

The Near East and North Africa is one of the most arid regions in the world. Growing populations, climate change and unsustainable water management practices are currently aggravating the already scarce water resources base of the region, while agriculture is still using over 85 percent of the available fresh water resources.



To support countries in streamlining policies and good practices that can significantly improve agriculture, water management and food security in the region, FAO launched the Initiative on Water Scarcity in the Near East and North Africa (2013). The main outcome of the Initiative is a collaborative regional strategy on sustainable agriculture water management.

The strategy will seek structured mechanisms to address water scarcity beyond the national level and will provide an agricultural water lens to the 'Arab Water Security Strategy' (2010-30).

Decentralization of agriculture, water management, empowerment of farmers and horizontal stakeholder coordination are just some of the innovative approaches that the strategy will put forward.

NERC-32 will prompt countries to develop national plans for the implementation of the strategy and will invite them to plan their water resources allocation strategically with the imperative of making the best use of every single drop of water.

■ **Closing the gender gap in agriculture and rural areas**

Women producers in the region still face uneven access to productive resources, economic opportunities, inadequate infrastructure and services and a policy environment that requires additional efforts to better address gender inequality. This situation remains in many countries of NENA despite some institutional arrangements and legislative changes introduced and adopted by a number of governments from the region.

NERC-32 will discuss the main challenges to be met in order to reduce gender inequalities in agriculture and in the rural sector of the NENA region.

Strengthening rural institutions, developing the human capital of women and youth, disaggregating data by gender, followed by a holistic understanding of social dynamics in rural areas will be some of the key issues that the conference will address.

Member countries will be called upon to advance gender equity for agricultural development and food security in the region also through the establishment of policy and institutional environments aiming to close the existing gender gap.



NERC member countries*: Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cyprus, Djibouti, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.

**A country can be a member in more than one regional conference*

