



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS



# REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

## RECOVER AND RESTART: INNOVATIONS FOR

BETTER, GREENER AND MORE RESILIENT AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS  
TO ACHIEVE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



VIRTUAL MEETING

13-15 JULY 2021

REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE



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## RECOVER AND RESTART: INNOVATIONS FOR

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## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Since February 2020, the world is experiencing what is probably the worst health and economic crisis of modern history. The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the vulnerabilities of our societies and the need for radical review of our social and economic models. Central to this transformation will be the way we produce, process, distribute and consume food.

Starting in 2022, FAO is embarking on a new Strategic Framework that will guide its action in support to agri-food systems transformation in member countries. FAO's Strategic Framework focuses on the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind.

The four Betters represent an organizing principle for how FAO intends to support achievement of the SDG Agenda and encourage a strategic and systems-oriented approach. Twenty Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) will shape FAO action in supporting countries to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

In the Near East Region, the pre-COVID-19 situation of food security and sustainable agriculture was already critical in many ways, with some alarming trends that have only been exacerbated by the crisis: hunger was on the rise under the combined effects of crises, conflicts and natural extreme events; inequalities were growing, in particular between rural and urban populations; natural resources were degraded and water scarcity was worsening due to demographic pressure and climate change, and changes in dietary habits led to unprecedented levels of overweight and obesity and to the exacerbation of non-communicable diseases.

In line with the approach developed for FAO Strategic Framework, and considering regional specificities, four main priorities have been identified to transform the region's agri-food systems, recover from the effects of the pandemic and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. These four priorities focus on innovations and best practices for: (i) Reducing the economic divide between urban and rural livelihoods through better rural employment opportunities, in particular for the youth and for women; (ii) Ensuring healthy diets for all in an increasingly urbanised region; (iii) Restoring environmental balance, with a focus on water scarcity, natural resources and climate action; and (iv) Building resilience against multiple shocks. Just as the challenges and risks facing food security, nutrition and natural resources in the region are interrelated, priorities are also interdependent and interrelated, and they need to be addressed in an integrated manner.



## OBJECTIVE AND PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

In preparation for the Regional Conference for the Near East which will take place in February 2022, the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (NENA) convenes a regional stakeholder dialogue to engage in informal consultations with Member States and stakeholders from the region so as to help shape the agenda of the Conference. This meeting is part of FAO efforts to strengthen the governance mechanism and ownership of the Organization’s activities in the region.

The meeting will allow for substantive technical deliberations on the thematic and programmatic areas that are deemed important by Member States, in particular in relation with addressing the four regional priorities. Through this consultation countries and relevant stakeholders will be able to shape the agenda of the FAO Regional Conferences, focusing on salient priority issues and challenges.

The results of the meeting will be used to identify issues on which we wish to deliberate and will help define how Member States, together with FAO and partner institutions, can collectively develop and implement a programme to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the countries of the region, build more resilient agri-food systems and ensure that their transformation paves the way towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.



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## EXPECTED OUTCOME/ OUTPUTS OF THE MEETING

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The main expected outcome of the meeting is ownership by Member Countries of FAO's regional governance process through the joint identification of issues for deliberation at the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East.

### EXPECTED OUTPUTS

The deliberations of the meeting will lead to the formulation of the following products:

- A stocktaking on the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 crisis on agriculture value chains, food security and nutrition in the countries of the region, and lessons learned on actions taken to cope with and recover from the COVID-19 crisis, with special focus on innovations and best practices
- Inputs to inform the main papers to be submitted to NERC-36 with specific focus on the main issues to be discussed in each paper.
- Recommendations on the modalities for addressing these priorities in preparation for the Regional Conference.

These recommendations will take into consideration the new FAO Strategic Framework and Priority Programme Areas, provide regional perspective on the priority areas of action for the Organization in the region and advise on the incorporation of such priorities into the Organization's forthcoming Programme of Work and Budget.

The findings and recommendations of the meeting will be used to craft the agenda of the forthcoming Ministerial Regional Conference and its Preparatory Committee that will take place in late 2021.



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## PARTICIPANTS AND MODALITIES

Participants include senior and high-level professionals from the Ministries concerned of each Member Nation adhering to NERC, as well as their respective Permanent Representatives to FAO, experts from the region and from development and financial institutions, representatives of the private sector, civil society, academia and other key stakeholders. The consultation will also be supported by FAO experts and Representatives in the countries of the region. Considering the current situation and the impossibility to convene a face-to-face meeting, the meeting will be convened online over three days between 13 and 15 July 2021.



## METHODOLOGY

The consultation is organized as part of FAO efforts towards enhanced ownership of regional Governance process. While it is an informal consultation, it will play an important role in shaping the agenda of the Conference. It is convened in the form of a facilitated technical workshop. Themes submitted for discussion are introduced by FAO, followed by panel discussions and leading to a set of recommendations.



## THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

The meeting will be structured around the four Regional Priority Areas endorsed by the 36<sup>th</sup> Near East Conference. For each theme, a short background document will be prepared as a basis for discussion. Participants are expected to provide their views on the priority areas for action proposed for discussion and on the specific questions that they wish to see discussed at the NERC-36.



## PRIORITY 1: RURAL TRANSFORMATION FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

This priority aims at reducing the divide between urban and rural livelihoods. Interventions must aim at raising incomes and quality of life in rural areas through inclusive programs and policies that favour an increase in agricultural productivity through sustainable intensification of crops, livestock and fish production, and rural development. Such inclusive policies and programs should consider the promotion of digital agriculture, efficient value chains, empowerment of producers' organisations, service oriented advisory and extension, services and the adoption of tools that manage risks as a protection against shocks (market and climate related). They should also aim at increasing job opportunities that are attractive to youth and women by encouraging investments in infrastructure and services and the participation of the private sector in the development of inclusive value chains. Value chains geared towards export markets will also be supported - focusing on implementation of SPS standards, branding, indications of geographic origin - as they offer high potential for employment. Gender sensitive approaches are central to the achievement of this priority.

## PRIORITY 2: TRANSFORMING AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY DIETS FOR ALL

This priority focuses on all dimensions of food security and addresses the triple burden of malnutrition in the region. Limited natural resources do not allow the region to produce all the food it needs. Delivering healthy diets for all in an increasingly urbanised region requires managing risks associated with the region's growing dependence on food imports while encouraging the development of nutrition sensitive supply chains through diversification of production and public-private investments towards healthier and more affordable diets, strengthening capacities of governments, SMEs, small farmers and fishers to improve quality of food safety, traceability mechanisms, and the food environment . They will seek to enhance the consumption of nutritious foods by reforming food related policies such as monetary and non-monetary incentives, raising awareness about healthy diets, fostering consumer protection systems, encouraging appropriate food trade policies, strengthening food supply information systems, strengthening and establishing regional food supply chains, and combating food losses and waste.

## PRIORITY 3: GREENING AGRICULTURE: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Agriculture is the largest user of the region's increasingly scarce resources, and it fuels land and water degradation, biodiversity loss and deforestation. In parallel, fisheries are often associated with the unsustainable use of marine resources. With the adoption of supportive policies and innovative governance mechanisms, modern technologies and smart investments, agriculture, sustainably managed fisheries and aquaculture can become engines of positive change and progressively restore ecosystem functions. Building on the achievements of the Regional Water Scarcity Initiative, interventions should contribute to more productive and more sustainable management of water resources. They should also focus on investing in sustainable soil management, encouraging afforestation, adopting an ecosystem approach to fisheries and aquaculture, and promoting sustainable and integrated land uses including drylands, and agricultural practices. Interventions will need to focus on the widespread adoption of CSA practices to help mitigate carbon emissions and develop more resilient production systems.

## PRIORITY 4: BUILDING RESILIENCE TO MULTIPLE SHOCKS

Conflicts and protracted crises are the prime drivers of hunger and poverty in the region. Many communities in the region, particularly the most vulnerable, lack the capacities to anticipate, prepare for and respond to shocks and crises. Supporting countries to build the resilience of agricultural and rural livelihoods needs to focus on providing humanitarian assistance, stimulating economic recovery and helping build stronger rural livelihoods, by strengthening risk governance and integrating disaster risk reduction in sector policies. This will include developing early warning systems and shock responsive social protection systems. Operating along the Humanitarian Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus will ensure the effectiveness of aid while building resilience. Finally, interventions must also address the growing threat of zoonotic and transboundary diseases as well as pests and strengthen regional collaboration on these important challenges. The One Health approach serves this purpose.



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# ACCELERATORS AND CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

## Accelerators

FAO's new Strategic Framework identifies four 'accelerators' intended to accelerate progress optimize the impact of efforts in meeting the challenge of the SDGs, and to realize the four Betters. These accelerators are: **(i)** technology, **(ii)** innovation, **(iii)** data, and **(iv)** complements (governance, human capital, and institutions), and will be applied in all programmatic interventions to accelerate impact while minimizing trade-offs. In discussing the above four priorities, the Consultation will review the role of these accelerators. In particular, the Consultation may wish to consider the following: Innovation and technology including digitalization of agriculture and fisheries sectors; Policy and investment; Partnerships; Data and knowledge (including big data); Capacity development and knowledge exchange; Integrated monitoring system for SDG indicators.

## Cross-cutting themes

Cross-cutting themes as critical areas identified to be taken into account across all of FAO's programmatic work in order to ensure the achievement of the UN programming principle of leaving no one behind. In the FAO Strategic Framework, the focus will be on **gender, youth, and inclusion**, issues which are of critical importance for reduced inequalities and leave no one behind which are key to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. These cross-cutting issues will be considered in discussing the four priorities.

## The Hand-in-Hand Initiative

In addition to cross-cutting themes, FAO has engaged in integrated programmes that cut across the priority action areas and are aimed at accelerating progress towards sustainable food security. In most low-income countries and those in food crises, livelihoods are constrained by persistently low levels of productivity in agri-food production systems and access to markets, weak capacities to manage complex processes of agricultural and rural transformation, and limited ability to cope with complex, evolving markets and accelerating climate change. Through the **Hand in Hand Initiative**, FAO hopes to support the transformation of agriculture and sustainable rural development through targeting the poorest and the hungry, differentiating territories and strategies, and bringing together all relevant dimensions of agri-food systems through analysis and partnerships. The Consultation will consider the potential impacts of the Hand in Hand Initiative in addressing the regional priorities.

# DRAFT AGENDA



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## DAY 1 - TUESDAY 13 JULY 2021

### SUBJECT

- Opening
- FAO new Strategic Framework: View from a regional perspective
- Stocktaking of COVID-19 impact and implications for regional priorities
- Towards the food systems summit: The findings from the dialogues and emerging solutions

## DAY 2 - WEDNESDAY 14 JULY 2021

- **Priority 1:** Rural transformation for youth employment and income
- **Priority 4:** Building resilience to multiple shocks
- Findings from the Regional Private Sector Dialogue

## DAY 3 - THURSDAY 15 JULY 2021

- **Priority 2:** Transforming agri-food systems to promote healthy diets for all
- **Priority 3:** Greening agriculture: towards sustainable recovery and climate change action
- Tentative agenda of NERC-36
- Close



Food and Agriculture  
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**Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa**

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

**For more information**

**Website:** <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/nerc36/en/>

**List of Documents:** <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/regional-conferences/nerc36/documents/en/>

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