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2017 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development

Special Session Concept Note

Prospects of achieving food security in the Arab region within the 2030 Agenda



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This Special Session on “Prospects of achieving food security in the Arab region within the 2030 Agenda” is organized by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

Background

The concept of food security has evolved over the past decades, and its scope has widened. In 1996, the World Food Summit provided a definition of food security that has become widely accepted and used today: “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”¹

More recently, some of the targets and indicators under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are strongly linked to food security issues. SDG2, in particular, amalgamates a number of related issues: it aims at ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Food security issues in the Arab region are characterized by heavy reliance on imports due to many challenges including water scarcity, arid climate and population growth. However, local agriculture remains vital and is tied closely with livelihoods of the rural poor, many of whom are women. Increased efficiency and reduced waste along the entire food chain can maximize the region’s scarce resources² and at the same time improve food access.

The FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa (RNE) and ESCWA, with their direct mandates to follow up on sustainable development in the region and to support the implementation of the SDGs in the Arab countries, are currently working on a joint publication entitled: “ARAB HORIZON 2030: FOOD SECURITY-Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region”. The publication’s main objective is to provide recommendations and policy options to support member countries achieve food security by 2030, and overcome the challenges and complexities that arise when dealing with the important and crosscutting issue of food security.

In this context, FAO-RNE and ESCWA are organizing this session within the 2017 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development to discuss the main outcomes of the publication. It will provide an overview of the food supply and demand projections, and will highlight the challenges facing member countries in reaching the targets of SDG2 aiming to “end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture” as well as other food security related targets.

The session will also review factors that have determinant impacts on achieving food security and reducing poverty, including water and land availability and management, conflicts and political stability, climate change, and trade. Finally, the session will provide a podium to discuss ways to enhance intraregional cooperation on how to achieve food security, reduce hunger, and enhance prosperity in the Arab region, in addition to other relevant issues like trade, joint investments, and joint research and development among others.

¹ FAO 1996, World Food Summit Plan of Action, para 1.

² ESCWA (2015). Arab Sustainable Development Report, First Edition, United Nations, New York, <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/arab-sustainable-development-report-1st.pdf>.

Session Objectives

The Session is an opportunity to discuss the prospects of achieving food security in the Arab region within the 2030 Agenda, with the overall aim of eradicating poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Proposed Agenda

Themes selected for the interactive discussion include:

- Factors shaping food security in the region including water availability and management, conflicts and political stability, food loss and waste, and land degradation.
- The region's potential to achieve goal 2 to “ end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”
- Means of implementation identified for the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, including policies and programmes, financing, technology and capacity building.
- Analysis of crosscutting issues like climate change and gender.