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Meeting Report

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in cooperation with The Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)

Technical meeting on “Food Security Monitoring and Analysis at National Level – Reflection of Results in the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture Strategy for 2021-2025”
Radisson Blu Hotel, Verdun, Beirut, Lebanon, 15 October 2019

Summary

ESCWA, based on a technical assistance request from MOA/Lebanon, organized in cooperation with FAO and WFP Lebanon country offices, a technical meeting on “Food Security Monitoring and Analysis at National Level – Reflection of Results in the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture Strategy for 2021-2025” on the 15th of October 2019 at Radisson Blu Verdun, Lebanon. The workshop aimed to improve the capacity of participants in understanding the complex dynamics of food security monitoring at national level and help them analyze the latest data to inform the strategic directions that the Ministry of Agriculture would take to strengthen food security in its forthcoming strategy (2021-2025).

The meeting gathered 37 participants from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Energy and Water, the Ministry of Economy and Trade, the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Tourism, UN organizations (FAO, ESCWA, and WFP), a research institution (Lebanese Agriculture Research Institute (LARI) and key experts in the sector.

The meeting ended with key policy recommendations that ESCWA in cooperation with FAO, and WFP will take into consideration to inform the forthcoming MOA’s strategy for 2021-2025 that is due on April 2020. The meeting helped participants to understand the various dimensions of food security in Lebanon and their main challenges at individual and households levels and to discuss and use the “Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework”, developed by ESCWA, to evaluate the food security situation at national level in the country. The technical meeting proposed key policy recommendations aiming to improve cereal yield, reduce import dependency, improve food logistics, increase water use efficiency and productivity, increase public and private investment in agriculture, promote nutrition sensitive agriculture, and reduce food supply variability.

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I- Introduction

1. ESCWA and the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) in Lebanon in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), Lebanon Country Offices, organized a meeting in Beirut at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Verdun on the 15th of October 2019, entitled “Food Security Monitoring and Analysis at National Level – Reflection of Results in the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture Strategy for 2021-2025”. The workshop aimed to improve the capacity of participants in understanding the complex dynamics of food security monitoring at national level and help them analyze the latest data to inform the strategic directions that the government would take to improve food security in the new agriculture strategy (2021-2025).
2. The meeting was attended by 37 participants from Lebanon representing the Ministry of Agriculture (the Minister office and several departments), the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Energy and Water, the Ministry of Economy and Trade, the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Tourism, UN organizations (FAO, ESCWA, and WFP), a research institution (Lebanese Agriculture Research Institute (LARI), and key experts in the sector.
3. The meeting succeeded in bringing together main policy makers from several ministries and experts to discuss the concept, various pillars, and challenges of food security in Lebanon. It also succeeded in presenting the Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework and defining its main pillars along with their linkages with agriculture and SDGs. Deliberations with partners resulted in an understanding of the context of food security and its monitoring at individual, households, and national levels. Discussions contributed to key messages, and basic principles to guide further discussions with line ministries on joint efforts to promote food security in the current context of Lebanon.

II- Recommendations

4. The meeting concluded a set of recommendations and key messages which will assist the Ministry of Agriculture in developing a context-specific strategy to improve food security in 2021-2025. Key messages and policy recommendations are summarized as follows:
 - a) Revise bilateral trade agreements to reach market saturation while avoiding the dumping of subsidized imported products which directly affect farmers’ income and the profitability of agri-businesses
 - b) Improve wheat productivity by supporting additional research and development on drought tolerant high yielding varieties, improving extension services, and strengthening post-harvest services and activities. Wheat subsidies should be revised to consider a targeted support to bread wheat production for tested drought tolerant and high yielding varieties
 - c) Assess the situation of arable uncultivated land to design a structure support for cereal production through supplementary irrigation. The evaluation of unexploited water resources

such as the Assi River should be conducted to encourage cereal production and eventually reduce cereal import dependency

- d) Pilot and scale up the use of treated wastewater for the production forages and other cash crops in parallel to a revision to the legal framework of water reuse in agriculture
- e) Work with stakeholders and donors to jointly improve the agriculture orientation index to structuring investment in strategic value chain through the timeframe of the strategy
- f) Revise the legal framework of wholesale market in Lebanon and work to improve post-harvest and food logistics aiming to reduce food losses
- g) Support the initiation of services provider cooperatives to collectively reduce food losses across value chains
- h) Encourage youth employment in the agriculture sector by facilitating the transfer, adoption, and scale up of agriculture technologies aiming to improve efficiency and resiliency of agri-food systems
- i) Promote households' plant and animal production in rural and urban areas
- j) Design with line ministries awareness campaigns to reduce food waste
- k) Support high nutritive value local food processing in rural areas to preserve healthy food diets
- l) Support research and development to pilot and scale up iron rich crop production (like beans) adapted to climatic conditions with a high yielding potential
- m) All listed recommendations and policies should ensure the stability of prices for consumers while avoiding inflation
- n) Activities to improve the adaptation and mitigation of climate change effects on agriculture should be prioritized and promoted
- o) Access to climate smart finance for youth to invest in agriculture should be promoted

III- Summary of discussions

A- Opening Session

5. **Mr. Elias Ghadban**, Regional advisor on Food Security, facilitated the opening session and started by welcoming the Former Minister of Agriculture H.E. Ms. Wafaa Dikah Hamze, and all participants. He highlighted the importance of Food Security in the formulation of the MoA 2021-2025 strategy.
6. **H.E. Ms. Wafaa Dikah Hamze**, former Minister of Agriculture, started with some key challenges facing the agricultural sector in Lebanon such as heavy reliance on imports (only 20% of food is locally produced in Lebanon), water scarcity, and political instability. Also, Ms. Dikah highlighted the importance of improving the quality of our national products to meet the international standards of exports, enhance market access and livestock production. Nevertheless, she mentioned that stating the challenges alone is not enough and that further efforts need to be undertaken to identify a clear set of actions informing MoA 2021-2025 strategy.

B- Session 1: Food Security and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

7. **Mr. Hussein Nasrallah**, Minister Consultant at MoA, chaired the session and introduced the speakers. Then, he facilitated the discussions and questions from participants
8. The first presentation was delivered by **Mr. Elias Ghadban**, regional advisor on food security at ESCWA, Lebanon. He began by explaining the evolution of food security dating back to the term's first use in 1974, up to its present-day definition "Food security exists when all people... healthy life". (World Food Summit 1996) The four pillars of food security were covered including: availability, accessibility, utilization and stability, with examples provided for each. He pointed out that food should be culturally appropriate and adhere to national food preferences. Mr. Ghadban discussed different food security challenges including climate change, population growth, political instability etc. and highlighted that challenges need to be addressed according to different levels ranging from international to individual interventions. Finally, the linkages between food security, agriculture and SDGs were addressed. Methods to mainstream SDGs into national policies were summarized. The second presentation was given by **Ms. Maya Makhoul**, Head of Food and Nutrition Department at MoA, who tackled the shift of dietary habits that is being witnessed among the Lebanese population. It is manifested by a transition from traditional to western/energy-dense diets and accompanied with an increase in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, hypertension and cancer leading to death. She stated that 88.7% of deaths in Lebanon were linked with NCDs in 2015 (WHO 2016). Ms. Makhoul emphasized on some interventions to prevent NCDs such as promoting healthy eating habits ads instead of fast food. These ads could help in guiding the consumer towards a healthier lifestyle like eating whole wheat grains, fruits, vegetables and being more active. She also stressed that school canteens should offer healthy options to kids and adults. Ms. Makhoul ended her presentation with some challenges facing the nutrition sector in Lebanon along with some actions that can create an enabling environment and improve the food and nutrition sector in Lebanon. The last presentation of the first session was delivered by **Ms. Carla De Gregorio**, food security sector coordinator at WFP, she briefly stated facts from the 2019 VaSyr assessment on Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities. Recent data (2015) has shown that 10% of Lebanese households are vulnerable to food insecurity and 73% farmers need agricultural support to survive. Therefore, improving the availability and access to food remains a major concern for the most vulnerable communities in Lebanon. Ms. De Gregorio explained how food security outcome monitoring surveys (FSOM) are used to measure food security and assess WFP's different cash-based assistance modalities including cash for food e-cards and multipurpose cash for essential needs e-card. She ended her presentation stating that assistance help fill the gaps but cannot fulfill all the job.
9. **Mr. Hussein Nasrallah** then opened the floor for general discussion. Participants and speakers raised the following issues:
 - Concerns were raised on food waste. A participant gave the example of France, where supermarkets are obliged to offer their surplus to NGOs; and suggested that this example could be adopted in Lebanon to decrease food waste.
 - Participants agreed that the agriculture sector was neglected by the government and this is reflected by its very minimal budget allocated to this sector (<1%).
 - Questions were raised on wheat/flour stocks in case of political instability
 - Importance of meeting national food preferences while controlling food safety was mentioned
 - WFP stated that their assistance comes in two forms: Conditional and unconditional

C- Session 2: Measuring and monitoring food security in the Arab Region – Lebanon case study

10. Mr. Elias Ghadban, chaired the session and introduced the speakers. Then, he facilitated the discussions and questions from participants
11. The second session started with a presentation delivered by **Mr. Simon Renk**, Head of Monitoring and Evaluation unit at WFP Lebanon. He gave an overview of VaSyr which is a tool that helps planning and decision-making program design. He further explained VaSyr's objectives and adopted methodology and introduced the audience to household definition according to VaSyr and food security classification. After that, **Ms. Sirin Zuhairi**, GIS officer at WFP, presented the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) adopted in monitoring food security; she explained how data visualization can help policy makers to see information from a different perspective; for example, monitoring livelihood activities monthly. The third presentation was delivered by **Mr. Elie Choueiri**, Programme Associate at FAO Lebanon. He presented the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), a worldwide survey to assess food security at a household level. Mr. Choueiri focused on the importance of this tool for being reliable, timely and relevant. The Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework was detailed by **Mr. Elias Ghadban**, with clarifying the choice of each indicator, its significance and providing some examples. Finally, **Ms. Layale Gedeon**, Research Assistant at ESCWA, clarified the methodology of data normalization and sources of indicators used to develop the food security dashboard.
12. Then, Mr. Elias Ghadban opened the floor for the general discussion. Participants and speakers raised the following concerns:
 - Pesticide residue should be addressed as it is part of the supply chain
 - MoA should incorporate Food Security assessment using FIES into its strategy
 - Indicators can be adapted to each country
 - Food insecurity is still high even with cash assistance for refugees and host community

D- Closing session: Discussing the food security situation in Lebanon with concerned Ministries and stakeholders – Proposing recommendations to promote food security within the framework of MOA strategy for 2021-2025

13. **Ms. Wafaa Dikah Hamze**, chaired the session and introduced the speakers. She facilitated the discussions and questions from participants. **Mr. Elias Ghadban** then shared briefly the latest results of Lebanon using the Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework. He analyzed the situation (Increasing POU, increasing obesity, alarming import dependency, low agriculture orientation index, reduced water use efficiency, weak food logistics, increased anemia for pregnant women, access to water and sanitation is available but with a reduced efficiency, and high variability in per capita food production and supply) and stated priority interventions (detailed in the list of recommendations)
14. **Plenary Discussion: Policy recommendations were shared by the following participants:**

MP Bakr El Houjairi – Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Tourism

- Mr. Bakr stated the challenges that the food security sector is facing including water scarcity, climate change, lower quality of food, increase in malnutrition and NCDs etc.
- He highlighted the effect of water/air pollution on food safety which is part of food security
- Policies are needed to improve research oriented towards food security and agriculture including climate smart agriculture (drought resistant seeds), high yielding varieties
- He stressed on the burden being imposed on the government with the increase of NCD caused by unhealthy eating habits
- Healthy food at affordable prices always need to be available
- Farmers main areas of support should be targeted towards agriculture technology, capacity building, access to better seeds, improvement in transportation and promoting our national crops like chickpeas and lentils
- Update on the legislation of Cannabis were shared with the participants

Ms. Wafaa Houmani – Ministry of Public Health

- Lebanon has the highest rate of NCDs in the Arab world; this is linked to the unhealthy eating habits accompanied with low physical activities
- Lebanon has high obesity levels for children and women- Awareness campaigns should be targeting rural and urban areas
- Anemia for women is another concern due to the change in dietary habits
- MOA can play a role in promoting healthy national diets
- MOEW can secure clean water for agriculture and sustainable energy
- MOET can play a role in importing healthy food by monitoring food safety standards

Mr. Elie Bou Yazbeck – Ministry of Economy and Trade

- The gap between production and supply is further increasing
- Food production and agriculture productivity should be increased to reduce this gap
- Better coordination between line ministries on trade and food safety issues should be promoted
- Bilateral trade agreements should be revised to promote a fair competition and encourage farmers to abide to safety standards
- Consumer protection should promote food safety standards to enhance food utilization

Mr. Wissam Kanj – Ministry of Energy and Water

- Rainwater harvesting should be promoted across rural areas
- Integrated water resource management is a key priority to improve food security
- Dams are strategic to create a positive balance in water resource management and part of them should be targeting agriculture for irrigation water supply
- Support infrastructure development in physical irrigation asset is essential to increase water efficiency
- Promoting cooperation between MOEW and MOA on water saving technologies is essential to cope with climate change effects

Other issues that were raised during the discussion are:

- Review pesticides import regulation and control illegal trade to avoid use of highly toxic pesticides
- Increase coordination between LARI and MOA and support research centers linked with MoA
- Increase in cancer rates in Qab-Elias is because of water pollution affecting also food utilization
- Establish a central laboratory concerned with seeds' quality inspection
- Participant asked if the percentage of obesity delivered by MoPH is a good representative of all the population or just a sample
- Agricultural calendar should be respected in Lebanon
- Many national crops are not being sold because of water pollution
- Due to the reliance on food import, producing countries are controlling what the Lebanese eats
- Agricultural products should meet international standards to be exported
- Nutrition sensitive agriculture should be adopted in Lebanon to help fill the gap of deficiencies such as anemia
- Agriculture technology is a must for the farmers to sustain their livelihoods
- Increase in agricultural land for cereal production should be strategized
- Support programs to attract the youth into the agriculture sector as the average age of farmers is 52 years old
- Encourage home gardens to increase food availability at household level
- Focus should be on staple food like burghul, freekeh and wheat to reduce import dependency

IV. Organization of work

A- VENUE AND DATE

16. The Technical Meeting on Food Security Monitoring and Analysis at National Level – Reflection of Results in the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture Strategy for 2021-2025” was held on the 15th of October 2019 at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Verdun, Beirut, Lebanon.

B- OPENING

17. The Technical Meeting was formally opened on Tuesday 15 October 2019, at 09:30 a.m. with remarks from Mr. Elias Ghadban and Former Minister of Agriculture in Lebanon H.E. Ms. Wafaa Dikah Hamze.

C- PARTICIPANTS

18. The meeting was attended by 37 participants from Lebanon including 6 members from ESCWA.

19. The list of participants to the Technical Meeting is attached as Annex I.

D- AGENDA

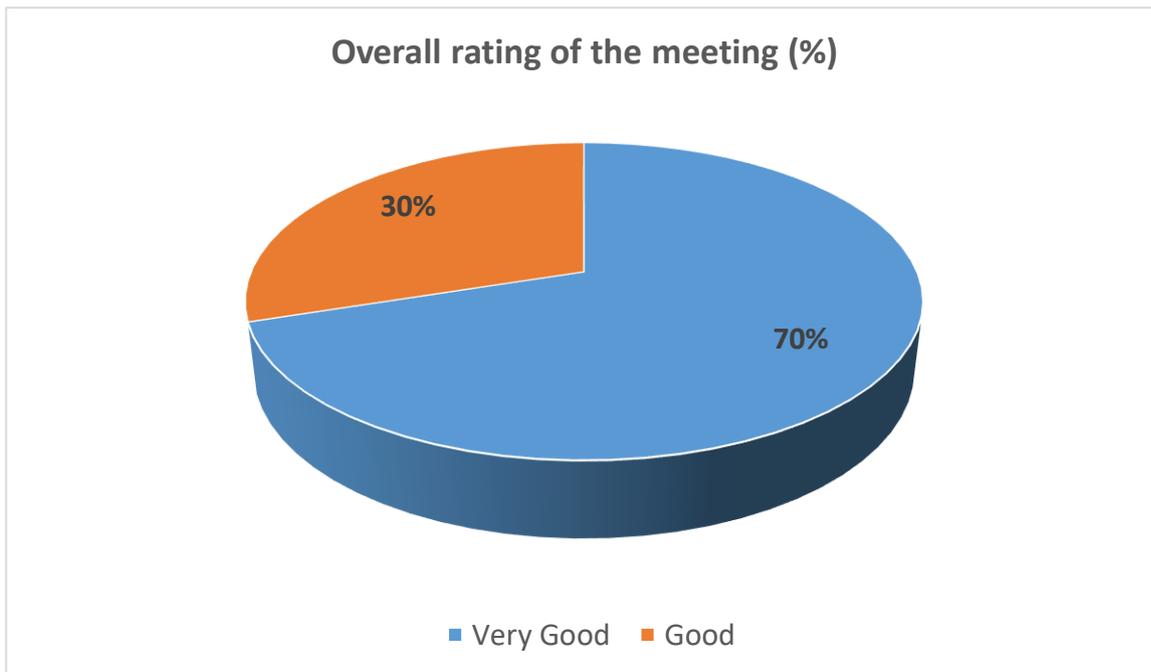
20. Remarks, presentations and discussions were made and held over the following sessions:

- Opening Session
- Session 1: Food Security and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Session 2: Measuring and monitoring food security in the Arab Region – Lebanon case study
- Session 3: Discussing the food security situation in Lebanon with concerned Ministries and stakeholders – Proposing recommendations to promote food security within the framework of MOA strategy for 2021-2025
- Policy recommendations and closing remarks.

21. The agenda of the Technical Meeting is attached as Annex II.

E- EVALUATION

An evaluation sheet was distributed to participants at the end of the meeting to assess quality and impacts. As shown in the chart below, 70% of the participants responded that the overall rating of the meeting was very good.



Fifty- percent of participants agreed that the meeting’s objectives were clear. In total, 60% of participants stated that the content of presentations was very good and excellent. As for the rest of evaluation questions, the following percentages were received for the answers below:

- Relevance to participants’ field of work: 30% Excellent, 60% V. good, 10% Good
- Participatory discussion: 30% V. good and 70% Good
- Coordination and effectiveness: 10% Excellent, 50% V. good and 40% Good
- Exchange of info between participants: 10% Excellent, 30% V. good and 60% Good
- Organizational arrangement before and during the meeting: 10% Excellent, 30% V. good and 60% Good

Among the recommendations, it was suggested to allocate more time for discussions, and organize another meeting to follow up on the implementation of policy recommendations. Some participants suggested the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education should have been invited. Moreover, one participant suggested that the focus should have been on the case of Lebanon only then present VaSyr in future meetings. One common comment was that the initiative of bringing together different relevant ministries on one table was amazing, and a good start for improving the agriculture sector and food security in Lebanon.

F- DOCUMENTATION

22. The meeting details, presentations and selected pictures are provided at the following link:
<https://www.unescwa.org/events/food-security-monitoring-analysis-Lebanese-strategy>

Annex I: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Annex II: AGENDA OF THE MEETING

Tuesday 15 October 2019

9:00-9:30 **Registration**

9:30-9:45 **Opening Session**

- **Statement of Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia**

Mr. Elias Ghadban – ESCWA – Lebanon

- **Statement of the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture**

Ms. Wafaa Dikah Hamze – Ministry of Agriculture – Lebanon

9:45-11:00 **Session 1: Food Security and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Moderator: Mr. Hussein Nasrallah – Minister Consultant – Ministry of Agriculture – Lebanon

- **The four pillars of food security and their linkages with SDGs**

Mr. Elias Ghadban – Regional Advisor on Food Security – ESCWA

- **Food Security in Lebanon – Reality and Challenges**

Ms. Maya Makhoul – Food and Nutrition Department – MOA – Lebanon

- **Promoting food security for vulnerable host communities and Syrian refugees in Lebanon: challenges and impacts**

Ms. Carla De Gregorio – Food Security Sector Coordinator – World Food Program – Lebanon Country office

- **Q&A**

11:00-11:15 **Coffee break**

11:15- 1:30 **Session 2: Measuring and monitoring food security in the Arab Region – Lebanon case study**

Moderator: Ms. Mariam Eid – Head of Agricultural Industries Department – MOA

- **WFP experience in Lebanon – Measuring Food Security at Household level**

Mr. Simon Renk – Monitoring and Evaluation Officer – World Food Program – Lebanon Country office

- **FOA experience – Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)**

Mr. Elie Choueiri – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations – Lebanon Country office

- **Arab Food Security Monitoring Framework – Indicators used and analysis**

Mr. Elias Ghadban – Regional Advisor on Food Security – ESCWA

- **Methodology for Obtaining Food Security Indicators within the Arab Monitoring Framework**

Ms. Layale Gedeon – Research Assistant – ESCWA

- **Q&A**

13:30-14:30 **Lunch break**

14:30-16:30 **Closing session: Discussing the food security situation in Lebanon with concerned Ministries and stakeholders – Proposing recommendations to promote food security within the framework of MOA strategy for 2021-2025**

Moderator: Ms. Wafaa Dika Hamzeh – Former Minister, Minister Consultant – MOA – Lebanon

- **Presenting the results of Lebanon**

Mr. Elias Ghadban – Regional Advisor on Food Security – ESCWA

- **Plenary discussion**

- MP Bakr El Houjairi – Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture and Tourism
- Ministry of Public Health
- Ms. Wafaa Houmani – Head of Nutrition Department – Ministry of Public Health
- Mr. Elie Bou Yazbeck – Food Science Expert – Ministry of Economy and Trade
- Mr. Wissam Kanj – Head of Irrigation Department – Ministry of Energy and Water
- Mr. Elias Ghadban – Regional Advisor – ESCWA
- Mr. Elie Choueiri – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

- **Recommendations**