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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Technical meeting on “Food Security Monitoring and Analysis at National Level –Reflection of Results in the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture Strategy for 2021-2025”

Beirut, Lebanon, 15 Oct 2019

INFORMATION NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

The concept of food security was first introduced in the 1996 by the World Food Summit and has evolved over time to include four pillars, namely availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. By definition, food security is “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. Food security is a complex topic, involving a diverse range of areas of study including agriculture, economics, politics, sociology and human physiology. The food security concept is still debatable in the Arab Region, and its importance has increased over time due to challenges arising from regional trade integration, climate change, rapid population growth, armed conflicts, and high import dependency ratios for main strategic crops. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, ‘Zero hunger’ covers in principle all pillars of food security, nevertheless, the cross-cutting nature of food security makes it difficult to classify all pillars in one single stand-alone goal. Food security at individual, household, and national levels is closely linked to several targets across all SDGs.

In Lebanon, a middle-income country with the highest rate of refugees per capita in the World, food security remains a challenge owing to low water productivity, excessive water use for irrigation, high water pollution, high food imports dependency, and low logistics performance, etc.

The food security challenges are reflected in the poor performance of major indicators such as prevalence of undernourishment which has increased from 4.5% to 10.5% between 2011 and 2016 respectively. This resulted directly from the refugees’ crisis and the associated deteriorating socio-economic conditions. Obesity also is quite prevalent at a rate of 31%, as well as anemia among women of reproductive age at a rate of 31%. The consumer price index in Lebanon has reached 119% in 2017 and an estimated 300 thousand Lebanese citizens are extremely poor and unable to meet their basic food needs, living on less than 2.5\$ per day. A broad overview of the agricultural sector in Lebanon shows that it contributes to only 3% of the national economy and public budget allocated to this sector has never gone beyond an average of 2% over the last 15 years. The sector employs about 7-9% of the total active labor force. Per capita food production variability and supply have decreased over time to reach 5.8% and 63% respectively. Food trade is an important fraction of the Lebanese economy.

In 2018, live animals, vegetable products, edible fats and oil, and prepared foodstuffs represented 18% of total imports and 22% of total exports. Agriculture consumes 60% of available water resources and almost 50% of agricultural land in Lebanon is irrigated. The primary cereal yield as a percentage of potential achievable yield is 72.2%. Food losses can be explained by the weak post-harvest infrastructure including storage and packaging facilities with a moderate logistics performance index of 2.7% (maximum is 5).

After the civil war, the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) has focused on food availability and has succeeded in increasing production and accordingly self-sufficiency in several crops. The Ministry is now working on enhancing the performance of the agricultural sector, and as part of its efforts towards this, it is preparing a new 5-year strategy that will prioritize the new directions of the government in developing the agricultural sector and enhance its contribution to the achievement of related SDGs. There is a need to reflect the way MOA will address issues related to the four pillars of food security in the new strategy and decide what interventions and partnerships are necessary to help improve food security at national level in general.

II. FOOD SECURITY MONITORING FRAMEWORK

ESCWA has developed a framework to monitor food security in the Arab region in partnership with the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development (AOAD) and FAO regional office in Cairo, within the context of the project on “Promoting Food and Water Security through Cooperation and Capacity Development in the Arab Region”. The framework is the result of a long consultative process that included extensive desk research and a thorough analysis of both national and regional policies that relate to food security through any of its four dimensions, and a series of meetings that brought together experts from regional and international organizations. The framework covers the four pillars of food security divided into 22 indicators relying on international available data sources (WB, FAO, etc.). It was adopted by the Arab Ministers responsible for Agriculture during the 35th Executive Committee meeting of AOAD on 28 March 2019. AOAD will issue a yearly food security report for the Arab Region which would be based on the developed framework.

Lebanon has been part of the consultative process for development of the framework, and the MOA was represented. Within the timeframe of the preparation of the new agriculture strategy, there is a need to discuss and analyze various food security pillars to help tailoring strategic policy objectives that improve food security. This will lead to a structured vision on the way the government will approach food security through the mandate of MOA.

III. OBJECTIVES

In this respect, ESCWA, based on a technical assistance request from MOA, is organizing in cooperation with FAO and WFP Lebanon country office, a capacity building workshop on “Food Security Monitoring and Analysis at National Level –Reflection of Results in the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture Strategy for 2021-2025” on 15 Oct 2019 at Radisson Blu Verdun, Lebanon. The workshop aims 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.

Deliberations with partners will produce an understanding of the context of food security and its monitoring at national level. Deliberations will result in 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.

The specific objectives of the workshop are:

- Understand the context of food security in Lebanon and its main challenges
- Help participants read and evaluate the food security situation in the country
- Present the Food Security Monitoring framework and how it can be adapted to the Lebanese conditions
- Introduce the selected indicators for monitoring food security and related dashboards
- Provide policy recommendations for the MOA to improve food security at national and regional levels

IV. PARTICIPANTS

The meeting will bring together experts from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, The Ministry of Energy and Water, The Ministry of Economy and Trade, UN organizations (FAO, ESCWA, WFP) and key experts in the sector

V. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

The meeting will be held at the Radisson Blu Hotel Verdun, Lebanon, on the 15th of October 2019. Participants are kindly requested to arrive at 9:00 am to register for the meeting, which will promptly start at 9:30 am.

VI. LOGISTICAL CORRESPONDENCE

Participants are kindly requested to return **completed registration form** to ESCWA (Ms. Nour Charafeddine) no later than **5 October 2019**

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence and inquiries concerning the meeting should be addressed to:

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