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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Regional Meeting on “Promoting Food and Water Security in the Arab Region”
Amman, Jordan, 27-28 November 2019

INFORMATION NOTE

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) is organizing a regional meeting on “Promoting Food and Water Security in the Arab Region” to discuss the challenges and opportunities related to promoting food and water security through cooperation and coordination of policies. The regional meeting is to be held during 27-28 November 2019 at the Kempinski Hotel in Amman, Jordan.

1. BACKGROUND

Achieving food and water security is a top priority for Arab Countries. With a current population exceeding 360 million ensuring food access, availability and quality, is a major challenge. Chief among these is the rising scarcity of water resources due to a combination of factors including the impact of climate change, excess withdrawal by upstream countries and over-abstraction of non-renewable aquifers. Other challenges include extreme weather events, dwindling arable lands, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, changing lifestyles and diets, an increasingly degraded environment and the rising uncertainty due to protracted socio-political transformations and unrests.

In response to these challenges, ESCWA has implemented since 2015 an initiative on promoting food and water security in the Arab region with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and in partnership with FAO-RNE, the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development (AOAD) and the Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD). This initiative was designed to enable policy makers address challenges related to food security and climate change within the framework of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and related Arab strategies and initiatives. The initiative examined food and water security through an integrated lens within a regional context that considers the needs of the population within a natural resource scarce environment.

By end of 2019, the main achievements of the initiative included the availability of a diverse and rich knowledge outcomes to inform policy makers, enhance technical capacity on assessing climate change impacts on strategic agricultural crops, adopt and use of a common regional framework to monitor the status of food security, promote the application and adoption of good agricultural practices at national level, and encourage an improved coordination of policies and programmes across water and agricultural ministries through regional and national institutional mechanisms.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of the Regional Meeting on Promoting Food and Water security is to provide a multi-stakeholder platform for dialogue on food and water related issues in the Arab region.

The objectives of the meeting are thus to:

- Exchange views and experiences among Arab States on enhancing food and water security based on the initiative outcomes including experience in monitoring and reporting on SDGs related to food security (poverty SDG 1, food security (SDG 2), water (SDG 6), economic development (SDG 8), and sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12));
- Foster dialogue on interlinkages between water and agriculture within climate change context;
- Consider the policy dimensions of these interlinkages and the means of implementation, namely green technology, finance and capacity development, that should play a role in enhancing food security in the Arab region;
- Discuss further regional gaps and priority issues of concern related to food and water security to assist ESCWA in shaping the way forward for the coming years including topics related to food waste and loss and restoring food systems in a post-conflict context.

3. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Sharing views, experiences and outcomes related to the regional initiative

Building capacity and networking to inform decision makers on Arab food security

Tracking food security, a complex endeavor, was made possible through the development and adoption of diagnostic tools that describe the status of food security, assess the impact of climate change on the agricultural sector and identifies areas of improvement and interventions. The development and adoption of informed and integrated policies can be attained through strengthening the national and regional knowledge base, enhancing technical capacity and providing platforms for exchange of lessons learned and best practices and to scale-up capacity development in the Region.

Enhancing food security through informed agricultural policy recommendations increases the agriculture sector's resilience to climate change. Forecasting agricultural productivity in relation to the projected climate change at regional and national levels using the Regional Initiative on Climate Change in the Arab Region (RICCAR) climate modeling output data in association with AquaCrop, a production assessment model and GIS tools, will provide policy makers with the scientific analysis and evidence on impacts of climate change on agricultural productivity in selected locations.

The Regional Framework on Monitoring Food Security in the Arab Region takes into consideration regional specificities and its alignment with the integrated approach of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; it also tackles the four dimensions of food security namely food availability, access utilization and stability. The outcome of the framework provides policy makers and relevant stakeholders with statistical evidences on the current state of food security and identifies areas of deficiencies that need to be addressed and remedied towards enhancing food security status at country level.

Coordination in the water and agriculture sectors for cross sectoral policy formulation

Enhancing food and water security in the Arab region requires informed and integrated policies in addition to greater regional cooperation and coordination amongst sectors and range of stakeholders given the rapidly changing natural, economic and socio-political environment. At institutional level, the establishment of a joint ministerial and technical mechanisms for regional coordination on water and agriculture issues enabled the Arab region to harmonize efforts to maximize and prioritize the

use of scarce water and agricultural resources to help bridge the food security gap and achieve sustainable development in the region.

Policy makers and high-level officials from various sectors are able to conduct technical discussion, exchange information and propose action plans to address common challenges in view of ensuring greater cross sectoral policy coherence at national and regional levels. At the local level, communities of various backgrounds and composition also need to be provided with the knowledge, information and opportunity in learning how to manage resources and engage in decision-making that affects their livelihoods in rural and urban settings. Particular attention should be paid to empowering women and youth as their engagement generates multiple benefits for social cohesion as well as the health, nutrition and welfare of the population.

Examine issues related to enhancing food security at the regional and national levels

Green Technologies for Addressing Food Waste and Loss

Current patterns of economic growth in the Arab region have largely relied on the extraction of natural resources, manufacturing and delivery of services that fuel excessive consumption; this trend has been noticed, particularly in the Arab Mediterranean countries, that are calling for innovative breakthroughs to turn the situation around, thus the focus on innovative technologies should be on waste reduction.

To foster cooperation on the ground, an initiative for enhancing regional knowledge and sharing experiences on waste reduction in the Mediterranean is being prepared. Its objective is to undertake a regional assessment of the effectiveness of high-tech and low-tech solutions implemented in the selected countries of the Mediterranean region, to understand their role in waste reduction solutions and efforts, with a focus on food waste.

Restoring agri-food systems and promoting food security in a post-conflict context

Conflict compromises domestic production, reduces access to food, and affects its utilization. The impacts of the conflict on food security are not only limited to the country of origin. Yet, they go beyond the borders to challenge food security on a regional level such as through disrupted trade, change in water allocations, markets' distortion and increase in transboundary diseases, and refugees' burden on local economies among others. Post-conflict food security programs at micro and macro levels including the restoration of agri-food systems determines the severity of the food insecurity trap that impacts the resilience of local communities to various shocks.

Internally displaced people and refugees are the population of concern with regards to food insecurity in a post-conflict context. In a protracted forced displacement setting, the affected communities have lost their livelihoods, assets and their social and economic integration. Programs targeting livelihoods and food security need to be nutrition sensitive to create a bridge and move from a humanitarian to a development context. Moreover, an enabling environment should be secured for refugees' return.

4. PARTICIPANTS

Representatives of Arab member States are invited to participate in the meeting, as well as senior representatives from relevant regional and national organizations, institutions and civil society organizations engaged in food and water related issues affecting Arab States. International experts and organizations will be invited to contribute to the discussions. FAO-RNE, AOAD, ACSAD, and other implementing partners will also participate in the regional meeting.

5. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

1. Date and venue

The regional meeting will be held at the Kempinski Hotel, in Amman, Jordan, on 27 – 28 November 2019. Registration will commence at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, 27 November 2019. The meeting will conclude by 5:00 pm on Thursday, 28 November 2019.

2. Language of the meeting

The meeting will be conducted in Arabic and English languages. Interpretation between both languages will be provided.

3. Registration

Invited participants and those nominated by their institutions are kindly requested to complete and return the meeting registration form to ESCWA by **12 November 2019**. Participants must return their completed registration form with a copy of their passport identification page to ESCWA before the deadline. Participants covered by ESCWA will receive support in accordance with United Nations Rules and Regulations, which should include Roundtrip airfare, a daily subsistence allowance for up to three nights in Amman and terminal allowance to facilitate airport transfers, as appropriate.

4. Accommodations and airport transfers

A number of rooms are available at the Kempinski Hotel Amman. The hotel is located on Abdul Hamid Shouman Street in the Shmeisani area of Amman. The preferential room rate for the meeting is US\$ 117 (single occupancy) or US\$ 126 (double occupancy), inclusive of breakfast, internet and all taxes and service charges. Hotel email: info.amman@kempinski.com; Tel: +962 6 5200 200

Airport transfers from the Queen Alia International Airport to Amman are available by taxi outside of the airport. The cost of a one-way transfer is JD 22 (approximately US\$ 33). Personalized airport pick-up and drop-off services can also be arranged directly through the Kempinski Hotel Amman at a rate of US\$ 50 each way. Currency exchange facilities are available at the airport in Amman.

5. Visa

Participants are responsible for securing their own visa for travel to Jordan. ESCWA can provide registered participants with a personalized letter of invitation to facilitate the visa request process. ESCWA can also assist registered participants who do not have Jordanian consular services available in their country, and those who are facing special circumstances, with visa processing through our office in Amman. Kindly note that requests for visa assistance must be received at least three weeks prior to the date of travel to allow time for processing.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

All session-related correspondence should be sent to the following ESCWA officials:

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