

“1st Meeting on the RCM Thematic Working Group on Food Security” Draft

Date: 16 May, 2011

Venue: FAO RNE Office, Cairo

Participants: FAO RNE, WFP, AOAD, UNDP and UNHCR.

The RCM Thematic Group on Food Security met on 16th of May at the FAO RNE office regional office in Cairo. Invitation of the meeting were sent to the members of the Food Security Thematic Working which are UNRWA, UNDP, UNHCR, IFAD, AOAD, WFP, WB, WHO, ESCWA and FAO. However only five organizations attended the meeting.

Opening

Dr. Fatima Hachem, FAO/RNE Food and Nutrition Officer welcomed Dr. Saad AlOtaibi, the ADG / FAO Regional Representative who officially opened the meeting. In his opening remarks Dr AlOtaibi said that food security is cross-cutting issue which underpins the wide range of activities that the UN agencies and other partners do in this region. He also mention that despite the structural problems like high dependency on food imports, poverty, unemployment, and high population growth rate, majority of the population in this region have been able to access food and income. However concurrent and multiple shocks including soaring international food prices, armed conflict (in Libya and Yemen) and civilian displacement, social unrests, disruptions of tourism and associated service sectors, and slow down of investment and remittances inflow among other problems, rendered significant number of poor households in the region highly vulnerable to food insecurity. Collaborative efforts, joint programming and regular information sharing on food security and related activities, are therefore needed more than ever. Dr AlOtaibi encouraged members of the UN agencies, especially those who are dealing with food security information systems and programs to regularly meet and provide rigorous analysis, and actionable recommendations including policy options.

The meeting was also attended by Mr. Moujahed Achouri, FAO Representative in Egypt who also the Deputy regional Representative and Coordinator of the FAO/SNE Sub regional Office. He also emphasized the need for regular food security information sharing and increased collaboration and coordination between the UN agencies in the region.

Objective of the meeting

The objective of the meeting was to discuss the food security issues and, activities undertaken by the UN agencies in the region. The meeting was attended by regional food security experts from FAO, WFP, Arab Organization of Agricultural Development (AOAD), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UNDP and UNHCR. FAO RNE as the lead agency of the Thematic Working presented draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Thematic Working Group on food security along with a

suggested work plan for the future. The meeting endorsed the draft Terms of Reference and agreed to establish a common database that will facilitate monitoring of key food security indicators in the region; the meeting also agreed to prepare a food security strategy paper for the region.

Presentations

A number of presentations were made by the participants from ESCWA, WFP, UNDP and FAO. The following provides highlights of the various presentations.

Presentation one

Title: *Improving Food Security in Arab Countries, FAO*

Arab countries are the highest cereal net importers; -58.2 million metric tons in 2007 and are vulnerable to food price shocks. Since the Arab countries are price takers, i.e. they don't affect the prices, projections indicate that their vulnerability will likely increase over time. Therefore the solution lies in decreasing the demand, increasing the supply and managing market volatility.

Food security in the region could also be improved by implementing integrated strategies and effectively mitigating factors especially focusing three areas:-

- strengthening safety nets, providing people with access to family planning services, and promoting education;
- enhancing domestic food sources; and
- managing market volatility through proper early warning of price shocks, stock management etc

Presentation two

Title: *Highlight points from Study on Development Challenges in the Arab Region, UNDP*

The presentation highlighted the need to fill some of the important gaps by complementing the traditional UNDP human development approach with economic policy analyses.

The study highlighted weak institutional/Governance framework, environmental problem and resource constraints as some of the major challenges that faces the Arab region. The study also emphasized other challenges including low, volatile, and Oil-led growth, high and rising unemployment and limited progress on income poverty reduction since 1990 and Medium Levels of Income Inequality. Like the other presentations UNPD emphasized lack of proper and credible data on agricultural production and market price as major problem and recommended the establishment of a regional Early Warning Unit to help provide proper and timely food security analysis. The study classified countries

according to their food security level and compared food security with food sovereignty; The study shows that Yemen food poverty is 27 percent of the population. The study recommends that there is a need to enhance inter regional aid from rich to poorer countries; -trigger discussion instead of just having consensus; discussing the role of technology;

Presentation three

Title: Food Security and Conflict in the ESCWA Region, UN ESCWA

The presentation highlighted immediate determinants to food insecurity in the region to be poverty, conflict, inequality, demographic characteristics, human capital, and natural disasters. The report also suggests that indirect and powerful determinants of food insecurity in the region are economic policies/characteristics, institutional capacity, and regional cooperation. Conflicts and civil insecurity are found to be the worst type of shock as it disrupts economy and institutions. Sources of conflict in the ESCWA Region are grievance-based: like Non-finalized colonial dialectic, geopolitics, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict, external interventions, weak governance, natural-resource based (rentier) economies, demographic burden with populations growing faster than jobs and frustrated young population, horizontal inequality, international prices shocks and fast depleting natural resources. ESCWA member states were involved in 59 of the total of 315 conflicts, with a human cost of close to 3.5 million people.

ESCWA concluded that that food security is a regional problem that requires a regional approach; In the short - to medium-term measures include:-

- Review effectiveness of national social safety nets, health, nutrition support, and education programs
- Review best-practices in regional early warning systems
- Review land policies and ag R&D funds
- Review of service delivery mechanisms and decentralization processes
- Discuss roadmap towards (agricultural) trade facilitation
- Review regional migration policies
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The medium- to long-term measures include:-

- Establish an integrated (climate + prices + human-induced shocks) regional early warning mechanism
- Coordination of food procurement through physical/virtual regional stocks
- Consolidation of many fragmented agricultural R&D funds into fewer and larger long-term funds with particular focus on rain-fed agriculture
- Reforms and harmonization of land policies
- Regional infrastructures and trade facilitation
- Coordination of financial instruments: insurance against crop failure + MFI and producers' associations (Ethiopia), investment guarantee fund
- Better and harmonized business environment (incl. dispute regional resolution mechanisms)

Presentation four

Title: Climate Change and Food Security, WFP

The presentation highlights include that IPCC predicts: increase in temperature, decrease in precipitation, increased sea level and increase of extreme weather condition which could lead to increased drought, rural to urban migration, increase gap between rich and poor, fuel social tensions and strain public finances and increased cross border migrations. The presentation also highlighted the link between food security and political and social stability in the region.

The WFP Climate Change study concludes that agricultural development alone will not ensure food security however agriculture production must be increased to increase access to food; the study recommends convergence of emergency and development to mitigate future disasters and enhance climate adaptation required to build resilience of food insecure populations.

Presentation five

Title: Results of the FAO survey on Food Security Related Activities by the UN Agencies and Partners in MENA Region, FAO

The presentation highlighted that the survey was the first step, essentially aimed at stock taking and obtain information on the areas of work related to food security that are currently undertaken by various international and regional organizations in the region; The survey also aimed at identifying the common themes in the work programmes and the activities of the institution to help identify specific gaps and areas of potential collaboration.

The survey concluded that many common themes were reported in the work program of institutions. However, increased effectiveness and efficiency are required to develop joint actions and projects at the country level, which in turn necessitates much greater detail at the level of institutional activities and outputs; The survey also confirms the need for a Food Security Activities Tracking and Management Information System (FS-ATMIS) to enhance information sharing within the UN system in the region. The finding of the survey also highlights the need to set up of a number of Task Teams (TT) that would undertake a detailed examination of the planned outputs of the UN institution involving food security related activities especially in the following areas: Technical and policy assistance to governments; Food security policies and strategies; Climate change; Agricultural productivity and production; Food safety; Trade

Some of the main points made by participants include:-

- Not only cereal imports have to be considered when addressing food security but livestock is also an issue.
- The investment in technical and technological knowhow should be worthy of interest as it could solve a number of issues. For example it could contribute in saving around 25% of the food lost by the region which is not less than 100 million tons yearly.
- How can UN help support active cooperation between the countries? The regional block needs to have a common agenda, formulation of policies, assessing the economic value added and the rate of return for different projects. UN could help with concrete feasibility studies to achieve better response.
- Not only active warfare but also social unrests and civil insecurity affect daily activities and market access hence worsens problem of food insecurity for poor households.
- Environmental issues such as water availability and trans boundary water use which could impact the efforts to address food production in the region;
- Segregation between the activities of UN organizations and their costs should be considered, sort of a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted.
- Need for a regional Early Warning and Food Security Analysis Unit hosted by FAO could help predict/provide credible information for timely response to market-related and other shocks affecting the most vulnerable population in the region.
- The UN is not as big as governments or as small as NGOs in terms of enforcement, so its lies in between.??

Key action points :

- The Thematic Working Group on Food Security to agree on indicators to monitor and establish Contact Database as a platform for information sharing especially in areas of early warning, food security activities and programs, including findings of diversified studies.
- Agree on Action Plan/realist work plan and deliverables and budget, for the TWG on Food Security for the Arab region.
- Produce regional strategy paper for food security.
- Agree on the frequencies of the group meeting; minimum of two meetings per year to feed into the two RCMs.