



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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World Food Programme

The Regional Coordination Mechanism—Arab States

Working Group on Food Security and Nutrition

Food security in the Arab region is part of a complex food system and has long been a concern for a number of reasons. First, the regional population growth rate is one of the highest in the world, second only to Sub-Saharan Africa. At 2.7 percent per year (1967-2016), population growth in the Arab region implies a doubling of the total population of the region every 26 years (World Bank, 2017). Second, the Arab region is one of the most resource-constrained regions in the world, and consistently uses water unsustainably. According to the latest available statistics, freshwater withdrawal as a portion of total renewable water resources is over 100 percent in half of the countries of the region, and over 1000 percent in some, climate change is likely to exacerbate these challenges. As the largest user of water by far, agriculture is primarily responsible for water overuse (FAO Aquastat, 2017). Third, since 1990, regional cereal yield growth rates have been the lowest in any region of the world, including Africa (FAOSTAT, 2017). The fast-growing population and low production growth have made the region the highest cereal importer in the world, and exceptionally dependent on food imports. By 2030, an additional 150 million people are expected in the Arab region, with about 130 million of these likely to live in urban settings. For non-producers and urban dwellers, food security is more closely linked to employment, developments in global markets, the national economy, and how well governments and food systems respond to shocks such as global food price volatility. In 2014-16, the Arab region was only 35% self-sufficient in cereals and 67% self-sufficient in meat. The region's dependence on food imports is expected to rise from 56% in 2000 to 63% by 2030 (World Bank) as a result of the unbalanced increase in supply and demand. The volatility of food prices, particularly since 2007, increases the complexity of the food security issue. Last, and most important, the region has experienced an unprecedented upsurge in conflict after 2003, with a third of NENA countries now engaged in civil conflicts (FAO and ESCWA, forthcoming, 2017; FAO, forthcoming, 2017).

Despite the myriad of challenges in the region, conflict is currently the primary driver of food insecurity. For example, undernourishment in the Arab region in 2014-16 was under 6 percent for all but the five conflict countries (Sudan, Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iraq). Moreover, according to the latest figures, stunting in the conflict countries is generally higher than in countries both

inside and outside the region with similar incomes per capita. Among low-medium income countries with data after 2010, Sudan and Yemen have the highest stunting levels in children from 6 to 59 months in the region, exceeding the global average for this income category. In high-medium income countries in the region, the highest level of stunting is found in Iraq and Libya. These levels also exceed those in high-medium income countries in the rest of the world (FAO, forthcoming, 2017).

The singular role of conflict in the deterioration of food security and nutrition in the region shapes the nature of both humanitarian and development support. The deterioration of the food security situation is largely driven by the spreading and intensity of conflicts and protracted crises. The Syria crisis in particular has deepened during the period 2015-2016, leaving more than half of the population in need of food assistance and 4.8 million refugees, mostly in neighboring countries. The numbers of food insecure and the internally displaced are also rising in Libya, Iraq and Yemen (WFP). Post-war conditions are often quite fragile, and 40 percent of conflict countries revert to conflict within a decade (FAO, 2017). Preventing the repetition of the cycle of recurring conflict accompanied by state fragility and low community trust requires a resilience-centered approach to development assistance. There is increasing recognition that food security and nutrition are key pillars for sustaining peace, which is not only a post-conflict activity, but should be a priority for assistance in countries before, during and after conflict.

Beyond conflict, however, access to safe and nutritious food remains a challenge in most parts of region. Governments in the region have traditionally invested heavily in consumer price subsidies to support household level food security. In fact, most governments in the MENA region spend more on subsidies as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than other comparable countries, however, more targeted social assistance programmes receive much less support. However, reform of social protection and safety net systems is underway in a number of countries and offer real opportunities for increased stability, food security and improved poverty outcomes. Looking ahead, the prospects for achieving the SDG2 are critically linked to these issue and implementation of integrated and inclusive food system approaches, effectively advancing sustainable food security and nutrition policies that address the demography, climate change, water and natural resources issues, conflict and stability, and chiefly access to food. .

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Rationale

The Regional Coordination Mechanism has the overall objective to act as a forum for regular consultation and coordination between Member States and UN humanitarian and development agencies. It thus has the potential to play a key role in the coordination and targeting of UN support to countries on food security and nutrition issues. The Arab Region Working Group on Food Security and Nutrition is established in the context of the Sustainable Development Agenda to contribute to advancing the SDG2 “End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition and promote sustainable Agriculture”. The working group will take advantage of the opportunities for open consultation between Member Countries, the League of Arab States (particularly coordination with the LAS Arab Sustainable Development High Level Committee and the proposed SDG2 subcommittee group) and UN Agencies to monitor developments in food security and nutrition in the region, identify countries for joint UN support, host a regional dialogue on food security and nutrition and to present an annual or biannual review of food security and nutrition issues representing a UN consensus view for the benefit of Member States.

Activities

1. In partnership with WFP & ESCWA, monitor developments in food security and nutrition in the Arab region through sharing data collection and analysis among UN agencies and with Member States. Compile the work of UN and other partner agencies related to food security and nutrition.
2. In partnership with WFP & ESCWA, promote the exchange of data between UN agencies and Member States conducive to have more accurate and updated information to monitor developments in food security and nutrition in the Arab region.
3. Identify countries for joint UN agency analytical, field and policy support on food security and nutrition issues at the country level using the MAPS approach in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.¹ Mobilize direct support to Member States.

¹ Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) was adopted by the UNDG in October 2015 as a common approach to its support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the country

4. Where appropriate, identify strategies for sustainable natural resource use, especially water, consumption and formulate medium to long-term strategies for diversifying food sources.
5. Review current humanitarian undertakings with a view to formulating strategies for enhancing the development benefit of international support efforts, and setting the stage for post-conflict development and peace-building.
6. Foster regional dialogue on food security and nutrition issues in collaboration with the League of Arab States, the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development and other regional organizations.
7. Produce and disseminate joint UN regional annual or biannual thematic reports on the state of food security and nutrition in the Arab Region, with each agency taking the lead on a rotating basis.
8. Conduct thematic studies in relation to food security and nutrition and to SDG2.
9. Provide capacity building support to the relevant departments and councils of ministers in the league of Arab states in advancing the SDG2 in the region

Expected outputs

1. In partnership with WFP & ESCWA, Annual or biennial report tracking the progress towards the achievement of SDG2.
2. An annual regional dialogue on food security and nutrition fostering exchange of experiences and lessons learned in key thematic areas for the region.
3. Specific effort to address implementation options and modalities of SDG2 in fragile and protracted crisis contexts.
4. 2-3 joint country support missions to advance the SDG2 agenda using the MAPS approach.

Working Group Members

Several UN agency and regional organizations are actively engaged in activities related to food security and nutrition.

FAO . Food security and nutrition is directly related to FAO areas of work. As a leading UN technical agency, FAO is well positioned to directly support member countries in achieving food security and nutrition related SDG goals. FAO is currently the custodian of 20+5 SDG indicators and places special attention to SDG2 – Zero Hunger – in which FAO as a food security agency can lead and promote. FAO is implementing three regional initiatives that are expected to contribute

level. The MAPs approach reflects the core components of the UNDG’s upstream support to the SDGs, including (1) raising public awareness of the 2030 Agenda, (2) performing analytical work that informs policy makers of the drivers and bottlenecks to sustainable development, contributing to the design of policy interventions and (3) joint UN agency policy support in support of SDG implementation in a coherent and integrated way (<https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/doco-summary-brief-on-maps-march2016.pdf>).

directly and indirectly to the achievements of food security. In 2017, FAO produced a flagship regional “Panorama” report on State of Food Insecurity; future reports could be published jointly with WFP, UNICEF, WHO and ESCWA . The organization is already collaborating with other organizations in several areas. For instance, FAO partnered with ESCWA to produce “Arab Horizon 2030”. In partnership with WHO, WFP, UNICEF and IFPRI, FAO is organizing a regional nutrition symposium in December 2017 with emphasis on the role of food systems in eliminating all forms of malnutrition.

WFP is the largest humanitarian organization addressing the challenges of global hunger and nutrition. While WFP’s mandate clearly articulates humanitarian and development responsibilities, the organization’s comparative advantage and long experience call for prioritization of emergency, life-saving and development-enabling work that benefits the poorest and most marginal people. For WFP, SDG 2 ‘Zero Hunger’ and SDG 17 ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ form the core of the current Strategic Plan through 2021, recognizing that all 17 goals are interconnected. WFP’s Strategic Objectives are: (i) End hunger by protecting access to food; (ii) Improve nutrition; (iii) Achieve food security by improving productivity and incomes for smallholders and supporting sustainable food systems; (iv) Support SDG implementation; (v) Partner for SDG results. In the Arab region, WFP is the largest provider of food assistance, reaching 30 million people in 2017. To carry out its mandate, the organization invests heavily in providing actionable food security information through robust food security monitoring and analysis. By regular data collection and monitoring, and as a co-lead of FSS/C, WFP is a key actor in providing information in support of emergency and protracted crisis operations, as well as supporting national governments in the region in their mid-to longer term efforts.

UNICEF

The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018-2021 is anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and charts a course towards attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of a future in which every child has a fair chance in life. It sets out measurable results for children, especially the most disadvantaged, including in humanitarian situations, and defines the change strategies and enablers that support their achievement.

Working with national governments and in partnership with others, UNICEF sets out to improve nutrition for all children and pregnant and lactating women by creating an enabling environment that results in evidence-based, sustainable, multisectoral nutrition actions delivered at scale. The updated approach to multisectoral nutrition programming is intended to enable a more effective contribution to national efforts to accelerate progress in nutrition. This will also contribute to attainment of the nutrition targets approved by the WHA, the United Nations Zero Hunger Initiative and the Sustainable Development Goals related to nutrition.

UNICEF's works with other United Nations entities and other partners contributes to the Sustainable Development Goal targets on maternal, neonatal and under-five mortality; HIV and AIDS; and stunting and other forms of malnutrition, while promoting early childhood

In humanitarian response, UNICEF supports scaled up nutrition assessments and surveillance, management of severe acute malnutrition and infant and young child feeding support; as well as scaled up life-saving interventions through population- and community-based services. UNICEF also support scaled up efforts that integrate GBV prevention and risk mitigation in nutrition and health programmes. UNICEF supports and advocate with partners for measures in line with international humanitarian law to ensure that children and their families are not denied access to food and essential health-care services, and to prevent the destruction or damage of critical civilian infrastructure such as hospitals.

WHO's regional strategy is focusing on health-specific SDGs, and includes a focus on ending malnutrition. (to be completed)

The League of Arab States (LAS) has adopted resolutions at the Summit level in 2015 and 2016 calling on Arab States to establish a mechanism for the implementation of Agenda 2030. LAS will implement the agenda in cooperation with all its ministerial councils and specialized organizations and with the UN and its specialized agencies. With food security high on the agenda of almost all member states, LAS is in a position to mobilize the political support of the Working Group on food security and nutrition. (to be completed by ESCWA).

UN-ESCWA has a regional strategy for implementing the 2030 Agenda adopted by its member States in December 2015. Like other UN regional commissions, UN-ESCWA is mandated to support Follow-Up and Review of the 2030 Agenda. Water-Energy-Food Security Nexus is among the three priority clusters identified by ESCWA.

Partnership and collaboration already exists between the above mentioned agencies. The Working Group will build on the existing collaboration and move further to strengthen the delivery of the partners on cross-cutting issues related to food security and nutrition in the region, climate change and natural resources and address policy support in the context of MAPS.

It is suggested that the following agencies be members of the working group:

1. FAO
2. WFP
3. UNICEF
4. WHO
5. ESCWA
6. LAS

The Working Group is open to other UN agencies, to partnership with regional organizations (AOAD, ACSAD and others), and to partnership with the World Bank, ICARDA, IFPRI, and others international organizations, as appropriate.