



TOWARDS THE UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT 2021

Arab Regional Food Systems Dialogue

29 March 2021, 5:30-7:00 pm

INFORMATION NOTE

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in partnership with the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD) are organizing the Virtual Arab Regional Food Systems' Dialogue in preparation for the Food Systems Summit (FSS) to be convened by the United Nations Secretary-General in September 2021.

The Arab Regional Food Systems Dialogue aims at providing an integrative and engaging platform to enable regional actors to share perspectives, experiences, and issues on making the region's food systems healthier, more inclusive and more sustainable, and enhancing their resilience within the COVID-19 context. It aims at encouraging creativity and mobilizing actions and partnerships to recover more strongly from the pandemic and to further elaborate on future pathways and synergies.

Background

According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (July 2020) estimates, around 1.95 billion people are facing moderate or severe food insecurity with more than a third experiencing severe food insecurity. The COVID-19 pandemic is further projected to increase the number of hungry people in the world by 83-132 million.

Food systems, the way the world produces and consumes food, need a revolutionary transformation to deliver on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The Food Systems Summit will be held in September 2021 with a broad vision to launch actions, solutions and strategies and identify pathways to accelerate progress towards more sustainable, inclusive and healthy food systems that are resilient to shocks like the COVID-19. The five action tracks followed by the Summit include:

- 1 ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all,
- 2 shifting to sustainable consumption patterns,
- 3 boosting nature positive production,
- 4 advancing equitable livelihoods, and
- 5 building resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress.

The Arab region is experiencing food insecurity, and suffers from the prevalence of undernourishment, and obesity with 116 million food insecure persons, 43 million undernourished and close to 115 million obese in the region. Food production in the region is limited due to the rising scarcity of natural resources, primarily water and arable land.

Poor yields, resource-use inefficiency and limited investments also limit the production. The challenges of climate change, population growth along with its associated growth in food demand and the impact of the protracted conflicts effect the region's food security as well. The region has been increasingly depending on food imports over the years and is now importing over 50 per cent of its calories consumed. The fragile food security situation in the region impacts how the food sector functions and puts it at risk in case of a sudden shock or crisis like that of the COVID- 19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the fragility of the Arab Region's food systems. The disruptions it creates are expected to add to already difficult socioeconomic challenges, import dependency, and protracted conflicts. Projections made in mid-2020 indicated that COVID-19 repercussion includes pushing additional 14.3 million persons below poverty lines and 17 million additional full-time jobs to be lost by end of the year. The 2020 State of Food Security and Nutrition Report foresees that COVID-19 may add 5 to 7 million hungry people in the Western Asia and North Africa by the end of the year. It becomes imperative for the Arab region to comprehensively review its food systems to enhance their resilience and drive progress.

ESCWA, FAO, WFP, WHO, IFAD, and AOAD are organizing an Arab Regional Food Systems Dialogue during AFSD in preparation for the 2021 Food Systems Summit. The Arab regional dialogue will be organized around the five action tracks of the Summit and examine them through the lens of the different stakeholders (NGO, research and academia, government , private sector), and considering cross-cutting issues such as finance, innovation, and empowerment of youth, women, refugees and other vulnerable groups.

Dialogue objectives

In preparation for the 2021 Food Systems Summit, the partners are organizing an Arab Regional Food Systems Dialogue for a diverse range of stakeholders to consolidate regional views, perspectives and experiences regarding pathways and actions for equitable and sustainable food systems transformation.

In addition, the Regional Dialogue is envisioned to raise awareness about the critical issues to be discussed during the Food System Summit and complement and contribute to National Dialogues that the Arab countries along with all UN member countries are invited to undertake.

In depth conversations amongst concerned stakeholders in value chain will allow for the identification of priority actions to support the implementation of the SDGs within the context of current realities.

Participants

Diverse groups and stakeholders will be invited to the dialogue taking advantage of their attendance to the Arab Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD).

Representatives of Arab member States are invited to participate in the meeting, as well as senior representatives from relevant regional, sub regional and national organizations, institutions, the private

sector, farmers' groups, Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, Arab Agricultural Engineers Union and civil society organizations engaged in food system issues affecting Arab States. International experts and organizations will be invited to contribute to the discussions.

Partnerships and Dialogue Output

The Dialogue is organized by ESCWA, FAO, IFAD, WFP and WHO in collaboration with AOAD.

The output of the regional dialogue will be a concise report that includes key messages and discussions that took place with the actors during the regional session, the Arab Youth Dialogue on Food Systems¹ and the Arab Stakeholders Dialogue on Food Systems². The report will be considered the regional input and will be submitted to the Summit Secretariat in preparation for the Food Systems Summit in September 2021. The report will be shared with member countries to guide and support the national dialogues.

Tentative agenda

- *Opening remarks*
- *The 2021 Food Systems Summit: Introduction and Dialogue processes*
- *Panel Discussion on challenges and priorities to transform the Arab Food Systems*
- *Participants' Discussion on regional key messages that reflect game changing actions*
- *Closing Remarks and Way Forward*

Date and venue

The Regional Dialogue will be held during 2021 Arab Forum on Sustainable Development at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon on 29 March 2021 between 5:30-7:00 pm.

Language of the session

The meeting will be conducted in the Arabic and English languages. Simultaneous interpretation from and into the Arabic and English languages will be provided.

Registration and Correspondence

Kindly register in advance for this Special event at: <https://fao.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAvf-2vqDgtGNF3KoXEj-5fG-rQeTAbfy7a>. Approved and registered participants will be provided with a link.

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

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¹ More information available at: <https://www.unescwa.org/Arab-Youth-Dialogue-Food-Systems>

² More information available at: <https://www.unescwa.org/Arab-Stakeholders-Dialogue-Food-Systems>