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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

First Consultative Meeting on Food Security Assessment and Monitoring in the Arab Region
Beirut, 11-12 April 2017

INFORMATION NOTE

I. BACKGROUND

Food Security is one of the main developmental challenges in the Arab region of which some countries are witnessing natural and environmental changes in addition to the economic, political and security crises in addition to dietary transitions. In fact, the concept of food security has evolved over the past decades, and its scope has widened. In 1996, the World Food Summit provided a definition of food security that has become widely accepted and used today: “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”¹ Applicable at all levels or scales (individual, household, national, regional and global levels), the definition conceptualizes food security according to four main dimensions, namely: **availability**, **access**, **utilization** and **stability** over time.

This broad acceptance of the concept, has not translated into a consensus on how to measure food security. A myriad of metrics have been globally proposed that prioritize selected food security aspects, apply at specific scales, and serve a certain purpose. For the Arab region, there were several national and regional initiatives on the dimensions of food security measurement including the “*Strategy for Sustainable Arab Agricultural Development for the Next Two Decades (2005–2025)*”², by the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), focusing on food security in the Arab region with respect to availability of safe food and stability to Arab rural communities, Riyadh Declaration to Enhance Arab Cooperation to Face World Food Crises (2008)³ and the Emergency Arab Food Security Programme (2009)⁴.

Despite the call for broadening the regional perspective on food security, it did not effectively move out of the realm of agriculture. The Arab region continued to center its public food security action on increasing agricultural production, while understating other dimensions, without visible linkages to other dimensions, especially those related to food quality and safety, the extent of supply stability of food in Arab markets, or the ability of the poor and vulnerable segments of the population to access food.

¹ FAO 1996, World Food Summit Plan of Action, para 1.

² <http://www.aoad.org/El%20strtigia%20Book.pdf>

³ <http://www.aoad.org/aga30declare.htm>

⁴ <http://www.aoad.org/Arab-food-security-report-2009.pdf>

Measuring food security is challenging in the region given the large disparities between Arab countries in terms of socio-economic characteristics and natural endowments. A rigid set of indicators that is limited in scope cannot give clarity about the level of food security in all the Arab countries. It is therefore important to develop a regional food security monitoring system, including a set of regional/sub-regional/national indicators, which is customized according to regional specificities, while taking into consideration ongoing global directions.

Moreover, food security monitoring and assessment has become an important issue that governments need to tackle within their frame of work in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG2, in particular, amalgamates a number of related issues: it aims at ending hunger (with its direct links to food access and poverty reduction), achieving food security (with its broad cross cutting nature), improving nutrition (with its links to health improvements), and promoting sustainable agriculture (with its links to production and productivity factors). Moreover, some of the targets and indicators under other SDGs are also strongly linked to food security issues.

In this context, ESCWA is currently implementing a project entitled “Promoting Food and Water Security through Cooperation and Capacity Development in the Arab Region”, financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The project aims to enhance food and water securities in the Arab region through improved and coordinated policy design, strategy development and programme implementation, under the rapidly changing natural, economic and socio-political environment. This is to be achieved by strengthening the national and regional knowledge base, capacity development and greater regional cooperation. The project is expected to be implemented by end of 2018, and it includes four main components:

1. Assessment of impacts of changing water availability on agricultural production in the Arab region;
2. Enhancing the capacity for intra-regional coordinated policy development on food and water security in the Arab region;
3. Enhancing the capacity for efficient food production in the Arab region;
4. Enhancing the assessment capacity of the status of food security in the Arab countries

As stated above, the forth component aims at the development of an institutionalized national and regional monitoring mechanism through an overall assessment of existing national food security policies and strategies in each Arab country. A comparative analysis of these policies will follow in order to establish an enhanced regional food security monitoring system that is tailored according to regional specificities and responds to current and projected priority concerns of the Arab region. The framework will place food security monitoring system based on specific and relevant indicators to the Arab region.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this “First Consultative Meeting on Food Security Assessment and Monitoring in the Arab Region” is to review the results of the mapping of national food security policies and strategies in some Arab countries. It will also discuss the various dimensions and indicators of food security monitoring adopted by member countries, in order to agree upon a set of indicators that will be used later on in setting the regional framework for food security monitoring.

During the meeting, participating national focal points and experts are expected to discuss their views with respect to the follow up activities on this component of the project taking into account food security issues in the Arab countries, in order to ensure the fulfillment of the expected accomplishments of the project.

Specifically, the meeting will aim to:

- Present the progress made in reviewing and analysing food security policies, plans and programmes in some Arab countries
- Discuss food security policies adopted in many Arab countries;
- Present the general framework for food security monitoring at the national and the regional levels;
- Link the proposed regional food security monitoring system with 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at national and the regional levels.

III. PARTICIPANTS

The meeting will bring together the food security national focal points appointed by Ministries of Agriculture in member countries to coordinate with UNESCWA on the implementation of the project. Members of the academia and individual experts and non-governmental organizations (NGOs, unions & chambers), private entities and regional and international organizations will be also invited to the meeting.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

The meeting will be held at the UN House in downtown Beirut, Lebanon, during 11-12 April 2017. Participants are kindly requested to arrive at 9:00 am on 11 April 2017 to register for the meeting, which will promptly start at 9:30 am.

V. LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

A list of Hotel offering preferential rates to the United Nations will be provided to participants from outside Lebanon and others who might need it. Markazia Hotel offers preferential rates and is within walking distance from the UN House in Riad El-Solh Square.

Participants are kindly requested to return completed registration form to ESCWA together with a scanned passport photograph so an access ID could be issued well ahead of time. Outside participants should submit their registration form to ESCWA no later than **Wednesday, 8 March 2017** to allow time to make the necessary arrangements for their travel. Sponsorship cannot be assured for registration forms received beyond that date. Participants are responsible for securing their own visa for travel to Lebanon.

VI. CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence and inquiries concerning the meeting should be addressed to:

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