



INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty



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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

**REPORT**

**FOOD SECURE ARAB WORLD: A ROAD MAP FOR POLICY AND RESEARCH  
BEIRUT, 6-7 FEBRUARY 2012**

**Summary**

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized a conference entitled “Food Secure Arab World: A Road Map for Policy and Research,” in collaboration with the American University of Beirut, the University of Cairo, the Economic Research Forum, the Hassan II Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine in Rabat, and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas.

The conference took place on 6 and 7 February 2012, in Beirut. Government officials, representatives of universities, research institutes, international, regional and national organizations and civil society organizations met to discuss and set the policy and research agenda for a food secure Arab world.

The conference featured presentations from high-level regional and international experts and policymakers on the following issues: economic transformation and poverty reduction; agriculture, water and climate change; health and nutrition; country-level food security; governance and conflict; trade and rural development; foreign direct investment; and data and knowledge sharing. A session was devoted to setting priorities for Arab food security and for the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research Program on Policies, Institutions and Markets (CRP2). The session aimed to guide CRP2 funding allocations and implementation to reflect regional priorities.

The conference concluded with seven recommended action points, namely: manage the transition; foster job-creating growth; improve trade and market integration; support innovative solutions for agriculture and water constraints; leverage health, nutrition and education for food security; implement effective strategies and policies; and establish strategic partnerships. Presentations, videos and other resources are posted on the conference website: <http://fsaw2012.ifpri.info>.

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## **Introduction**

1. Countries in the Arab region face numerous challenges to food security. Recent events have prompted regional transition and highlighted the urgent need to overcome food security challenges. Many voices are involved in the discussion of what Arab Governments should do in the short- and long- term to achieve food security, reduce poverty and create jobs. The road map to reach these goals is subject to much debate.
2. In response to those challenges, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), organized a conference entitled “Food Secure Arab World: A Road Map for Policy and Research”, which took place on 6 and 7 February 2012, in Beirut. Conference partners included the American University of Beirut, the University of Cairo, the Economic Research Forum, Hassan II Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine in Rabat, and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas.
3. The objectives of the conference included the following:
  - (a) To present a situation analysis of food security and poverty in the Arab region;
  - (b) To identify useful policies, technological and institutional innovations, and priorities of investment;
  - (c) To set research priorities in the Arab region to achieve food security, reduce poverty and create jobs.
4. The conference consisted of ten sessions, each devoted to a specific theme. Chapter I of this report highlights the main conclusions and recommendations of the conference, and chapter II provides a summary of each session.

## **I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5. Since the 2008 food crisis, food security has been a high priority of Arab Governments. It is likely that food insecurity and poverty are more widespread in the region than indicated by official data. Therefore, measures to overcome those challenges must be strengthened. Food insecurity may have contributed to the discontent that motivated recent socio-political upheaval in the region. Current transitions have created a window of opportunity for change.
6. The discussion of food insecurity in the Arab region took place in the context of a number of well documented facts and challenges. In the Arab region:
  - (a) There is limited economic diversification;
  - (b) There is high unemployment, especially among the youth;
  - (c) There is low labour productivity and a large informal sector;
  - (d) The level of corruption is high;
  - (e) There are large differences and inequalities between countries and between rural and urban areas;
  - (f) The food import dependency is the highest in the world;
  - (g) There is limited agricultural potential and there are yield gaps;
  - (h) The capacity for “food sovereignty” or “food self-sufficiency” is severely limited.
7. In addition to the list above, discussions of food security are being shaped by:
  - (a) The food-water-energy nexus with a focus on renewable energy;
  - (b) The global grain markets are thin: there are only five major grain exporters;
  - (c) The need for macro and household-level food security;

- (d) The existence of food insecurity pockets within countries;
  - (e) The mismatch between the skills and expectations of youth and job opportunities;
  - (f) The increasing importance of off-farm income, even in poor, rural areas;
  - (g) The high development cost of conflict and the increased risk of conflict during transition;
  - (h) The triple nutrition burden (malnutrition, obesity, micronutrient deficiency);
  - (i) The impact of climate change, especially on the poor (farm and non-farm);
  - (j) The potential for aquaculture production of fish.
8. In response to those issues, conference participants proposed seven action points:
- (a) Manage the transition:
    - (i) Build trust among citizens and between the State and citizens;
    - (ii) Increase community-level involvement and keep channels of participation open;
    - (iii) Strengthen civil society;
    - (iv) Improve data transparency and access to information.
  - (b) Foster job-creating growth:
    - (i) Develop youth labour-market policies;
    - (ii) Reduce entry barriers for small entrepreneurs;
    - (iii) Invest in science and technology;
    - (iv) Support job-creating growth for the poor, especially where household-level food insecurity is a risk;
    - (v) Encourage export financing of food imports and agriculture, especially where macrolevel food insecurity is a risk;
    - (vi) Adopt country-specific policies and strategies.
  - (c) Improve trade and market integration:
    - (i) Open trade and unleash the power of small businesses;
    - (ii) Improve access to financing and develop the regulatory environment;
    - (iii) Improve regional integration, as highlighted in experiences from Latin America and Eastern Europe;
    - (iv) Adopt a collaborative regional approach, for example, to establish regional storage facilities;
    - (v) Enlarge public stocks (reserves) after careful review of the downsides of this option (for example, quality decrease);
    - (vi) Explore available options to improve supply chain efficiency.
  - (d) Promote innovative solutions for agriculture and water constraints:
    - (i) Enhance agricultural productivity, where economically viable;
    - (ii) Cooperate on water and land management, which may reduce the risk of conflict;
    - (iii) Integrate rural development programmes, including access to rural finance;
    - (iv) Scale up aquaculture where feasible.

- (e) Leverage health, nutrition and education for food security:
  - (i) Strengthen social security and protection, and develop human capacity to foster innovation;
  - (ii) Improve maternal health, adopt targeted nutrition programmes, and mainstream nutrition issues into other sectors (such as education water and sanitation);
  - (iii) Transition from indirect food subsidies to direct subsidies for the most food-insecure populations;
  - (iv) Set up early-warning and related knowledge systems.
- (f) Implement effective strategies and policies:
  - (i) Create an enabling environment within governments to link agriculture, trade, health and nutrition policies;
  - (ii) Strengthen the capacity of local institutions, communities and other stakeholders;
  - (iii) Foster bottom-up and participatory approaches.

(g) Establish strategic partnerships, and explore the possibility of forming an Arab Food Security Partnership Network. Food security is a multisectoral, complex challenge and cannot be addressed by a single party alone. Strategic partnerships are needed from design to implementation, and the conference provided an opportunity to enhance existing partnerships and to develop new ones.

## **II. MAIN TOPICS OF DISCUSSION**

### A. INTRODUCTORY SESSION

9. The opening remarks by the organizers of the conference highlighted the scale of the food security challenge in the Arab region, which is home to 40 million undernourished persons. The need for a comprehensive food security strategy in the region cannot be overemphasized. While smallholder agriculture has a strong role to play in enhancing food and nutrition security in the region, food production alone is insufficient and should be complemented by carefully-designed trade policies. The objective of the conference was to advance the dialogue between policymakers and researchers to make a difference on the ground.

10. Keynote addresses cited the impact of recent global and regional changes on Arab development. At the regional level, political and economic challenges and opportunities include power shifts, poverty and inequality, employment, labour mobility, lack of fiscal transparency, and uneven distribution of natural resources. Arab countries can learn from political and economic transformation processes elsewhere as they struggle with transition. Five domains of public action will be fundamental for food and nutrition security, namely: building trust between citizens and States; developing human capacity to foster labour productivity and innovation; building social security institutions; opening trade and facilitating the formation of small businesses; and ensuring political and economic changes are taken into consideration.

11. In the case of Egypt, youth have proved to be the best agents of change. However, the challenge of the current transition is to build consensus on national priorities and accelerate the reform process. Creating jobs for youth, reducing inequalities (for example, rural/urban, men/women), improving the system of social services and allocating budget resources effectively are priority areas of action. Policy and programmatic interventions in agriculture and rural development use science and technology to raise agricultural productivity in a green economy context, clustering development along the agricultural value chain and promoting entrepreneurship and off-farm employment.

12. Finally, a three-pronged framework was put forward for the review and design of strategic interventions for Arab food security. The framework focused on: (a) social safety nets; (b) sustainable increases in agricultural productivity where possible; and (c) infrastructure and financial instruments. Policies are needed to address the framework, including: coping mechanisms for smallholder farmers; indirect subsidies versus direct subsidies; large-scale foreign investments; the costs of self-sufficiency; and the importance of grain storage. Policies are needed to support fledgling Arab democracies where food security is a primary concern and support regional food security initiatives based on overall economic complementarity.

#### B. ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION, FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY REDUCTION

13. The findings of the IFPRI food policy report “Beyond the Arab Awakening – Policies and Investments for Poverty Reduction and Food Security” suggest that poverty and income inequality in the Arab world are likely greater than indicated by official data. Because poverty indicators are misleading for many countries in the region, the report identified five risk groups in terms of food insecurity at the national and household levels. In the rest of the world, growth is led by agriculture, but the report showed that in the Arab region, growth is led by manufacturing and the service sector. In addition, high levels of public spending yield less growth in the Arab region than in other regions, particularly in the case of education. The report argued that the region urgently needs national dialogues about economic development strategies and included three recommendations: (a) improve data and capacity as the basis for evidence-based decision-making; (b) foster growth that enhances macro- and household-level food security; and (c) enhance the efficiency of public spending, reallocating funds as needed. Successful design and implementation of food security strategies will require visionary leadership, sound laws and institutions, accountability, civic engagement and patience and acceptance of the tenets of democracy.

14. National food security in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was discussed. Heavy reliance on food imports increases vulnerability to global prices and supplies, as was the case from 2007-2008 and in 2011. The socioeconomic impacts of price hikes may have helped to trigger the Arab Spring. In addition to vulnerability to price hikes, countries that rely heavily on food imports are at greater risk of geo-political impacts. In the region “food sovereignty”, or the State’s desire for political control over food supplies, is leading in various directions. Some MENA countries have renewed their interest in domestic food production. Other countries have shown rising interest in the acquisition of land in a host country to produce food supplies to meet their needs. More attention should be given to a third possibility. The MENA region should strengthen its participation in international food markets through a collaborative approach.

15. In Egypt, the impact of structural change on employment and productivity growth during the period 2001-2008 was the subject of a research paper, which showed that fluctuating labour-productivity growth rates did not exceed an average 2.4 per cent. Growth was led primarily by the private sector and can be attributed to such factors as the use of advanced technology and the increase in capital intensity, and workers’ skills and efficiency. The fastest-growing economic activities were transportation and storage (including the Suez Canal), communication, construction, public utilities, wholesale/retail trade hotels and restaurants. The movement of labour across different economic activities was marginal, although some sectors attracted employees including mining and extraction, wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels, manufacturing, transportation and storage and communication. Economic growth requires diversification and structural change, and wage increases cannot precede productivity.

16. The discussion of job creation for youth in the MENA region showed that the provision of schooling has not resolved unemployment, and that unemployment rates are highest among educated youth. Unemployment is a challenge throughout the region, but country-specific solutions are needed. A study of unemployment in Tunisia revealed wide variations within the country. “Core” areas of employment are located on the coast, while people in other areas may lack information about job availability. High migration costs and the absence of family support may also explain why workers are not migrating to core employment areas. Despite high unemployment, wages did not fall, possibly indicating that firms value experience and

skills more than education, or that educated youth won't accept lower wages. Youth-focused labour-market policies are needed to subsidise wages and mobility for all young employees.

### C. AGRICULTURE, WATER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

17. There is a need to improve agriculture and livestock production in dry areas. The challenges include climate change and the political situation, among other things, which have pushed the region to rely on imports to meet its needs. In order to improve food security, targeted programmes that build on applied research are needed. Pathways to food security include: intensifying agriculture; expanding agricultural land and bridging yield gaps through technology transfer; increasing the efficiency of inputs and adopting innovative policy measures.

18. The Arab world needs targeted investments to bridge the gap between food demand and supply. Programmes are needed to improve water, land and rangeland management, increase productivity, build appropriate partnerships and promote rural finance to create economic opportunities in rural areas. In particular, enhanced rural financing activities are needed, and success has already been achieved with cash crops or agribusinesses. Strong partnerships between local, regional and international institutions are needed to promote sustainable development in the region.

19. Climate change is a major challenge in the world and in the Arab region. The impact of climate change is threatening the livelihood of the population. Traditional coping mechanisms are becoming inadequate and climate change impacts are accelerating the pace of urbanization. To mitigate its impact, diversification, integration of adaptation measures into planning and implementation and strong leadership are needed. Those measures must be undertaken at the local, national and regional levels.

20. There is great potential for aquaculture in the region. Nutrition and health are important components of food security, and there is a need for more animal protein in the region, especially for the poor. Aquaculture could help the region achieve this objective. Currently, most fish come from freshwater aquaculture in Egypt, which has the potential to supply the whole regional market. Appropriate investment is needed. Egypt is the strongest candidate for investment in aquaculture, as both production and consumption are high. Investment should be directed towards modernizing the industry, improving the value chain, acquiring new technologies and providing training.

### D. FOOD SECURITY AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

21. The national food security strategy of Yemen was developed by the Government and adopted by the parliament in early 2011 in response to major food security challenges that began with the 2008 food price crisis and the global recession. Since then, the challenges have worsened due to increasing water scarcity and decreasing oil exports. The strategy was prepared through a multi-stakeholder consultative process under the leadership of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and in collaboration with IFPRI. The strategy included three phased objectives to reduce food insecurity and child malnutrition, and a seven-point action plan relating to fuel subsidy reform, business climate, qat agriculture, grain storage, water management, public investments and awareness campaigns. A macro/micro modelling framework was used to analyse two scenarios: (a) the promotion of growth in "promising sectors" (food processing, non-hydrocarbon mining, tourism, transportation, communication) through an improved business climate; and (b) the promotion of non-qat agricultural through investments (especially in coffee and wheat value chains) financed by qat taxation.

22. The socioeconomic status of households in countries bordering the southern basin of the Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia and Jordan) was discussed during the session. The discussion focused on food security and nutrition, the root causes of challenges and possible remedial policies. Food insecurity is exacerbated by structural challenges such as high unemployment, inequality, population growth, dwindling natural resources and

urbanization, and has resulted from emerging challenges of climate change, political and social unrest, and cross-border population movements. Although government subsidies have reduced the impact of global price spikes, social protection mechanisms should also address food security. Three case studies on household-level food insecurity and malnutrition in Palestine, Tunisia and Egypt, provided examples of what can be done to address these challenges.

23. The return on investment in agricultural research to improve food security and reduce poverty was highlighted. Agricultural research has had positive impacts on wheat crop variety and supplemental irrigation in the Syrian Arab Republic, water harvesting techniques in Jordan, and alley cropping of *Atriplex* and cactus in Morocco. An assessment of agricultural productivity showed that technical change has been the main driving force of total factor productivity. Low efficiency change values indicate a lengthy lag time between agricultural research investments and agricultural extension programmes. Policies that support technology transfer, access to inputs and finance are needed to reduce lag time.

#### E. HEALTH AND NUTRITION

24. Nutrition is a key challenge in the developing world. Malnutrition (proxied through stunting caused by chronic energy and nutrition deficits) has decreased in the world since the 1990s. Though on the decline, it still has an enormous cost and impact on health. Stunting goes hand in hand with other health issues including, inter alia, increased risk of illness, poor cognitive capacity and reduced economic activity. Strategies to combat malnutrition are available but need to be translated into feasible programmes at the local level. There is a need for better healthcare for mothers and targeted nutrition programmes. Nutrition can be mainstreamed into other sectors (education, policies, water and sanitation), and remedial policies should focus on the life cycle approach and benefit the poorest. It is also important to improve the availability and accessibility of data and information.

25. In the Arab region, nutrition should be addressed as a part of the food security equation. Nutrition is in a process of transition in the region. Most countries still have pockets of malnutrition even though they are generally food secure. Malnutrition usually affects specific population groups, but reliable data is lacking. It is estimated that up to a quarter of the population of the region is not meeting its dietary requirement. Stunting, one indicator of malnutrition, usually leads to obesity at a later stage and Arab countries are among the most affected by this phenomenon.

26. The connection between gender and food security varies between countries in the region. Women are often major contributors to the value chain of food production and nutrition even though their access to services and integration into socio-economic life may be restricted. There is a need to work within the local culture to enhance women's contribution to the value chain and adapt local programmes to meet women's needs.

#### F. GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT

27. An attempt was made to define the context and explain the characteristics of the ongoing regional transition. In the Arab world, the authoritarian bargain changed in the 1990s from the socialist contract based on State-led development, to a defensive model based on protecting liberals and the West from political Islam. The new authoritarian bargain remained for two decades. In the early 2000s, most Arab regimes were openly repressive and increasingly corrupt. Meanwhile, Islamic movements that were more inclusive gained the support of the middle class. When it became preferable to support political Islam rather than autocratic regimes, successful uprisings followed and led to the demise of the new authoritarian bargain. Understanding the context allows for more effective policy reforms.

28. The findings of a study on conflict and food security in the region were presented and discussed. The study used a structural model based on a large sample of data covering many countries over a 40-year period to capture the effect of conflict on per capita income and progress towards various Millennium Development



Goal indicators. The model differentiated between regions and between different kinds of conflict. The model indicated that, for the region, the effect of civil war on growth correlates to the length of the conflict: one year of civil war cancels out 5-10 years of development progress. The study also showed that the risk of conflict relapse in countries with good governance is far lower than it is for countries that suffer from governance deficits. In addition, conflict has led to the weak enforcement of land property rights. The volatility of the food supply and humanitarian aid in the last two decades proved that aid cannot be a long-term solution. Conflict and food security are regional problems that require a strong regional solution.

29. The results of an in-depth review of conflict in the Arab region and its determinants were presented. The conventional understanding is that economic growth reduces the risk of conflicts, but this has not been the case in the Arab region. The food policy report “Beyond the Arab Awakening – Policies and Investments for Poverty Reduction and Food Security” suggested that major conflicts are strongly related to food insecurity. Net food importers are vulnerable to volatile international prices. The analysis also found a strong correlation between oil export-dependency and the risk of conflict, which points to the unsustainable nature of the net redistribution system. During the democratic transition period, the risk of conflict is even higher. Yet, transition processes also offer great opportunities, and it is important to understand the dynamics of political transitions to reduce the risk of civil war.

30. Finally, the impact of a new Nile Basin agreement on the Egyptian economy was also examined. The agreement resulted in increases in upstream annual consumption and periodic flow reductions. A detailed hydro-economic model of various scenarios of future Nile inflows to the High Aswan Dam has been created to expose potential impacts on hydropower and irrigation water supply. The results show that average impacts are low. However, the risks of droughts coupled with periodic flow reductions could have significant impacts on the Egyptian economy. Water management options are available to mitigate the impact of droughts through regional cooperation.

#### G. FOOD SECURITY, TRADE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

31. There are three main pillars for improving food security: addressing demand, enhancing supply and managing the supply chain (transport, storage, unloading time, etc.). Effective supply chain management can have a big impact on food security: a 10 per cent saving could yield an additional month of food reserves for the region. The wheat import supply chain exemplifies the need for improved supply chain management. In 2009, the average cost of the wheat import supply chain in the region was US\$40 per metric ton, compared with US\$11 and US\$17 respectively for the Netherlands and South Korea. Average wheat import supply chain costs for the region were distributed as follows: 36 per cent for management, 29 per cent for port logistics, 22 per cent for inland transport and 12 per cent for storage. Egypt has the highest supply chain cost in the region and there are wide variations between its various components. The cost of inland transport is high, particularly in Yemen (more than 50 per cent of supply chain cost) followed by Jordan (42 per cent of supply chain cost) and Egypt (21 per cent of supply chain cost). A reduction in supply chain costs will have an immediate positive impact on food security.

32. Highly volatile commodities prices in recent years have highlighted the role of trade and grain reserves in stabilizing the food supply. Larger public food stocks (reserves) are needed despite the downsides (for example, decrease in quality). Experience has shown that market forces must be allowed to match supply and demand. In Bangladesh, market liberalization led to increased participation of private actors. Demand was met by drawing on public reserves, which insulated local food prices during the 2008 crisis. In Pakistan, the Government sets prices and provides subsidies to the food sector but it is hampered by corruption. In Zambia, the Government tried to go it alone but failed to deliver, which worsened the food crisis. Thus, good planning is needed to set up stocks and manage the food sector.

33. Since 1992, various international commitments have focused worldwide attention on sustainable development and food security. In June 2012, there will be a follow-up meeting to the Rio Summit of 1992 (Rio+20), which is expected to renew the global commitment to sustainable development. Food security,

sustainable agriculture and sustainable land management are closely linked to sustainable development and are highlighted in the preparatory documents for the Rio+20 conference (the zero draft). The zero draft stressed the right to food, the need for equitable distribution, the need to reduce waste, the need to diversify income, production and consumption, and the need to support small farms.

34. There are opportunities for development in the rural non-farm sector. Major lessons can be learned from what has been achieved elsewhere, particularly the cluster-based industrialization system in China. This system promotes job creation, and jobs contribute to food security. In China, the private sector represents up to 72 per cent of GDP growth, which helped the country evolve from an agricultural to an industrial society. A successful implementation of such a strategy requires government support through the provision of appropriate incentives. Incentives should reduce entry barriers so that small entrepreneurs can enter the market and take over various aspects of the production process. In general, market competition will reduce overall costs.

#### H. MAKING FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT WORK FOR FOOD SECURITY

35. The issue of food security within the context of investment in agriculture, fiscal constraints, poverty reduction and job creation in the Arab region was addressed. Despite the region's food deficit and sensitivity to food prices it has largely abandoned agriculture over the last 20 years, causing debt to increase with the price of food and food subsidies. These constraints could be overcome through foreign direct investment (FDI) to the agricultural sector. Due to limited fiscal space, FDI and private investment are needed for rural (primarily agricultural) development. A sound regulatory framework and good management will attract FDI. A responsible approach towards FDI for agriculture has the potential to achieve financial inclusion and empowerment for the local community and enhance food security. FDI for agriculture should be included in comprehensive rural development strategies and the overall macroeconomic framework.

36. The relative success of the Syrian Arab Republic in achieving food security through investment in rural agriculture and increasing wheat production was highlighted. It was also stressed that there is a need to include the social and cultural dimensions of macro- and household-level food storage, to highlight the importance of including all stakeholders (government, private sector, and civil society), and to take a comprehensive view of the food-access problem that accounts for complicated distributional channels and indigenous crop royalties imposed by developed countries.

37. The issue of agriculture and self-sufficiency in the Arab region was reviewed. It was stressed that Arab countries are unable to achieve self-sufficiency individually, but they can reduce their vulnerability to food insecurity by cooperating with each other. Poor countries may not have the option to purchase from food markets, but long-term contracts are one mechanism to safeguard against vulnerability. Participants noted that agriculture is one of the most productive sectors and provides a living for many. In addition, large investments are being made in the food processing sector. For those reasons, agriculture should not be abandoned. South-South investment opportunities through multinational agricultural enterprises should be explored.

38. Several methods of achieving food security were also reviewed and it was suggested that food security policy should manage the risk that supply will fall below demand. Diversification (also known as a portfolio approach) is the usual response to risk. There are at least four different pathways for Arab countries to deal with food supply risk, each with specific benefits and drawbacks. FDI is a simple and straightforward way of securing food inputs, but comes with high costs. Outsourcing, or making use of trade-partners is also a sensible way to ensure supply, but the geo-political constraints must be considered. Investing in national production to close the yield gap has long-term benefits but may yield little in the short-term. High-efficient metropolitan agriculture systems may prove to be a sound source of production, but require considerable up-front investment.

39. Spreading investments over these four pathways (a portfolio approach) will reduce a country's exposure to food security risks. Other pathways can also be pursued to manage food security risks.

#### I. DATA AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING FOR A FOOD SECURE ARAB WORLD

40. The region needs greater collaboration and data sharing, tools and research capacity to better inform policymakers on food security strategies. Networking and dialogue is needed between stakeholders including local policymakers, farmers and researchers. Building on existing networks is essential in the early stages of implementing new policies. The effectiveness and speed of implementing new policies is improved by strong local leadership. Stronger ties are needed with local partner institutions and government bodies in order to incite ownership and participation. The credibility and relevance of new policies depends on the quality of collaboration with local partners and institutions. The regional strategic analysis and knowledge support system for Africa is a good example of collaboration with partners at the local level. Sufficient resources are needed to achieve results.

41. Early-warning and food security information systems play an important role in planning and decision-making. There is a need to network, build consensus and ensure a multi-stakeholder approach. In general, information on crop harvest is available after one year (as is the case with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), and the delay is neither desirable nor helpful. Countries need high-quality, timely data and information to anticipate and prevent food crises and to improve programme planning and implementation. The factors that impact food security and nutrition are diverse and should be addressed. Data focusing solely on markets and trade is insufficient for a comprehensive food security strategy. Areas for enhanced monitoring and forecasting include: agriculture and climate; crop production; animal and plant disease; markets and trade; social and political environment; socio-economic indicators; livelihood profiles and mapping of vulnerable population groups; products and dissemination strategies; and policies and institutional arrangements.

#### J. SETTING FOOD SECURITY POLICY PRIORITIES: AN INTERNATIONAL PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

42. An enabling environment for the application of research is needed and policymakers should reach out to stakeholders (farmers, media, etc.) and the general public, particularly in this time of transition. There is also a need to identify and engage stakeholders and communicate effectively with them. Moreover, when setting priorities, trade-offs are needed to manage the competing demands of infrastructure, education, health and agriculture.

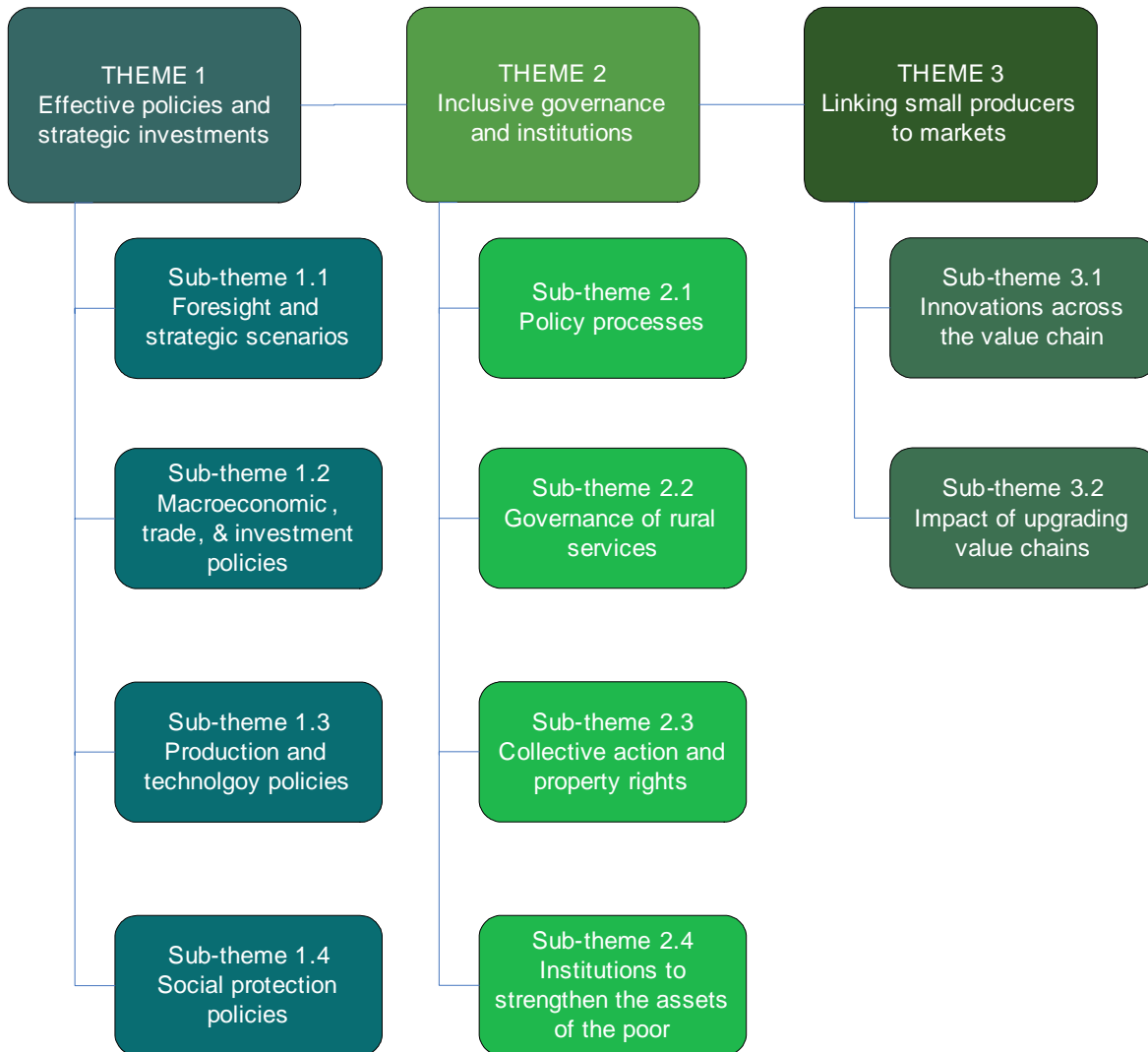
43. Knowledge must be translated into implementable programmes. Focus areas must be established to maintain accountability. Agriculture should play a role in the national strategy for social development and should be measured as an economic sector and a social sector. Development should emphasize the participation of all stakeholders.

44. There is a need for governance, accountability and equity. To this end there is a need for better integration and collaboration between Arab countries with a special focus on subregional programmes. A joint Arab agriculture policy could benefit the region though it would be difficult to implement. However, joint programmes may be more feasible if they do not cover issues related to food sovereignty. Multiparty and multidimensional food security approaches may also be useful.

45. Trade agreements are mechanisms that allow governments to defend their rights as investors. There is a need to take a closer look at trade in development particularly as populations' expectations are much higher than before. Short-term policies are needed to provide safety nets. Medium-term policies are needed to develop rural livelihoods and job opportunities. Long-term improvements are needed for resiliency, infrastructure, trade and others factors. The agricultural sector is one dimension of food security and it may be appropriate to restructure the industry to reflect this role.

K. PRIORITIES FOR FOOD SECURITY RESEARCH IN THE MENA REGION, AND THE RESEARCH PROGRAM ON POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS AND MARKETS (CRP2)

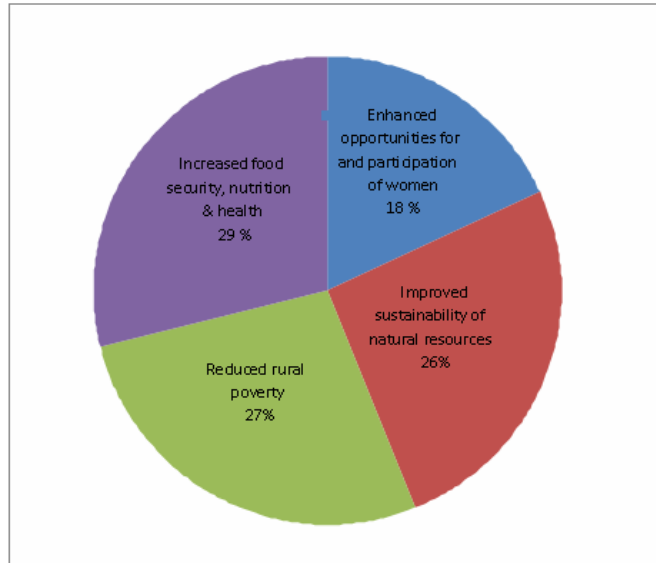
46. The final session of the conference was devoted to setting priorities for the Research Program on Policies, Institutions and Markets (CRP2) of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. Launched in January 2012, CRP2 aims at identifying and promoting sustainable policies, institutions, and markets to improve food security and incomes of the rural poor. CRP2 is structured around three themes:



47. The priority-setting process included three main steps. First, participants assigned weights to the four main objectives of CRP2: reduce rural poverty; increase food security, nutrition and health; improve sustainability of natural resources; and enhance opportunities for and participation of women. Second, participants discussed the importance of the 10 sub-themes in achieving CRP2 objectives. Third, participants assigned overall scores to the 10 sub-themes. Electronic voting devices were used in the first and third steps, which allowed for the instant display of results.

48. The results were as follows:

- Average weights of the main objectives:



- Average scores of the sub-themes:

Sub-theme 1.1 Foresight and strategic scenarios	3.4
Sub-theme 1.2 Macroeconomic, trade and investment policies	3.5
Sub-theme 1.3 Production and technology policies	3.9
Sub-theme 1.4 Social protection policies	3.8
Sub-theme 2.1 Policy processes	3.9
Sub-theme 2.2 Governance of rural services	3.7
Sub-theme 2.3 Collective action and property rights	3.6
Sub-theme 3.4 Institutions to strengthen the assets of the poor	3.7
Sub-theme 3.1 Innovations across the value chain	3.7
Sub-theme 3.2 Impact of upgrading value chains	3.0

49. These results showed that Arab countries value research on all sub-themes, particularly on production and technology policies, policy processes and social protection policies.

50. Detailed results can be found on the conference website.

### III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

#### A. VENUE AND DATE

51. The conference was held on 6 and 7 February 2012 at the United Nations House in Beirut.

#### B. OPENING

52. The opening session featured welcoming remarks by Mr. Nadim Khouri, Deputy Executive Secretary, ESCWA, and Mr. Fawzi al-Sultan, Chairman of the Board, and Mr. Shenggen Fan, Director General, IFPRI. Keynote addresses on “Arab Development in a Changing World”, “Challenges and Opportunities of Transition” and “New Perspectives for Arab Food Security” were delivered by Mr. Joachim von Braun,

Director of the Center for Development Research in Germany, Ms. Heba Handoussa, Professor of Economics and Lead Author of the Egypt Human Development Report and Mr. Nadim Khouri, Deputy Executive-Secretary, ESCWA. The session was chaired by Ms. Roula Majdalani, Director, Sustainable Development and Productivity Division, ESCWA.

### C. PARTICIPANTS

53. There were 194 participants at the conference, including representatives of the organizing institutions (ESCWA and IFPRI) and partner entities, namely: the American University of Beirut, Cairo University, the Economic Research Forum, Hassan II Institute of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine in Rabat, and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas. Representatives of the following embassies in Lebanon attended the opening session: Australia, Egypt, Iraq, Italy, Morocco, Oman and Spain. The embassy of the Netherlands in Egypt was represented and a delegation from the European Union was present.

54. Officials and researchers from 13 ESCWA member countries and 3 additional Arab countries participated in the conference, namely; Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen. Participants represented various government agencies and ministries including: agriculture, planning, international cooperation, trade, economy and foreign affairs, national food security programmes, statistics offices and specialized research entities.

55. More than 47 participants represented universities and research centres. The United Nations, international and regional organizations were also well-represented at the conference. The full list of participants is contained in the annex to this report.

### D. AGENDA

56. The conference was divided into four plenary sessions and six parallel sessions as follows:

- (a) Economic transformation, food security and poverty reduction;
- (b) Agriculture, water and climate change;
- (c) Food security at the country level;
- (d) Health and nutrition;
- (e) Governance and conflict;
- (f) Food security, trade and rural development;
- (g) Making foreign direct investment work for food security;
- (h) Data and knowledge sharing for a food secure Arab world;
- (i) Setting food security policy priorities: an international partner perspective;
- (j) Setting priorities for food security research in the Middle East and North Africa and CRP2.

57. Simultaneous to the conference, universities, specialized United Nations organizations and national, regional and international research institutes exhibited documentaries and printed material on their research at a knowledge fair that was open to all participants.

### E. EVALUATION

58. A questionnaire was distributed to assess the relevance, quality, effectiveness and impact of the conference. 72 participants responded to the questionnaire. The quality of participation at the conference was rated “good” to “excellent” by 86 per cent of respondents and 78 per cent rated the usefulness of the discussions as “good” or “excellent”. Around 64 per cent of respondents rated the quality of presentations to be “good” or “excellent”. All the respondents rated the topic “highly relevant” or “relevant” to their work and 90 per cent rated the organization and logistical arrangements of the conference as “good” or

“excellent”. The recommendations and conclusions were judged “significant” by 36 per cent of respondents while 51 per cent found them “partially significant”. Respondents highlighted the following potential difficulties in applying the recommendations: political (37 per cent); administrative (29 per cent); financial (22 per cent); and technical (9 per cent). Around 61 per cent of respondents agreed that the conference achieved its objectives and met the participants’ expectations. Thirty five per cent of respondents benefited highly from the conference, while 57 per cent rated benefit as average. Thirty nine per cent stated that the conference introduced new ideas, while 43 per cent thought that the conference introduced new ideas only partially.

59. The need for follow-up activities was acknowledged by 93 per cent of respondents. The following activities were suggested: sharing the conference results with officials and stakeholders and raising awareness of the conference outputs and the importance of the subject; focusing meetings and research on agreed upon priorities, and sharing knowledge to better implement the recommendations; facilitating a network for the participants, creating a blog and an e-forum for food security to exchange data, information and experiences; developing collaborative projects with the private sector and parliaments, scaling up the participation of government, local authorities and civil society organizations; and following a consultative process to set priorities.

60. To promote the conference recommendations, respondents suggested: raising awareness and promoting cultural change in relation to food waste in the region; organizing a conference on agricultural development; providing technical assistance and capacity-building for different stakeholders; emphasizing the multi-sectoral approach to food security; identifying and implementing joint relevant programmes; setting national priorities and expanding them to subregions and regions; and monitoring key performance indicators quarterly and yearly.

61. In addition, respondents commented on various aspects of the conference. They noted that: the focus of the conference was more on policy and less on a research road map; not enough time was provided for discussions; and the participation from civil society organizations did not match that of academia. They noted the need for: coverage of countries in conflict such as Iraq, Palestine and the Sudan that have arable land and water resources potential; transparency in the political component of food security, including bottlenecks and corruption; and clear actions and strategies to invest in agriculture, rural development, and safety nets. Feasible strategies for different Arab countries must be defined, along with implementation recommendations from financial, technical, and political perspectives. It was also suggested to avoid using “Arab Awakening”, which implies prior dormancy.

## F. DOCUMENTS

62. All background documents, presentations, and pictures can be accessed through the conference web page: <http://fsaw2012.ifpri.info>. The presentations delivered at the conference are available in both English and Arabic.

Annex

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