



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Land Management
as a Best Practice to Enhance Rural Development
in the ESCWA Region
Beirut, 25 – 27 March 2009

**STATEMENT ON PROPOSED POLICIES AND MEASURES FOR
THE ARAB REGION ON THE THEMATIC AREAS OF CSD-17***

Note: - ESCWA submitted this document for the Consideration of the Seventeenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-17).

- This document is distributed for discussion and feedback of participants in the Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Land Management as a Best Practice to Enhance Rural Development in the ESCWA Region.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

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I. AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is re-emerging as one of the priority sectors in the international agenda for development because of its relevance to food security issues. Agricultural development is reliant upon the continuous improvement of methods and practices, as well as on the development and adoption of innovations. Feeding an ever increasing population with a decreasing natural resource base is an enormously challenging task, particularly within the context of achieving sustainable agriculture. Accordingly, countries of the region need to coordinate their efforts in order to establish and implement the following policies and measures:

A. POLICIES

Countries of the region are heading towards establishing and implementing national policies aiming at:

- Supporting scientific research and agricultural extension activities;
- Supporting the production and marketing of agricultural products and ensuring the quality and competitiveness of these products;
- Drafting legislation on veterinary quarantine and phytosanitary issues;
- Increasing investments in agricultural production and achieving food security through projects and activities based on rural agricultural development priorities aimed at increasing the revenue of farmers;
- Developing effective means to manage risks related to investments in agriculture;
- Coping with the requirements of the world food crisis and the current financial crisis, and encouraging community-based indigenous approaches to sustainable food production;
- Developing a network of support institutions for income-generating projects and rural development activities aimed at poverty alleviation and achieving food security for rural communities;
- Enabling the participation of women in all aspects of agricultural development activities;
- Enhancing natural resources management in order to ensure greater environmental protection, particularly with regard to land and water use efficiency;

- Supporting and enabling institutions specialized in early-warning systems and forecasting natural disaster risks in the agricultural sector, and assisting these institutions in recruiting qualified experts and procuring essential equipment;
- Improving the productivity, efficiency and competitiveness of regional agricultural production sectors, especially among small and medium-sized agro-industries;
- Supporting institutions working in the agricultural sphere, raising staff competence levels and enhancing the technical, scientific and management capabilities of their workers.

B. MEASURES

Countries of the region aim at providing support to the implementation of the following measures:

- Implementing the 2007 Sustainable Arab Agricultural Development Strategy, and including it within the national development priorities of countries;
- Investing in scientific research on improving agricultural technologies and transferring appropriate and new technologies, especially biotechnology applications and biodiversity techniques;
- Establishing and harmonizing norms, standards and specifications for agricultural commodities and the protection of relevant intellectual property rights;
- Building human and institutional capacity through sound and innovative programmes and projects;
- Designing and implementing urgent national and regional strategies to cope with food shortages through the expansion of existing capacities and infrastructure of strategic food reserves, thereby increasing productivity of rural farming and achieving food security;
- Promoting methods to rationalize the use of natural resources in agriculture;
- Supporting institutions working in the agricultural sphere, and upgrading staff competence, both quantitatively and qualitatively;
- Supporting good practices in agriculture as a tool for achieving sustainable development in the Arab region.

II. RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The problem of food insecurity is still largely a rural issue in most Arab countries. Currently, about 44 per cent of the population of Arab countries live and work in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. In addition, the development potential of those rural areas is compromised by low education attainment levels, inadequate basic infrastructure and access to health and education facilities. The gravity of the problems require that countries of the region increase their efforts to alleviate poverty and hunger through the implementation of policies and measures in the context of the integrated rural development in the region. These policies and measures will include:

A. POLICIES

Countries of the region are heading towards establishing and implementing national policies aiming at:

- Adopting a rights-based approach in the design and implementation of rural development strategies;

- Ensuring a balanced development of rural and urban areas in order to reverse the trend of rural-urban migration;
- Ensuring equitable access to resources, infrastructure and services and empowering rural women to actively participate in development efforts;
- Encouraging a sustainable livelihoods approach in the development of rural areas;
- Narrowing the widening knowledge and education gap between rural and urban areas;
- Increasing investments and strengthening the role of community-based organizations in the provision of development incentives, especially water resources and agricultural inputs.

B. MEASURES

Countries of the region aim at providing support to the implementation of the following measures:

- Financing projects for small-scale farmers and improving rural market information services and infrastructure;
- Empowering rural populations to actively engage in knowledge-based economies, which are crucial to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;
- Developing appropriate education and training tools to strengthen national capacities in rural areas as people – not institutions nor technology – are the driving force behind development;
- Planning and investing in the development of effective knowledge and communication systems to support sustainable rural development;
- Supporting local development in rural areas, without losing sight of the larger picture, and ensuring the development of the production chain in an effective and balanced way.

III. LAND

Agricultural production and rural farming are not possible without land; therefore, the implementation of a socially just land policy, land use plans and sustainable land management practices, continue to represent enormous challenges in sustaining livelihoods. This will therefore require the implementation of the following policies and measures:

A. POLICIES

Countries of the region are heading towards establishing and implementing national policies aiming at:

- Ensuring socially just land tenure systems and designing realistic enforceable land use plans;
- Enhancing sustainable land management practices and protecting land from degradation;
- Increasing the use of non-conventional water resources to decrease over-dependency on conventional water resources;
- Improving our knowledge on natural resources and soils in arid and semi-arid areas and enhancing consumption efficiency;

- Supporting existing scientific research institutions to make better use of remote sensing and geographic information systems (GIS) techniques in establishing accurate and updated databases;
- Preventing land degradation and designating green belts and protected areas for agricultural activities;
- Promoting scientific research in natural resources protection in order to achieve sustainable development;
- Enhancing the role of the private sector and civil societies in implementing sustainable development programmes and applying integrated policies to eradicate poverty;
- Reforming the property system to eliminate communal ownership of pasturelands and forests in order to ensure their sustainable development.

B. MEASURES

Countries of the region aim at providing support to the implementation of the following measures:

- Reviewing current demographic policies and their negative impacts on the distribution of agricultural lands, the size of farm holdings and rural productivity;
- Mobilizing and supporting partnerships among national institutions, the private sector, civil society organizations and Arab parliamentarians on issues relating to land use;
- Encouraging cooperation among Arab countries on the exchange of expertise and information on land use-related issues;
- Developing a general framework and plan for the integrated management of surface and groundwater resources, both at the sectoral and national levels, while ensuring the equitable distribution of water resources;
- Raising awareness and investments in water resources conservation;
- Integrating the production systems of arid and semi-arid areas with those of marginal agricultural areas;
- Using scientific techniques in conducting field surveys, basic research and preparing land-use maps;
- Continuing to closely monitor land degradation through the use of appropriate technologies and scientific methods.

IV. DROUGHT

The region is currently experiencing increased numbers of severe drought episodes due to climate change. There is therefore an urgent need to design and implement comprehensive long-term drought risk management strategies that incorporate policies to improve the response to drought episodes. This will require the application of effective approaches and tools (e.g. models and decision support systems) and the implementation of the following policies and measures:

A. POLICIES

Countries of the region are heading towards establishing and implementing national policies aiming at:

- Mitigating and managing drought, organizing and preparing risk and vulnerability profiles and maps, as well as stimulating efforts to combat the negative effects of land degradation, drought and climate change;
- Supporting and developing human and institutional capabilities at the national level in order to combat drought and the effects of drought in rural areas;
- Enhancing cooperation in planning and implementing drought mitigation programmes at the national and regional level;
- Developing databases on activities related to drought monitoring, assessment, mitigation and management.

B. MEASURES

Countries of the region aim at providing support to the implementation of the following measures:

- Establishing and activating drought early-warning systems in order to manage and mitigate any adverse impacts;
- Conducting regular field monitoring of drought cycles and identifying reliable tools to predict the correct timing of drought episodes;
- Conducting risk, vulnerability and impact assessments on the effects of drought and the ecological, agricultural and socio-economic dimensions of this problem at the national and regional level;
- Engaging in a continuous review and assessment of the relevance and effectiveness of current practices, plan of actions and policies related to drought preparedness;
- Limiting the effects of drought episodes through the optimal use of rainwater harvesting techniques and storage facilities, such as dams and reservoirs;
- Developing capabilities, strengthening cooperation and implementing programmes to alleviate the effects of drought, among others.

V. DESERTIFICATION

Desertification and land degradation are constraining agricultural productivity in the Arab region. Concerted efforts are therefore needed to combat desertification and reverse land degradation trends in the region through the introduction and implementation of the following policies and measures:

A. POLICIES

Countries of the region are heading towards establishing and implementing national policies aiming at:

- Adopting an integrated approach to combating desertification that would include the physiological, biological and socio-economic dimensions of the problem;

- Enhancing the awareness of local populations, especially rural women and youth, on the importance of combating desertification and the sustainable management of natural resources, especially water resources;
- Enhancing the national capacities of countries of the region to enable them to undertake scientific research on desertification issues;
- Supporting the establishment of joint technology transfer programmes between national institutions, regional organizations and the private sector;
- Encouraging the establishment of information centres to monitor and combat desertification, as well as training technical staff on issues related to natural resources conservation and sustainable development.

B. MEASURES

Countries of the region aim at providing support to the implementation of the following measures:

- Developing and implementing national and regional long-term strategies encompassing all the technical aspects pertaining to the conservation of natural resources, as well as the socio-economic impacts of desertification on affected communities;
- Incorporating strategies for combating desertification in national and regional sustainable development strategies, in line with the commitments made to implement the Sub-Regional Action Programmes (SRAP) under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD);
- Enhancing cooperation between relevant national institutions and between them and civil society organizations in order to establish greater coordination in the regular monitoring of desertification, and formulate plans to combat desertification in the region, in cooperation with specialized regional and international organizations;
- Mobilizing public-private partnerships to finance and provide technical support in order to implement plans aimed at combating desertification and rehabilitating degraded lands;
- Encouraging academic institutions and non-governmental organizations to provide assistance to countries of the region in their efforts to combat desertification;
- Encouraging consultations and coordination among Arab countries under the auspices of the League of Arab States on the design and implementation of joint programmes and projects to enhance national action plans and on the management of transboundary water resources;
- Promoting cooperation and coordination in the establishment of an early-warning system for monitoring desertification at the national and regional level;
- Organizing public awareness campaigns on combating desertification and encouraging the establishment of relevant contributing community-based organizations, and preparing brochures and educational material on the subject.

VI. COOPERATION AT THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

The implementation of the aforementioned policies and strategies in the five thematic areas, requires regional and international cooperation, as well as technical and financial assistance offered by the

programmes of the different regional and international institutions and mechanisms active in these areas, including:

- Strengthening and supporting cooperation between United Nations organizations operating in the region and the League of Arab States, in order to achieve the most optimal results in the five thematic areas of the 2008-2009 cycle of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD);
- Reviewing and following up on the development and implementation of sustainable development indicators;
- Inviting regional and international organizations to support efforts made by countries of the region in the aforementioned thematic areas, through financial and technical cooperation programmes;
- Providing technical assistance to Arab countries in the development and coordination of desertification mitigation plans, including coordinating techniques and methods of developing these plans;
- Encouraging the exchange of information on monitoring tools and data on early-warning systems, drought and desertification mitigation practices and adaptation mechanisms, in order to support the decision-making process;
- Supporting countries in the provision of financial resources for national and regional programmes in the five thematic areas, especially those related to desertification, data gathering and information exchange, including on indicators to assess the effects of droughts and desertification;
- Implementation of regional capacity-building programmes in the five thematic areas;
- Enhancing the capacity of Arab countries to mitigate the effects of climate change on food security, natural resources and economic growth, through investments in agriculture;
- Taking into consideration the specificities and comparative advantages of Arab countries with regard to sustainable development;
- Adopting best practices and experiences from other countries in the five thematic areas and propagating them in the region.