United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 20-22 June, 2012*

*Side Event*

CONCEPT NOTE

**LAS, ESCWA, UNEP**

**Partners:** AOAD, GIZ, AFED, RAED

**“*Food Security and Safety for Development in a Changing Arab World***”

**Date**: 19 June 2012

**Time**: 15:30 to 17:00

**Venue:** Rio Centro Convention Centre, Room P3-F

**Background**:

Change is never easy and is seldom welcomed, but the need for change is upon this region if it is to reach and enjoy its full economic potential. Two areas are particularly of great importance to this region.

First, several countries have reached their limit of available water resources and assurances of unconstrained water supply are no longer viable options. In addition, the region is increasingly contending with climate change over which it has no direct control. Available data suggest that, in all probabilities, temperatures will continue to rise over the next few decades and that this will have major implications on the region’s rainfall patterns and water availability.

Second, several countries of the region are increasingly becoming food constrained. This is partly related to the endemic water and land scarcity prevailing in the region but also to the unintended consequence of inappropriate policies that have been relied upon for so long and which are increasingly being challenged. Though some countries are benefiting from higher oil prices, others are facing worsening economic situations due to these high prices and the ensuing price inflation affecting all commodities and particularly food products.

Thus, the region is swiftly transitioning to a future that is increasingly water and food-constrained and needs to urgently rethink its water and food security strategies with a view to turn the growing water and food security crises into an opportunity.

Of particular importance is the need for a better stewardship of the water and food sectors, as the most appropriate response to the rising crises. Better stewardship programmes could lead to new thinking and new implementation methodologies at all levels and as such would allow policy- and decision-makers to get a better handle on the elusive nexus of water and food security thereby enabling swift and appropriate interventions to be developed and implemented.

There is also a need to rethink the existing water and food security strategies in order to emphasize more on regional aspects rather than national ones as this would create much larger opportunities and offer more potential benefits (including safety) due to the larger range of beneficiaries and thus potential market.

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. Food security deals with food availability, access, utilization and stability issues.

Rio+20 Conference brings the opportunity to reaffirm the role of Food Security in Sustainable Development as referred to in the Zero Draft of the outcome document *under the paragraph of food security 64-66.*

Ensuring food security and safety have a strong role to play in supporting development in this changing Arab region and as there is a need for carefully designed policies and programmes that could contribute to food security and safety and ultimately ensure social security.

The Green Economy, which is one of the two main themes of the Rio+20 Conference, provides new opportunities to address the water and food security crises facing the region. As water and food security impact poverty alleviation, livelihood improvement and ecosystem management, they involve the three pillars of Sustainable Development (economic, social and environmental) that a Green Economy aims also to address.

Maintaining the social, economic and environmental functions of production systems with a view to support livelihoods and water and food security fits within the water-food security nexus and the Green Economy and the need for environmental preservation while responding appropriately to the scarcity of resources plaguing the region is amongst the goals of the Green Economy paradigm. (Par. 25 Zero Draft: “*We are convinced that a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication should contribute to meeting key goals – in particular the priorities of poverty eradication, food security…”).*

**Expected outcomes**:

1. The creation of a forum/network of civil society and international and regional partners for ensuring awareness and ongoing information sharing on food security and safety;
2. The proposal of a regional development project targeting public institutions and civil society with the overall objective of promoting safe and secure food habits and dynamics.

**Media Campaign:**

The issue of food security and safety have been widely debated among different stakeholders and in policy circles, CSOs, regional and sub regional foras. However, in the Arab Region, the public opinion is still amalgamating the concepts of food security and food self sufficiency. There is a need to draw a line between these two concepts while highlighting the impact of food security and safety on sustainable development and on the socio-political environment prevailing in the region. To this end a short video will be produced in order to allow stakeholders and notably the youth to express their views on food security and food safety issues at national levels and in the Arab world. To this end, it is envisioned that short interviews will be conducted with students among others in selected countries, and that these will be collected and integrated into a short video to be presented and discussed during the side event.

**Organization of work**:

The event will be organized as follows:

1. Welcoming remarks and presentation of objectives

2. Keynote address on food security and food safety in the Arab region

3. Short film

4. Panel discussion: Panellists and discussants will include representatives of the collaborating partners and other personalities to be identified

5. Question and answer session

**Target participants (Maximum room occupancy is 48 participants):**

1. Arab delegations at Rio+20 Conference;

3. Staff and constituencies of organizing and partnering institutions;

4. Other Rio+20 Conference attendees who might be interested in Arab developmental issues.