



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/SDPD/2006/2
23 February 2006
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

REPORT

THE REGIONAL SEMINAR ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND COMPETITIVENESS OF THE AGRO-FOOD SECTOR BEIRUT, 1-2 DECEMBER 2005

Summary

The Regional Seminar on Sustainable Development and Competitiveness of the Agro-food Sector (Beirut, 1-2 December 2005) touched on several issues, including the ways in which clusters and networks can enhance firm competitiveness in the agro-food sector in the region; the effects of environmental and food safety standards and regulations on the competitiveness of the agro-food sector, especially that of small and medium sized enterprises; and the ways in which clusters and networks can be used to facilitate certification and increase awareness on food labelling issues, particularly those related to geographical indicators and genetically modified foods.

The participants made a set of recommendations both to member countries and to ESCWA and partner institutions. Recommendations to member countries stressed on the need to adopt and enforce the implementation of international standards and to coordinate Arab efforts in this regard. It was further recommended to support clusters and networks in the agro-food sector.

This report comprises a brief overview of the most important points raised during discussions and the conclusions and recommendations of the participants.

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Introduction

1. The Regional Seminar on Sustainable Development and Competitiveness of the Agro-food Sector (Beirut, 1-2 December 2005), which was convened by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), had the following main objectives:

(a) To identify obstacles that hinder the development and competitiveness of the agro-food sector in the region, and to discuss ways in which clusters and networks can enhance firm competitiveness;

(b) To examine environmental and food safety standards and regulations on, among others, pesticide residues, packaging and colourants that affect the competitiveness of the agro-food sector, and to assess the impact of compliance and of non-compliance with these standards;

(c) To examine various food labelling issues and the ways in which clusters and networks can be used to facilitate certification and increase awareness of these regimes, including geographical indications, eco-labelling and genetically modified foods;

(d) To disseminate best practices from national and international experiences.

2. The Regional Seminar was organized in sessions, with each session concentrating on one topic followed by discussions (see annex II).

3. Recommendations were action-oriented whereby the focus was on empowering stakeholders at the national level and on coordinating activities at the regional level. It was agreed that the Seminar provided a good background for the Arab-Palestinian Roundtable on Agriculture and Agro-industrial Development in the Gaza Strip (Beirut, 3 December 2005), which was convened following the Seminar.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. CONCLUSIONS

4. Clusters and networks were identified as important gateways in terms of enhancing the competitiveness of agro-businesses that produce goods for local and international markets, with particular attention paid to the benefits that such inter-firm cooperative arrangements can present to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

5. The participants stressed the need to employ qualified personnel in order to implement food safety standards at the production level and to monitor such standards at the inspection level.

6. At a regional level, the lack of proper coordination and poor communication between public and private sector institutions in ESCWA member countries and among ESCWA members were identified as the main obstacles to the adoption of unified environment, health and safety standards. Moreover, participants highlighted a need to increase public awareness on food safety from "farm to fork".

7. Additionally, participants noted that the development of the agricultural and agro-food industrial sectors in the Gaza Strip required consolidated efforts and technical assistance programmes that ESCWA, in collaboration with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and others, could consider incorporating into their future work programmes.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

8. During the course of the Seminar, the following recommendations were made:

(a) To investigate further the effects of clusters in the agro-food sector on competitiveness in local and export markets, and to assist potential clusters that have been identified in terms of improving their organization, thereby maximizing the benefits of their cooperation;

(b) To support national and regional efforts aimed at establishing quality standards for products that could be registered with geographical indicators;

(c) To launch an Arab initiative aimed at harmonizing standards specifications and conformity assessment procedures for agro-food products, including testing, inspection, certification and accreditation;

(d) To build upon the draft proposal prepared by ESCWA regarding the development of the agricultural and agro-industries in the Gaza Strip and to discuss it further with counterparts in Palestine and with international organizations in order to prepare a final project document.

II. MAIN TOPICS OF PAPERS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. KEY ISSUES IN THE AGRO-FOOD SECTOR IN THE ARAB REGION: THE ROLE OF CLUSTERS AND NETWORKS

9. The opening statement highlighted the objectives and the main topics of discussions of the Regional Seminar. In her introductory remarks, Ms. Anhar Hegazi, Chief of Sustainable Development and Productivity Division (SDPD) in ESCWA, stressed the need to face the challenges that agro-food sector in the region is experiencing through various clustering and networking methods in order to enhance the competitiveness of agro-businesses that produce goods for local and international markets. Such cooperative arrangements present distinct benefits to SMEs.

10. The keynote address presented a full analysis of the past and present status of the agro-food sector, including the economic advantages of that industry and its current and projected development stages. The presentation then focused on the requirements for the sustainable development of food production in the Arab region by stressing on the issues of competitiveness, inter-firm cooperation, clustering and networking. Equally, the address highlighted the main obstacles that the sector is facing and sought to differentiate between national, regional and international obstacles. Within the context of the actions taken by the Arab Federation of Food Industries (AFFI) aimed at encouraging inter-firm cooperation, examples were presented from various sub-sectors, including dairy products, olive and olive oil, dates, poultry and related industries, and vegetable oils.

11. Following definitions of SME clusters and networks, discussions concentrated on the opportunities that such networks can offer to participating SMEs in terms of increasing competitiveness. Specifically, cooperative mechanisms can facilitate the sharing of experiences, particularly among SMEs, and improve access to information regarding ways to overcome obstacles and barriers to trade. The discussions enumerated the areas of inter-firm cooperation and stressed the need for cluster development agents.

12. Given that the Arab agro-food sector is largely composed of SMEs, the development of clusters and networks in that sector requires appropriate incentives to SMEs by Governments. Moreover, participants expressed an interest in the concept of cluster development agents and in their formation with the support of specialized agencies.

13. SMEs currently face the following challenges: (a) adapting to new market requirements, including, among others, compliance with food safety standards and norms; (b) acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge; (c) innovating their products and processes; (d) restructuring their operations; (e) upgrading their technologies; and (f) producing high quality products. Given these challenges, there is a strong need to stress the benefits of the networking arrangement to SMEs, particularly in terms of increasing competitiveness in local and export markets. However, the framework governing clusters has not yet been finalized in the ESCWA member countries. There is therefore an equally strong need for the concerned authorities and stakeholders to address this issue.

14. The discussions on agro-food industrial activities stressed the importance of food industries in the Mediterranean Basin and the need to support them. This translates into improvements in products and processes that must be undertaken prior to export, in addition to concentrating marketing efforts before the

production of goods. Within that context, the discussions underscored the lack of research and development in the Arab agro-food sector owing to the nature of SME producers.

15. In the areas of safety and quality, the discussions confirmed the importance of such quality systems and standards as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9000, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), Codex Alimentarius; and stressed the need for accreditation and testing services aimed at supporting the agro-food sector. Moreover, some participants argued that the low quality of some agro-food products in Arab countries could be largely attributed to poverty.

B. FOOD SAFETY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

16. In the area of food safety, a draft law in Lebanon on that issue was shown to represent an innovative and modern system that was based on scientific grounds and the principles of risk analysis. Specifically, the draft law on food safety, which is divided into 11 distinct chapters and 27 articles and is based on similar international laws and regulations, follows a “farm-to-fork” approach with traceability, precautionary principles and transparency as its core building blocks, and provides a high level of health protection for consumers.

17. In Palestine, UNIDO has established a food safety framework as part of its Integrated Programme in Palestine that is divided into two main branches, namely: private sector support and public sector support. The food safety infrastructure is considered under several levels of interventions, including policy, institutional, firm, consumer and testing facilities. Discussions focused on the external challenges, which include the deterioration in the security situation and the lack of control over goods produced along the borders and in Israeli settlements; and on the internal challenges, which include poor coordination and duplication mechanisms between stakeholders, poor coordination between donors and international organizations and between private sector institutions, and frequent changes in policies and leaders.

18. In the area of consumer protection, the work of the Consumers Lebanon Association was highlighted. This non-governmental organization (NGO) was fully engaged in the preparation of the Lebanese Consumer Protection Law of August 2005, and continues to play an active role in monitoring the implementation of that Law. The case of Consumers Lebanon Association was presented in order to highlight the leading roles that civil societies can play in that sector.

19. The establishment of a national framework for Lebanon on biosafety and its related subject of genetically modified organisms were discussed, specifically in relation to the work undertaken by the Ministry of Environment. While Lebanon has not yet ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, its implementation in Lebanon was reviewed, in addition to the national policies, administrative system and legislative regime proposed by the Ministry of Environment.

20. Subsequently, discussions focused on several issues, including the role and capacities of NGOs; possible conflicts of interest that NGOs could experience when monitoring the activities of agro-food producers; the ways that NGOs and universities could assist small producers to come into compliance with environmental, health and safety standards; and, in Palestine, the need to establish a consumer protection body and to raise the awareness of consumers.

C. MAKING THE FOOD INDUSTRY MORE SUSTAINABLE

21. A presentation on cluster mapping for the agro-food sector explained the purpose and value of such techniques, with examples of cluster mapping undertaken in Lebanon in the following sub-sectors: processing and packaging of herbs and spices, production of oriental sweets, and processing of fruits and vegetables and olive oil.

22. This was followed by a presentation of the work done by ESCWA in cooperation with UNIDO and with the funding of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the project, entitled “Employment Creation and Income Generation through the Development of Micro and Small Agro-industries in South Lebanon”. The project consisted of assessing the needs of the region, selecting targeted sectors for clustering

and proposing mechanisms for providing assistance to micro and small producers. Based on a number of selection criteria, this pilot work focused on the production of honey and of thyme, referred to as *zaatar* in Arabic. While various challenges were faced in implementing the clustering methodology, the results were successful. Participants suggested that agricultural producers of mint in Lebanon could equally benefit from such mechanisms.

23. In the dairy sub-sector, a study undertaken in Egypt investigated the waste from that industry and examined the use of whey by-products. Additionally, this study presented a number of possible manufacturing scenarios with attractive payback periods for potential investors, including lactose sugars and animal feed blocks.

24. Participants argued that many of the difficulties facing agro-food producers and exporters could be overcome by promoting access to information, and improving production practices and inter-firm cooperation through the development of clusters and networks.

25. From the perspective of the producers, the economic benefits of the agro-food clustering projects in South Lebanon were considered more important than the social benefits. The organization of a cooperative structure emerged as a necessity over time; and cluster development agents assisted those producers in terms of adopting a new vision based on inter-firm cooperation.

D. TRADE LIBERALIZATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE AGRO-FOOD SECTOR

26. ESCWA presented the sustainability impact assessment (SIA) of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA), which focuses on the impact of the liberalization of agricultural and agro-industrial food products on the sustainable development in countries of the southern Mediterranean Basin. This study, which was prepared by ESCWA and a consortium of partner institutions led by the University of Manchester and funded as an independent assessment by the European Commission, estimated the socio-economic and environmental impacts of EMFTA, and identified flanking measures for mitigating and enhancing possible impacts. Specifically, these impacts included, most prominently, the following: (a) a reduction of consumer welfare by -1 to +2 per cent of GDP owing to industrial trade liberalization; (b) a strong dependence on more substantial economic benefits through technological development and the implementation of effective domestic and regional policies; (c) significant adverse impact on Government revenues; (d) significant adverse impact on unemployment; (e) adverse effects on the status, living standards and health of rural women; and (f) local impacts on water resources, soil fertility and biodiversity in areas of existing stress.

27. Equally, the protection of geographical indications (GIs) was addressed, in addition to the relationship of such indications with enhancing the competitiveness of clusters in international trade. Arab countries are at different stages of implementing GI laws. Specifically, while Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia have relevant laws, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen have included in their trademark laws provisions that provide the minimum form of protection for geographical indications by refusing the registration of misleading GIs.

28. The subsequent discussions focused on several issues, including, among others, the sectors that could benefit from more sector-specific SIA analysis. The selection of these sectors is expected to be based on the significance of their economic, social, environmental and trade volume impacts. Suggestions are welcomed in this respect.

29. Moreover, discussions touched on the need for a comprehensive strategy for agro-food production in the Arab region, which could include the issues of protection of GIs within the context of international trade. This allows the support of traditional or ethnic products under the aegis of geographic indications or international protocols that seek to protect traditional knowledge.

E. COMPLYING WITH ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS

30. ESCWA presented the results of a study on the impact of standards and technical regulations on agro-food competitiveness in the region. The implications of international trade agreements on competitiveness were discussed, as well as the difference between voluntary and regulatory environmental requirements as related to product standards, process and production methods, conformity assessment and dispute resolution techniques.

31. The discussion underscored the importance of food regulations and the specific role that universities play in this regard. Currently, there is a vital need for the constant update of knowledge of different food laws and regulations issued by importing countries, exporting countries and by Codex Alimentarius. Moreover, consumers across the world are becoming increasingly sophisticated and are demanding higher quality products. Consequently, there is a need for a code of standards given the impact of readily available information via the Internet on the non-compliance of companies and the concomitant impact on competitiveness. This situation is compounded by the fact that ESCWA member countries lack official involvement in international meetings of Codex Alimentarius, which can often give the wrong indication to customers in export markets. That information gap could be filled by specialized programmes of technical assistance offered at some universities in the region.

32. Within the framework a UNIDO project that conducted risk assessment studies for a number of food sectors in Lebanon, several case studies of such sub-sectors were reviewed, including *halawa* and *tahina*, dairy products, and meat and poultry. The project pointed out that the surveyed producers were operating at hazardous biosafety levels below the acceptable international standards.

33. The discussions focused on the need for Arab countries to participate actively and effectively in Codex meetings with national representatives chosen among specialized experts in their fields, thereby allowing Arab countries to be part of the process of formulating Codex standards that form the basis for national regulations.

34. Participants highlighted the need for an Arab initiative aimed at coordinating national efforts on standardization, specification and conformity assessment in the agro-food sector. This could ultimately lead to unified Arab standards, specifications and conformity assessment procedures.

35. Additionally, participants explored the possibilities of regional cooperation among Arab countries in the field of risk assessment, with the assistance of ESCWA, UNIDO, FAO and other organizations.

36. Palestine, which is not a member of Codex, is unable to participate fully in Codex meetings. However, FAO is able to assist in this matter if the proper requests are received from concerned Palestinian authorities and from other Arab countries.

F. ENHANCING COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT

37. In the areas of conformity assessment and export competitiveness, the different certification services available to the agro-food sector were highlighted, including as follows: (a) the code of good manufacturing practice (GMP); (b) HACCP management system; (c) ISO 22000; (d) British Retail Consortium (BRC); (e) Euro-Retailer Produce Working Group Good Agricultural Practices (EurepGAP); (f) ISO 14000; and (g) Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series (OHSAS) 18001. The steps to be followed for certification were discussed, in addition to the various benefits that producers/exporters can reap upon certification.

38. The presentation on the role of accreditation in enhancing agro-food competitiveness noted that the accreditation of conformity assessment operators is an essential element of the quality infrastructure of a country. Specifically, it demonstrates competence in measurement and testing, establishes a level playing field for certification bodies, and supports national and global industry and trade. Additionally, it fosters competitiveness by avoiding multiple conformity assessments; minimizing cost and time of production and conformity assessments; overcoming technical barriers to trade and facilitating trade; and enhancing

international recognition of conformity assessments bodies. Within that context, there is a strong need for a national accreditation body and for the establishment of an Arab accreditation organization.

39. The presentation on the conformity assessment needs and the specific characteristics and conditions of the agro-food industry in the Syrian Arab Republic focused on challenges and opportunities affecting two sectors, namely, fruits and vegetables, and dairy products. It was shown that these sectors are in a state of non-conformity with international standards and are not competitive in the international marketplace. The main challenges hampering the development of these industries include poor marketing, weak distribution processes and difficulty in adapting to international norms. Consequently, there is a need to modernize the laws and regulations in order to meet food safety requirements and to harmonize them with those of the international community.

40. Based on the requirements for performing HACCP tests, ESCWA presented the findings of a background paper on the cost of conformity assessment in the olive oil, dairy and beverage sectors in Lebanon. The estimated costs for setting up a food quality control laboratory in Lebanon were estimated at some \$1.5 million, which was beyond the financial capabilities of SME producers.

41. Participants confirmed that the cost of product testing and conformity assessment could be reduced if local demand for these services were standardized and required on a regular basis by a cluster of companies sharing common interests, such as certification under a certain labelling regime.

42. While the importance of conformity assessment and compliance with new technical standards in the agro-food sector was repeatedly stressed by participants, a consensus was not reached with regard to the highly debated issue of whether to establish national laboratories or to rely instead on existing regional laboratories.

43. Cooperation among Arab agro-food retail organizations can contribute to establishing unified standards similar to those of British Retail Consortium (BRC), which are published by retailers in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This could initially help regional producers to apply minimum standards in their manufacturing plants and within their supply chain systems.

III. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

44. The conclusions and recommendations were presented and reviewed, and comments were provided verbally. Participants were in agreement with the conclusions and recommendations provided that the suggested comments and suggestions were taken into account.

IV. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. ATTENDANCE

45. The Regional Seminar was attended by a total of 50 participants from nine ESCWA member countries; experts from a number of international and regional organizations, including FAO and UNIDO; researchers and practitioners in various academic circles and universities across the region; and several Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian institutions, organizations and individual experts (see annex I for the list of participants). Most participants had a background in the agro-food sector.

B. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

46. The Regional Seminar was held from 1 to 2 December 2005 at the United Nations House in Beirut and was formally opened by Ms. Anhar Hegazi, Chief of SDPD of ESCWA. The six main sessions of the Regional Seminar were devoted to the key issues facing the Arab agro-food sector and the strengthening of agro-food SMEs through clusters and networks; food safety for sustainable development; making the food industry more sustainable; trade liberalization and sustainable development in the agro-food sector; complying with environment, health and safety standards; and enhancing competitiveness through

conformity assessment. Each session was followed by discussions and recommendations. A discussion of the conclusions and recommendations took place at the end of the Seminar.

V. MEETING EVALUATION

47. An evaluation questionnaire was distributed in order to assess the relevance, effectiveness and impact of the Regional Seminar. Overall, the feedback was positive and a majority of participants noted that the Seminar had achieved its objectives, that it had matched their expectations, and that the conclusions and recommendations were significant even if some of them could be difficult to implement owing to financial, administrative, technical and/or political constraints.

VI. ARAB-PALESTINIAN ROUNDTABLE ON AGRICULTURAL AND AGRO-INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE GAZA STRIP

48. Following the Regional Seminar, several participants remained to attend and contribute to the Arab-Palestinian Roundtable on Agriculture and Agro-industrial Development in the Gaza Strip (Beirut, 3 December 2005).

49. The objectives of the Roundtable were as follows:

(a) To identify opportunities and potential partnerships for assisting agricultural and agro-industrial business development in the Gaza Strip;

(b) To foster discussion and consensus on the priority areas for targeting development assistance to the Gaza Strip;

(c) To contribute towards the formulation of a proposal on ways to assist the reconstruction and development of the agro-food sector in the Gaza Strip;

(d) To provide tangible follow-up to issues raised during the Regional Seminar on Sustainable Development and Competitiveness of the Agro-food Sector.

50. An overview of the agricultural sector in the Gaza Strip showed that the challenges to the agricultural development were divided into two types, namely: general challenges comprising law and order, unemployment and poverty and poor infrastructure development, including electricity, fresh water, roads, schools and health services; and sector-specific challenges, including access to markets in the West Bank, and increasing of export capabilities. At the heart of the daily challenges facing the sector in the Gaza Strip are securing the timely export of agricultural products; the interrupted imports of seedlings, fertilizers, pesticides and other inputs; and a steady flow of goods and people between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Moreover, other important challenges faced by producers include increased productivity, standards, quality assurance and market access.

51. It was further suggested that the development agenda for the agricultural sector needed to aim at opening up the Gaza Strip to local and world markets and at developing the institutional and infrastructure support system in order to assist the development of agricultural competitiveness based on knowledge-intensive production.

52. ESCWA presented a draft proposal for discussion on agricultural and agro-industrial development in the Gaza Strip. The beneficiaries were identified as farmers in the most disadvantaged areas of the Gaza Strip, agro-industries, Palestinian agricultural and agro-business associations, and Palestinian Authority institutions. The expected accomplishments include a greater capacity to assess and address key challenges facing agriculture and agro-industrial competitiveness in the Gaza Strip with regard to the necessary technical and legal aspects aimed at ensuring food safety from “farm to fork”; upgrading technical skills of project beneficiaries through professional exchanges with Arab and international counterparts, thereby supporting the viability and sustainability of agricultural production and associated agro-industries; and

improving access of Palestinian products in the Arab region and the global marketplace. Achievement indicators and a range of activities were proposed, along with an institutional framework suggesting the establishment of a steering committee that could supervise project activities and set the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries of the project. The duration of the project was suggested to be three years.

53. The subsequent discussions concentrated on several issues, including, among others, the need to coordinate projects in the Gaza Strip given that several donors with different projects are planning sectoral interventions in Gaza. UNIDO confirmed its interest to help in this regard.

54. Discussion focused on the institutional set up, which requires immediate attention, including the active involvement of the private sector in the management of the agricultural and agro-industries sector; and on developing Palestinian standards and specifications and the possibilities to coordinate efforts with Arab counterparts.

55. There was a debate with regard to possible export channels to Arab and international markets. The types of agricultural and agro-industrial products intended for export were thought to represent important factors to be considered in an export strategy for the Gaza Strip. For example, products with high value added, which are most suited to European tastes, and fresh-cut flowers were proposed. FAO confirmed its readiness to offer assistance in this regard given an official request for such assistance.

56. Marketing remains one of major hurdles towards achieving the competitiveness of the agricultural and agro-industrial sector in the Gaza Strip. Participants considered that the draft proposal prepared by ESCWA for the development of the sector incorporated the issue of marketing.

57. There was a general consensus that comments made by participants during the Roundtable would be taken into consideration when formulating a more detailed proposal for assisting the agricultural and agro-industrial sectors in the Gaza Strip.

Annex I

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Annex II

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Day I. Sustainable development in the agro-food industry

8:30 am – 9:00 am	Registration
Session I	Opening session
<i>Moderator:</i>	<i>Mr. Hassan Charif, Regional Advisor, ESCWA</i>
9:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.	Opening statement <i>Ms. Anhar Hegazi, Director, Sustainable Development and Productivity Division (SDPD), ESCWA</i>
9:15 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.	Keynote address: Key issues facing the Arab agro-food sector <i>Mr. Falah Jaber, Secretary General, Arab Federation for Food Industries, Jordan</i>
9:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.	Strengthening agro-food SMEs through clusters and networks <i>Mr. Antoine Mansour, Team Leader, Private Sector and Enterprise Development Team, Sustainable Development and Productivity Division (PSED/SDPD), ESCWA</i>
9:45 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.	Discussion
10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	Coffee break
Session II	Food safety for sustainable development
<i>Moderator:</i>	<i>Mr. Ali Berro, Director, Quality Programme, Ministry of Economy and Trade, Lebanon</i>
11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	The Draft Lebanese Food Safety Law <i>Mr. Toufic Rizk, Dean, Faculty of Sciences, St. Joseph University, Lebanon</i>
11:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Establishing a Palestinian food safety framework <i>Mr. Ali Badarneh, UNIDO Consultant, Palestinian Food Industries Association, Ramallah</i>
11:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.	The Lebanese Consumer Protection Law of August 2005 <i>Mr. Zouhair Berro, Consumers Lebanon Association, Lebanon</i>
11:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Genetically modified organisms and biosafety <i>Ms. Diane Klaimi, National Focal Point for Biosafety, Ministry of the Environment, Lebanon</i>
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Discussion
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Lunch
Session III	Making the food industry more sustainable
<i>Moderator:</i>	<i>Mr. Abdel Rahman Al-Hebib, Head of Soil and Irrigation Department, National Agricultural Research Centre, Saudi Arabia</i>

Day I (continued)

- 2:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m. Cluster mapping the agro-food sector: Potential clusters and networks in Lebanon
Mr. Bourhan Kreitem, Consultant, Lebanon
- 2:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Honey and zaatar synergy for sustainability: A cluster approach
Mr. Rami Ollaik and Ms. Rouba Arja, "Employment creation and income generation through the development of micro and small agro-industries in South Lebanon" Project Team Members, PSED/SDPED, ESCWA
- 2:30 p.m. – 2:45 p.m. Utilization of waste in the dairy industry in Egypt
Mr. Yehia El-Samragy, Professor, Ain Shaams University, Egypt
- 2:45 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. Discussion

Day II. Enhancing competitiveness in a sustainable development framework

Session IV Trade liberalization and sustainable development in the agro-food sector

Moderator: Mr. Adel Al-Samahy, Chairman, Board of Directors, Food Industries Holding, Egypt

- 9:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m. Sustainability impact assessment of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area: Agricultural and agro-industrial dimensions
Ms. Carol Chouchani Cherfane, First Economic Affairs Officer, PSED/SDPD, ESCWA
- 9:15 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Protection of geographical indications: Clustering for competitiveness
Mr. Atef Idriss, President, Middle East North Africa Food Safety Associates (MEFOSA), SARL, Lebanon
- 9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Discussion

Session V Complying with environment, health and safety standards

Moderator: Mr. Khaldoun Zaaideh, Director General, Quality Food Company, Jordan

- 10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. Impact of standards and technical regulations on sector competitiveness in the region
Ms. Carol Chouchani Cherfane, First Economic Affairs Officer, PSED/SDPD, ESCWA
- 10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. The importance of food regulations: The role of universities
Mr. Vincent Hegarty, Dean, College of Food Systems, United Arab Emirates University, United Arab Emirates
- 10:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m. Risk assessment case studies: *halawa, tahina*, dairy and meats in Lebanon
Mr. Hussein Dib, Professor of Food Safety, Lebanese University, Lebanon
- 10:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. Coffee break
- 11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. Discussion

Session VI Enhancing competitiveness through conformity assessment

Moderator: Mr. Basel Al-Khatib, National Food Safety Project Manager, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Lebanon

Day II (continued)

- 12:15 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. Conformity assessment and export competitiveness
Mr. Nouhad Bedran, Project Manager, SGS Liban S.A.L., Lebanon
- 12:30 p.m. – 12:45 p.m. The role of accreditation in enhancing agro-food competitiveness
Ms. Samia El Azazy, Technical Director, Egyptian Accreditation Council, Egypt
- 12:45 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. Conformity assessment needs in the Syrian agro-food industry
Mr. Ahmad Ammar Said, Executive Manager, Aleppo Chamber of Industry, Syrian Arab Republic
- 1:00 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. Costing conformity assessment in the olive oil, dairy and beverage sectors
Mr. Hratch Kouyoumjian, Consultant, ESCWA
- 1:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. Discussion

Session VI

Closing session

- 1:30 p.m. – 1:45 p.m. Summary of findings and discussions
Mr. Bourhan Kreitem, Consultant, Lebanon
- 1:45 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. Concluding remarks
Mr. Antoine Mansour, Team Leader, PSED/SDPD, ESCWA