Regional Cooperation to counter Locust threat promoted during key meeting

Islamabad—A high-level ministerial meeting was organized by the FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in South West-Asia (SWAC) at the request of four FAO member countries, Pakistan, Iran, India, and Afghanistan to present the latest desert locust situation and forecast; take stock of national, regional and global capacities; review contingency plans and preparations for addressing the potential desert locust threat, and identify gaps to propose actions.

Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtiar, Federal Minister for National Food Security & Research represented Pakistan at the meeting where he gave an overview of Pakistan’s action plan to control the locust threat. The Federal Minister proposed the formation of a high level technical committee, comprising of senior officers from Southwest Asian countries for effective management and control of the locust threat.

The meeting was attended by Lt. General Muhammad Afzal, Chairman National Disaster Management Authority, Dr. Muhammad Hashim Popalzai, Secretary, National Food Security & Research and key technical staff from Pakistan, ministers and high officials from Iran, India and Afghanistan and key FAO experts in Rome and Pakistan.

“Setting up of a new agile technical and operational coordination mechanism under the FAO Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in South West-Asia (SWAC) will allow information exchange, addressing gaps and cross border synchronisation of control operations.” Minà Dowlatchahi, FAO Representative in Pakistan.
The Assistant Director General FAO briefed countries on the current locust situation, the expected migratory patterns of the swarms, and recommendations for preparedness. The horn of Africa and South West Asia, regions affected by the infestations, have been divided into zones for better regional cooperation and coordination. FAO’s facilitation to the governments in their efforts to counter the infestations was discussed and countries were encouraged to come up with extensive national plans, which would ultimately contribute to the regional action plan. The e-Locust3 application developed by FAO was also presented which the countries were encouraged to use for gathering data on the ground.

A technical and operational coordination team will be formulated to increase coordination between the four countries, which will facilitate information exchange and preventive measures while addressing the gaps. The team would be comprised of national locust technical officers, as well as relevant authorities and will provide a platform for discussing threats, and the best planning and implementation of data, giving a regional overview of the locust situation.

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FAO PRESS RELEASE

National dialogue on agriculture held to provide recommendations on mainstreaming agriculture in policy and planning

Islamabad – The National Dialogue on Agriculture, convened with the technical support of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United

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Nations and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), concluded with a declaration and a new resolve to uplift Pakistan's agro-economy. The members of the National Assembly of Pakistan agreed to maximize efforts to mainstream agriculture in the national policy planning and budgeting.

A flagship initiative of the Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan, Mr. Asad Qaiser, the national dialogue was attended by the President of Pakistan, Members of the cabinet, treasury and opposition benches, international financial institutions, agriculture specific international organizations, ambassadors, farmers unions and technical experts.

Speaking on the occasion the President of Pakistan Dr Arif Alvi stressed on the need to build new synergies, mobilization of investment in Agriculture Research and enabling environment for the private sector to drive the Agriculture transformation agenda. He appreciated the Speaker National Assembly’s efforts to turn around Pakistan's Agricultural decline. Minister for National Food Security and Research also spoke on the occasion.

The Speaker termed the dialogue as the beginning of a nationally integrated effort to facilitate policy shifts in the agriculture sector. He vowed that the jointly agreed recommendations would be pursued to a logical end. The Speaker National Assembly stressed that enhanced farmers’ profitability, diversified national nutrient base and employment generation in agriculture sector were key objectives of such national deliberations.

The dialogue addressed 8 themes which included agriculture research, extension and technology transfer frameworks, farmers’ access to credit, input for higher yields, pathways for enhancing Pakistan’s agriculture exports, women and youth in agriculture, integrated natural resource management, high value agricultural products and value addition for a resilient agriculture sector.

Experts from FAO participated in the dialogue stressing on the need to focus on sustainability, productivity, value and inclusion to revitalize Pakistan's agricultural sector and rural economy.

FAO Representative in Pakistan, Mina Dowlatchahi while speaking on the theme of women and youth in agriculture said, “75% of the manual labour in agriculture is done by women, yet they are extremely underrepresented. It is pertinent to have a dialogue on how women and youth can be included in policy related to agriculture sector employment, which is important for the design of the government structure.”
The Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shah Mehmood Qureshi speaking at the conclusion of the dialogue remarked that poor farmers’ lack of access to finance and markets precluded them from achieving the economies of scale in agriculture.

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