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FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa

FAO leads efforts to enhance investments in ecosystem restoration at the Third Arab Land Conference



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The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) convened a high-level side event at the Third Arab Land Conference titled “Investment Pathways for Ecosystem Restoration in the NENA Region,” urging increased funding and regional collaboration to scale up ecosystem restoration efforts in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region.

The session addressed critical environmental challenges in NENA that threaten socio-economic stability, such as land degradation, water scarcity, and climate change. FAO emphasized the urgent need to increase funding and regional collaboration to scale up

ecosystem restoration efforts, as progress remains limited due to inadequate financial and technical resources.

FAO, in partnership with the League of Arab States, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), is leading regional dialogues and strengthening technical capacities for investment-driven restoration. The event explored how financing mechanisms and land tenure reforms can accelerate sustainable restoration while empowering local communities, women, and youth.

Bridging the climate finance gap

Abdulhakim Elwaer, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa, highlighted the urgency of action: “Climate change, recurring droughts, and unsustainable agricultural practices are placing immense pressure on NENA’s natural resources and ecosystems, leading to environmental degradation, socio-economic instability, and worsening food insecurity. Severe land degradation already affects 45 percent of agricultural areas, compounding the region’s critical water scarcity, while the economic toll of land degradation is estimated at USD nine billion annually in NENA.”

The session presented the NENA regional integrated land restoration and investment framework, which aligns national development goals with a regional ecosystem restoration approach. Despite growing investments, NENA receives only 6.6 percent of global climate finance—far below what is needed. This framework aims to bridge this gap by diversifying funding sources, advocating for equitable climate finance, and developing innovative financing mechanisms. The session explored how countries can integrate restoration into their national strategic frameworks and make policy adjustments that attract investments in sustainable restoration.

Case studies and best practices

Representatives from FAO, partner organizations, and member countries shared case studies, best practices, and insights to strengthen regional cooperation in tackling restoration challenges:

- **Tunisia:** Naoufel Ben Haha, Director of the Forestry Directorate in the Ministry of Agriculture of Tunisia, highlighted the urgent need for integrated governance, local participation, and policy reforms to address Tunisia's forest challenges. He noted that engaging local communities and improving legal access to forest resources are essential for sustainable management.
- **Oman:** Ahmed Alnagar, Director of the Animal Wealth Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Sultanate of Oman, introduced the Oman Blue Carbon Project, which uses nature-based solutions to reduce carbon emissions. The project aims to plant 100 million mangrove trees and create artificial lakes and reclaimed non-wetlands to improve coastal resilience.
- **Lebanon:** George Mitri, Professor of Environmental Sciences and Director of the Land & Natural Resources Program at the University of Balamand, highlighted Lebanon's community-driven efforts in post-fire restoration. Projects like Land Degradation Neutrality for Mountain Landscapes in Lebanon and STEP4Nature have helped develop national guidelines for post-fire restoration. The updated national strategy for forest fire risk reduction includes restoration and recovery planning, ensuring a coordinated and sustainable approach.
- **Land tenure issues:** Shahd Mustafa, Regional Coordinator for Europe, Middle East & North Africa of the International Land Coalition (ILC), highlighted land tenure issues in rangelands, including how tenure insecurity, shifting governance systems, and limited recognition of customary land rights hinder large-scale restoration efforts.
- **Scientific innovation:** Mauro Centritto, Research Director at the Institute for Sustainable Plant Protection of the National Research Council of Italy, emphasized the role of scientific research, innovation, and local knowledge. He cited the SALAM-MED project as an example of how community-driven approaches can foster sustainable development.

Commitment to sustainable restoration

As FAO marks its 80th anniversary, the organization reaffirms its commitment to driving sustainable land and ecosystem restoration across the NENA region. By enhancing investment pathways, strengthening regional collaboration, and promoting innovative financing mechanisms, FAO aims to support countries

in addressing land degradation, water scarcity, and climate change, which are key challenges that threaten both environmental stability and socio-economic development. The discussions at the Third Arab Land Conference highlighted the importance of inclusive policies, scientific research, and community-driven approaches, particularly in empowering local communities, women, and youth in restoration efforts. Moving forward, FAO and its partners will continue to lead regional dialogues, build technical capacities, and advocate for equitable climate finance, ensuring that restoration initiatives create long-term benefits for both people and the planet.

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