



MENA2050's Vision for Agrifood Systems Transformation in the Wake of COP28 Dubai: Navigating Food Security Challenges in the MENA Region

By **Dr. Lee Recht**

Reviewing COP28's Agrifood Systems commitments and Initiatives While Harnessing Opportunities for the MENA Region

The global food systems, covering our dietary choices, food preparation, production, distribution, and the handling of waste (including occasional wastage), contributes to approximately one-third of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Surprisingly, for the majority of the last three decades, the conclusive agreements emerging from the annual UN climate summits overlooked the significant impact of food systems on climate change. Notably, sustainable food systems transformation currently receives only 4.8% of climate funding, with a mere 2% allocated to sustainable agriculture.

A positive shift in this pattern occurred during COP28 in Dubai, where the UN climate conference commenced with the 'Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action,' endorsed by 159 countries. This event marked an unprecedented dedication of an entire day to focus on food and agriculture, unveiling a roadmap for food systems outlined by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Notably, both the Global Goal on Adaptation



(GGA) and the Global Stock Take (GST), recognized sustainable agriculture as a crucial component in appropriately addressing climate change, however, it did not provide recognition for the mitigation section of the GST, concentrating solely on the adaptation segment.

Numerous activities, commitments, and collaborations unfolded among diverse stakeholders within the agrifood systems. COP28 saw the participation of 750 agrifood experts in more than 500 agrifood events this year. Noteworthy initiatives include (1) the launch of the Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation (ACF) during COP28, led by Norway, Brazil, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and Cambodia. This alliance aims to propel ambitious implementation of the food systems agenda in these countries. (2) The Non-state Actors Call to Action, facilitated by the UN Climate Change High-Level Champions, that included commitments from some of the world's largest companies to source sustainably produced commodities from 160 million hectares of land across supply chains amounting to \$2.2 billion of investment.

We also witnessed a greater commitment to allocate funds dedicated to the transformation of agrifood systems, most notable is of the UAE and Gates Foundation's commitment of \$200 million to support CGIAR (formerly the Consultative Group for International Agricultural research).

Concluding COP28 on a positive note for the transformation of agrifood systems, H.E. Mariam Almheiri, UAE's Minister of Climate Change and Environment, stressed the importance of addressing the food systems in her closing remarks. She emphasized that achieving the 1.5-degree goal, even with a successful transition to renewable energy, is unattainable without resolving challenges in food systems. Additionally, she stated that food systems will be a focal point in future COP conferences.

Climate change is affecting all regions on Earth and is having a disproportionate impact across MENA in particular. Addressing food security and agrifood systems transformation in the Middle East requires diversification of food supply, innovation



towards novel and sustainable food production systems, with an emphasis on protein diversification, as well as economic collaboration.

To foster regional collaboration in the Middle East, we at MENA2050 propose solutions that promote joint R&D projects, knowledge sharing, and public-private partnerships to support agrifood systems transformation. Such solutions include:

- Creating a regional authority to oversee a collaborative food security plan, including a regional

fund to invest in related initiatives

- Harmonisation of regulations of novel foods.

- Trade agreements incentivizing local and sustainable products, aiming towards zero waste and loss

- Regional innovation and training centres.

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