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FAO preventive actions to the introduction and spread of the Olive Quick Decline Syndrome OQDS - associated to *Xylella fastidiosa* in NENA Region

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The occurrence of the Olive Quick Decline Syndrome (OQDS) caused by *Xylella fastidiosa* in Puglia region (Italy) with the strain Co.Di.R.O affecting olive trees poses an enormous threat to olive production in all the Mediterranean countries. *X. fastidiosa* is a regulated pest in many countries in the world. Around 95% of olive trees are cultivated in the Mediterranean region, where the Near East and North Africa (NENA) countries rank second in terms of global production of olives, after Southern European countries (Spain, Italy and Greece). In spite of their economic relevance, olive trees have important historical and cultural roots in the NENA countries, where Syria is known as the first olive-producing land in the ancient world and the area of origin of olive growing. The olive production and olive oil sector is one of the important sources of income of thousands of families and of food security in the region. The first report of *X. fastidiosa* on olive trees in Southern Italy and consequent estimated cost of olive trees losses in this region (€250 millions) raised an alert on the emerging threat to the entire Mediterranean Basin due to favourable climatic conditions for the epidemic spread of the infection. The host complexity of *X. fastidiosa* and diversity of the ways of its spread increase the risk of its introduction into the countries of the NENA region through the movement and trade with potentially infected host plants. These facts impose the necessity for reviewing and strengthening the phytosanitary measures applied in the region and putting in place a harmonized surveillance programme in the NENA countries. However, the NENA countries lack technical capacities/expertise to deal with this new emerging disease; therefore they approached the FAO for technical assistance. Hence, the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (FAO-RNE) embarked on preparing technical support programmes to help countries raise the awareness about this disease, strengthen their capacities for the enforcement of appropriate phytosanitary regulations/measures, and put in place effective surveillance and monitoring programmes. The FAO-RNE has communicated the risk of the OQDS disease to all National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPOs) and other stakeholders through email and other media. Special side sessions on the Olive Quick Decline Syndrome and *X. fastidiosa* were organized by the FAO and IPPC in the framework of the Regional IPPC Workshop held in Amman, Jordan, in September 2015 and the 11th Session of the Commission for Phytosanitary Measures held in Rome, Italy, in April 2016.

An FAO Regional Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) will be launched in the mid of 2016 to support the Near East and North Africa Countries in their efforts to enforce preventive measures for the introduction and spread of *Xylella fastidiosa* – Olive Quick Decline Syndrome in their territories.

TCP will support the governments' efforts to reduce the risk of introduction and spread of *X. fastidiosa*, and its harmful effects. TCP is expected to support participating countries in developing a contingency and surveillance plan to prevent the introduction of the disease; it will build institutional capacity and the skills of technical staff and farmers on early detection, diagnosis, surveillance and phytosanitary measures. In addition, TCP will raise the awareness of

all stakeholders on the risk of the disease and ensure their active involvement in the promotion of preventive measures. The regional coordination and information and knowledge sharing will be established and maintained by TCP between the countries in the region and with the international experts and partner institutions involved in the project.

The actions envisaged by the project aim to provide a legislative basis for dealing with the emergency caused by *X. fastidiosa*. At the same time, activities for upgrading and professionally training phytosanitary inspectors and technical experts involved in the phytosanitary diagnosis are planned, in order to increase the professionalism of those who are involved in the emergency. Similar training will be targeted at public and private technicians engaged in agricultural extension services. All this can be the basis for future interventions supported by the countries or donors, which may include the supply of instruments and equipment necessary for monitoring and diagnostic tests, as well as training and awareness raising activities.

Improved technical capacity will enable countries to take proper action in case of emergency, and raise strong public awareness on the seriousness of the disease and its associated risk; it will facilitate the implementation of the measures to be taken to reduce the risk of introduction and spread of *X. fastidiosa* in their territories.

The expected impact of the project is “Prevention of the risk of the introduction and spread of *X. fastidiosa* – Olive Quick Decline Syndrome in the NENA region, and saving the livelihood and income of olive growers and national economies”. Hence, it is envisaged that the project will positively contribute to saving more than 40 million hectares of olive trees and the income and livelihood of more than 500,000 farmers in all participating countries.

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