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Research Proposal: CAFPA*

(Center for Agriculture and Food Policy Analysis
in North Africa and the Middle East)

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❖ *This proposal was initially drafted by the steering committee of the network which met in Montpellier, France, September 6-10, 1993.*

Countries in North Africa and the Middle East are facing increasing challenges in many areas but perhaps more basically in the agriculture and food sectors. These challenges stem from a variety of considerations. First there is the pressing demand due to population growth which is putting pressures not only for increasing supplies of food, but also for improving per capita incomes. Then, there are increasing pressures to change the composition of the aggregate food demand as well. Policy-makers have the responsibility for the elaboration and implementation of appropriate policy instrument mixes to meet those demands. They also need to have appropriate tools to comprehend the intricacies of such questions and to predict their future consequences.

On the other hand, economic policy reforms are underway everywhere aiming at promoting trade liberalization. This will inevitably imply a decreasing degree of Government intervention in the food and agricultural economies that have hitherto been heavily regulated. Present and future policy decisions will inevitably imply choices and trade-offs between policy alternatives which in most cases require profound analyses and information processing. Simplistic answers have proven in the past to be too limited and costly.

Additional reliance on market mechanisms will require information on potential improvements in economic efficiency for the regional agricultural economies to become competitive in world markets. This suggests the need to search for areas of economic and social inefficiencies to alleviate and potential sources of growth to promote. Alternatively, this also suggests the need to appraise the degree of complementarity and competition between countries of the region.

By and large relevant economic information to assist public decision-makers in such matters, if they exist, are by no means comprehensive or systematic. True, occasional piecemeal attempts to address partial questions can be found here and there, but no systematic and continuous research activities in the field of agricultural economics can be found anywhere in the region; let alone across-country economic performance comparisons.

This is the basis for proposing to create a Regional Center for Agriculture and Food Policy Analysis (CAFPA) in the region¹. While the structure is intended to be permanent, the following is a description of what such a Center is meant to accomplish over a typical period of three years.

I – Potential Activities

Activities of the Center will fall primarily into two categories: Research and Training. Research activities of the Center will certainly be diversified as the primary identification and formulation of research programs will be carried out by researchers themselves. However, general guidelines will be provided to researchers so that pertinent and relevant research areas would not be omitted. Furthermore, local, regional and, possibly, international scholars will be encouraged to address relevant policy research questions and issues of the region. Research areas that will be given high priority in the research agenda

da of the Center include:

- comparative country impact studies on socio-economic impacts of alternative on-going economic policy reform programs and their sequencing;
- comparative studies on the performance of agricultural sectors in the countries of the region;
- analysis of short term as well as long term comparative advantages of countries in food production and marketing activities;
- analysis of inter and intra sectoral effects of economic policies and the extent to which non-agricultural policies have contributed to or hindered the development process of agriculture in the region;
- natural resource management and long term prospects for sustainable development.

The training component, on the other hand, is aimed at promoting research capabilities in the region. Toward this end, the Center will provide training opportunities for potential researchers in the region which will focus on:

- the development of appropriate analytical tools for policy analysis and evaluation;
- the promotion of model building skills;
- data collection, computer processing and analysis.

II – Organization and Operating Procedures

CAFPA will be headquartered at the National Institute of Agriculture in Tunis, Tunisia (INAT). In conducting its various activities, however, the Center will act as an independent and non profit research structure. The main bodies of the Center consist of a chairman, a multi-national executive research committee, a council of recognized international scientific advisors and the research teams, stationed in their own countries.

The Chairman of the Center will be responsible for the overall management of the activities of the Center. These activities include:

- the mobilization of financial resources for the Center;
- the monitoring of research programs;
- the management of publication material of the researchers;
- the organization of meetings, workshops and conferences in collaboration with the executive research committee.

Furthermore, the Chairman is appointed for a period of 3 years and he reports to the Director of INAT, the executive research committee and the financial donors.

1. Executive Research Committee

The executive research committee (ERC) consists of 5 members including the chairman. The committee is chosen from among the country research team coordinators in such a way as to have a reasonable and working representation of countries. Responsibilities of this committee include:

- assisting the chairman in selecting and monitoring research activities to be conducted by the research country teams;
- advising the chairman on the planning of the overall activities of the Center (workshops, conferences, selection of international contributors, etc.) and other pertinent actions to be taken.

This committee meets following every meeting of researchers (workshops and conferences) and as the need arises.

2. The Scientific Council

The scientific council is an *ad hoc* body of academic scholars chosen by the executive committee for consulting and refereeing the research programs and publications of the Center. The members of this council are expected to have knowledge and expertise on the agricultural and economic problems of the region.

3. Research Teams and Researchers

This body of researchers consists of the country teams of researchers and policy-makers who conduct research under the support of the Center. It is expected that country teams will involve national policy-makers in various capacities so as to make the activities more policy making oriented and relevant.

III – Expected Output

The Center is designed to promote research and training activities that would help policy-makers in their pursuit for more effective and sustainable food and agricultural strategies. This will be achieved through the various country research programs, periodic seminars and meetings, published works, training and creating of a regional comprehensive data bank. The dissemination of research results through these activities along with the continuous interaction with policy-makers should contribute to more informed policy formulation and decision-making.

1. Research Programs

Collaborative research activities are seen as an effective way to improve the capacities of the region's institutions to undertake policy analysis. Through the research and training programs the Center aims at contributing to making the local country researchers environments more research conducive and demanding.

2. Periodic Meetings

Workshops, seminars and meetings providing means of communication between researchers and policy-makers can help establish a bridge with the policy making process. The Center will organize two workshops during the first year and annual conferences thereafter. The first workshop will take place right after a first set of projects is approved by the executive committee. The second one will take place approximately 6 months later to ensure that practical difficulties in research implementation are brought to bare and discussed. Annual conferences will be the forum for research findings discussion and dissemination.

3. Publications

It is intended that various types of publications would be coming out of the research activities of the Center.

Regional quarterly newsletter. The purpose of this newsletter is to give information on on-going research activities and researchers, announce future events of the Center and give useful information on the activities of international institutions.

Working papers series. These papers will report on various research findings. They constitute the basis for subsequent publications in scientific journals. Reviews by and comments from colleagues within the Center network and outside will be solicited. Once reviewed these papers will be made available to policy-makers and libraries.

Scientific journal articles. The Center will encourage its members and help facilitate the dissemination of the regional research results to an international forum through the recognized scientific journals. Furthermore the attempt will be made to take the necessary steps to initiate the publication of a Mediterranean Journal of Applied Economics (MJAE).

Other publications. The Center will help other forms of publication deemed appropriate. Monographs and/or books describing various facets of the food economy of the region will specifically be encouraged. Abstracts of detailed publications can also be made available in a systematic way.

4. Creation of a Regional Data Bank

The Center will utilize various sources to put together and update a reliable statistical information base on the food and agricultural sectors and the general economies of the region.

5. Training programs

The Center will help organize training sessions wherever possible. Most of the training will be of a short run nature and will be funded mostly through the teams' research grants. At the level of the Center, selective training sessions will also be organized. The search for additional sources of funding will continue so that more training of long term nature can be undertaken.

Note

1. Countries in which teams have already expressed interest in participating are Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Other countries are likely to join in too.

