



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



LINKING AGRI-FOOD SMEs TO INNOVATION FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS: THE ROLE OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACHES

Thursday 13 October 2022 | 09:30 - 11:00 (CEST)

BACKGROUND

The challenges facing agrifood systems are significant, wide-ranging, and interlinked. Geopolitical conflict, climate variability and extremes, economic slowdowns and downturns are major drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition and led to an increase in world hunger in recent years. In the Mediterranean region, this has been further exacerbated by the impacts of the current Russia-Ukraine war, the pandemic, and the energy shocks with negative effects on food security and sustainability in a region heavily reliant on global imports of food and fertilizers.^{1,2} The current multiple crises urge a multiplicity of Mediterranean stakeholders to cooperate for joint solutions that can enable a sustainable transition of the current agrifood systems.

Mediterranean agrifood systems contribute to, and endure the negative consequences of, the climate crisis and environmental degradation, including biodiversity loss, GHG emissions, water scarcity and land degradation. Since the Mediterranean is recognized as a climate-change hotspot due to multiple vulnerability factors,³ it is therefore imperative for the actors engaged in its food systems to enhance and accelerate adaptation and mitigation strategies and actions. Multi-stakeholder approaches are needed to counterbalance the adverse impacts of these challenges on the environment, the economy and the people.

In this framework, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a central role in the path towards more sustainable Mediterranean agrifood systems and to achieve the 2030 Agenda, as they are positioned at the intersection between small-scale producers and local consumers. A focus on small-scale production can facilitate the shift towards agrifood systems that are better connected to the needs of specific localities, more agile in response to market disruptions and changes in consumers' demands and lifestyle. This is especially true in the Mediterranean region where a significant proportion of agrifood production, agricultural landholdings and source of income in rural areas belongs to and derives from SMEs and small-scale producers. However, a major proportion of food distribution and value addition is informal, traditional and labor-intensive, even in urban centers, with poor performance in terms of food safety and quality standards and low innovation.⁴ Considering also the relation between poverty, seasonal and informal employment, as well as the often invisible role of women and youth in the agrifood sector, a better integration of SMEs and small producers in food chains and regional economies would significantly improve food security, nutrition and livelihoods, with positive impacts on the sustainability of Mediterranean food systems.

Stakeholders need to create a conducive environment to allow SMEs and small-scale producers to access to, and benefit from, **science and innovation, as key enabling drivers to induce positive transformation of the agrifood system.** Innovation in the agrifood system should support the achievement of the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. It is the engine able to ensure profitability for agrifood companies and farmers, while providing adequate (available, safe, nutritious and affordable) food for all and a sustainable use of natural resources, promoting renewable energies and circularity practices. A wide range of approaches, technologies and practices exist that can contribute to transforming agrifood systems to nourish people, nurture the planet, advance equitable livelihoods and build resilient ecosystems.

Since small-scale producers and SMEs often lack the human and technical capacity to seize the opportunities that technological and organizational innovation can offer, **specialized**

THE SFS-MED PLATFORM

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) have joined forces in a [multi-stakeholder initiative for Sustainable Food Systems in the Mediterranean \(SFS-MED Platform\)](#), as an affiliated project of the One Planet Network Sustainable Food Systems Programme. The SFS-MED initiative aims at promoting dialogue and collaboration among Mediterranean countries and stakeholders while they implement national and local efforts for a transformation to more sustainable food systems.

THE SFS-MED WEBINAR SERIES

This series of technical webinars is organized to leverage the knowledge and expertise of a network of researchers, development practitioners and decision-makers. The webinars aim at **strengthening knowledge sharing** and **stimulating debate** around themes relevant to food systems transformation in the Mediterranean, **peer exchange** about recent research and study findings, as well as **showcasing successful and inspiring actions** to promote the operationalization of food systems approaches.

Building on the findings of a [stocktaking exercise of the UN Food Systems Summit \(UNFSS\) Dialogues held in the Mediterranean](#), the webinars will revolve around a set of shared priorities and trends that are common to most countries in the region, considered as entry points or main thematic areas regarding what to transform in the Mediterranean food systems. Many of these were reflected as well in the national pathways for food systems transformation that countries developed within the UNFSS process during 2021.

capacity and business development support is essential to develop human capital and address skill mismatch. Moreover, networks, and business associations are useful instruments for collective action to facilitate access to extension and advisory systems, policy advice, training, sharing of technologies and practices to concretely enhance access to innovation.

Furthermore, an **effective governance and policy environment⁵ able to generate adequate incentives and taxation mechanisms**, would remove barriers to entry for SMEs and small-scale producers, fully valorizing their social, economic and environmental contribution.

Finally, access to finance remains one of the top challenges for entrepreneurs in the region. **Financing innovation and sustainable finance are needed to overcome risk-aversion towards investing in SMEs and the sustainable agrifood sector**, which adversely affect competitiveness and innovation.

Indeed, expanding the potential of sustainable agrifood systems transformation requires policies, institutions, research, legislation, and investments that aim to maximize the synergies created by the different actors of the agrifood ecosystem. **Innovative multi-stakeholder approaches that promote efficient and effective coordination** are pivotal to support the transition of agrifood SMEs towards enhanced sustainable business practices. A strategic approach, able to pursue the long-term objective of building sustainable and resilient Euro-Mediterranean agrifood systems in the face of future crises, requires a multi-stakeholder approach, where different competences, needs and potentials are mutually addressed and valorized. The challenge of partnering, as reminded in SDG17, is also true for the agrifood ecosystems and to induce the needed transformations towards sustainable food systems.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Based on this background, the SFS-MED Platform is organising this webinar, designed in the framework of the [FAO Science and Innovation Forum](#), to present concrete experiences of university-business cooperation, successful cases of innovation adoption and transfer, innovative pathways of capacity development, provocative thoughts from investors and farmers.

The webinar will highlight the needs and challenges that agrifood SMEs and farmers are experiencing in linking with innovation and investigate possible pathways and the added value of multi-stakeholder approach to promote the uptake of innovation. The event will also allow strengthening collaboration among the different partners and stakeholders shaping the agrifood ecosystem, that are essential to enable SMEs and farmers with solutions, tools and best practices.

The webinar will aim to address a key question: **how can multi-stakeholder approaches accelerate the transition of agrifood SMEs towards more sustainable business practices?**

OBJECTIVES

KNOWLEDGE

Create a knowledge base about opportunities, innovative solutions and gaps or limitations for food systems transformation, specific to the Mediterranean context.

EVIDENCE SHARING

Facilitate replication and upscaling of concrete solutions for food systems transformation through the dissemination of evidence about successful approaches and lessons learned from across the Mediterranean.

AWARENESS

Promote and raise awareness on food systems thinking by facilitating multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial exchanges.



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¹FAO. 2022. The war in Ukraine and the risks it poses for global food commodity markets. In: FAO, *Food Outlook – Biannual Report on Global Food Markets*, pp. 65-73. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9427en>

²FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and ESCWA. 2021. *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa 2020 - Enhancing resilience of food systems in the Arab States*. Cairo, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4902en>

³Ali, E., Cramer, W., Carnicer, J., Georgopoulou, E., Hilmi, N.J.M., Le Cozannet, G. and Lionello, P. 2022. Cross-Chapter Paper 4: Mediterranean Region. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Lösschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA. Cambridge University Press. <https://bit.ly/3U1edgz>

⁴FAO. 2021. *COVID-19 impact and response in the Near East and North Africa*. Cairo, FAO. [fao.org/3/nh897en/nh897en.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/nh897en/nh897en.pdf)

⁵European Committee of the Regions, Sidlo, K., *Innovation ecosystems and start-ups in the Mediterranean as a means of recovering from the COVID-19 crisis*, European Committee of the Regions, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2863/518444>

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AGENDA

Interpretation will be provided in English and French

9:30-9:35	Welcome and technical background	Angelo Riccaboni Co-Chair, PRIMA Foundation
9:35-9:45	Keynote remarks Setting the scene	Ayşegül Selışık Assistant FAO Representative, FAO Representation in Türkiye
9:45-10:55	Panel discussion Farmer organizations' innovation approach <hr/> Business-academia cooperation <hr/> Science-policy interaction <hr/> Capacity development for innovation <hr/> Sustainable finance <hr/> Fostering innovation	Moderator: PRIMA Foundation Arianna Giuliiodori Secretary General, World Farmers' Organization (WFO) <hr/> Madhi Khomsi Project Coordinator, BusinessMED <hr/> Giuseppe Provenzano Project manager, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) <hr/> Damiano Petruzzella Scientific Administrator, CIHEAM-Bari <hr/> Kamel Sallam Head of Development Finance, Commercial International Bank Egypt (CIB) <hr/> Paula Hafner Project manager, EIT Food
10:55-11:00	Closing remarks	Laura De Matteis Food Systems Expert, FAO

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Publications

- FAO. 2022. The war in Ukraine and the risks it poses for global food commodity markets. In: FAO, *Food Outlook – Biannual Report on Global Food Markets*, pp. 65-73. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9427en>
- FAO, CIHEAM and UfM. 2021. *Food systems transformation – processes and pathways in the Mediterranean: a stocktaking exercise*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7978en>
- FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and ESCWA. 2021. *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa 2020 – Enhancing resilience of food systems in the Arab States*. Cairo, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4902en>
- Ali, E., Cramer, W., Carnicer, J., Georgopoulou, E., Hilmi, N.J.M., Le Cozannet, G. and Lionello, P. 2022. Cross-Chapter Paper 4: Mediterranean Region. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA. Cambridge University Press. <https://bit.ly/3U1edgz>
- FAO. 2021. *COVID-19 impact and response in the Near East and North Africa*. Cairo, FAO. fao.org/3/nh897en/nh897en.pdf
- European Committee of the Regions, Sidto, K., *Innovation ecosystems and start-ups in the Mediterranean as a means of recovering from the COVID-19 crisis*, European Committee of the Regions, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2863/518444>

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