

2014 IYFF FAO Concept Note

Background:

The General Assembly of the United Nations, at its 66th session, declared 2014 as the “International Year of Family Farming” (IYFF) and invited FAO to facilitate its implementation in cooperation with governments, the United Nations system and relevant non-governmental organizations. The overall aim of the IYFF is “to promote international awareness and support country-owned plans aimed at strengthening the contribution of family farming and smallholders in eradicating hunger and reducing rural poverty leading to sustainable development of rural areas and food security”.

Introduction:

For the purpose of the IYFF, it is proposed to outline common principles that define Family Farming. *Family Farming* (which includes all family-based agricultural activities) is a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labor, including both women’s and men’s. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, social and cultural functions.

FF is one of the most predominant forms of agriculture worldwide, in both developing and developed countries. Diversity of national and regional contexts, in terms of agro-ecological conditions, territorial characteristics, infrastructure availability (access to markets, roads, etc.), policy environment, and demographic, economic, social and cultural conditions, influences FF structures and functions, as well as livelihood strategies.

The sector comprises a wide spectrum of farm sizes and types. At one end of the spectrum are very large landholdings of several hundred hectares in high-income economies where farms can be easily cultivated by one or two family members with the use of labour-saving machinery and hired labour. At the other end of the spectrum, in low-income economies, FF usually consists of smallholdings of a few hectares or less, often oriented towards subsistence with low marketable surplus.

This document aims to establish the reference framework to gain insight into the scope and targets behind the celebration of the IYFF.

Box 1: Historical role of FF

The complex, systemic and transversal role of FF in food security and nutrition, in supporting local economies and rural employment, and in territorial management, is understood intuitively and well-known socially, but difficult to capture in simple, scientific and economic terms. For this reason, despite having been overlooked and ignored during the last two centuries as a policy target, FF continues to be the backbone of food security, territorial development and social cohesion and resilience. Particularly during the last 30 years, policy agenda and economic priorities have often disjointed agricultural production from management of resources and from the role of farmers in society. The IYFF is strongly supported by civil society and social movements that have recognized the central role of FF in rural development and livelihoods. It is also inserted in a context where certain countries have started to adopt policies and institutional arrangements for making the most of FF livelihood diversification and production potential.

Re-positioning FF at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies (as well as in the agendas of FAO and other UN agencies) is the goal of the IYFF, and identifying gaps and opportunities to promote a shift towards a more equal and balanced development of the people, the territories they contribute to manage, and the need to produce sufficient food and goods for 9.15 billion people by 2050¹ is our FAO challenge.

The multiple functions of FF**Production:**

While FF is well positioned in the policy framework of various countries, policy-makers around the globe need compelling evidence of the advantages of FF in terms of productivity. With a new vision of the basic production unit, FF may offer the space for greater impact of sector policies previously directed either to small-scale agriculture or commercial agriculture.

The agricultural sectors, including crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries and aquaculture² produce greenhouse gases and use significant amounts of energy derived from fossil fuel. Agriculture activities also contribute largely to loss of biodiversity and soil degradation (the Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA) project assessed that one-quarter of the global areas is affected by biophysical degradation, including biodiversity degradation). According to *The State of the World's Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture (SOLAW)*, there is a large number of systems at risk facing a progressive

¹ World Agriculture towards 2030/2050, the 2012 Revision. ESA Working Paper No.12-03, June 2012.

² The term "agriculture" includes agriculture, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture activities and a combination of these.

breakdown of their productive capacity. A future free of hunger demands joint efforts to foster the transition from non-balanced to more sustainable production practices, focusing on improved management of ecological processes and the use of innovative technologies. Renewed policies including fiscal regulations must capture the entire FF system, which is knowledge-intensive and is linked to the territory as it manages biodiversity, soil fertility, water and wastes, and social settings. These will reduce the vulnerability of FF and enhance their capacity to invest and produce. The linkages between production, food systems, nutritional security and the value chain will need to be adjusted to FF systems.

Environment:

The world is witnessing an increased erosion of natural resources (land, water, forests, fisheries, air, fossil energy and genetic resources), which impacts on food safety, human health and the long-term productivity of land. The key challenges are to reduce/avoid natural resource depletion and degradation and associated cost increases, as well as high levels of related pollution. The role of family farmers in food production at global and national level requires to be analysed (for Latin America it has been estimated that FF produces 60%³ of the basic food supply), and consolidated evidence is needed on the advantages of FF in terms of potential to generate positive environmental externalities. The challenge is to develop complex mechanisms to reach a large number of farmers scattered over vast territories and using very diversified technologies and sustainable agricultural practices.

Box 2: Globally Important Agricultural Heritage systems (GIAHS) Initiative

To promote the role of FF in sustainable management of natural resources FAO has developed the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage systems (GIAHS)¹ Initiative that recognizes the crucial importance of the well-being of FF communities in an integrated approach while directing activities towards sustainable agriculture and rural development. It further seeks to support the present-day resilience of these traditional agricultural systems and thus provide a sustainable legacy for the benefit of future generations. This global initiative is not just a collection of local projects; it has a global focus within the framework of policies promoting local food security through sustainable systems.

Livelihoods and governance:

The territorial dimension of FF is a key element contributing to stability, employment and cultural integration. Family farmers are highly motivated to manage natural resources sustainably as there is a solid interdependence between the activity developed and the maintenance of their habitat; therefore

³ FAO. 2010. Panorama de la seguridad alimentaria y nutricional en América Latina y el Caribe 2010. Santiago, Chile.

they play a crucial role in stabilizing and improving the social, ecological and economic governance of territories. The multiple functions of the ecosystems become part of economic cycles through FF activities and might return into the system. FF could be considered both a livelihood and economic system that interrelates forms of territorial uses and that creates synergies between the various uses of the land and labour. To promote policy action in favour of FF, existing evidence should be consolidated on the capacity of FF to maintain and increase productive employment when families can sustain their livelihoods with viable production units. Strong evidence on the capacity of FF to control land fragmentation, on the one hand, and land accumulation, on the other hand would undoubtedly be welcomed by policy-makers.

Family farmers face a multitude of entrepreneurial risks linked to natural resources variability, market conditions, changing climate, etc. Their participation in the economic process faces those risks by increasing complexity, maximizing flexibility and accentuating the resilience of family livelihoods. They invest their own capital and their own work and, if supported by enabling policies, information and sustainable land tenure rights, they can invest for their own future and the future of their territory. The vulnerability of family farmers has therefore to be protected by addressing the issue of territorial governance, to avoid migration and to minimize the risk factors related to climate changes, price volatility and alterations in international trade. A good territorial governance aims to ensure the maintenance of the natural resource base for future generations, and at the same time to develop policies with the goal of creating positive conditions in order to encourage new generations to keep working on the family farm.

As a result of their critical role in promoting a good governance of the territories where they live and work, there is a critical need to propose a convergent path between the IYFF and the activities related to the Implementation Phase of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security.

Family farmers are not only a fundamental element of local social cohesion but they also contribute to maintaining a balanced relationship between cities and the rural environment. Therefore, regional planning involving cities and their territories could facilitate the management of food security and natural resources in a more sustainable way while promoting a better integration of local markets.

Family farmers are also inextricably linked to consumers, and enabling investments in rural areas promoting local and national markets, nutritious and healthy and sustainable food production, development of appropriated production and transformation technologies will lead to improved diets and food security, increased rural employment opportunities and reduced migration, enhanced integration between production systems and local markets, and maintenance of the natural resource base.

FAO's role

Two different FAO roles can be distinguished: one as facilitator and another as a specialized agency that will make specific contributions.

1. In its role as facilitator and in the framework of MDGs 1, 7 and 8, FAO is responsible for creating a dialogue space and promoting a partnership that covers all stakeholders, including national and international organizations, civil society, research centres and the private sector. FAO will facilitate the development of a concerted agenda to raise awareness of the links between FF, food and nutrition security, poverty reduction and sustainable management of natural resources and their territory.

In order to determine this agenda that has to deal with these challenges and strengthen the FF potential, a wide range of topics need to be addressed that may fall beyond the capability of any organization, such as: access to and tenure of physical resources (land, water, air), to finance, markets, food chains, technologies tailored for low inputs, diversified systems, climate resilience, employment (especially of the young and women), improved governance, fiscal policies and payments for the provision of ecosystem goods and services that are providing broader externalities, basic rights and equity policies (health, education, social protection), cultural and intercultural policies, and sustainable production.

The participation of a broad range of stakeholders and the ability to promote partnerships will be key elements to enable the contribution of each stakeholder in leading one or several thematic guidelines according to their expertise and comparative advantages.

2. FAO, in its role of as a specialized agency, and according to the priorities set by member countries at their Regional Conferences and to the Strategic Objective targets being determined for 2014–2015, could focus its work on:

- integration with local markets and food systems;
- sustainable intensification and climate change adaptation;
- pro-FF policies and institutions.

On a cross-cutting basis, FAO will facilitate the flow of information and enable dialogue to develop common understanding and planning capacities with special focus on the young and gender equity. As FF has been identified by the FAO Regional Conferences in Latin America as a priority area, FAO will also promote, through its Strategic Objectives, pilot activities and networks that will last beyond the IYFF, and organize stock-taking of information related to the role of FF in food security, production and nutrition, management of natural resources, and social stability and employment.

The Right to Adequate Food and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security context, will be cross-cutting themes of the IYFF.