



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Regional Initiative

on Small-Scale
Agriculture



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Rationale of the Initiative

World's population, about 7.2 billion¹, lives directly from agricultural production systems represented by over 570 million farms around the world (FAO, 2014). The vast majority of the farming systems represents family farms and are considered as Small Scale Agriculture (SSA). Farmers produce food and non-food products on a small-scale with limited natural and external resources, cultivating field and tree crops, raising livestock and managing and *harvesting fishery resources*.

Different definitions of small-scale agriculture exist; most of them refer to the type of management and ownership, the labour supply on the farm and physical or economic size. If small-scale agriculture is defined according to the size of the holdings, farms of less than 2 hectares account for 84%² of all farms at global level.

In the Near East and North Africa region (NENA), more than 80 per cent of agricultural production is provided by the small scale agriculture. Small farmers, especially women and youth, are a vital element to reducing poverty and improving global food security.

Small-scale agricultural activity (which comprises small-scale farmers, pastoralists, forest keepers, fishers and aquaculture farmers), includes also postharvest activities (handling, processing and marketing). These activities constitute the major source of income in rural areas in the NENA Region, not only for smallholders themselves but for the rural economy as a whole through the creation of farm and off-farm employment. However, inequality and rural poverty continue to represent one of the main challenges in the region and small-scale agriculture remains neglected by major policies related to agriculture and food security. Sustainable development of small-scale agriculture has the potential to boost local economies, and lift communities out of poverty and create decent jobs in rural areas.

Scope of the Initiative at Regional, Sub-Regional and Country level

For the NENA region, FAO has formulated three Regional Initiatives (RIs) that reflect the common priorities expressed by the Member Countries. These initiatives are based on the principles of country ownership, participation and partnership. They focus on innovations and enhanced collaboration within and among the countries of the region, highlight the need for multidisciplinary approaches to addressing problems, both with Member Countries and with regional and international partners.

By establishing a dynamic initiative on Small-Scale Agriculture for Inclusive Development (SSA), FAO is working closely with thousands of small farmers and producers in the region. Special attention is paid to women farmers, women agricultural workers and youth involved in agriculture reflecting local context, social vulnerabilities and disadvantaging factors. This initiative is putting farmers and smallholders as well as their organizations, at the centre of the fight against hunger and poverty through the intensification of their production in a sustainable manner, strengthening their capacity of knowledge-based decision-making, their managerial and negotiation skills to market their products and fostering the role of women and youth in the agricultural sector.

¹ <http://www.worldometers.info/>

² Data based on a sample of 460 million farms in 111 countries. SOFA (FAO, 2014)

Arab Peasants & Agricultural Cooperative Union

A strategic partnership has been envisaged between FAO and the Arab Peasants & Agricultural Cooperative Union (APACU).

APACU was founded in 1976 under the auspices of the Arab League with the concrete efforts of the Arab agricultural Organizations and Unions. Its mission is to establish an Arab agricultural integration based on the achievement of a comprehensive agricultural and social development approach and to support and revitalize agricultural cooperatives and to improve the living conditions of Arab farmers and small-holders and encourage rural women's empowerment in the Near East and North Africa Region.

APACU is as an effective regional representative of cooperatives that brings together its members to influence policy and decision-making processes in such areas as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, livestock and natural resources in favour of small- holders. APACU also promotes gender equality and youth employment in rural and agricultural areas.

The partnership will bring FAO and APACU in collaboration for the purpose of:

- a) Supporting the advancement of the cooperative model at three levels: individual, organizational and policy/legal;
- b) Knowledge sharing and generating through documentation of best practices and contributing to documents and publications; and
- c) Organizing and participating in regional and global consultations and awareness-raising events, highlighting the important contributions of rural cooperatives working with small-scale farmers and within the family farming context.

The objective of the FAO SSA Regional Initiative is to support countries in reducing rural poverty through a cohesive programme addressing small-scale agriculture development, based on previous experiences available in the region.

The eight (8) focus countries for the Regional Initiative are Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan, Mauritania and West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS). During the first biennium (2014/2015), the five first countries were identified as focus. Jordan, Mauritania and WBGS have been included for the 2016/2017 biennium subsequent to consultations within FAO and with all candidate countries of the region.

The initiative aims to encompass and integrate activities at regional, sub-regional and country levels. The SSA Regional Initiative is led by the FAO Strategic Objective three (3) corresponding to efforts envisioning the reduction of rural poverty. However, it contributes to the achievement of the other four (4) strategic objectives of the FAO Strategic Framework, in particular to the Strategic Objective two (2) on Sustainable Production.

Making a difference

The overall objective of the Regional Initiative on SSA is to support countries to reduce rural poverty in the region through a comprehensive programme addressing small-scale agriculture development. It addresses challenges to small-scale agriculture in line with FAO's new Strategic Framework through a three-pronged approach:

- (i) Identify and recognize the various typologies of small-holders, their labour dimensions, linkages with markets and barriers in order to support evidence-based policy and strategies to prioritize interventions as well as better target public and private investment in favour of small-scale agriculture and family farming.
- (ii) Address specific challenges of small-scale agriculture to sustainably preserve the fragile natural resources and local ecosystems, improve productivity and quality, social sustainability, livelihoods and viability of the sector.
- (iii) Empower those engaged in small-scale activities in agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries, including strengthening farmers' knowledge, professional organizations and support the creation of decent rural employment opportunities, in particular for youth and women.

Special emphasis is given to the development of a regional strategy on social protection. A mapping of the existing social protection programmes and the identification of the regional and institutional needs will provide the means to diagnose the state of social protection and food nutrition security in the region to better tailor FAO's support to member countries. FAO works in the identification of concrete entry points in (i) ensuring access to social protection benefits for the rural small scale farmers and (ii) aligning social protection and agricultural interventions.

Social Protection

Social protection is being recognized as an instrumental tool in rural poverty reduction and in rural development policy-making. FAO is working on social protection by engaging in rural and agricultural development work such as social protective functions, emergency and disaster risk reduction. In the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region, many countries are developing social protection frameworks that are aimed to tackle urban and rural poverty by protecting vulnerable households from several shocks common to the region.

FAO supports the NENA countries in their social protection initiatives. Special emphasis is given to the development of a regional strategy based on the existing social protection programmes. The identification of regional and institutional needs provides the means to diagnose the state of social protection and food nutrition security in the region and allows FAO to tailor its support to member countries. FAO works in the identification of concrete entry points in (i) ensuring access of social protection benefits to the rural small scale farmers and (ii) aligning social protection and agricultural interventions.

The importance of social protection to address livelihoods protection and resilience building in conflict-affected contexts represents a crucial challenge in the region. For example, in Lebanon, FAO is working with the existing programmes, intending to include a productive component to enhance their economic impact and to benefit both host and refugees' communities. Other countries under humanitarian frameworks are in request of further social protection support from FAO.

The RI SSA is identifying opportunities for enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of rural services targeting small scale farmers, through strengthening institutions and organizations (public and private) and enhancing rural services targeting small scale farmers in collaboration with national governments and non-state actors. The initiative would not only focus on needs and supply for services, but as well on how national policies and institutional environment favour (or disfavour) access of the poor to effective rural services to improve their production, productivity and access to markets and entrepreneurship.

In order to reduce poverty in rural areas and migration to urban areas, the RI SSA is engaged in strengthening Producer Organizations, cooperatives and networks in the focus countries, in order to enable small-scale and family farmers to have better positioned value chains and food systems and gain better market power to scale-up decent employment opportunities in agriculture and gain a voice in policy making. Small producers when better organized have an amplified competitiveness that is powerful not only to enhance agricultural production, increase income, but also to improve livelihoods in the rural areas that should reduce rural migration to urban areas.

Community empowerment/cohesion represents an integral part of the RI work, improving access to information, critical analysis and decision making, optimizing productivity, improving food and nutrition security, strengthening rural institutions and having a positive impact on the sustainable management of natural resources. All these aspects are particularly relevant for vulnerable groups of rural society.

Focus areas of work

Improving productivity, efficiency, sustainability and inclusiveness in the agricultural sector, increasing competitiveness and improving food systems and livelihoods are some of common priorities for the region.

The expected results will be provided through an integrated multidisciplinary and holistic approach to rural poverty in the region.

Tunisian National “Strategy for Decent Rural Youth Employment”

Unemployment rates in Tunisia have been increasing in the recent years, with the higher rates found in rural areas. The impact of unemployment seems to be worse for the youth as, currently, 35.2% of the Tunisians between 15 to 29 years old are without a job. The problem of unemployment is strongly linked to poor performance of the education systems, even more in rural zones. Those factors are fueling youth migration to urban areas that not only over populate urban centres but as well, represent a gap in the needed labour force to improve agricultural productivity in the country.

Aware of the many constraints caused by youth unemployment in the rural areas, FAO is supporting an Integrated Approach for Rural Development that takes into account the creation of decent farm and non-farm employment for the young Tunisians. FAO implemented *three* technical assistance projects to help promote employment of young men and women in rural zones. The projects provided capacity building for individuals and institutions; promoted entrepreneurial activities and; improved the knowledge of agriculture value chains and the job market. The project adopted a community participatory approach and focused on gender empowerment and human rights. Based on the experience and lessons learned from the projects, FAO is working on a strategy for youth unemployment that considers the strengthening of youth skills, entrepreneurship, knowledge of economic diversification, social dialogue, social protection for vulnerable youth and, lastly, control of regulated rural migration.

The areas of work of this Regional Initiative are summarized into three main fields:

- ✓ Support Governments, Producer Organizations and Rural Institutions promoting capacity development tools on governance, sustainability and equity.
- ✓ Support development of value chains and market linkages, and improve access to sustainable rural services.
- ✓ Support to strengthen producers' capacities, raise awareness of their priorities and create decent employment opportunities.

Farmer Field Schools

Farmer Field School (FFS) is an approach based on people centered learning. It uses participatory methods to create a learning environment. Participants have the opportunity to learn through direct observation, experimentation, discussion and decision -making in practical field exercises throughout the production cycles.

A range of technical problems can be addressed through FFS: soil, crop and water management; seeds multiplication and varietal testing; agro-ecology and Integrated Pest Management; agro-pastoralism, aquaculture, agroforestry, food chains, market linkages, etc.

FFS was designed to assist small-holders in solving their local specific crop and pest problems; the approach represents an important tool for the empowerment of the rural poor, improving their access to information, critical analysis and decision making; optimizing productivity, improving food and nutrition security; strengthening rural institutions and having a positive impact on the sustainable management of natural resources. All these aspects are particularly relevant for vulnerable groups, and contribute to social protection in terms of community empowerment and its own social safety nets.

"Hasan is a farmer from Safi in Jordan that attended a FFS programme. He enrolled in the programme to better manage his 3 ha farm. Through the work and experience of FFS, himself, his wife, son and niece participated in different FFS learning innovative technologies to be applied in his farm. Currently, they produce a variety of vegetables based on the IPM approach, reducing costs, increasing the quality of produce and having better access to market being recognized as a good farmer. Higher revenues allowed the family to diversify source of income and create job opportunities in his farm for part of his community. Hasan and his family improve their livelihood standards and are respected members of their community; Hasan is now member of a local district group that represents the local community."

Main partners

In order to support the different approaches defined to reduce rural poverty in the NENA region, the SSA Initiative works with member countries and partners. Collaboration with partners aims at optimizing the resources for efficient delivery of results. Main partnerships contribute in the implementation of programmes at local, national and regional level.

Ministries of Agriculture and other Governmental Institutions are key partners for the development of the work of the SSA in the focus countries. Other RI SSA partners belong to the following different categories.

Research

- CIHEAM: Centre international de hautes études agronomiques méditerranéennes
- CIRAD: Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement
- CNRADA: Mauritania: National Center for Agricultural Research and Agricultural Development
- ICARDA: International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas
- IMROP: Mauritanian Institute of Oceanographic Research and Fisheries
- ISET: Institut Supérieur de l'Enseignement Technologique (Mauritania)
- LARI: Lebanese Agriculture Research Institute
- MBC: Sudan: Mamoun Beheiry Centre for Economic, Social Studies and Research in Africa
- NCSR: Lebanon: National Council for Scientific Research
- RISMER: Réseau Maghrébin des Instituts de Recherches - Plateforme Maghrébine des instituts de recherches Halieutiques
- UMNAGRI: Union Maghrébine et Nord-Africaine des Agriculteurs / Regional platform covering Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan and Tunisia)

Associations/Unions

- APACU : Arab Peasants and Agricultural Cooperatives Union
- ASALA – WBGS: The Palestinian Businesswomen's Association
- CACU-Egypt: Central Agricultural Cooperative Union
- Confédération marocaine de la pêche artisanale au Maroc
- FAEM - Fédération des Agriculteurs et Éleveurs (Mauritania)
- Fédération nationale de la pêche artisanale en Mauritanie

- FNP: Fédération Nationale des Pêches (Tunisia)
- GIPP: Groupement interprofessionnel de la pêche en Tunisie
- GNAP: Mauritania: National Grouping of Pastoral Associations
- Inaash Al Qarya Al Khayrya Association (WBGS)
- GRDR – Mauritania: Association for international solidarity in support of development
- Maghreb Platform for aquaculture
- Maghreb Platform for the small scale fisheries
- PARC - WBGS: The Agricultural Development Association
- Plateforme des OPAP de la pêche artisanale au Maghreb.
- Plateforme nationale de la pêche artisanale et chambre nationale de la pêche en Algérie (Member of the RIMSMER and OPAP)
- RADD0 : Réseau Associatif de Développement Durable des oasis (Mauritania)
- Réseau national de la pêche artisanale en Tunisie
- SSHEIA – WBGS: Horticultural Export Improvement Association
- UAWC – WBGS: Union of the Agricultural Works Committees
- UMA: Union du Maghreb Arabe
- UPA-DI: Union des producteurs agricoles - Développement international
- YMCA - East Jerusalem: Young Men Christian Association

International Organizations

- IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development (Support to Farmer Organizations of Africa Programme – SFOAP)
- ILO: International Labour Organization
- UNWomen (Egypt and WBGS)
- WWF: World Wild Life

Universities

- American University of Beirut: Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences (FAFS) and Agriculture Research and Education Center (AREC)
- Holy Spirit University of Kaslik - Faculty of Agriculture (Lebanon)
- Lebanese University – Faculty of Agriculture (Lebanon)
- Saint Joseph University – Faculty of Agriculture (Lebanon)

- AfDB- Mauritania: African Development Bank
- CEEOS – Egypt: Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services
- ESDC – WBGS: Economic & Social Development Centre of Palestine
- EU-ENPARD: European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
- FONCIMED: Mediterranean multidisciplinary and inter-institutional network
- ISESCO: Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- ITC - WBGS: International Trade Centre
- MGO - WBGS: Mount of Green Olives' Company for Agricultural Marketing
- Misr El Kheir (Mauritania)
- NCARE- National Center for Agricultural Research and Extension (Jordan)
- NEPPO – Near East Plant Protection Organization
- NSCE – Egypt: North-South Consultants Exchange
- PARM- Tunisia: Prospective Agricole et Rurale en Méditerranée
- PHARE - Tunisia: Forum Agriculture et Ruralité
- SFD - Mauritania Social Fund for Development
- WBF- WBGS: Women Business Forum

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