

## Concept note

**The FAO International Symposium on Agricultural Innovation for Family Farmers: Unlocking the potential of agricultural innovation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**FAO Headquarters, Rome, 21-23 November 2018

---

***Rationale***

The world is facing unprecedented global challenges<sup>1</sup> that affect the sustainability of food and agriculture systems, and thus the livelihoods of millions of family farmers worldwide. These challenges include natural resource depletion and the adverse impacts of environmental degradation, such as desertification, drought, land degradation, water scarcity and loss of biodiversity; an ever-increasing world population; and climate change.

These global challenges pose serious threats to achieving the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger<sup>2</sup>. Today, hunger remains an everyday challenge for humankind and about 815 million people are still chronically undernourished<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, to meet the demand from a projected population of nearly 10 billion people in 2050, it is estimated that agricultural output will need to increase by almost 50 percent compared to 2012<sup>1</sup>. The bulk of this increase must come from family farmers who manage about 75 percent of farmland worldwide, produce about 80 percent of the world's food but, paradoxically, are often poor and food insecure themselves.

To respond to these challenges, the 193 Member States of the United Nations (UN) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>4</sup>. The SDGs are articulated in 169 targets and 230 indicators and FAO is the custodian UN agency for 21 indicators and a contributing agency to four others. From ending poverty and hunger to responding to climate change and sustaining the natural resources, food and agriculture lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs will shape national development plans until 2030.

In this context, innovation is the central driving force which will transform food systems, lift family farmers out of poverty and help the world to achieve food security and sustainable agriculture and the SDGs.

***The role of agricultural innovation***

Agricultural innovation is the process whereby individuals or organisations bring new or existing products, processes or ways of organisation into use for the first time in a specific context in order to increase effectiveness, competitiveness, resilience to shocks or environmental sustainability and thereby contribute to food security and nutrition, economic development or sustainable natural resource management.

Innovation in agriculture cuts across all dimensions of the production cycle along the entire value chain - from crop, forestry, fishery or livestock production to the management of inputs and resources, to organization and market access. It may, for instance, involve planting new crop varieties, combining traditional practices with new scientific knowledge, applying new pest control and post-harvest practices or engaging with markets in new, more rewarding ways.

---

<sup>1</sup> FAO 2017. The future of food and agriculture – trends and challenges. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6583e.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> FAO 2004. Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-y7937e.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2017. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017. Building resilience for peace and food security. Rome, FAO. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7695e.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> UN. 2015. Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E)

Innovation is not just about technology, which on its own may simply remain on the shelf. It is also, and perhaps most importantly, about social, economic, institutional/organizational and policy processes, and having an impact on the lives of family farmers. The public sector – working with civil society, farmer organizations and the private sector – must create the conditions that will enable innovation to flourish, linking these various actors, fostering the capacity of farmers and other stakeholders, and providing incentives, for them to innovate. Research and, even more importantly, extension play a central role in these innovation pathways.

### ***The role of FAO***

At its 66th Session, the UN General Assembly declared 2014 to be the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) and invited FAO to facilitate implementation of the Year, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders. Among its initiatives for the IYFF, FAO dedicated its major annual flagship publication, the State of Food and Agriculture, to "Innovation in Family Farming"<sup>5</sup>. The report highlighted that the world's food security and environmental sustainability depend on family farms that form the backbone of agriculture in most countries. It also stressed that family farms are an extremely diverse group and that this diversity must be taken into account. The report underlined how innovation could lift farmers out of poverty and help the world achieve food security and sustainable agriculture. Now it is time for that action to materialise so that agricultural innovation can be scaled up for the benefit of family farmers, herders, fishers and forest-dependent communities.

The UN General Assembly recently proclaimed 2019–2028 the United Nations Decade of Family Farming<sup>6</sup>, recognizing the success of the IYFF, which raised the profile of the role of family farming, pastoralism and smallholder farming in contributing to the achievement of food security and improved nutrition. In its resolution, the UN General Assembly gave particular attention to innovation, recognizing "the important role of science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship in supporting smallholders, including pastoralists and family farmers, in particular women and youth in rural areas". The UN General Assembly called upon FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to lead implementation of the Decade.

During the 25<sup>th</sup> Session of FAO's Committee on Agriculture (COAG)<sup>7</sup> in 2016, FAO member countries underscored the importance of agricultural innovation in achieving sustainable rural development, particularly for addressing the challenges of employment for youth and rural women to alleviate rural poverty. They also encouraged FAO to continue its work on agricultural innovation systems, which includes building on partnership platforms such as the CGIAR<sup>8</sup>, TAP<sup>9</sup>, GFAR<sup>10</sup> and GFRAS<sup>11</sup>. Member countries also recommended that FAO should play a greater role in assisting them and local communities in the development of their agricultural innovation system strategies through comprehensive analysis and needs assessments in partnership with farmers, academia, private sector, research, extension institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

### ***Justification for the Symposium***

*The FAO International Symposium on Agricultural Innovation for Family Farmers: Unlocking the potential of agricultural innovation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* is a direct and firm

---

<sup>5</sup> The State of Food and Agriculture 2014 <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2014/en/>

<sup>6</sup> Resolution 72/239 adopted by the UN General Assembly at its 72<sup>nd</sup> Session on 20 December 2017

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/72/239](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/72/239)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.fao.org/coag/en/>

<sup>8</sup> A global agricultural research partnership <http://www.cgiar.org/>

<sup>9</sup> The Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP) is a G20 initiative aimed at strengthening national capacities for agricultural innovations in the Tropics <http://www.fao.org/in-action/tropical-agriculture-platform/background/en/>

<sup>10</sup> Global Forum on Agricultural Research <http://www.gfar.net/>

<sup>11</sup> Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services <https://www.g-fras.org/en/>

response to member countries' enthusiastic encouragement for FAO to play a strong catalytic and supporting role to empower smallholders and family farmers through innovation.

FAO is uniquely positioned to convene such an international symposium, to provide inspiration for innovation actors and decision-makers, especially in the developing countries, to unlock the potential of innovation to drive socio-economic growth, ensure food and nutrition security, alleviate poverty, improve resilience to changing environments (e.g. climate change) and thereby achieve the SDGs.

Many developing countries are as yet unable to harness the full potential of agricultural innovation. The symposium will aim to increase understanding of the innovation drivers and processes, which is critical to unlocking the potential of innovation to achieve the transformative change required in agriculture and rural development. Collective actions are required to remove barriers and address the constraints (technological, social, organizational, policy, etc.) that stifle the capacity of family farmers, and of other stakeholders in agriculture and food systems, to innovate.

Scaling up, which is fundamental, also requires that the stakeholders and decision-makers develop a better understanding of impact pathways as well as new partnership and business models involving the public sector, private sector, civil society and farmer organizations. Through the symposium, stakeholders can learn about the pathways and drivers that lead to successful innovation as well as opportunities for rapid scaling up of agricultural innovation.

The symposium is conceived as a dynamic multistakeholder and multidisciplinary forum aimed at understanding the socio-economic potential of innovation, its key drivers and processes, and impact pathways through exchange of knowledge, information and practices, review of enabling policies and platforms, and development of potential partnerships and action plans.

Investing in innovation is essential for achievement of the SDGs. This can be done, inter alia, through platforms for investment aiming to upscale the benefits of agricultural innovation for millions of family farmers. In recent years, global calls for responsible investments to foster, promote and advance innovation have been repeatedly made, for example by G7 and G20 countries and in Agenda 2030, the Paris Climate Agreement and Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The symposium is expected to encourage increased investments in agricultural innovation at local, national and international levels, including the development of appropriate national innovation strategies in support of countries' efforts to achieve the SDGs.

### *Objectives of the Symposium*

1. **Serve as a global knowledge and partnership platform** to better understand the potential of innovation in agriculture to address the SDGs, with a special focus on supporting smallholder and family farmers;
2. **Increase understanding of the drivers** of innovation and the main constraints;
3. **Propose processes, pathways and interventions needed** to unlock the potential of innovation in agriculture and scaling up inclusive innovations;
4. **Celebrate inspiring success stories** of innovation and innovators in sustainable agriculture;
5. **Act as a catalyst for boosting partnerships as well as public and private investments** to foster and scale up agricultural innovation.

### *Symposium expected outputs*

1. **Support for a Call for Action** to unlock the potential of agricultural innovation for family farmers to achieve the SDGs;
2. **Identification of priority intervention areas** where key stakeholders, including FAO, can support countries to unlock the potential of agricultural innovation to achieve the SDGs



3. **Identification of potential actions and strategies for scaling up** successful innovations to meet the needs of millions of family farmers
4. **Electronic proceedings** of the symposium with key recommendations for action.

### ***Symposium structure***

The symposium will be held over 2.5 days at FAO Headquarters in Rome on 21-23 November 2018. It will be organized in partnership with other key actors in agricultural innovation, including CGIAR, IFAD, the Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP) and the European Alliance on Agricultural Knowledge for Development (AGRINATURA). It is expected that the programme will comprise:

- a) A high-level segment
- b) A series of technical sessions on strategic themes
- c) An Innovation Fair focusing on examples of successful innovations that are used by family farmers
- d) A special session dedicated to young innovators

### ***Target participants***

About 300-400 participants are expected from governments and public, private, civil society and farmer organizations working on innovation for sustainable food and agriculture. Inspiring world leaders, innovation practitioners, farmers, researchers and policy-makers, students and young entrepreneurs, experts and thought-provoking speakers will be invited to share their stories and challenge symposium participants to think out of the box on how innovations will feed the world and be an engine for the SDGs.

### ***Governance and organization***

**FAO Task Force (TF):** A Task Force will be established to oversee the coordination and organization of the symposium. It will also act as the decision-making and executing body of the symposium, with responsibility for the development and delivery of the symposium. The Task Force will be composed of FAO staff from different departments and Strategic Programme (SP) teams. The Chair will work under the overall guidance and coordination of the Deputy Director-General for Climate and Natural Resources (DDN). The FAO Research and Extension Unit (AGDR) will provide the operational secretariat to the Task Force.

**Advisory Panel (AP):** A technical advisory panel composed of world leading experts and innovation champions will be established. It will operate as an independent advisory body that will provide technical advice and guidance to the FAO Task Force. AP members will sit on the panel in their personal capacities. The selection of AP members will aim to reflect a balanced combination of gender, expertise and experience (covering a wide spectrum of areas related to innovations in general, and agricultural innovation and innovation systems in particular), geographic representation, and a wide range of perspectives (e.g. research and education, civil society organizations, private sector, bridging institutions, governments), thus promoting diversity and inclusiveness. The work of the Advisory Panel will be conducted primarily using e-mail. A face-to-face meeting of the Panel is expected to take place in Rome in the first half of the year. AGDR will provide the necessary operational and administrative support to the Advisory Panel.