



# Enhanced data and analysis for the United Nations Decade of Family Farming

## KEY MESSAGES

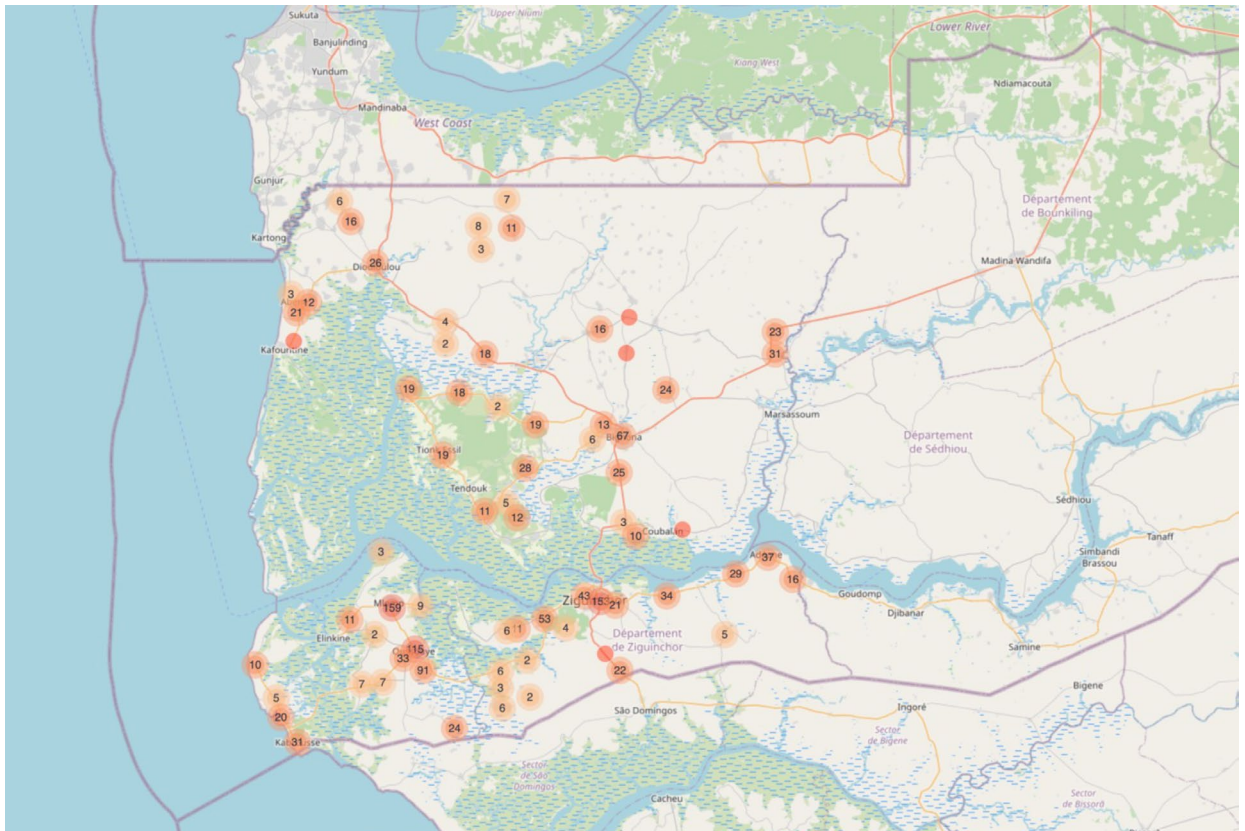
- ▶ Family farming is a diverse sector that requires the development of farm typologies to better target policies.
- ▶ United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDF) offers an opportunity to leverage technology and connectivity in rural areas to empower farmers' organizations and build capacities for data collection and analysis.
- ▶ Tools are widely available for the UNDF to become a catalyst for enhanced data and knowledge on family farming.

The United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDF) (FAO, 2023) aims at putting family farming, and all family-based production models, at the centre of interventions for a period of ten years. By dedicating an international year to family farming (2019), the United Nations repositioned this sector at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies in national agendas while highlighting the need for more equal societies.

Among the priorities defined by the UNDF Global Action Plan (FAO and IFAD, 2019) is the improvement of the global knowledge base on family farming. This is motivated by a paucity of standardized, internationally comparable data about the sector. Particularly, there is limited information about the mobilized family farming sector, namely family farmers that are organized within producer and other civil society organizations. The social capital and networks that tie together these producers can be instrumental to building resilient farming communities and production systems.

The knowledge base is still nascent regarding how such producers interact and rely on their networks and organizations, especially for developing effective strategies in response to the multiple challenges that family farmers face, amongst others, vulnerability to markets; adapting to climate change; recovering from COVID-19 induced disruption; structural barriers in production; access to resources; harmful agricultural policies; and poverty and hunger more broadly. Under the UNDF, FAO aims at shedding light on more specific questions related to family farming in the context of rural transformations – constraints, needs, opportunities – for and with family farmers. This includes supporting actions for non-state actors to collect and use their own data (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1** UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF FAMILY FARMING SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION IN SENEGAL IN 2021, COORDINATED BY FAO AND THE RÉSEAU DES ORGANISATIONS PAYSANNES ET DE PRODUCTEURS DE L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST (ROPFA)



Source: Kobo. 2023. *KoboToolbox*. Cited 27 March 2023. [www.kobotoolbox.org](http://www.kobotoolbox.org), modified by the authors based on data from FAO. (forthcoming). *Consultation of the status of family farmers in the region of Ziguinchor*. Rome.

## Data available for family farming comes with various assets and shortcomings

Data on family farming is derived from multiple sources, each with advantages as well as shortcomings. Agricultural censuses provide a universal list of farms, which may cover all production systems. However, they could miss secondary sectors (e.g. fisheries, aquaculture or forestry). They also tend to offer a more limited set of indicators, given the large undertaking of the data collection. Another downside of censuses and registries is that these are costly exercises and thus infrequently implemented.

Agricultural and household surveys, on the other hand, provide a representative sample of farms and households respectively, tend to be more frequently implemented and provide more detailed information on production and socioeconomic characteristics. However, they can often be limited in scope. Agricultural surveys are often stratified by land area or key crops, limiting the inclusion of certain farm types. Household surveys, on the other hand, are not sampled to be representative of the agricultural population so may be not adequate for the analysis of family farming when the share of the agricultural population in a country is low. Disaggregation to the territorial level is generally not possible for either type of survey, limiting the inclusion of certain farm types as well and the conclusions that can be derived from the data.

Additional challenges may also arise when collecting new information on family farming. One is the lack of an updated sample frame due to infrequent censuses or poorly implemented farmer registries. Furthermore, information about farmer organizations and their membership is often limited or unavailable. In some contexts, farming populations can be hard to reach or not considered if they have rotating agricultural activities according to agricultural seasons.

## Developing family farming classifications

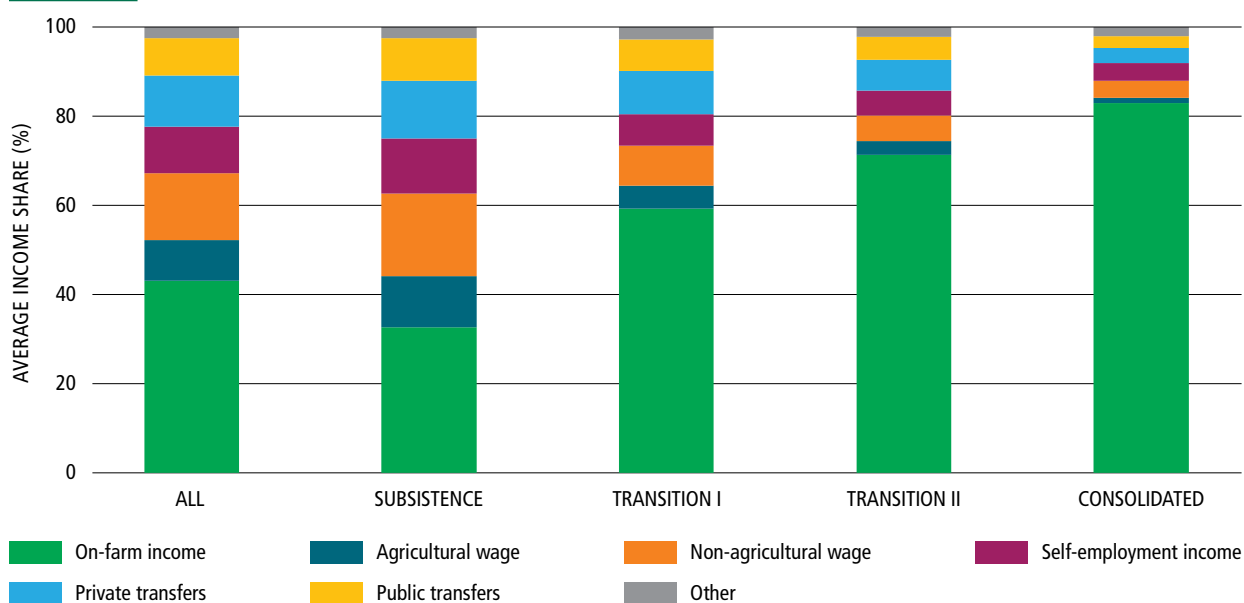
In the context of the UNDF, several countries have developed national strategies in support to family farming. These require a clear definition of what constitutes a family farm, yet, establishing a statistical (and thus, operational) definition of the sector is often at odds with the concept of family farming. Particularly, statistical definitions are limited to quantifiable indicators, preventing integration of normative aspects, which go beyond economic dimensions (FAO, 2023), and make justice to the significant cultural and social values associated with family farming.

Attempts to measure the size of the sector (Lower, Sánchez and Bertini, 2021) place family farmers as managing around 90 percent of the world's farms, around 80 percent of the global food supply, and more than half of the world's nutrient supply. However, if farm size is considered, smaller farms of 2 hectares or less, contribute to a lesser extent.

Such standardized measures may underestimate the sector in terms of scope and scale, due to inherent criteria regarding the production unit, which generally excludes non-crop agriculture. Regardless of the definition adopted, consensus exists (FAO and IFAD, 2019) that family farmers are major actors in the global food system, critical contributors to global food security and an essential population to consider and support for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) continues to support its Member Nations in the development of farm typology classifications (FTC, 2018) and in the development of operational definitions of family farming. FAO is also supporting the UNDF by enhancing the evidence on family farming (FAO, 2023) status around the world. A recent publication profiling family farming in Peru (Cabrera and De la O Campos, 2023), based on four typologies of family farms, highlights the diversity of the sector's livelihood strategies (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2 LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES OF THE DIFFERENT FAMILY FARMS IN PERU**



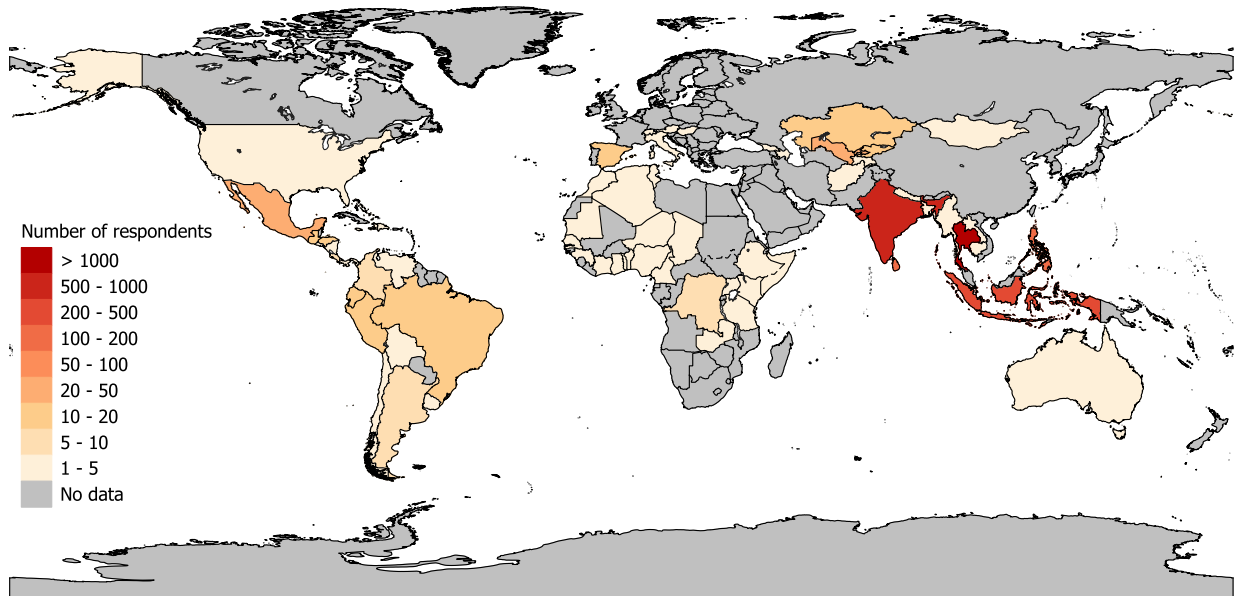
Source: Cabrera Cevallos, C.E. y De la O Campos A.P. 2023. *La agricultura familiar en el Perú - Brechas, retos y oportunidades*. Economía del desarrollo agrícola de la FAO – Estudio técnico N.o 28. Roma, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4897es>

## Global consultation: the challenges of COVID-19 for family farmers

FAO piloted a global online consultation on the challenges and strategies of family farmers in the context of COVID-19, focusing on crisis and postcrisis recovery strategies. An online survey targeting family farmers and small-scale producers was developed for this purpose. An additional survey, conducting in person interviews by farmer organizations, was implemented in the last two months of 2020 and early 2021.

The survey instruments developed for the global consultation were then refined to launch a more comprehensive, representative and regular monitoring strategy of family farming during the UNDF (see next section). Although the pilot survey was not based on a universal sample frame of family farmers (given the absence of any such tool) the widespread implementation of the questionnaire through family farming networks enabled extensive coverage among specific subpopulations, validating the survey instrument in its content and applicability among family farmer populations (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3** ONLINE CONSULTATION: NUMBER AND LOCATION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



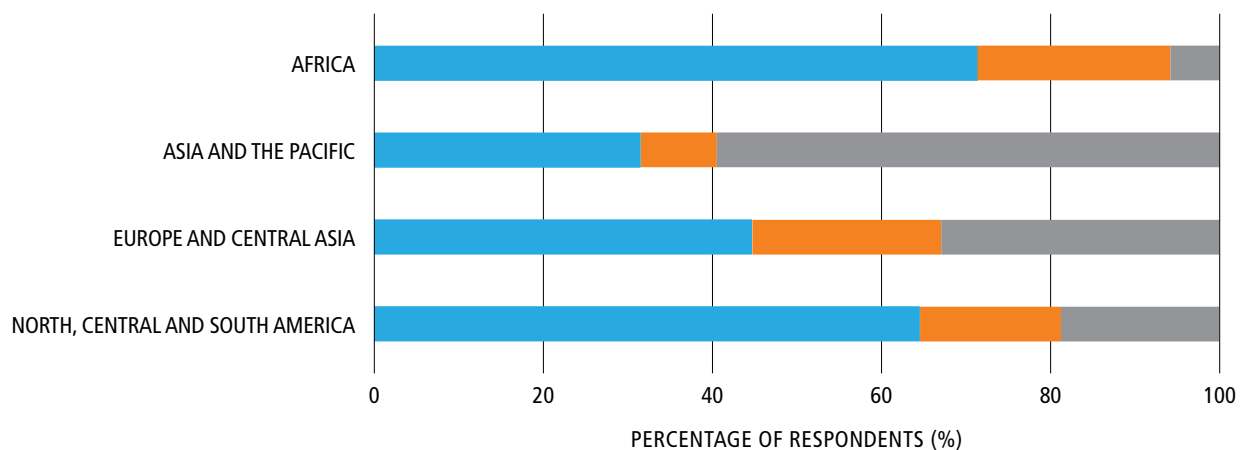
*Notes:* The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined. A dispute exists between the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

*Source:* United Nations Geospatial. 2020. *World map* [shapefiles]. New York, USA, United Nations, modified by the author.

The survey results, which were based on responses from about 2 800 farmers, revealed the impact of the global pandemic on family farming. Over 80 percent of respondents affirmed exposure to lockdown policies that limited movement and access to markets. Most respondents believed their income was below the normal level. Commercialization of agricultural output was notably challenged, with more than two-thirds of respondents indicating constraints faced in commercializing production. This reflected the widespread implementation of food and input market restrictions in terms of operating hours and overall closures. Those restrictions were also reflected in constraints to accessing productive inputs for crop production.

Strategies for recovery were demonstrably reliant on individual farmer capacity to respond to the crisis and limited in terms of external sources of support. Except for respondents based in Asia and the Pacific, more than two-thirds of respondents were unaware of or unable to access social assistance. This, paired with the low level of access to credit, productive inputs, post-harvest services and extension, meant that family farmers held limited means for engaging in swift recovery (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4** ONLINE CONSULTATION: FINANCIAL HELP PROVIDED TO FAMILY FARMERS IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19



*Source:* Author's own elaboration.



## Collecting data with and for producer organizations and farmers

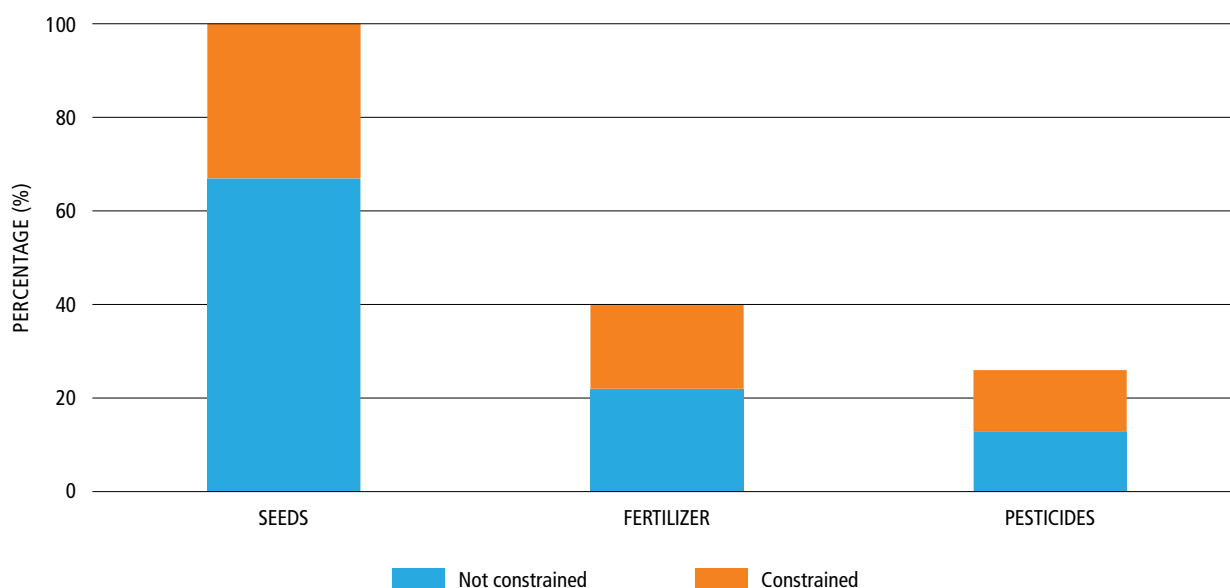
Enhancing the availability of family farming-related data does not only occur through the enhancement of national statistical offices and agricultural ministries. It also involves support to data that is collected by farmers and their organizations themselves, as direct users and beneficiaries of more and better information.

COVID-19 brought multiple challenges for family farmers (see previous section), however, it also enhanced the online tools and remote collaboration for data collection. In this context, FAO has been supporting the development of quantitative survey instruments that can be easily administered by farmer and civil society organizations, while ensuring rigor, namely in the accuracy and compatibility of indicators and sampling strategies.

Through these processes, FAO has also helped build capacities amongst umbrella organizations, as well as support in the analysis of information. More recent studies have been conducted in countries with different family farming situations and vocations – the Northeast of Brazil, Senegal, Ghana, Uganda, Fiji and the Cook Islands. The latter focused on the role of fishers' organizations and the services that these provide to artisanal fisher folk, while surveys in the former two countries focused on a wider range of producers and farming systems.

FAO worked with *Articulação no Semiárido Brasileiro* (Brazilian Semi-arid Articulation) (ASA, 2023) (Figure 5) to assess the constraints faced by their farmers network during and after COVID-19. The results of this panel study are supporting the services that ASA provides to farmers in production, commercialization and access to water. It has also provided evidence to civil society for supporting the formulation of new policies in support to family farming.

**FIGURE 5** ACCESS TO AGRICULTURAL INPUTS OF FAMILY FARMERS BY ACCESS CONSTRAINTS



Source: FAO. 2023. *Brazilian semiarid survey – Family farmers' resilience strategies during COVID-19*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4136en>

## Enhancing the monitoring and evaluation of policies to support family farming: UNDFE surveys

FAO's family farming platform (FAO, 2023) gathers quality information on family farming from all over the world. Tools are now available for catalysing initiatives aiming at generating quality data and knowledge on the different challenges and potential solutions that family farming face. These tools include standardized questionnaires that can be downloaded and directly applied, or it can be adapted to the specific needs of farmers' and civil society organizations.

FAO's UNDFE survey has been created with the goal of supporting the monitoring and evaluation of multiple actions under the UNDFE Global Action Plan (FAO and IFAD, 2019). These can also provide a basis for the operationalization of family farming definitions and typology classifications, including in the design of farmer registries to better target policies. Scaling up their application across different family farming groups, at territorial levels, can also support knowledge generation across critical themes. Finally, when integrated with projects, these can also support the evaluation of their impact on key outcomes for family farming.

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The findings of this note are adapted from different publications developed by the FAO sustainable markets, agribusiness and rural transformations (SMART) team and briefs in support to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDF).



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