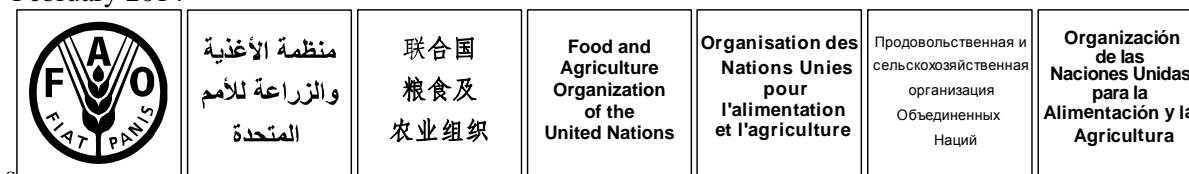


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FAO Regional Conference for the Near East

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Regional Dialogue on Family Farming in the Near East and North Africa Region

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In 2011, taking note of a proposal put forth by the Government of the Philippines, the 37th Session of the FAO Conference proposed that the United Nations declare 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). The 66th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, declared 2014 as the “International Year of Family Farming” (IYFF) and invited FAO to facilitate its implementation, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

2. FAO in collaboration with the World Rural Forum, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the World Farmers Organization (WFO) held a series of regional dialogues to enhance local, regional and global discussions on family farming as defined in the context of IYFF¹, smallholder farming (including forestry, fisheries and pastoral production).

3. The Near East and North Africa Regional Dialogue aimed at highlighting the crucial role of family farmers, smallholders, producer organizations and cooperatives, as the cornerstone of world food security and the key to a sustainable future, eradicating hunger and poverty, achieving social cohesion, employment and sustainable use of natural resources. The meeting was organized in Tunis (Tunisia) during 20-21 November 2013.

¹ In the context of IYFF, the following common principles 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 capital and 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. At the country level, both in developing and developed countries, Family Farming (FF) is the predominant form of agriculture in the food production sector. Within this framework, the development of viable modalities of Family Farming is essential for the achievement of sustainable development in agricultural, forestry, and fishery production systems.

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Other documents can be consulted at www.fao.org*



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II. ACTIVITIES

4. The workshop was attended by more than 50 participants representing producers organizations, civil society, research institutions and Government of Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen and international institutions (IFAD, CIHEAM, ICARDA, WRF, WFO, ICA).

5. The participants discussed three major themes:

- The Importance and role of family farming in the region and its contribution to sustainable rural development and food security. Good practices, innovations and lessons from experience.
- The policy environment and the existing programmes and strategies in support of family farming, including research programmes focused on family farming.
- The role of producer organizations and cooperatives for sustainable and performing family farming.

6. Debates and interventions promoted constructive exchanges between different actors leading to a better understanding of the potential role of family farming in diverse contexts that characterize the countries of the region. Emphasis was placed on identifying challenges and opportunities for development and investment in family farming while focusing on policy priorities to achieve food security and the eradication of hunger and rural poverty.

7. The Family Farming sector in the region is to be considered in a broader and more complex definition in relation to its multifunctionality and the different activities that characterize it. This organizational model represents different models of farms and production systems that guarantee sources of income for large numbers of rural poor. Based on existing experiences and practices such as the oasis system, it is clear that family farming undergoes several negative impacts related to global crises, inadequate economic reforms, demographic issues such as rural exodus, as well as pressures caused by climate change. Particular interest was paid to the gender dimension, emphasizing the dominant role of rural women in family farming. In this respect, the recommendations from the Consultative workshop on “Addressing Gender Equality in Agriculture and the Rural Sector” in the Near East and North Africa, held on 18-19 November in Tunis, were presented to and discussed by the participants.

III. OUTCOMES

8. The main message from the consultation is that family farming plays a crucial role in the region’s agriculture, fisheries and food security, and therefore measures to support family farming should be an integral part of all agriculture development and food security strategies. The consultation highlighted the importance of policy measures in the following areas:

- Financing and investment: Actions in this area will need to tackle (1) development of new financial institutions with procedures that are adapted to the need of family farmers; (2) putting in place insurance schemes that would reduce the risk associated with lending to family farmers; (3) the possible of use dedicated lines of credit for family farmers; and (4) the need to increase public investment in physical and social infrastructure in rural areas.

- Land: The group pointed out that land fragmentation and the small (and decreasing) size of holdings is a problem. They suggested three areas for action: (1) encouraging farmers to group their land so as to facilitate technology transfer and marketing; (2) consider innovative ways of implementing laws on inheritance so as to limit additional fragmentation; and (3) resolve problems with land titling and the use of collective and public lands so that family farmers can feel secure in their access to land.

- Youth and gender: The group argued that investments to improve the rural sphere and make family farming more profitable would help encourage youth to remain in rural areas and work in agriculture. In addition they suggested the need for: (1) special interventions that would help women deal with their domestic responsibilities (e.g. water pumps) and thus have more time available for their agricultural work; (2) new projects and programs that target youth and women (e.g. women's bank); and (3) legal changes to provide more rights for women to access to resources and markets.
- Natural resources: The group noted that climate change poses a serious challenge to the region's agriculture and especially to small family farms. They argued that governments should (1) put in place programs that would help farmers adapt to climate change (e.g. through new varieties); and (2) encourage the development of more environmentally-friendly production technologies.
- Increasing value added: It was pointed out that a very small proportion of agriculture value added remains with the family farm. The group suggested two types of actions: (1) support new marketing process that group farmers and limit intermediaries; and (2) special campaigns to promote the products of family farms through labeling etc.
- Research and extension: It was argued that current research and extension efforts are ill-adapted to the family farm. The group proposed that: (1) new research and extension institutions be developed through public-private partnerships; and (2) increase the use of new instruments and tools (such as mobile phones, radio, internet, etc..) to deliver information to family farmers.
- Government support to producer organizations and other civil society actors: There was a unanimous view that governments should demonstrate the political will to support producer organizations and ensure their administrative and financial independence. Support to such institutions will require: (1) legal and regulatory changes to ensure their freedom and independence; and (2) technical and institutional support to encourage their development.
- The importance of producer organizations: Participants agreed that producer organizations could play a key role in developing family farming in the region because they could: (1) provide voice for family farmers in policy circles; (2) bring farmers together to provide training, marketing support, etc.; (3) work across countries and support regional integration and the exchange of experiences; and (4) help in the implementation of social protection schemes and anti-poverty programs.

IV. THE WAY FORWARD

9. The outcomes of the five regional dialogues will set the ground to provide a regional overview of Family Farming issues that will be addressed in the IYFF Global Dialogue to be held in Rome in 2014, the FAO Regional Conferences and other relevant regional and fora.