
National workshop:
“Agricultural policies to support economic growth and the reduction of food insecurity and poverty in rural areas”

Tuesday 5 March 2013, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

1. Background

A national workshop on “Agricultural policies to support economic growth and the reduction of food insecurity and poverty in rural areas” was organised on 5 March 2013 under the “EC/FAO Programme on Information Systems to Improve Food Security Decision-Making in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) East Area”. The Programme is financed by the European Commission (EC) and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The objective of the EC/FAO Programme is to improve food security by enhancing the national capacity to generate, analyse, communicate and mainstream more relevant and reliable information into policies and programmes. It is being implemented in four countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova.

The development of agriculture is currently receiving a lot of attention from policy-makers in the four countries covered by the EC/FAO Programme, which is mainly explained by the determination of the countries to reduce their dependency from grain exporting countries (South Caucasus) and to increase the contribution of agriculture to economic development (Moldova). Renewed focus on agriculture is one of the outcomes of the global crisis with, among other consequences, rising food prices and difficulty to secure grain imports in years of tight production due to export bans in traditional grain supplier countries in the region. A number of policies, strategies, subsidy programmes are therefore being implemented with main targets set in terms of increased production, productivity and self-sufficiency.

Agriculture has also been identified as a key sector for reducing food insecurity and poverty in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus as the sector employs a large share of the labor force in rural areas where poverty\(^1\), an important indicator of food security, is widespread. Increasing agricultural productivity is fundamental to reducing food insecurity and poverty but not all policies and programmes will have the same impact, taking into account the fact that the bulk of agricultural output is currently produced by small farmers who rely on subsistence or semi-subistence agriculture for livelihood. A national workshop was organized in each of the four countries to discuss selected agricultural policies of the country and analyze the extent to which these policies fully contribute not only to economic growth but also to the reduction of food insecurity and poverty.

\(^1\) The poverty level increased from 27.6% in 2008 to 35.8% in 2010 in Armenia, from 22.7% in 2008 to 24.7% in 2009 in Georgia and from 31.3% in 2007 to 36.3% in 2009 in rural areas in Moldova.
The national workshops took advantage of the skills and knowledge acquired by national professionals who have graduated from facilitated online training courses with the support of the EC/FAO Programme:

(i) Twenty-six professionals from the national institutions of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova have successfully completed the first facilitated online training course: “Food security: Assessment and Action” (five of them from the Republic of Moldova); and

(ii) Ten professionals have graduated from the second training course: “Assessing the impact of Development Programme on Food Security” (three of them from the Republic of Moldova).

Each course has provided 15 credits (European Credit Transfer System) that are fully transferable to the “UOC's Master's in Food, Society and International Food Governance”. The course was sponsored by the “EC/FAO Programme on Information Systems to Improve Food Security Decision Making in European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) East Area” and run by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya's (UOC).

The national professionals who have graduated from these courses have acquired a strong and holistic understanding of food security, as well as skills and knowledge to analyze food security projects, put those skills into action during the national workshop, which aimed at debating agricultural policies to support economic growth and reduction of food insecurity and poverty in rural areas of the Republic of Moldova.

2. Objectives of the national workshop

The main objectives were the following:

(i) Advance the national debate on agricultural policies related to food security and poverty reduction, in the context of agricultural development, taking advantage of the newly developed skills of the graduates.

(ii) Stimulate the dialogue between participants from a range of government institutions and development agencies on the policy options available for agriculture to further contribute to food security and poverty reduction.

(iii) Reinforce learning by encouraging graduates to apply the skills and knowledge acquired during the training to their country context and to communicate their findings to a wider audience.

The agenda of the workshop is provided in Annex 1.

3. Participation

The National Workshop gathered representatives from national institutions, NGOs, farmer representatives and private sector organizations that are responsible for, or involved in, the formulation and implementation of agricultural policies and policies related to the reduction of food insecurity and poverty. Thirty five professionals participated in the workshop including, in addition to the five training graduates, representatives from Ministry of
Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI), Institute of Economy, Finance and Statistics (IEFS) of the Ministry of Economy; representatives from national NGOs (National Agency for Rural Development (ACSA), AGREX NGO, Agricultural Development Institute), as well as regional NGOs, the National Farmers Federation and the private sector.

The workshop was moderated by Dr. Kay Muir-Leresche and Ms. Francoise Trine, EC/FAO Programme Coordinator. Dr. Kay Muir-Leresche is Professor at the University of Catalonia. She has led and facilitated the participation of national staff from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova in the online food security training courses. Dr. Muir Leresche worked in marketing in the USA, Zimbabwe and the UK in the 1970s, then as a fulltime professor of agriculture and national resource economics for 22 years and as an international consultant in sustainable agricultural development, food policy analysis and evaluation for the last 10 years.

The list of participants is provided in Annex 2.

4. Process

4.1. Opening

The participants were welcomed by Mr. Viorel Gutu, MAFI Deputy Minister. Mr. Gutu emphasized that the issues which were going to be discussed during the workshop, like fostering economic growth, increase food security and alleviation of poverty in rural areas, are in line with MAFI strategic priorities for 2012-2015 and the new Strategy for agriculture and rural development for the period 2014-2020.

The workshop was introduced by Ms. Françoise Trine (Picture 1). Ms. Trine presented the objectives of the EC/FAO Programme and the main activities which were being implemented in the Republic of Moldova. The workshop is part of the activities which are being implemented in all countries in collaboration with the graduates of the UOC training courses. All national workshops will focus on the same topic which is considered highly relevant to the four countries. The agricultural policies on which the debate will focus during the workshop have been selected by the graduates.

4.2. Presentations

The Keynote Speech was delivered by Dr. Kay Leresche. Dr. Leresche presented the concept of food security through the prism of its four dimensions: availability, access, utilization and stability, as well as the role of the State as facilitator of sustainable and equitable growth that reduces poverty and contributes to real food security. She pointed out that improving food security does not mean achieving self-sufficiency – improving income and security of exchange (markets/trade) is important to affordability of the food.

Based on experience from different countries, she explained that distortions of policies (subsidies, taxes, etc.) often favor large-scale agricultural producers. At the same time, most agricultural production comes from small farmers, which are poorer. International evidence shows that if you provide the needed infrastructure and services, small farmers are more efficient than large farms – especially in countries with high unemployment. Thus, increasing competitiveness of small farmers together with encouraging rural development will stimulate growth; will reduce poverty, rural-urban migration and political instability.
An overview of agricultural policies in Moldova was made by Mr. Ion Sula, Chief of General Department of Development of Sectorial Policies (MAFI). He explained that currently, the strategic vision for agriculture is integrated into the country's economic growth agenda and focuses on modernizing the sector as well as market access. Mr. Sula listed the main strategic documents, which are in force, particularly:

- the Program of the Government of the Republic of Moldova "European Integration: Freedom, Democracy, Welfare" (2011-2014);
- the National Development Strategy "Moldova 2020";
- the National Strategy for Development of Agro-Industrial Complex of the Republic of Moldova (2008-2015);
- the Food safety strategy for 2011-2015;
- the Strategy for Development of rural extension services for 2012-2022;
- the Concept of farmers' subsidy system for 2008-2015.

He also underlined the importance of the strategies under development for economic growth, reduction of food insecurity and poverty, such as: Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development for 2014-2020, Horticultural sector development program for the period 2013-2027 and Conservative Agriculture program. Mr. Sula also presented the Strategic priorities for 2012-2015:

- Implementation of the food safety reform;
- Restructuring and modernization of the wine sector;
- Support to the development of a modern market infrastructure;
- Implementation of conservative agriculture;
- Reformation of the meat and dairy products’ sector;
- Support to the development of production of renewable energy from agriculture wastes;
- Reorganization of existing education and research resources;
- Reorganization of agriculture subventions sector, aimed at the modernization and concentration of production;
- Implementation of a basic information system for the support of food chain functioning;
- Support to the development of Value-Added Agriculture.

The participants made some comments. In particular, the Vice-president of the National Farmer’s Federation stressed the fact that most subsidy beneficiaries are large scale farms and small farmers practically do not have access to the subsidy fund (Picture 2).

Mr Sula answered that this problem could be solved by creating producers' groups. A law in this regard was recently submitted to the Parliament.

The Food Security situation in Moldova was presented by Ms. Felicia Pricop, UoC graduate. The presentation was based on a recent survey by the World Bank which will be available soon. Ms. Pricop mentioned that food energy requirements for Moldova’s residents are on average largely being met. However, the proportion of people consuming insufficient quantities of food energy is fairly large in Moldova -29% - FED rate; 16% High FED rate
Prevalence of food insecurity increases with the household size. Farmers and agricultural employees are the two socio-economic groups exhibiting not only fairly poor food security outcomes, but also the least progress over time in their food security situation. Thus, the main food security bottlenecks are as follows:

- **Availability:** there is a high yield volatility caused by under-developed weather-related risk mitigation instruments;
- **Access:**
  - low agricultural prices result in low incomes and low purchase power;
  - low market competitiveness rooted in production and post-production deficiencies;
  - low coverage and targeting accuracy of social assistance transfers.
- **Utilization:** inadequate system of control over the safety of food sold within the country represents constant public health threat.

The analysis of the government agricultural subsidy policy, and its impact on economic growth, food security and poverty reduction: was selected for the workshop by the graduates and the presentation was delivered by Ms. Felicia Pricop. Ms. Pricop mentioned that the strategic priorities in agriculture serve as a basis for the sector growth and the subsidies fund has an important role in this process. Its objectives are: increasing productivity and competitiveness of the sector; increase farmers’ income and poverty reduction; attracting young farmers in the sector; as well as efficient use of natural resources. In order to provide a professional and efficient administration of the fund a new public body was established - the Agency Interventions and Payments in Agriculture subordinated to MAFI. The subsidy fund (app. 400 million MDL) makes about half of annual public expenditure allocated to agriculture and about 1% of total public expenditure. 20% of the fund is allocated to current needs (access to credit, access to irrigation, land fragmentation and volatility of agricultural production (subsidizing insurance in agriculture) and 80% for investments in modern agriculture: production and post-harvest infrastructure, high value sector, and more recently the creation of producer groups and support to young farmers).

Inclusion of small producers in subsidy schemes is very limited at present. Large corporate farms absorb 75-80% of the annual grants. This is true for both the current and the investment subsidies. Only protection subsidies for vegetable field crops have a higher proportion going to small farm associations.

Eliminating subsidies ceilings in 2011 has resulted in: reducing individual households included in subsidy schemes; increase the average size of a subsidy; increasing the gap between subsidies received by small and large size households.

*Is this appropriate to achieve the set objectives?* Agriculture subsidies fund is currently focused more on supporting large farm agriculture. It does not address poverty reduction or food security and international experience shows that it would improve agricultural growth more if it focused on improving the efficiency of small farms. The analysis concluded that the present agricultural subsidy program does have room for a more inclusive and sustainable approach to growth, food security and poverty reduction. The graduates proposed that now is a right time to think about the development model of the agricultural sector of Moldova: large corporate farms vs. small family farms and enterprises; high value products vs. low value products (taking into account the comparative advantages); quantity vs. quality/differentiation of local products.

4.3. **Recommendations**
Agricultural subsidy program has to support more: efforts to increase competitiveness must be complemented by efforts to stabilize and increase productivity of the sector, taking into account climate change. State support, including climate-related risk reduction and adaptation measures could be offered in locally relevant packages for small farmers including financial support, transfer of knowledge/information and advice to improve the efficient use of the technologies. To revitalize rural areas it is important to extend the coverage of the Agricultural Subsidy Fund to include more small scale farmers, farmers groups and young farmers. The graduates proposed that subsidies should be capped, that support should be given to small farm producer groups with a focus on attracting young farmers.

**Group work**

In order to discuss on policy/institutional changes proposed by the Country Team, participants were divided into two groups. The main debated issues were as follows:

**Group 1: What would be the model/vector of agricultural development in Moldova in order to achieve sustainable and equitable growth? (Picture 3)**

- Big corporate enterprises vs. small and medium family enterprises;
- High value added products vs. low value products (taking into consideration the comparative advantage);
- Quantity vs. quality/differentiation of local products.

Discussion of policies/policy instruments in order to sustain a model or another (what should do the state/MAFI to stimulate movement in the direction(s) desired, including through the Agriculture Subsidy Fund resulted in following conclusions).

**Corporate large farms vs. small and medium family farms**

Existence of big and small scale farms is a reality in Moldova therefore a mixed model would be most appropriate.

However the participants saw numerous advantages of small and medium family farms as a driving force. These are:

- Prevent migration of human and financial capital from rural to urban areas as well as abroad;
- The family farms are the main source of agricultural output in Moldova and improving their competitiveness will increase growth;
- In addition to increasing growth, support to these small farms will reduce poverty and lead to more equitable growth;
- Better competition and thus quality of agricultural products;
- Encourage association and cooperation processes between small and medium family farms aiming at strong promotion and protection of common interests;
- Create and diversify jobs in rural areas including non-agricultural (e.g. rural tourism, handicraft, traditional activities). Propose new support measures for subsidies.
- Youth support measures.
High Value (HV) added crops vs. field crops

- Advantages of HV crops: higher returns per unit of surface area, small areas requirements, better quality and marketing advantageous (HV products are easier to market in small quantities), more labor intensive and thus more jobs; HV products can be easily promoted/protected (unlike field crops) as traditional, regional, organic products, et. to gain better marketing opportunities
- Advantages of field crops: field crops help to reduce reliance on imports of national staples (wheat); field crops are part of value chains in animal breeding sectors; require less water.

Quantity vs. quality/differentiation of indigenous products

- Small areas of land - > incentives to improve quality and yields to obtain higher returns
- Big areas of land - > small economic incentives to improve quality (e.g. wheat production in Kazakhstan)

Group II discussed on the topic: How to re-model/adjust agriculture subsidy policy to address the objectives of economic growth, poverty reduction and food security in a comprehensive and sustainable way? (Picture 4, Picture 5)

What measures include and what measures should include the subsidies fund to contribute more effectively to: economic growth; poverty reduction and food security?

Economic growth

- Invest in research extension relevant to develop the economic activities of small farms;
- Invest in infrastructure and information support for marketing and processing agricultural commodities;
- Increase the investment subsidies for small farms;
- Extend the access to subsidies for small farms through credit associations;
- Focus subsidies on high value products;
- Encouraging the association of the small producers;
- Promotion of the local products within the country and aboard;
- Development of postharvest, transport, market and processing infrastructure;
- Increase the access to the technologies of the small farms.

Poverty reduction

- Apply indirect subsidy systems for the farmers or specific social groups from rural area;
- Decrease the cap level of the subsidies;
- Assure multilateral support for the rural areas youth,
- Fix the allocation for the subsidies: a fixed percentage from total budgetary expenditure or from GDP;
- Subsidy and support development of the processing industry and other non-agricultural economic activities in rural areas.

Food security
- Subsidies for the extension service;
- Subsidies for the qualitative seeds and breeding animals for small farms;
- Simplify the procedure for homologation of the new varieties.

Each group reported back to the Plenary, outlining their recommendations and the key ideas (Picture 6).

5. Workshop results

(i) Countries’ efforts to address food security and poverty were broadened by identifying priority issues for agricultural policies, related not only to food availability at national level, but also to accessibility and utilization (affordability of food, nutrition, poverty and gender in particular).

(ii) Graduates’ skills and knowledge were strengthened by applying theoretical learning to practical circumstances;

(iii) Networking between graduates within the country was strengthened, thus facilitating future exchanges and collaboration on food security and poverty.

Participants’ feedback after the workshop is presented in Annex 3.

6. Follow-up

The findings of the national workshop will be summarized in a Policy Brief that will be translated and widely disseminated in the country.
### Annex 1. Agenda for national workshop

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>9.00- 9.30</td>
<td>Registration of the participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.30 - 10.00</td>
<td><strong>Opening</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Viorel Gutu, Vice Minister, MAFI</td>
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<td>Ms Francoise Trine, EC /FAO Program Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.00 – 10.30</td>
<td><strong>Presentation</strong> (Dr Kay Leresche): Agricultural policies for growth and reduction of food insecurity and poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30 – 11.00</td>
<td><strong>Presentation</strong> (Mr. Ion Sula, MAFI): Overview of agricultural policies in Moldova</td>
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<td>11.00 - 11.30</td>
<td><strong>Coffee/Tea Break</strong></td>
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| 11.30 – 12.30 | **Presentation** (Country team: Mr. Eugen Chiabur, Mr. Radu Fala, Mr. Maxim Gorgan, Ms. Felicia Pricop, Mr. Sergiu Tirigan):  
|               | - Overview of the food security situation of the country                                               |
|               | - Selected government policies and programmes to address food security                                 |
|               | - Recommendations for selected policies and programmes to better contribute to food insecurity and poverty reduction |
| 12.30 – 13.15 | **Group work:** the objective is to review the recommendations made by the Country Team                |
| 13.15 – 13.45 | Presentation of the results of group work – Plenary discussion on the conclusions of the working groups |
| 13.45 – 14.00 | **Wrap up**                                                                                            |
| **14.00:**    | **Lunch**                                                                                            |
## Annex 2. List of participants

<table>
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<th>N</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Contacts</th>
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Picture 1. The workshop was introduced by Ms. Francoise Trine, EC/FAO Programme Coordinator.

Picture 2. Mr. Vasile Mirzenco, President of the National Farmer’s Federation of Moldova providing some comments.
Picture 3. Group 1 during the work process

Picture 4. Group II providing their opinions on the proposed subject.
Picture 5. Food security is a broad subject

Picture 6. Plenary presentation of the group discussions results
Annex 3. Participants’ feedback after the Workshop

Mr. Vasile Mîrzenco, President of the National Farmer’s Federation of Moldova

“I participated at a very interesting seminar from my point of view and I was surprised in a pleasant way that within the seminar were approached subjects that we are discussing within our organization for many years- that in the Republic of Moldova we see the problem of food security and eradication of poverty in the rural areas through the development of small and medium agricultural producers’ capacity for production and sales of agricultural products. We do not see a big perspective for large corporate farms, whose development is based on more on hired labor, because this becomes more and more expensive each year and the deficit of labor force is already felt in the rural areas. The solution of problems related to state food security and poverty eradication in rural areas depends a lot on the state policies promoted in this domain. We are convinced that in this matter an important role is to be played by professional agricultural organizations and rural entrepreneurs who have to participate in the improvement of these policies through participation in their elaboration and implementation. This kind of seminars have to be organized at regional and local level as well for the population to know where do the roots of this difficult situation in the rural sector grow are from and those who are responsible for the elaboration of policies in the agricultural domain and rural sector must also learn this modality of approaching food security and poverty eradication problems”.

Ms. Lilia BANUH – Civil Society Organization “Center for private initiatives”, from the North of Moldova, Bălți

“For a period of 10 years we are implementing and promoting the policies of the Ministry of Agriculture in the rural areas. The information presented during the seminar is every useful and we will share it with people in the regions where we work. The organization of similar seminars in the territory would be very welcome. Within the working group we concluded that the highest priority is held by the small and medium sector, thus these producers must receive the most support”.

Mr. Sergiu Țirigan – Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry

“The seminar allowed discussing the problems of food security both with colleagues from the civil society as well as those from the private sector and producers associations, representatives of agricultural producers. The promotion of food security is not only the task of the Ministry of Agriculture or other governmental structures. It is a common task and a common problem which has to be comprehended and promoted. The things discovered now, defining elements for the food security of Moldova, are very important and we succeeded together to identify constructive solutions to key problems, which was a benefic exercise. We can say that the number of persons who understand the key notions related to food security, the number of people who have capacities to promote policies, concepts related to food security, structure, integrate in their messages elements related to food security has increased. Colleagues present here are dialog partners at every policy elaborated and promoted by the ministry. Very often in our country food security is perceived through the prism of auto-sufficiency. From this point of view many had the perception that we do not need food security in the country, but the presentations and discussions today proved it is not so, that in the Republic of Moldova there are problems in food security and the presence of all sectors important for the republic, private and associative sectors, producers representatives, who succeeded in approaching, understanding key elements of the definition of food security and
defining elements is important. In the second aspect they succeeded to have a thinking exercise on some politics, on some problems.

All those who participated at the workshop are dialog partners and often in the framework in which a certain policy is discussed, there are people who promote the necessity of adopting one or another policy in our country and this is important from the point of view of promoting concepts and improving policies, adding to analyses made an element of interpreting the criteria of satisfying the level of food security”.

Mr. Eugen Chiabur – FAO Programme manager

I consider the workshop reached the objectives set and namely the increasing of the participants understanding the concept of food security. I am sure that until now a large share of the participants considered food security to be the availability of food and I assume to the end they were convinced that it is not only about food availability, other aspects of food security as are the physical or economic access, use as well as establishment of these three.

Another reached objective within this workshop is the incineration of discussions and debates on food security. I assume a large share of participants thought at the beginning of the seminar that Moldova does not face any problems related to food security. The discussion generated during this seminar will lead to a change in thinking of the participants related to this complex concept of food security, which in future might contribute to the elaboration of some policies or influence the process of public policies formulation in view of ensuring or introducing this concept in sectorial and national strategic policies which is very important, because for the moment, agricultural policies are oriented mainly towards the availability of food at country level and there are no problems in this matter, in the same time other elements of food security are disregarded. Definition of this problem as well as the further debates on this problem and the measures to solve are already a step forward towards solving this issue.

I consider this type of workshop where discussions are generated and a consensus is found regarding food security is very welcome for the future”.

Mr. Eugen REVENCO, Program Coordinator, ACSA Agency

“At this seminar, I established contacts with FAO representatives, with representatives of research institutions, non-governmental organizations that were involved in discussions that took place here regarding a major problem for human existence - ensuring food security of the country, poverty reduction and everything connected. It is a large problem and it is not limited only to 2-3 positions and discussions which were held as a result of reports presented. I do not think it solves the problem definitively, it was an introduction into the problem and it expanded the space for those who should promote the policies which were discussed here in their day to day activity in the centers or institutions which they represent as well as work with the populations, especially rural. It is also the task of the Agency that I represent and I think we will further contribute to solving such problems.