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United Nations Decade of Family Farming

Executive summary

The Near East and North Africa (NENA) region, like other parts of the world, faces a series of challenges related to food and nutrition security, rapid population growth, increasing urbanization, low growth in food production, and the degradation of already scarce natural resources. Conflicts, migration and climate change exacerbate these challenges. Current trends are clearly unsustainable and, if not adequately addressed, will further aggravate these challenges and hinder the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Small-scale family farmers are amongst the most vulnerable communities to any of the aforementioned shocks. Although they provide the majority of agricultural production in the region, small-scale farmers face a number of constraints that hinder their productivity, profitability and livelihoods. The United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDF) was launched in 2019 with the main goal of promoting these important livelihoods and mainstreaming actions to holistically support family farmers. The Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), aims to launch the UNDF in the region and align its work with the UNDF Global Action Plan (GAP), adapting it to the regional context. The expected result is a series of concrete regional actions that can be prioritized nationally and supported regionally to promote public policies and investments to support family farming, taking into consideration the various contextual constraints and specificities.

Suggested actions by the Regional Conference

The following recommendations are made to the Regional Conference:

1. welcome the UNDF;
2. encourage countries to take advantage of the momentum behind the UNDF and promote the development, implementation and monitoring of public policies and investments to support family farming;
3. call on FAO and IFAD to lead the development of a regional action plan and support countries in developing national action plans in alignment with the UNDF.

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I. Family farming and the 2030 Agenda

1. The United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDFE) provides an extraordinary opportunity for the United Nations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in an inclusive, collaborative and coherent way. Putting family farming and all family-based production models at the centre of interventions for a period of ten years will contribute to building a world free from hunger and poverty, where natural resources are managed sustainably and where no one is left behind. In so doing, the UNDFE supports the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.
2. Family farmers, around the world, hold unique potential to become key agents of development strategies. Family farming itself is the predominant form of food and agricultural production in both developed and developing countries, producing about 80 percent of the world's food in value terms¹. Given the multidimensional nature of family farming, the farm and family, food production and life at home, farm ownership and work, and traditional knowledge and innovative farming solutions are all deeply intertwined.
3. Recognizing the core role of family farming and its potential for sustainable development, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2019–2028 as the United Nations Decade of Family Farming at its 72nd session. The International Steering Committee (ISC) of the UNDFE was established to oversee its implementation and is supported by the FAO and IFAD joint secretariat. The UNDFE serves as a framework for countries to develop public policies and investments to support family farming and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. It addresses family farming from a holistic perspective with a view to eradicating rural poverty in all its forms and dimensions, while giving the SDGs a central role in the transition towards more sustainable food systems and societies. To guarantee the success of the UNDFE, action must be supported by coherent, cross-sectoral policies, concurrently addressing the environmental, economic and social dimensions of agricultural and rural development.
4. The UNDFE was launched in Rome on 29 May 2019. The launch was attended by 448 participants, including 216 family farmers and representatives of civil society, academia, and the private sector (including small and medium-sized enterprises [SMEs], large enterprises, social enterprises and foundations) and 232 delegates from 113 countries.
5. One of the major outcomes of the UNDFE is the Global Action Plan (GAP), which aims to accelerate actions undertaken in a collective, coherent and comprehensive manner to leverage family farmers' potential as key agents of sustainable development. To effectively support family farming, it is necessary to consider its particular geographic and socio-economic specificities and to develop context-specific interventions focused on the explicit features of the relevant family farmer groups, while building on locally available resources and capacities. The GAP serves as a tool to create connections with ongoing processes and recommended approaches where family farming, rural development and sustainable livelihoods are already present, as well as supporting the development and implementation of strategies at global, regional, national and local levels.
6. The GAP calls for countries to develop their own strategies for implementation by setting an ambitious target of 100 national action plans worldwide to be developed by 2024. After the

¹ FAO. 2014. The State of Food and Agriculture. Innovation in family farming. Rome. (available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4040e.pdf>)

global launch, the UNDFE directly entered into the implementation phase. It is very promising to note that more than 30 countries already moved into implementation and initiated the development of their own national action plans for family farming, including the investments that will be channelled to rural development programmes and commitments from different governmental institutions.

7. The UNDFE was launched regionally in the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean in August 2019, with the support of IFAD. The Dominican Republic, the Gambia, Indonesia and Peru have approved their national action plans; while Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Cameroon, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Costa Rica, Ghana, Mali, Mexico, Nepal, the Niger, the Philippines, Portugal, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and the United Republic of Tanzania are in the process of drafting their national action plans commensurate with the GAP.

II. Pillars of the UNDFE

8. The overall structure of the GAP is comprehensive and the different pillars address issues directly linked to the SDGs, such as building resilience, tackling inequality, increasing productivity, empowering communities and contributing to sustainable development. The UNDFE has seven pillars that focus on different aspects of supporting family farmers in both developing and developed countries. These are outlined in the pillars below.

Pillar 1. Develop an enabling policy environment to strengthen family farming

9. This pillar aims to build and strengthen supportive policies, investments and institutional frameworks for family farming at local, national and international levels based on inclusive and effective governance and on timely and geographically relevant data. It also aims to guarantee sustained political commitment and investment by state and non-state actors, and to create and strengthen international, national and local cooperation and partnerships with a view to promoting the rights and multifunctional role of family farming.

Pillar 2. *Transversal* Support youth and ensure the generational sustainability of family farming

10. This pillar aims to ensure the generational sustainability of family farming by enabling youth to access land and other natural resources, information, education, infrastructure, financial services, markets, and policy-making processes related to farming. It also aims to leverage the intergenerational transfer of tangible and non-tangible farming assets, and stimulating young farmers' capacities to interconnect traditional, local knowledge with innovative ideas to become agents of inclusive rural development.

Pillar 3. *Transversal* Promote gender equity in family farming and the leadership role of rural women

11. This pillar aims to support instruments and conducive actions for the achievement of women's rights and gender equality in food and agricultural production. It also seeks to promote gender equality by reinforcing women's organizations, promoting self-empowerment and women's autonomy and agency, in order to increase access to and control over productive and financial

resources, especially land, as well as access to information, social protection, markets, job opportunities, education, appropriate extension services and gender-friendly technology. This pillar also aims to foster women's full participation in policy processes.

Pillar 4. Strengthen family farmers' organizations and capacities to generate knowledge, represent farmers and provide inclusive services in the urban-rural continuum

12. This pillar seeks to strengthen the (self-) organization of family farmers within all rural institutions, including associations, cooperatives and civil society organizations. In so doing, it aims to foster their capacities as agents of change; enhance the generation and dissemination of knowledge and services to maintain the economic, social, cultural and environmental diversity of rural areas in a harmonious interconnection with urban areas; and to enhance family farmers' meaningful participation in decision-making processes at all levels.

Pillar 5. Improve socio-economic inclusion, resilience and well-being of family farmers, rural households and communities

13. This pillar focuses on the improvement of family farmers' livelihoods and the enhancement of their resilience to multiple hazards. It also deals with rural communities' access to basic social and economic services by addressing the multiple social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities of family farmers and promoting the realization of human rights. It then aims to promote production diversification to reduce risks, improve the consumption of healthy and nutritious food, expand and diversify family farmers' production and economic opportunities to access inclusive and equitable markets and income-generating activities.

Pillar 6. Promote sustainability of family farming for climate-resilient food systems

14. This pillar aims to improve family farmers' access to and responsible management and use of land, water and other natural resources in order to enhance sustainable and diversified production. This would improve resilience to climate change, foster productivity and the economic viability of family farming, promote a market environment, which promotes short food supply chains and create new employment opportunities in rural areas. The pillar also values and promotes indigenous and traditional knowledge, and increases the availability of diverse, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, contributing to sustainable, resilient and inclusive food systems and to healthy diets in both rural and urban areas.

Pillar 7. Strengthen the multidimensionality of family farming to promote social innovations, contributing to territorial development and food systems that safeguard biodiversity, the environment and culture.

15. This pillar focuses on fulfilling family farmers' potential towards protecting the environment and preserving the diversity of ecosystems, genetic resources, culture, and life. It promotes their role in fostering social innovation, economic opportunities and market solutions that rely on family farmers' services, production and processing with specific quality characterization; thus enabling more diverse food consumption while increasing economic opportunities and preserving traditional practices, knowledge, and agricultural biodiversity, contributing to territorial development.

16. These pillars are implemented through an extensive list of activities implemented through various modalities of action, including data collection pertaining to specific issues, advisory and extension services, and communication and advocacy activities tailored to target groups. However, to effectively achieve the aims of the UNDF, the GAP needs to be adapted at the regional and country levels.

III. UNDF in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region

17. The NENA region, like other parts of the world, faces a series of challenges related to food and nutrition security, rapid population growth, increasing urbanization, low growth in food production, and the degradation of already scarce natural resources. Conflicts, migration and climate change exacerbate these challenges. Current trends are clearly unsustainable and, if not adequately addressed, will aggravate the above-mentioned problems and hinder the achievement of the SDGs. Small-scale family farmers are amongst the most vulnerable communities to any of the aforementioned shocks. Although they provide more than 80 percent of agricultural production in the region, small-scale family farmers face a number of constraints that hinder their productivity, profitability and livelihoods.
18. In the NENA region, the Regional Initiative on Small-Scale Family Farming (RI-SSFF) was launched by FAO in 2015 and provides countries with a cohesive framework to promote sustainable small-scale agriculture as a means to reduce rural poverty and improve the livelihoods of the most vulnerable communities. The initiative focuses on a comprehensive programme addressing small-scale family farming development. Through its integrated approach, the initiative works directly with governments, smallholders, cooperatives, formal and informal rural institutions and producers' organizations. Its strategy is channelled into three main areas of work:
 1. developing sustainable and innovative practices to boost the agricultural productivity of small-scale family farmers and their associations;
 2. developing and incentivizing decent rural employment opportunities and complementary social protection mechanisms for small-scale family farmers;
 3. strengthening the capacities of rural organizations and institutions to improve small-scale family farmers' access to rural services and markets.
19. Through these three major areas of work the regional initiative focuses on the multidimensionality of family farmers and is highly relevant to the pillars of the UNDF GAP owing to its focus on:
 - a. developing sustainable and resilient small-scale agriculture and advancing policy options to sustainably improve productivity, quality and value addition of small-scale production;
 - b. promoting decent rural employment, especially among the youth;
 - c. supporting social protection, rural services and access to markets for small-scale farmers for inclusive economic growth that will benefit small farmers and their rural communities.
20. The opportunity to mainstream the UNDF is also an opportunity to align national priorities with the areas of work of the regional initiative. The GAP plays an important guiding role, by

recommending a series of indicative actions to be considered as guidance for developing plans and strategies at different levels. The UNDFP also focuses on innovations, especially social innovations, in the sphere of small-scale agriculture. There is a growing need for countries in the NENA region to further invest in and adapt innovative solutions, and the GAP provides the vision for that. Given this, the regional initiative is well placed to adapt to current global trends and directly supports countries in the development and implementation of certain technologies that could be challenging at first. Global research in development is a key asset that needs to be further channelled down to countries, and the international community has a role to play in that.

IV. Way Forward

21. Given the opportunity to work regionally on the promotion of activities that strengthen family farming, the regional initiative will launch the UNDFP at the regional level. The importance of this event is not only that it will mark the relevance and prioritization of small-scale family farming, but also that it supports countries in the development of public policies and investments for family farming, and in the design of national action plans based on national priorities, guided by the GAP and supported by the regional initiative and by FAO/IFAD in key areas for development. The event will take the form of a high-level workshop and is scheduled to take place in 2020. The regional launch expects to reconcile national priorities on small-scale family farming with regional resources and the UNDFP GAP. The expected results of this event are:
 - Output 1: Sensitize FAO partners regarding FAO's effective contribution at national and regional levels throughout the region through the RI-SSFF;
 - Output 2: Prepare a regional work plan for the NENA region and identify the outputs and main activities, under the framework of the UNDFP;
 - Output 3: Identify the relevant actors, including networks, to validate and launch the regional RI-SSFF work plan that reflects the UNDFP GAP.