

## POLICY BRIEF

# Enabling Family Farming to speed progress across the 2030 Agenda



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## KEY MESSAGES

- Family farmers are powerful agents of change in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Evidence suggests that smallholder family farms are more sustainable, better at protecting biodiversity, more inclusive and more productive per unit of land than other kinds of farms. Consequently, developing food systems that promote this kind of farming is central to achieving some of the main objectives of the 2030 Agenda – especially ending hunger, protecting ecosystems, and building peaceful and equitable societies.
- Policies, safeguards and institutional arrangements are needed to protect the rights of family farmers to land and other natural resources, and to involve them as active participants in the development of their communities and societies. Internationally negotiated policy tools, in particular those of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), provide governments and other stakeholders with guidance on how to ensure the participation of smallholders, and the respect of their rights, in national development.
- Markets must be accessible and remunerative for family farmers if they are to fulfil their role and provide sufficient and nutritious food for all. Existing barriers and sources of bias need to be addressed and support must be provided for the markets that family farmers are most involved in.
- Given the challenges facing global food systems, the world needs young farmers, now more than ever. To achieve this, a new kind of family farming is required – one that innovates, takes advantage of both new technologies and traditional knowledge, is supported by policies and investments, and is market-based and remunerative.

On 20 December 2017, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution 66/222<sup>1</sup> proclaiming 2019-2028 the United Nations Decade of Family Farming. In so doing, the United Nations explicitly recognized “the role that family farms play in improving nutrition and ensuring global food security, eradicating poverty, ending hunger, conserving biodiversity, achieving environmental sustainability and helping address migration”.<sup>2</sup> The Resolution builds on the success of the 2014 International Year of Family Farming and, more pertinently, gives family farming a central role in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Many factors justify this assessment by the UNGA:

- From an economic perspective, higher incomes for family farmers mean more spending in the local economy, especially on non-farm goods.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, backward and forward production linkages come into play, the first supporting production by providing local inputs, capital and services (e.g., machinery and credit), the second underpinning processing and distribution of agricultural products (e.g. storage, processing centres, markets and restaurants). This is why promoting family farming is an effective way of developing the rural economy – both on and off the farm.<sup>4</sup> There are also labour market benefits through the generation of local employment, as well as production benefits – through improved land productivity associated with family farmers’ knowledge and practices.<sup>5</sup> Further benefits include better education, nutrition and health among local rural populations as the livelihoods of family farmers and their workers are improved.
- From a social perspective, family farmers are central in promoting equity, poverty reduction and employment opportunities. Indeed, communities where family farming is predominant have been found, in diverse contexts, to offer more opportunities for civic and social engagement, greater attachment to local culture and landscapes, and higher levels of intra-community trust.<sup>6</sup>
- From an environmental perspective, the close attachment of family farmers to local communities and landscapes, and their reliance on these, naturally make them custodians of biodiversity and ecosystems. More specifically, sustainable approaches to agriculture such as agroecology, organic agriculture and permaculture are best suited to relatively small parcels of land and rely on the intimate knowledge of landscapes and natural environments that family farmers generally demonstrate.

In sum, the Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 offers a compelling opportunity to enable family farmers to fulfil their potential as accelerators of progress across the 2030 Agenda.

## DEFINITION AND DIVERSITY OF FAMILY FARMING

Considering the diversity of family farms around the world, no all-encompassing definition exists. However, it may be stated that family farming exhibits several features, including: family ownership and management of the farm; extensive reliance on family labour; and families living on their farm.

Another common, though not universally applicable, characteristic of family farming is that farms tend to be relatively small.<sup>7</sup> For example, in Africa and Asia, where family farming

<sup>1</sup> For full text, see: <https://undocs.org/A/RES/72/239>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See the often-cited Engel’s law, as incomes increase, the proportion of household expenditure devoted to food declines (Engel E [1857] *Die Productions- und Consumtionsverhältnisse des Königreichs Sachsen*. Zeitschrift des Statistischen Bureaus des Königlich-Sächsischen, Ministerium des Innern, 8 (9), pp. 1-54).

<sup>4</sup> Suttie, D. (2019) *Smallholder farming, growth linkages, structural transformation and poverty reduction: Lessons and prospects for sub-Saharan Africa*. Rome: IFAD.

<sup>5</sup> See detailed literature outlined in: FAO and IFAD (2019) *The future of family farming in the context of the 2030 Agenda*. Available at: [www.fao.org/3/ca4778en/ca4778en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca4778en/ca4778en.pdf): p.7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Exceptions to this may be found in land-abundant countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

predominates, the majority of farms are 2 hectares in size or less. In such contexts, the terms “family farming” and “smallholder agriculture” largely overlap. Moreover, while average farm sizes tend to be larger in other regions, an estimated 84 per cent of the world’s farms are 2 hectares or under.<sup>8</sup>

## THE VISION AND GLOBAL ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE DECADE

The overarching vision for the Decade is: “A world where diverse, healthy and sustainable food and agricultural systems flourish, where resilient rural and urban communities enjoy a high quality of life in dignity, equity, free from hunger and poverty.”<sup>9</sup> As set out in the Global Action Plan for the Decade, enabling family farmers to deliver on this vision requires appropriate public policies, programmes and regulations that widen opportunities for family farmers to be key accelerators of progress for the 2030 Agenda.<sup>10</sup>

That can only be achieved by working with family farmers and their organizations, listening to their views and advice, and supporting their agency around decisions at the global, national and local level for the effective implementation of the Decade. Bearing in mind the diversity of family farmers within and between regions, as well as the different needs of the various groups working within family farming, the Decade can only realize its vision of serving all stakeholders if family farmers themselves are integral to its implementation. This is why the Global Action Plan was developed through a consultative process in which family farmers and their representatives – as well as other state and non-state actors – were given the opportunity to provide their views on priorities and challenges for the implementation of the Decade.

With this background in mind, this brief aims to outline some key areas in policy and investment to be addressed in order to make the Decade a success.

## ENTRY POINTS FOR POLICIES AND INVESTMENTS

### 1. Respect and enable family farmers’ ownership and access to land and other natural resources, including water

Access to land and other natural resources is fundamental for the viability and sustainability of family farmers’ livelihoods. There are concerns, expressed by family farmers during consultations around the Decade and reported in academic studies,<sup>11</sup> that public policies and practice often tend to favour the acquisition of land by large-scale investors at the expense of any claims by local family farmers. Approaches to land tenure and titling need to be based on an understanding of local institutions and the often-customary systems that inform land tenure in rural societies. United Nations Declarations – such as the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas,<sup>12</sup> and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)<sup>13</sup> – recognize the need to safeguard the rights of small-scale family farming communities to land and other natural resources, while inter-governmentally negotiated and endorsed policy tools – such as the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT)<sup>14</sup> – provide guidance to public authorities on how to achieve this in practice.

<sup>8</sup> FAO (2014) *The State of Food and Agriculture. Innovation in Family Farming*. Rome: FAO.

<sup>9</sup> FAO and IFAD (2019) *United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028: Global Action Plan*. Available at: [www.fao.org/3/ca4672en/ca4672en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca4672en/ca4672en.pdf): p.13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see: Deininger, K. (2014) Securing land rights for smallholder farmers. In: OUP Oxford (ed.) *New directions for smallholder agriculture*. Rome and Oxford, UK: Oxford and IFAD; Vorley B., Cotula, I. and Chan, M.K. (2012) *Tipping the balance. Policies to shape agricultural investments and markets in favour of small-scale farmers*. Oxford, UK: Oxfam International; and Gyau, A. et al. (2014) *Smallholder farmers’ access and rights to land: The case of Njombé in the littoral region of Cameroon*. Special Agroforestry Issue: Vol 27, pp. 23-39.

<sup>12</sup> See: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1650694?ln=en>

<sup>13</sup> See: [www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](http://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> See: [www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf)



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#### Recommendations:

- Recognize the legitimate claims of family farmers to their traditional lands, territories, and natural resources; implement international human rights, including treaties and the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, as well as the UNDRIP.
- Devise approaches, institutions and tools (including communications and digital technologies where appropriate) to ensure stakeholders living in remote areas are provided with space and opportunities to have their voices heard in planning and policy processes; specifically, provide spaces for family farmers' organizations to participate in policy and planning processes.
- Work with local institutions, such as family farmers' organizations, indigenous peoples' groups and water-user groups, to identify ways of recognizing and securing the rights of family farmers to land and other natural resources, understanding that existing rights are often grounded in customary systems; consult, adapt to local contexts and implement the CFS Guidelines (see box 1).

#### 2. Support family farmers' markets and promote food systems that enable family farmers to fulfil their role in providing healthy and nutritious food for people in rural and urban areas

In the years and decades ahead, food systems need to provide sufficient, affordable and nutritious food for a growing global population, while dealing with the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss, and contributing to solutions to mitigating the drivers of these existential threats. At the same time, some trends – such as growing urban markets, strengthening rural-urban linkages,<sup>15</sup> and new technologies – are creating opportunities for

<sup>15</sup> For more information on rural-urban linkages in the context of food systems and what they mean for smallholder family farmers, see: IFAD (2017) *Policy brief: Promoting integrated and inclusive rural-urban linkages and food systems*. [Online] Available at: [www.ifad.org/en/web/knowledge/publication/asset/40256615](http://www.ifad.org/en/web/knowledge/publication/asset/40256615)

### **Box 1. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security**

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security, endorsed by the CFS in 2012, is the first global, inter-governmentally endorsed agreement on the tenure of land and other natural resources. The Guidelines represent the establishment of internationally accepted principles and norms to define responsible practice with respect to the ownership, management, and use of land, fisheries and forests. They support the realization of the human rights of family farmers and other rural people and are therefore an important tool for the implementation of the Decade.

The Guidelines promote responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests with respect to all forms of tenure: public, private, communal, indigenous, customary and informal. They serve as a reference and set out principles and internationally accepted standards for practices for the responsible governance of tenure, providing a framework that countries can use when developing their own strategies, policies, legislation, programmes and activities. They allow governments, civil society, the private sector and citizens to judge whether their proposed actions and the actions of others constitute acceptable practices.

The full document is available at: [www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/i2801e/i2801e.pdf)

family farmers, though not all are set to benefit. For family farmers to prosper and contribute to better food and nutrition outcomes, the priority must be on promoting food systems that are not only fairer and more inclusive, but also more productive and sustainable. In this realm, more focus is needed on areas such as strengthening the markets in which family farmers operate – local and domestic markets,<sup>16</sup> as a rule – as well as on removing biases in agricultural markets generally, for example discriminatory international trade policies. Issues related to the true cost of food also deserve consideration, especially since much seemingly low-cost food (which family farmers are forced to compete with) is actually relatively expensive when social and environmental dimensions are taken into account.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

- Support local markets, including informal markets, where most food is produced, including by providing financing mechanisms in collaboration with municipalities, local authorities, and the private sector to fund necessary infrastructure and services.
- Promote fair, inclusive, and equitable food markets from local to global level, enabling family farmers to access these (see box 2) and addressing sources of bias that disadvantage local family farmers vis-à-vis larger industrial operators: these include regulations, subsidies, and other trade and investment rules and norms.
- Explore and implement tools that internalize the true cost of food production – for example ecological economics<sup>18</sup> – to improve the functions of markets and raise awareness of the social and environmental costs and benefits associated with different types of food production and marketing.

<sup>16</sup> Elaborated on in: IFAD (2016) *Agrifood markets and value chains*. In: Rural Development Report 2016. Rome: IFAD; and acknowledged in: Committee on World Food Security (CFS) (2016) *Connecting smallholders to markets: Policy recommendations*. [Online] Available at: [www.fao.org/3/a-bq853e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-bq853e.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> See: Holden, P. (2016) *The True Cost of Food*. [Online]. ILEAI – Centre for leaning on sustainable agriculture. Available at: [www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/436356/](http://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/436356/). [Accessed April 5, 2019].

<sup>18</sup> Family farming knowledge platform (2016). *The true cost of food*. [Online] Available at: [www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/436356/](http://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/436356/) [Accessed December 2, 2019].

### 3. Invest in enabling family farmers to develop resilient livelihoods

Family farmers the world over live and work in many of the landscapes most susceptible to climate and environment-related stresses and shocks – for example in tropical regions, in mountainous areas, in low-lying coastal plains, and in arid and semi-arid regions. By its very nature, agricultural production relies on interaction with natural processes involving the climate and environment, making family farmers a key group in adapting to the already inevitable consequences of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. At the same time, it makes them agents of change in addressing the drivers of these mounting challenges. The traditional volatility in agricultural markets<sup>19</sup> also makes family farmers vulnerable to economic shocks. Tailored policies and interventions are thus needed to enable family farmers to cope with the multiple risks they face, to protect their livelihoods in times of crisis, and to contribute to addressing the causes of major environmental issues, especially those raised by climate change.

#### Recommendations:

- Invest in social protection programmes specifically aimed at family farmers covering the provision of training, access to employment, financial services and transfer of productive assets, where feasible. The aim is to protect livelihoods, encourage adoption of sustainable practices and manage risks.
- Recognize, raise awareness and support initiatives to document the practices, innovations and traditions that characterize family farming and contribute to adapting to environmental and climatic challenges. Publicize the potential of these practices to sustainably increase agricultural productivity.
- Invest in more and better tools in the field of agricultural risk management, consulting with family farmers and their organizations to understand the problems they face and to develop apposite approaches.

#### Box 2 . Connecting Smallholder Family Farmers to Markets

In October 2016, the CFS endorsed a set of policy recommendations on “Connecting Smallholders to Markets”. The document built on a high-level forum convened by the CFS as well as a two-year consultation process informed by a technical task team in which IFAD, FAO and WFP, along with civil society and private sector representatives, took part. The recommendations recognize the key role of smallholder family farmers in promoting food security and offer good policies and practices to develop this role.

These recommendations are far-reaching and touch on not only topics such as food safety standards, but also on what kinds of markets smallholder family farmers are most involved in, and how to support those markets. The document further provides advice to smallholders, governments, United Nations agencies and other stakeholders on applying the recommendations to national and regional policies and programmes.

The document is available at: [www.fao.org/3/a-bq853e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-bq853e.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Arising as a consequence of both production and consumption elasticities being relatively low in the short term; consider that planting decisions cannot be adjusted in response to a change in prices, whereas in other (non-agriculture) markets producers are able to moderate supply based upon short-term fluctuations in demand.

#### 4. Promote innovations and technologies to develop the dynamism of family farming and make it an attractive career option for young people

New technologies and innovations are already transforming the way many family farmers work and have shown potential in attracting young people to activities around family farming, both on and off farm. At the same time, accessibility, especially linked to affordability, and suitability present challenges on the generally small scale in which most family farmers operate, as does fostering the kinds of innovation that can help family farmers thrive. It is also important to recognize family farmers' traditional knowledge and practices and adopt bottom-up approaches to promoting and adapting innovations. Social, and not just technical, innovation is also required, for example in addressing barriers to the participation of women in some family farming activities.

Young people are among the most dynamic actors in food systems, with the potential to contribute to the positive transformation of the way food is produced, marketed, and consumed. Indeed, given: a) their large numbers in many parts of the world where family farming is the principal provider of employment and the main contributor to GDP – especially in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>20</sup>; and b) the nature of the challenges to family farming and food systems, it is imperative that specific policies, investments, and institutional arrangements are targeted at youth in the context of the implementation of the Decade (see box 3).

##### Recommendations:

- Prioritize public investment to complement and, where necessary, compensate for shortfalls in private investment to improve the accessibility of new technologies – such as digital technologies and ICTs – in rural areas; provide education and training opportunities to facilitate their uptake by family farmers.
- Create spaces for family farmers and their organizations to elaborate on the kinds of innovations needed for them to address the challenges they face, and how these may relate to existing knowledge and practices.
- Develop specific policies, programmes, and investments aimed at young people – such as agri-entrepreneurial incubation centres – with measurable indicators in terms of youth participation and impact, and involving youth in their design, implementation and monitoring.
- Recognize the need for social innovation, in particular through measures to promote women's empowerment within food systems, including by running programmes to advance their ownership of land and other productive assets, and to access markets and services.

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS ON THE SDGS THROUGH FAMILY FARMERS

Family farmers are key agents of change in achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. Family farmers perform essential tasks in producing food, managing natural resources and contributing to community cohesion. Supporting and building these roles is central to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda – especially ending hunger, protecting ecosystems, and building peaceful and equitable societies. The successful implementation of the Decade is therefore vital to the 2030 Agenda.

A key next step will be the contextualization of the Global Plan of Action through the development of National Action Plans (NAPs). It is encouraging that interest and commitment among Member States has been strong, with at least 100 NAPs expected to be in place by 2024.

<sup>20</sup> In Africa, where shares of employment in agriculture remain relatively higher than other regions, the proportion of youth in the population is higher than in other regions, while the number of youth is still increasing, as is the rural population in general. See: Mabiso A. and Benfica R. (2019) *The narrative on rural youth and economic opportunities in Africa: Facts, myths and gaps*. 2019 Rural Development Report Background Papers. Rome, IFAD.

### Box 3. IFAD's Rural Youth Action Plan

IFAD's recently approved Rural Youth Action Plan aims for 50 per cent of its portfolio of loans and grants to be youth-sensitive, meaning that youth dimensions will be carefully analysed and assessed when designing projects and that youth will be the central target group for concrete objectives, activities, and results frameworks. Against this backdrop, IFAD will implement a comprehensive menu of interventions to foster youth employment as well as their social empowerment, tapping into wider labour markets while also generating jobs through entrepreneurship development.

To achieve this, the main focus will be on vocational and technical training and business development services, with other activity streams including credit and equity financing for youth-owned enterprises and start-ups. Concrete examples include:

- IFAD's recently launched Agribusiness Capital Fund. This will provide young rural agro-entrepreneurs with small investments to fill the "missing middle" financing gap and thus spur local producers and production. The Fund focuses mostly on Africa, where it will help the private sector invest in rural areas and provide employment for youth. It will also channel funds directly to youth working in the private sector.
- IFAD's partnership with the Songhai Centre in Porto Novo, Benin. Linked with IFAD projects in the region, this initiative carries out training, production and research by combining traditional and modern learning methods. The Songhai model presents an integrated system of production where agriculture, animal husbandry and fish farming interact with agro-industry and services. Values such as creativity, innovation, initiative, competitiveness and organizational capacity are stressed to young trainees.

The implementation of these NAPs, through investments and enabling policies, and supported by IFAD, FAO and their partners, is the main avenue through which the ambitions of the Decade will be realized.

As the Decade begins, expectations are therefore high and so too is commitment among IFAD and its partners to provide family farmers and their organizations with the support they need to achieve the vision enshrined in the Decade of Family Farming.



International Fund for  
Agricultural Development

Via Paolo di Dono, 44  
00142 Rome, Italy  
Tel: +39 06 54591  
Fax: +39 06 5043463  
Email: [ifad@ifad.org](mailto:ifad@ifad.org)  
[www.ifad.org](http://www.ifad.org)

[facebook.com/ifad](https://facebook.com/ifad)

[instagram.com/ifadnews](https://instagram.com/ifadnews)

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