

The Mediterranean Farmers' Perspective on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Marco Marzano de Marinis

Secretary General
World Farmers Organization (WFO)



During the course of the current year, the combined presentation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the approval of the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN General Assembly in New York, will finally bring sustainability at the forefront of the international policy coordination agenda.

Expected to frame political and corporate policies over the next 15 years, the SDGs are a set of 17 ambitious goals described as "action oriented, global in nature and universally applicable", and accompanied by 169 associated targets, very general and to be adjusted for each country according to general conditions and existing priorities.

Compared to their predecessors the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), SDGs broaden the sphere of action to include new topics such as sustainable growth, resilience, reduction of inequality, sustainable consumption, climate change, access to energy and conservation of both land and marine resources.

While MDGs have not fully considered the holistic nature of development. The SDGs find respective correlations within topics in a way to create an overall action plan to be tackled simultaneously at different levels: globally, nationally and locally. In addition to eliminating poverty, the new framework will need to address the drivers of change, such as economic growth, job creation, reduced inequality and innovation that makes better and more careful use of natural resources. The MDGs were considered targets for poor countries to achieve, with finance from wealthy states. With SDGs, every country will be expected to work towards achieving the goals.

Within this massive project every actor in society -from national Governments to members of civil society, international organizations and academia - will have to play a role.. This works also for the private sector such as agriculture and the farming, that are increasingly emerging as global player in the development of the agenda.

The role of farmers in detail

The role of agriculture in the achievement of Goal 2 claiming to ensure to "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture" by 2030, is fundamental. Farmers have a crucial role to play and must be in a position to feed the world population by providing healthy, nutritious, affordable and diverse food, while protecting the environment, securing food safety and respecting animal welfare. Food security underpins the achievement of almost every development goals, as it is a major contribution to lifting people out of poverty by enabling them to find a decent job and go to school.

Farmers should produce food that be enough, good, safe and at reasonable prices for consumers. They can produce food in a wide variety of ways, year round. This variety is key to end all forms of malnutrition as it allows for a balanced diet, acknowledging the nutritional value of vegetables, as well as of animal food products and ensuring healthy lives. Sustainable agriculture is a fundamental element for the future development agenda as it creates lasting growth in rural areas and ensure food security. It is about bringing together different agricultural systems, depending on the local traditions and regional constraints, which can jointly deliver conventional or organic agriculture, reduce tillage, provide efficient nutrient and water management and inspire environmentally sustainable management of grasslands. A similar observation should be made with regard to the protection and availability of genetic diversity in agriculture (2.5), which should be promoted not only as such, but also as a functional model to a sustainable and competitive agricultural production.

For what concerns Goal 15 claiming to "Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forest, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss", farmers are stewards in combating desertification and land degradation. Yet, they can do more than avoid downgrading of land. In fact, farmers can actively upgrade farmland by contributing to halting biodiversity loss. They can provide valuable experiences to increase the nature potential of farmland as well as to the management of nature's reserves. In this regard, they are key in providing access to green spaces and help strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's natural heritage, thus creating the pillars for the development of sustainable tourism, leading to higher occupational rates in rural areas.

Looking through the SDGs and especially on the single targets set within each goal, further comments related to the role the agricultural sector is likely to play arise as follows:

- Goal 6 claims “*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*”, the agricultural sector has already made good progress and should be considered to be one of the areas where it is still possible to increase efficiency. However, appropriate investment is required, as it will support farmers in optimizing the use of water in the production processes as well as in the management of water resources.
- In Goal 7, centred on the “*access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all*”, agriculture can be a playing field for the use of renewable energy sources able to boost and optimize the use of agricultural soils.
- Goal 11 calls for making “*cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*”. Along this goal one of the target focuses on the availability of “safe, inclusive and accessible” green areas in urban areas by 2030 (paragraph 11.7). This is also an objective that can benefit from the support of agricultural enterprises around the world.
- Goal 12, addressing the private sector for more “*sustainable consumption and production patterns*”, cannot but involve the agriculture sector already struggling to significantly reduce food waste and losses along the supply chain of food production (paragraph 12.3). To this purpose the optimization of consumption patterns and production techniques are key elements that can certainly be improved through research and innovation.

The Post-2015 Agenda won't be effective unlike the targets set will be attentively monitored. It is necessary to intervene and setting specific deadlines for achieving goals. It is also important to always have global agricultural enterprise representatives involved, at least for the objectives that are directly and indirectly related to agricultural production. That is why the World Farmers' Organisation, WFO, is strongly engaged in representing the voice of farmers in the Post-2015 negotiations, in its capacity of Operating Partner for the Farmers Major Group.

The Mediterranean perspectives

Not only can the SDGs improve the farming sector for the reasons mentioned above, but they can also enable farmers from the Mediterranean area to have access to tools, regulations, innovative systems used by other countries in the same sector. Moreover SDGs can likely guarantee a more sustainable food production leading to food security for farmers.

Evidence shows that the Euro-Mediterranean Region is vulnerable to environmental disasters, both land-based and at sea. According to a report¹ realised by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Program, the Mediterranean coastal environment provides the livelihood for at least 150 million people. 13 gas plants, 55 refineries, 180 power stations, 750 yacht harbours, 286 commercial ports, 112 airports, and 238 desalination plants were listed by the same report along the Mediterranean coast; they could be potential sources of environmental emergencies. The report states also that establishing adequate measures to mitigate the impact in case of natural or man-made disasters is a top priority for the whole region. Hopefully, the SDGs can act as a concrete solution to these issues. They will, with no doubt, contribute in raising awareness of governments and as well as making citizens more familiar with the possible negative consequences on the Mediterranean environment.

Over the last decades, the Mediterranean basin has increasingly become a complex socio-economic, political and institutional area spanning several geographical spaces and entities, such as EU countries, pre-accession and candidate countries, those involved in EU Southern Neighbourhood Policy, Euro Mediterranean & multilateral institutions, as well as different sets of sub-national, economic and civil society actors. This diversity of stakeholders represents a variety of local, regional, national, EU and global cultures; as well as of geopolitical situations, strategies and policies. Not to mention cross-cutting challenges at basin level such as sustainable development in its so-called three dimensions (economic, social and environmental); the action on climate change and environmental risks prevention, or the promotion of decentralization and democratic governance, among many others.

While planning and monitoring the implementation of the SDGs the Mediterranean area, there are several factors that must be contemplated. The first one is the climate in this area. In North Africa and in Southern Europe, a considerable amount of land has been forsaken, especially in arid and mountainous regions, giving rise to the possibility of fires. We also need to consider that some of these areas in Northern Africa have become temporary homes of local nomads; therefore they must also be considered while implementing SDGs. The proposed Goal 5, aiming at achieving gender equality and women empowerment is also crucial regarding agricultural progress. Indeed in the Mediterranean, women play important role in agriculture, in cattle farming but they participate very rarely in the decision making process. At all levels, civilian and governmental in the Mediterranean, girls and women should have an equal access to information, school, work and be represented

¹ Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Program (PPRD South) February 2013, <http://www.preventionweb.net>

Regarding Southern European countries, the main issues to consider are the economic and social concerns regarding agriculture. Countries such as Greece and Spain have seen their agricultural sectors stagnate because of the financial crisis. Recovery has not been successful as both political and economic solutions have been unable to solve the problems. This has caused society, as well as farmers to demonstrate their lack of support for institutions. Therefore cooperation with farmers will be essential in creating trust in the accomplishment of the objectives. Farmers in these regions will need educational, financial and institutional support in order to allow them to compete with the prices of other producers within the European Union. In regards to North African regions, efforts will have to be directed towards eradicating poverty. This step will allow society, especially farmers, to position themselves more adequately and focus on agricultural development. Moving on, in order to achieve such sustainable goals, it is primordial that efficient use of water and soils is promoted among producers. It is a key step in preventing the loss of biodiversity in the region. This means that the farming culture will have to transform and adapt to the current situation farmers are living in.

In view of these global challenges, it therefore appears crucial to strengthen multi-level and territorial cooperation within the Mediterranean rims, in order to reinforce the assets the area naturally benefits from, while reducing and solving the common challenges it has been faced with over time.² Accomplishing these goals will not only depend on National Governments, but also on a broader spectrum of stakeholder and on individual choices, at large. The detailed approach to these goals aims at creating an environment of engagement from the people for the people. This is where WFO's expertise and network will be crucial in ensuring that the voice of world's farmers is heard clear and loud.

Conclusion

As representative of the global farming community, WFO has been leading the involvement of the Farmers Major Group in the preparation phase of the Post-2015 agenda and it is keen to continue taking over this critical role during the implementation phase.

WFO community is composed of National Farmers Organisations, strongly engaged in the political lives of their countries. In this perspective, WFO members look at the SDGs implementation phase as an opportunity to strengthen their cooperation with National Governments and to support them to implement the Goals with a view to reinforce the agricultural sector from the national to the global level. In fact, national Farmers Organisations may provide an added value to the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SDGs, in close collaboration with National Governments.

Moreover, Farmers' Organisation may give their fundamental contribution to the realization of a so-called "data revolution", the gathering of more and more precise statistical information on agriculture within countries that will be used to measure the success of the SDGs implementation.

On their side, to be really effective in tackling issues arising from sustainability, farmers need access to appropriate knowledge and skills in order to make continuous improvements to agricultural sustainability. Investments in education and capacity building will provide lasting returns. Farmers need the possibilities to acquire the appropriate knowledge and to become real entrepreneurs. This is because the economic dimension of sustainable development is important as well as the social and environmental ones.



² European Economic and Social Committee, *The post-2015 objectives in the Euro-Mediterranean region*, by Ms Le Nouail Marlière, June 2015