

## Transformation pathways for the food and agriculture sector: a necessary debate for the post 2015 agenda

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### **Sustainable development as a universal and not only a global challenge**

2015 global negotiations on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and on Climate change are particularly crucial for Mediterranean countries. Both negotiations are converging towards the common understanding that sustainable development issues are critical challenges necessitating international cooperation, but that they cannot be solved by solutions decided at the global scale, because each national situation is very specific.

In both the SDG and in the climate discussion, 2015 is a very important milestone because in each case there is a recognition of the universality of the challenges : each country has to invent a new development pathway to face jointly all the challenges of the 17 SDGs (from access for all to health, education, sustainable energy and food to eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities, and to preserving biodiversity and ecosystems); each country also has to reflect on a development pathway to face jointly the objective of climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Even if common but differentiated responsibility concerning global environmental degradation, as stated in Rio 1992, is still at the heart of UN discussions, there is a common understanding that action to reduce environmental degradation and greenhouse gases emissions is necessary not only in Northern but also in Southern countries, and that adaptation to climate change, access to health, food and energy as well as fighting poverty and inequalities are not challenges only in Southern countries but also in Northern countries.

This is why every country has agreed to produce for the Climate negotiation their specific *Intended Nationally Determined Contribution* (INDC), accounting for national objectives and strategies to 2030 both for adaptation to and mitigation of climate change, as a response to both national and global challenges. Based on these declared national efforts, whose cumulated impact on global greenhouse gases emissions is still insufficient to reach the objective to stay under a +2°C increase in global average temperature in 2100 compared to preindustrial levels, international cooperation will have a key role to play to engage a collective learning process and address other needs for cooperation (financial transfers, capacity building, innovation...) to make these policies effective and rapidly more ambitious. In the SDG framework agreed at the UN General Assembly on September 25<sup>th</sup>, each country will also have to account for their efforts and achievements in reaching the SDGs. The critical assumption behind these two international processes is that the international arena and its processes of accountability will help support national policy debates addressing what will be in many cases the need for a deep transformation of development pathways.

### **Transforming food and agriculture systems: a necessity for sustainable development in the Mediterranean area**

The Mediterranean context is particularly illustrative of the fact that attaining the Sustainable Development Goals will not be possible without a deep transformation of the development pathways, and in particular, the transformation of food and agriculture systems. First, the impact of climate changes will be particularly important in the Mediterranean basin, amplifying the frequency and magnitude of extreme events of droughts, heat waves, storms and floods, while at the same time reducing the average availability of water. Already existing phenomena of water scarcity, soil erosion and degradation will therefore be foreseen to be even more acute.

Adapting to these changes will therefore be a key challenges for many of the agricultural systems in the Mediterranean, and in some cases it could mean a complete reconversion of specialised supply chains to other crop types, which could mean, inter alia, changing cropping patterns and choices, developing new markets and new partnerships with processing industries and retailers, renegotiating contracts and value shares in supply chains... Given the role and place of the agriculture and food sector in national economies and particularly its share in the national workforce, such reconversion challenges clearly call for a debate on the social, economic and environmental orientations of the sector, in each of the Mediterranean countries.

Of course, many of the challenges faced by agriculture and food systems in Mediterranean countries are already very acute in the shorter term. Therefore, to some extent, having climate change and sustainable development so high on the international agenda in 2015 can be considered mainly as a political window of opportunity to put the systemic challenges concerning agriculture and food at the heart of national debates; as stated before, international processes could also be useful to help the structuration of such national policy debates, with deadlines, a set of objectives, targets and indicators; these international processes might also constitute a legitimate reference statement for civil society organizations, private sector or other stakeholders to ask for a debate on long term transformations of the food and agriculture sector in order to prepare innovative public policies.

The scarcity and vulnerability of water and soil resources are of course at the heart of this sustainable development challenge, but technical solutions to improve water efficiency or soil management practices will not be solving the problem if the economic, social and political dimension is not taken into account. First of all, employment and decent incomes is a critical issue for all Mediterranean societies, and not reducing or even increasing the amount of jobs in the agriculture and food sector will probably be necessary in a variety of national contexts where the other sectors of the economy also struggle a lot to offer jobs to a growing and young population. But what are the trends of change in the number and structure of farms, and their labor intensity, driving the level of employment in agriculture? These trends are influenced by international and internal competition, changes in land tenure regulations, but also by choices in terms of techniques and technologies (choices made to preserve the environment or to increase productivity, substituting capital to labor,...), or by the changes in markets and supply chains for different products. Solutions for sustainable development in this sector therefore have to address jointly all economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Moreover, managing the scarcity of water or land resources will also mean not just to develop resource efficient practices, but also to make politically very difficult choices of allocation of resources between users, therefore allocating development opportunities for the future between sectors and between regions. In this case, managing the scarcity of resources means to make stringent political choices, with some sectors of agriculture and some regions being favored, while others will be the losers of such arbitrages. Such political choices can not be accepted politically at the national scale if they are not made within a larger framework of a vision for the transformation of the whole agrifood sector and its role in the national economy, as well as its role for regional development of different regions. Such radical transformations of development pathways and their differentiation between sectors and regions need to be prepared and debated, and the SDG process offers a very good opportunity to open such a difficult debate in the proper systemic and long term framework.

### **Based on national long term transformation pathways, a renewed debate on the need for international cooperation**

If the 2015 global negotiation processes put very much at the centre the role of national domestic policy debates, this "bottom-up" perspective is also a way to reconstruct on a sounder basis the motivations for international cooperation. Once we know what transformation every country would need to accomplish, what are the needs for international cooperation in order for these national transformation to be made possible or even more ambitious? These processes are in that regard also an opportunity to identify with a new lens the crucial needs for cooperation between Mediterranean countries, based on what countries need to achieve their own specific transformation towards sustainability.

Among the needs for international cooperation, the Addis Ababa Conference on Financing for Development in July 2015 tackled the priority question of international financial transfer, if we are to implement the very ambitious post 2015 agenda. And it put the focus on the role of public international financial transfers in order to catalyze private investments. For many Southern Mediterranean countries, having a clearer vision of the longer term transformation of the economy is in this regard a key factor to succeed in attracting and making the best use of those financial transfers, either from public or private sources.

But there are also other dimensions for which international cooperation will be crucial. First, international policy dialogues at the Mediterranean scale would be very useful to serve as learning processes for policy making, in a context where these policies will need to rely on sound institutional frameworks, able to anticipate future resources scarcities, deal with critical political decisions to face necessary reconversions or reallocations, all processes where the impact of political choices for losers and for winners will be very important, necessitating both transparency and deliberation, and the design of compensation mechanisms.

Second, all these transformations in national agrifood sectors will have to be made consistent with one another, because of the interdependency between these countries and regions, either through shared resources, through common markets, or through the mobility of people. The capacity of countries to adjust, and negotiate with one another will be critical, in times of rapid economic and social changes for the agrifood sector in every of the countries. Preparing jointly for the reconversions of the agrifood sector should be a priority project for the Mediterranean international institutions.

Lastly, one of the earliest drivers of radical change in the agrifood sectors in the Mediterranean region will be linked to the liberalization of trade between countries. These crucial negotiation processes between the European Union and other countries of the region, or between these countries, need to be assessed with the clearest vision in mind of the necessary transformation in each country, particularly given the stringency of the employment challenge in a region with limited natural resources. While sustainable development is often considered a secondary or annex chapter in trade liberalization, the SDG and Climate processes could be an opportunity to question the very soundness of proposed free trade agreements when referred to the systemic challenges addressed under the SDGs.

Because of the criticality of the sustainable development challenge faced by many Mediterranean countries, national debates on transformation pathways in agriculture and food systems are necessary. But, as they particularly will deal with the issue of employment, these visions of the transformation should also be used as necessary building blocks of a broader analysis of possible pathways of sustainable development for the whole Mediterranean region. Building common markets, sharing and jointly managing resources, are considered unavoidable dimensions of international cooperation at the regional scale. The SDG process, because of its systemic nature, necessarily questions the possibility that such neighborhood cooperation could avoid properly addressing also the mobility of the workforce and migrations, that might be made necessary in some countries because of the transformation of the structure of the economy and of the unavoidable reconversions in some sectors, even if national policy debates are not yet prepared to accept it. It is urgent to pave the way for such discussions.

