

THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) came to their conclusion at the end of the year 2015. The MDGs have been a milestone in global and national development efforts, catalysing important actions by governments and the wider international community in support of poverty eradication and human development. However, progress in achieving these eight MDGs has been uneven across regions and countries. In addition, the siloed approach of MDGs with regards to development objectives and their insufficient emphasis on sustainability have represented critical shortcomings that the new development agenda has aimed to address. Their disproportional focus on achieving economic growth and improving education and health left little space for trifling over the ecological aspirations of MDG 7 (“Ensure environmental sustainability”). After the first Rio Conference on Sustainable Development held in 1992, much of the MDG era was still characterised by the illusion of competing demands between economic, social and environmental progress.

In September 2015, the international community approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a successor framework to the MDGs, including seventeen new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The new Agenda makes a resounding statement for addressing sustainability in all its dimensions, economic, social and environmental, while achieving the overall objectives of eradicating poverty and hunger. While the 2030 Agenda is intended as a global framework, not much discussion has taken place yet to consider what the new Agenda could mean for a region such as the Mediterranean, given its unique features, particular challenges and fragmented political integration. Although much progress has been made to achieve the MDGs in the region, several challenges remain to both ensure food security and reverse the degradation of natural resources. From 1961 to 2010, the region’s ecological footprint increased by 54% whereas its biocapacity dropped by

21% indicating that socioeconomic progress heavily depends on natural resources and imports. Regarding sustainability priorities, the social pillar was very much promoted during the Rio Summit of 2002 (Johannesburg) which resulted in improved global socioeconomic conditions in the region; however, in the Mediterranean, this progress could be difficult to maintain and extend, due to a strong and costly dependency on resources as the Mediterranean environmental assets do not meet the region's demand (GFN, 2014).

Through the lens of agriculture and the sustainable use of natural resources, this chapter will outline the main challenges in the Mediterranean in the framework of the shift from the 2030 Agenda to the MDGs, highlighting critical improvements and gaps with respect to the new SDGs. It will then specifically focus on the main regional initiatives in the Mediterranean aimed at rural and agricultural sustainability, before an in-depth discussion on what it could mean and what it would take to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean at regional, national and local levels.

The Role of Agriculture from MDGs to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the seventeen SDGs and their 169 targets represent a radical shift from the MDG approach. They have adopted a fully integrated approach to sustainability, focusing on its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental; they are universal goals, which means they will apply to all countries and not only to the developing or least-developed countries. They are characterised by a strong country ownership and an inclusive process; they have adopted a more holistic approach, leading to a more integrated agenda, with critical sustainability dimensions covered under various Goals. They call for countries to mobilise domestic resources as well as enabling conditions to catalyse investments and resources, including, but not limited to, Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The new Agenda comes at a critical time and was welcomed by many, including the Mediterranean countries, which have contributed to its shaping through a patchwork of regional arrangements, including the Union for the Mediterranean, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA), the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Arab League. The world today is certainly very different to what it was in the year 2000, and while the narrow and segmented approaches of the past yielded some results, they can no longer carry us forward in the face of increasing environmental, social and economic challenges. Among the most pressing challenges facing the world today is feeding a growing global population projected to increase from over 7 billion currently to over 9 billion by 2050. This will require food production to increase by 60% globally and to nearly double in many developing countries (Alexandratos and Bruinsma, 2012). This challenge is compounded by the additional threats of climate change, increasing water and land scarcity, soil and land degradation, and a deteriorating natural resource base.

These threats will likely be felt more acutely in the Mediterranean, which has for some time been identified as a “climate change hotspot”. Climate change impacts in the region are becoming increasingly evident. Observations over the last decades show that temperatures have risen faster than the global average and that dry spells are becoming frequent. All model projections agree on the region’s future warming and drying with potential huge risks and costs to the region’s economy, population centres and biodiversity.

To a large extent, tackling these issues require investments in the capacities and the security of tenure rights of small-scale producers who still dominate the landscape around the Mediterranean, in order to help them remain stewards of natural resources and environmental wellbeing. The multidimensional causes of natural resource degradation require integrated actions across sectors to address the challenges. Better political and policy coherence, alignment, coordination and cooperation among agriculture, health, water, energy and other sectors are needed to improve global sustainability in consumption and production (CIHEAM, 2015). Reducing natural resource degradation and its associated social and economic costs, must begin with good governance of natural resource systems. The key lies in ensuring healthy and dynamic ecosystems that are more resilient to stresses and better able to cope with – and respond to – climate change, extreme weather events, emerging diseases, shifts in population patterns and economic disruptions and shocks.

Agriculture, a vector for sustainable development

Recent scientific research highlights the imminent reach of thresholds that will lead to irreversible changes in climate and ecosystems, and therefore in human societies. Agriculture is the main threat in five key areas: biodiversity loss, the disruption of nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, changes in land uses and water use challenges. Regarding the first two, these limits have already been surpassed (Costanza *et al.*, 2012). This means that the current level of food production already has excessively high marginal environmental costs. If global food production is to increase by 60% by 2050 without a drastic improvement in the sustainability of food systems, the costs for the environment and hence for human society will likely be overwhelming.

Compounding the challenge is the problem of food losses and waste, an estimated one-third of global food production is lost or wasted at different stages of the food chain (FAO, 2011a). While it is clear that food losses and waste exact an enormous toll on natural resources, the phenomenon has a variety of causes. Along the value chains and particularly with regards to processing and distribution methods, there are risks associated with the high concentration in the food industry on the one hand and a high concentration of produced varieties (with associated diversity loss) on the other hand.

Several proposals have been made in order to tackle the conundrum of increasing food production whilst ensuring the sustainable use and management of natural resources (FAO, 2011b, 2012a, 2013 and 2014). What is clear is that agriculture broadly understood (including crops, livestock, fisheries, forestry and aquaculture) is a critical priority sector in ensuring sustainable development, balanced in its three

dimensions. Studies have demonstrated that agricultural growth is, on average, at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth originating in other sectors and up to five times more effective in resource-poor low-income countries. Productivity growth in agriculture generates demand for other rural goods and services and creates employment and incomes for the people who provide them, with benefits rippling from the village to the broader economy (FAO, 2012b). Simulations show that agriculture in green economy could produce 40 million additional jobs in the next forty years compared to a “business as usual” scenario (UNEP, 2011).

Also critical for the region will be the adoption of a more nutrition-sensitive approach to agriculture, wherein national policies and investments integrate nutrition objectives into food and agriculture policy and programmes, with the aim of ensuring food security and enabling healthy diets (ICN2, 2014). Whereas all the developing countries in the Mediterranean region have achieved the MDG 1.c target of reducing by half the proportion of undernourishment, progress on other fronts has been less encouraging. Out of the countries that have achieved the MDG 1.c target, only Turkey has also achieved the more ambitious World Food Summit target of halving the number of undernourished people. Across the Arab littoral of the Mediterranean, progress on stunting has been marginal in the last decade, even though the micronutrient deficiencies that account for this phenomenon have lasting effects on societies and economies. Moreover, the entire Mediterranean Basin has been affected by a “nutrition transition”, where, as income and urbanisation increase, people gradually adopt a lifestyle with reduced physical activity and a diet of more energy-dense, semi-processed foods leading to an increase in overweight and obesity. In Arab countries, 45.1% of adults are obese, whereas obesity is over 20% in Malta, Spain, Turkey, Cyprus, Albania, Italy, Greece (ESCWA, 2013).

For any such progress to happen, agriculture must be decoupled from the degradation of natural resources and instead help increase productivity, reduce negative externalities and rebuild natural capital. The presence of significant risks generated by competition over land must also be recognised, as well as the competition between crops for food and those for bioenergy production. The appropriate instruments required to address these issues include integrated policy frameworks such as the “Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure” (CFS, 2012) and the “Principles on Responsible Agricultural Investment” (CFS, 2014), as well as a broader rethinking of the many existing economic tools that penalise investment in the environment, such as price subsidies and subsidies for the combustion of fossil fuels and for food production. Such perverse incentives lead governments to effectively sponsor those practices that go against preserving the quality of environmental goods. Renewed regulatory frameworks will thus be needed to establish standards that regulate and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

It is clear from the above that agriculture lies at the heart of sustainability concerns reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, providing the thread that links society, the economy and the environment. At the same time, agriculture is being, and will be, more affected by the ongoing deterioration of natural resources. Despite undeniable progress regarding food security improvement in the region, the

impact of climate change may jeopardise these achievements by accelerating natural resources degradation and precipitating a decline in agricultural yields. Recent studies suggest that agricultural land will be reduced by a progressive desiccation of cropland in southern countries and by the flood risk related to the rise of the Mediterranean Sea (World Bank, 2014).

Sustainable rural development and the waste of natural resources

Regarding agriculture and rural development, the situation is rather contrasted between the South and the North of the Mediterranean; agriculture has many functions in both sub-regions though in different contexts. In the South, agriculture still dominates the rural economy and contributes to rural communities' livelihoods by providing jobs and food products (Campagne and Pecqueur, 2014). Rural tourism and agro-tourism are also developing, enhancing rural diversification, though reluctantly in view of the socio-political instability in many southern Mediterranean countries since 2011 and the lack of appropriate infrastructures. In the North, since the 1990s, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was set up with the aim to improve the environment, landscape and social quality of rural areas. For decades, the CAP together with the rural development strategy guidelines fostered intensive farming practices until awareness was raised on serious health and environmental consequences. Some public health crises like the "mad cow disease" generated sufficient pressure from civil society to allow the development of alternative models of agriculture at political level, relying on the integration of social and environmental values at territorial level and the recognition of the multi-functionality of agriculture, the provision of environmental services by farmers and their contribution to economic diversification. Meanwhile, tourism has become a strategic opportunity for remote rural areas development. Alternative forms such as natural tourism, agro-tourism and ecotourism are flourishing, thus contributing to rural diversification.

Much progress has been made to achieve the MDGs in the region. Still, the waste of natural resources has become a serious constraint to sustainable rural and agriculture development. Moreover, local knowledge associated to natural resources management in specific contexts is also vanishing. As a matter of fact, in the Mediterranean, this knowledge loss is due to the significant transformations of rural societies and their agriculture over these last decades and also to the environmental degradation. Regarding rural societies, agricultural and economic policies have generally led to rural exodus, an increasing abandonment of land and agriculture by the youth, the ignorance of former practices and of their benefits for environmental quality and food production. Simultaneously, the emergence of a new type of agriculture funded by external investors that acquire land can contribute heavily to both the waste of natural resources and local knowledge (Bessaoud and Requier-Desjardins, 2014). Most investors usually prefer securing short-term gains without considering social and environmental associated costs.

Although the northern and the southern Mediterranean shores present important differences in their agricultural and rural development trends, sustainability is a common challenge for the entire region, the growth of inequalities, either economic, social or environmental, could quickly evaporate gains by generating more pressure on the region's natural resources, political stability and migration trends.

Main regional initiatives to address the challenge of rural and agricultural sustainability

Several regional initiatives have been launched in order to ensure sustainable development in the region. These initiatives have been substantially harmonised with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda process and the SDGs. They reflect a strong concern for improving coordination and governance in national decision-making processes.

The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development: towards an ecological approach to rural development

In 2005, the first Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) was developed with a ten-year horizon under the coordination of the *Plan Bleu* and Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) and in partnership with the countries of the region and major regional and international actors in the field of agricultural and rural development such as the CIHEAM and the FAO. The process and its outputs were closely aligned with the MDGs' structure and orientations. In 2014-2015, Mediterranean countries worked on the elaboration of the second Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (2015-2025) (UNEP-MAP, 2015a). The following Box presents the structure and objectives of this text.

Rural development according to the MSSD (2015-2025)

The MSSD focuses on the environmental dimension of sustainable development, highlighting the natural wealth of the region, the human pressures and the need to ensure development in the long run. The strategy has six main goals at two levels:

- Three are specific and linked to territorial reflections because they can be addressed jointly at local level: coastal and marine areas (1); natural resource management, production and food security and rural development (2); the management and planning of sustainable Mediterranean cities (3).
- Three are global and transversal: climate change as a priority for the Mediterranean future (4); the transition towards a blue and green economy (5); improving the governance to promote sustainability (6).

Agriculture is not a strategic objective *per se* but either a sub-objective of environmental targets or a target related to the access to markets. Main actions relate then to the development of sustainable rural tourism, the valorisation of local knowledge and to the capacity building of rural actors to enhance agricultural and rural sustainability.

Source: UNEP-MAP (2015).

Regarding agriculture and rural development issues, the second MSSD recommends an ecosystem approach integrating the different dimensions of sustainability. Indeed, the second target reaffirms that natural resources, rural development, and food security are interdependent components all contributing to collective wellbeing. Throughout the text of the second MSSD, appropriate legislation and regulations are referred to as relevant tools contributing to mainstream rural development. Environmental impact assessments are promoted to improve the management of natural resources within the economic objective of production.

Suggestions of better regulations include:

- The implementation of incentives for farmers to engage in agricultural practices that protect the environment and for industries to restore land and water resources that have been degraded due to extracting activities.
- The regulation of the competition over land between food security and energy objectives within agriculture.
- The evaluation of the processes of land attribution and of their conditionality. This is a critical issue because there are seldom constraints regarding the integration of environmental and social concerns in these arrangements (Vianey *et al.*, 2015).

Similarly to the SDG process, the second MSSD seeks to overcome intra-regional disparities to offer a single and coherent vision for the region's future. This may entail the harmonisation of some regulations regarding the environment at regional level. Governance has also been identified as a priority objective throughout the participative process of elaboration: sustainability cannot be reached without development practitioners and ordinary citizens being equipped to respond appropriately to global challenges. As the degradation of natural resources in one place can have impacts at regional level, collaboration between Mediterranean countries is therefore necessary for sustainability.

Two relevant regional initiatives: Climate Change Adaptation Framework and the OZHM

One of the three transversal sustainability issues in the MSSD relates to the necessity of climate change adaptation, given that the impact is expected to be particularly acute in the region. This has led to the elaboration of a Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework for the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Zones, still under development (UNEP, 2015). Five elements in the draft document of this strategy are already in line with the MSSD and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

- The lack of shared scientific knowledge on climate risks, vulnerability impacts and adaptation in the Mediterranean. This is about broadly addressing the issue of capacity building at all levels and for all groups, as a prerequisite to the implementation of sustainability.
- The lack of transfer of existing knowledge to all the segments of society.
- The need to develop regional collaborative research networks to better generate and share knowledge, which relates to the issues of science and knowledge that are central to sustainability.
- The promotion of an enabling institutional environment for the integration of adaptation into national and local planning, including the implementation of

necessary reforms, which is in line with target two of the MSSD emphasising regulation and legislation to organise natural resources management in the ecosystems and rural development sustainability approach.

– The necessity to find suitable funding systems to increase investments to combat climate change and favour adaptation, which is related to innovative funding in the quest for sustainability.

Regarding agriculture and rural development, the strategy plans to identify the main geographical areas of vulnerability as a prerequisite for the development of contextualised adaptation actions, and to invest in research activities (for instance on agricultural seeds) and the monitoring of these adaptations. Knowledge is a core issue as all the above-mentioned orientations intend to limit the waste of knowledge.

Similarly, the Observatory of Mediterranean Humid Zones (OZHM) is a regional initiative referring to sustainability processes and focusing on the production of operational knowledge. The OZHM was created in 2009 as a unit coordination of thirty-four technical and institutional partners in the Mediterranean, including, conservation and development administrations, civil society organisations, higher education and research bodies and some representatives of both the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD). It aims at: giving appropriate information on the state and tendencies of humid zones (1), identifying the threat and delivering appropriate orientations to promote their conservation, rational use and their restoration (2), and evaluating how these areas are considered in the Mediterranean sustainable development context (3). The OZHM approach is built on the DPSIR model (Drivers, Pressures, State, Impacts and Responses Model) initially developed by the Economic Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1992) and the European Environmental Agency (AEE, 1999) to promote sustainability in public policies. The Observatory also works in line with the SDGs approach, developing indicators of state pressure and tools that are coherent with the sustainable development approach. This coherence is crucial because country partners need to understand clearly how thematic or global initiatives can be interlinked and implemented at national and local levels.

The Observatory delivered its first assessment in 2012 (OZHM, 2012a and 2012b), which confirmed the disappearance of half the humid zones during the last century and the further degradation of most remaining areas, even when they are protected. It is a critical issue for sustainability, as humid zones are one of the main bases allowing the economic development of the region. The Observatory also identified a lack of skills and knowledge about ecological and environmental issues within the administrations in charge of development, both at local and national levels.

Local planning and the low consideration of environmental issues

The implementation of sustainable development norms encourages countries to develop planning processes at local scale and in a participatory manner. The OZHM has launched several studies to see how environment is taken into account in local planning processes and documents in the southern and eastern Mediterranean.

The analysis carried out on nineteen local planning documents shows that environment is marginal in the strategic axes that are declined into projects and actions. At local level, the environment is better represented, but mainly with a utilitarian vision considering the environment only for human needs. These results relate to both the institutional segmentation between development and environment administrations and a lack of skills and knowledge in the field of ecology and environment.

Capacity building on global challenges and the environment therefore appears as a main strategic and urgent target to promote sustainability, sound reflections and implementation at local level where the sustainability can be tangible, perceived and lived by all actors.

Source: Chazée et al. (2013).

The MSSD invites countries to focus more on environmental goals while elaborating development actions and encourages them to make flexible use of the regional framework and to develop and strengthen their national priorities. Countries can also refer to and benefit from other regional or global initiatives as they are in line with the SGD and the MSSD process. Regional cooperation is necessary in terms of collaborative production and sharing of knowledge.

Mediterranean regional cooperation: the Euromed and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

The Mediterranean region is influenced by European policies and cooperation projects in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). One main objective of the ENP is to reduce socio-economic disparities in the region and to integrate the environmental dimension in development projects. It is implemented through various channels and tools such as the cross border cooperation programme in the Mediterranean, ENPI CBC MED (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument – Cross-Border Cooperation in the Mediterranean).

Since 2008, the cross border cooperation programme “Mediterranean Maritime Basin” aims at promoting socio-economic development (1), environmental sustainability (2), better mobility for people, goods and capitals (3), cultural dialogue and local governance (4). It is dedicated to private and public actors from the coastal regions bordering the Mediterranean and organised in cross-border partnership. Ongoing and ex-post capitalisation (2007-2013) shows that among the 95 funded projects, 38 concerned environmental issues such as water, waste, energy, natural resources and coastal areas. In order to better understand the place given to agriculture in the funded projects, one still needs to get back to the projects classification according to the three calls for tender. In 2008-2014, 32 projects have been funded according to environmental priorities. Among them, four deal with agriculture, more specifically with agricultural water (3) and agricultural pollution (1).

ENPICBC MED projects (2007-2013) and the marginal place of agriculture

With regards to the projects funded that address priorities other than strictly environmental, three of them focus on the “promotion of socio-economic development and the enhancement of territories” and the “promotion of agriculture and agri-food systems” and five others related to the “promotion of cultural dialogue and local governance” deal with agriculture. In total, when adding the four projects addressing interactions between environment and agriculture, there are twelve projects out of ninety-five that address agricultural issues: four are connected to environmental objectives, five to participatory governance processes and three to socio-economic development.

More broadly, regarding agriculture and rural development, only one EU ENP programme specifically targets this sector: the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) implemented by the CIHEAM in the Neighbouring countries since 2012. This programme provides reflections and orientations for the development of agricultural policies that support farmers and rural development in the Euro-Mediterranean countries.

Source: ENPI CBC (www.enpicbmed.eu).

Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean

While the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been designed by member States in the context of an intergovernmental UN process, implementation will invariably take place at national and particularly local level. It is evident that the local dimension of development is increasingly intertwined with global and national issues. Issues such as peace, human security, health, employment, climate change and migration are mainly addressed at regional and international level, but long-term solutions often require attention to national and local dimensions, implications and nuances. Local planning, participation and governance will therefore be crucial for most solutions. To a large extent, the achievement of many MDGs indeed depended on local governments and local stakeholders. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will thus require national commitment to provide an appropriate legal framework, as well as institutional and financial capacity to local governments. National and local contexts are often shaped by the economic and social situation, colonial history, political realities and social norms and behaviours. Since the Mediterranean region is one of the more diverse regions in the world, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will be more successful if solutions to problems fit the local context taking account of cultural characteristics and if the full diversity of stakeholders is captured. (e.g. governments, civil society, business etc.) (UNDG, 2014a).

As the emerging development agenda is expected to encapsulate a set of development goals that are more interdependent, transformative and universally applicable than the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda will require greater capacities, more responsive institutions and stronger political will for successful implementation. In this regard, strong public institutions can be enablers, but unfortunately, what has often been the case in the region are weak public institutions that have sometimes encumbered

implementation. A transformative development agenda will thus require upgraded, coordinated and integrated institutions and capacities, especially in the southern Mediterranean countries that are going through political transitions.

Effective coordination mechanisms to strengthen vertical (multi-level) and horizontal (multi-stakeholder) relationships in the Mediterranean region are necessary for the implementation of the 2030 agenda. National governments and multilateral organisations must promote enabling environments to maximise the full role of local and regional governments and local stakeholders in development. At national level, implementation responsibilities should be clearly divided among different levels of government, taking into account the distinct comparative advantage of each level, and accompanied by effective coordination mechanisms that harmonise efforts across them. In concert with national governments and key local stakeholders, local governments can plan and manage appropriate local responses to the challenges of urbanisation, resilience and sustainable use and management of natural resources. Decentralisation, subsidiarity and good governance at all levels are essential for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (UNDG, 2014b).

At the policy level, it is clear that the piecemeal approaches of the past require a drastic overhaul. The MDG approach in several countries of the region suffered from a focus on quick fixes and narrow-scale interventions, and was mainly assessed in the quantitative dimension of development rather than the qualitative one. For example, access to water, as measured by the MDG indicators improved in a number of countries in the region. However, those indicators did not take into account the quality of water resources or the intermittency of the service (ESCWA, 2014). With the SDGs reflecting a comprehensive approach to development that focuses on both quantitative and qualitative measures, an analogous coherent and coordinated approach to national development will be needed, including the adoption of progressive economic, environmental and social policies and protection systems.

In this regard, there will be a particular need to promote inclusive development and reinforce the positive nexus between natural resource management, poverty and hunger. Sustainable production and consumption patterns are key factors in a region facing an unprecedented confluence of economic, social and environmental pressures. Economic growth, agricultural production, industrial development and manufacturing, and access to food and social services all need to be approached from that perspective. For example, enhancing water use efficiency and preventing land degradation to improve agricultural production is expected to help address food security challenges in the region (ESCWA, 2013). Conversely, growth is not sustainable in a context of high and rising inequality. Increased agricultural production that relies on a rapidly reducing forest cover or the depletion of aquifers is not sustainable. Similarly, intensive fishing and marine pollution exert a mounting pressure on littoral countries of the Mediterranean due to the closed nature of the sea.

While a drastic overhaul of current practices is necessary, instead of starting from scratch, the implementation of this new vision for sustainable development in the Mediterranean should not be built on existing national and regional strategies and action plans (such as those on sustainable consumption and production, water,

energy and education) and in line with commitments to global agreements, so as to avoid duplication of efforts. There is no paucity of multilateral environmental agreements in the region for instance. All Mediterranean countries are parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and most countries are also parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (with the exceptions of Turkey, Syria and Israel).

Nevertheless, there is a gaping weakness in regional governance. The Mediterranean is characterised by a fragmented political organisation of littoral countries that may challenge the implementation of policies, plans and programmes that require joint action. The most acute divide is between the countries of the northern Mediterranean shore, most of which are developed countries, members of the European Union, and the countries of the southern and eastern shores, most of which are middle-income, developing countries, members of the League of Arab States and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. As such, there are only a few initiatives and programmes that address questions of sustainability in the Mediterranean region as a whole, and even these have seen their effectiveness hampered by the aforementioned political fragmentation of littoral countries.

Conclusion

The mixed track record of the Mediterranean countries in achieving the MDGs, the fragmented political integration of the region, its specificities and fragility in terms of natural resources, as well as the poor integration of environmental concerns in local planning, present a significant challenge for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, SDGs, at regional level. Only drastic improvements in the governance of natural resources and targeted measures to achieve more resilient, climate-smart, low-waste and sustainable production and consumption can ensure that the needs of present generations are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Although much progress has already resulted in hunger alleviation and improved health in the region, other acute challenges remain in order to ensure food security and to reverse natural resources degradation in the future. Natural capital degradation is thus a serious constraint for the achievement of sustainable rural development. In a context of major transformations in rural societies both in the North and the South, the loss of natural resources implies an associated loss of local knowledge regarding these resources. Therefore, the waste of natural resources is linked to knowledge loss and this interaction requires a more comprehensive analysis in order to ensure the sustainability of rural and agricultural development in the region.

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs offer a comprehensive vision to address these challenges in an integrated way, with a radical improvement over the siloed approach prevalent in the MDG era. Ensuring sustainable use and management of natural resources whilst eradicating poverty and hunger will be a monumental task.

Nonetheless, it is feasible if we accept that we must transform consumption and production systems, embrace sustainable living and working practices, improve governance for development and, crucially, secure the political will to act.

However, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Mediterranean will be more successful if solutions to problems fit the local context, if global targets are translated into national targets, and if political commitments are made to provide appropriate legal frameworks and the required institutional and financial capacities. At the same time, building on already existing regional instruments for rural and agricultural development should ensure greater effectiveness and a harmonised approach between littoral countries that otherwise appear to belong to distinct political and socio-economic spheres. To paraphrase Plato, all Mediterranean countries are like frogs sitting around the same pond, and in this regard they all share a common responsibility for its sustainable development.

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