

International Seminar
“Rural Development in the Mediterranean Area”
4 and 5 February 2014, Algiers

Recommendations

The Algerian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the CIHEAM co-organized an international technical seminar on “Rural Development in the Mediterranean”, in Algiers on 4 and 5 February 2014 which aimed at:

- Providing an overview of rural areas in the Mediterranean areas, generating consensus around new approaches to address rural development priorities and identifying good practices to encourage;
- Reaching practical conclusions, especially in terms of national actions and regional cooperation.

The seminar allowed the identification of main constraints and issues related to the following five themes:

- rural areas facing the challenges of attractiveness and competitiveness,
- diversity of territories and agriculture, promotion of quality labels and local agricultural products,
- sustainability of natural resources and support to family farming in the Mediterranean,
- support to women and young entrepreneurs in rural areas,
- capacity building of stakeholders.

MAIN FINDINGS AND STATE OF PLAY

In CIHEAM Member countries, despite the consecutive improvements following public interventions and thanks to the increased role of private and civil society actors, significant challenges still remain to be tackled in rural areas.

They concern poverty and inequalities, unemployment, which particularly affects rural youth, and the still precarious socio-professional situation of rural women.

Some rural areas remain outside the major centers of production and consumption, mostly urban, and therefore have only a limited appeal.

The scarcity of natural resources (water, soil, flora and fauna ...), combined with risks related to global climate changes, is also a major threat to food security.

This highlights the imbalance of development of rural areas in the Mediterranean countries, requiring the rehabilitation of the most vulnerable areas, in order to provide a better living environment for rural populations and contribute to national economic growth.

Specific, participatory and multi-sectorial public policies, where they exist, contribute significantly to the reduction of inequalities, the development of rural areas and their competitiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that ensue from these points are the followings:

General recommendations:

- Consider inclusive growth as a global and sustainable path for the development of rural areas, an essential condition for stability and social cohesion;
- Adopt an integrated approach to rural development through the coordination of sectorial policies, harmonization of approaches at different spatial and temporal scales and taking into account economic, social and environmental dimensions;
- Support the establishment of evaluation and monitoring systems for the implementation of sustainable development policies in rural areas.

In terms of regional development and diversification of activities:

- Strengthen equipment, infrastructures and basic services in rural areas in order to contribute to the welfare of all citizens;
- Coordinate sectorial policies (agricultural, economic, regional, environmental and social) by relying on civil society and reinforced local authorities;
- Conduct national policies that strengthen the ability of rural economies to diversify through incentives (tax, credit, training, services) and create jobs, notably on green, social and solidarity economies;
- Preserve and encourage investment efforts in sustainable agriculture and improve farmers access to markets by encouraging the development of appropriate logistical systems;
- Provide support to farmers through services, the first of which extension, research and training, and promote innovation;
- Implement policies to add value to local products and promote quality products that meet consumers' expectations;

- Develop non-agricultural activities - including responsible tourism, business valuation of tangible and intangible heritage, traditions and local knowledge, processing of agricultural products within units of small and medium size, develop trade, services, craft enterprises and new rural businesses - which play an important role in providing jobs and income and enabling rural people to improve their living standards and their resilience.

In terms of sustainability of natural resources and improvement of living conditions of rural populations:

- Place family farming at the heart of rural development, first with an appropriate legislative framework for its recognition and with appropriate policies for its development, considering that agriculture guarantees a fair and sustainable resource management;
- Aim to reduce inequalities and ensure social protection of rural populations;
- Promote rural women and youth activities as well as their empowerment by increasing their initial and ongoing training with appropriate and adapted measures tailored to their internal diversity with the aim of strengthening the resilience and social cohesion of Mediterranean regions;
- Strengthen the protection and sustainable use of natural resources through the promotion of best practices and appropriate environmental management tools;
- Identify, validate and disseminate local knowledge, and best practices related to responsible investments, environment, management of natural habitats and specific ecosystems (such as forests, oasis...) and agro-ecological transition;
- Consolidate and strengthen policies for the preservation and rehabilitation of degraded and sensitive rural areas, as part of the strategy to fight against erosion and desertification;
- Strengthen adaptation measures to climate change in sustainable development programmes of rural territories, primarily targeting the most vulnerable areas.

In terms of stakeholders' capacity building

The needs are as follow:

- ensure the transition to a new model of sustainable rural development to permit the implementation of ambitious agricultural and rural policies by improving the capacity of stakeholders;
- strengthen local governance, inclusive and participatory methods to involve all stakeholders in a fair and transparent manner, in a fruitful crossing of skills and knowledge.

To do that, it is recommended to:

- Make a priority of actors' training and technical assistance in rural development policies and programmes;
- Use initial education and learning by doing to promote new jobs and new faces of agriculture and rural development;
- Strengthen the capacity of public institutions to develop and conduct coordinated policies and ensure synergies for the benefit of territories;
- Support the emergence and reinforcement of farmers' organizations;
- Encourage networks, clusters, agri-food integrated systems, and public-private partnerships to create and share experiences and knowledge;
- Pool resources between different actors and / or rural communities by strengthening inter-sectorial approaches and cooperation between local players.

In terms of regional cooperation in the field of rural development:

Regional cooperation is to be deployed in areas where strengths, good practices and experiences of each are offered to others, encouraging partnerships between local actors. It should be consolidated in both South-South framework and between the North and South of the Mediterranean.

And, it has also to:

- Support the countries and institutions especially in the field of research, consultancy, innovation, capacity building, instruments relating to markets, farmers' organizations, standards and indicators for measuring sustainable development of rural areas;
- Promote sharing of experiences by using instruments such as twinning programmes between rural areas, visits to integrated projects sites and exemplary networks;
- Encourage joint projects involving actors, institutions and mobilizing donors.

In terms of operational programs:

- Encourage synergy of institutional support in the framework of international cooperation for human capacity building;
- Emphasize a participatory planning of development programmes, management procedures, monitoring and evaluation of actions and agricultural and rural policies, with the primary objective of reaching targeted populations through appropriate interventions;

- Strengthen technical and managerial skills of all executive officers for improving their level of knowledge and skills;
- Continue and strengthen, in its national and regional dimensions, the ENPARD initiative (European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) proposed in 2011 by the European Union, as a strong and coordinated response to challenges identified by the seminar and expectations formulated for better recognition of agriculture and rural areas.

This initiative must continue to support the renewal of agricultural and rural policies in partner countries, in a context of political and institutional reforms, and promote the sharing of experiences and good practices between countries of South and North of the Mediterranean;

- Mobilize CIHEAM as a major instrument to support and facilitate regional cooperation in order to:
 - Meet the needs expressed by countries in terms of training, research, and concrete actions for development,
 - Support countries and their institutions through capacity building, advice and cooperation, particularly in the area of food security and rural development,
 - Continue its involvement in partnerships and joint projects working in the Euro-Mediterranean integration of training, research, innovation and agriculture and food systems development, in programmes such as MED Spring, ARIMNet 2, Feeding Knowledge and EranetMed.