

Adoption of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025 *Investing in environmental sustainability to achieve social and economic development*

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Food and agriculture security is of primary importance in the Mediterranean since the region is deficient in agricultural production, with a strong imbalance between some Northern countries (exporter) and the Southern ones (importer). Food production patterns are unsustainable due to lack of land resources, water resources scarcity, and climate change impacts. Agriculture is suffering climate change effects and is the most dependent sector on climate. On the other hand, agriculture sector represents opportunities of adaptation and mitigation response to climate change, for instance regarding carbon sequestration of crops.

In addition, it is recognized that less food and agriculture security means more risk of social and politic instability. For instance, a decade of droughts in Syria has been amplified by unsustainable agriculture model. Indeed, aggravated by climatic vulnerabilities and climate change impacts, inequality, oppression and poverty remain at the core of environmental destruction. Following Arab springs and political crisis, the main challenge is that of governance to address wrong economic growth models, poverty and unemployment, food and water security threats, and environmental degradation.

Food and agriculture security and rural development are at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by United Nations in September 2015, New York. Investing in the agricultural sector sustainability can address not only hunger and malnutrition but also other challenges including poverty, water and energy use, climate change, and unsustainable production and consumption patterns. The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2016-2025) represents a declination of the global sustainable development agenda at the Mediterranean scale.

Due to the overwhelming relevance of sustainable agriculture as well as food security and nutrition for sustainable development and poverty reduction, these issues have been given high priority in several MSSD objectives and strategic directions. The challenge remaining is now to put in place a process to efficiently and jointly monitor the implementation of the 147 actions agreed upon by the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention.

MSSD 2016-2025: what is it?

At their 19th Ordinary Meeting (COP19) held in Athens, Greece, 9-12 February 2016, the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) adopted MSSD 2016-2025. The Strategy is a guiding document for all stakeholders to translate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at regional, sub-regional and national levels.

MSSD 2016-2025 is formulated taking into account the outcomes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which put particular focus on the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. The Strategy aims to contribute significantly to the long-term sustainable development vision of the Mediterranean region, especially within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 (New York).

The review of the 2005-MSSD¹ was led by the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSDD) with the assistance of the Secretariat to the Barcelona Convention (Coordinating Unit of the Mediterranean Action Plan – UNEP/MAP) through its Plan Bleu Regional Activity Centre (PB/RAC) and the support of the other MAP components (RACs). All member States and regional key stakeholders had the opportunity to participate to the MSSD Review through a highly inclusive process.

MSSD 2016-2025 is a strategic policy framework to secure a sustainable future for the Mediterranean region, adapting international commitments to regional conditions, guiding national strategies and stimulating regional cooperation in the achievement of sustainable development objectives, and linking the need to protect the environment to socio-economic development. The Strategy is based on the principle that socio-economic development needs to be harmonized with the environment and protection of natural resources. It emphasizes that investing in the environment is the best way to secure long-term sustainable job creation: an essential process for the achievement of sustainable socio-economic development for the present and future generations.

MSSD 2016-2025 highlights that the Mediterranean region is particularly rich in human settlements and civilizations, both ancient and modern, as well as in natural ecosystems and environmental values. However, the Mediterranean is at the same time subject to considerable pressures, due to urban sprawl of big agglomerations and coastal cities, intense economic uses leading resources and ecosystems to stress conditions, and significant disparities between sub-regions. Therefore, the MSSD vision answers to the need for a proper development direction: A prosperous and peaceful Mediterranean region in which people enjoy a high quality of life and where sustainable development takes place within the carrying capacity of healthy ecosystems. This must be achieved through common objectives, strong involvement of all stakeholders, cooperation, solidarity, equity, and participatory governance.

MSSD 2016-2025 addresses key areas impacted by human activity, from the marine and coastal environments, using ecosystem-based approach and planning tools such as Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), to urban settlements and the rural and agricultural systems. It also focuses on climate change, which is expected to impact severely the Mediterranean. The Strategy also introduces emerging approaches that help in turning political will into reality: e.g. a Green economy approach combined with Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP).

MSSD 2016-2025 follows a structure based on six objectives that lie in the interface between environment and development. They were chosen to provide scope for an integrated approach to address sustainability issues. The first objectives of the Strategy reflect a territorial approach, while the other objectives are crosscutting ones, as follows:

1. Ensuring sustainable development in marine and coastal areas;
2. Promoting resource management, food production and food security through sustainable forms of rural development;
3. Planning and managing sustainable Mediterranean cities;
4. Addressing climate change as a priority issue for the Mediterranean;
5. Transition towards a green and blue economy;
6. Improving governance in support of sustainable development.

A set of strategic directions is formulated for each of the six overall objectives. The strategic directions are complemented by national and regional actions, as well as flagship initiatives and targets. The actions aim at providing guidance and inspiration for the most effective implementation of the Strategy. Not all countries may have the necessity or the resources to undertake all the proposed actions; the proposed actions need to be adapted to national needs.

¹http://planbleu.org/sites/default/files/upload/files/smdd_uk.pdf

Finally, it is worth reminding that the CIHEAM Strategic Agenda 2025 is in line with MSSD 2016-2025 Objective 2 presented in this paper, notably concerning three axes, as follows: Food security and nutrition “Boosting sustainable agriculture and food”; Inclusive development “Investing in new generations and marginal territories”; Crises and resilience “Preventing risks and managing tensions”. In addition, CIHEAM and UNEP/MAP system, including Plan Bleu Regional Activity Centre, share fundamental values listed in this Strategic Agenda 2025: e.g. Holistic vision of development; Multilateral approach; Bottom-up collaboration, and; Problem solving oriented projects. This paper is also an opportunity to acknowledge CIHEAM experts who contributed to the MSSD Review process at various occasions along this process: e.g. online consultations, participatory workshops, regional conference, 16th MCSD Meeting.

Agriculture and climate change in the MSSD

The sustainable management of natural resources, rural development and food production and security are interdependent aspects that ensure the well-being of rural communities and provide significant inputs to downstream industries, from food processing to tourism. Agriculture represents a key issue in the Mediterranean, especially facing global changes such as climate change and anthropogenic pressures. Agriculture and climate change are interconnected: climate change impacts agriculture since farming activities depend on climatic conditions, and agriculture contributes to climate change through the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. However, agriculture also contributes to climate change mitigation by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and by sequestering carbon while maintaining food production.

Rural areas in the Mediterranean are relatively diverse in their history, culture, natural conditions, population density, settlements, economic structure, and human resources, and thus require different policy interventions. When addressing the use of natural resources in rural areas, attention must be paid to the protection of terrestrial ecosystems, which provide essential goods and services for human development. Those range from food and water to medicinal plants, fuel, timber, and housing materials. The maintenance of the good status and health of those ecosystems is therefore fundamental for both biodiversity conservation and human well-being.

The issue of agriculture and rural development is mainly dealt within MSSD Objective 2 “Promoting resource management, food production and food security through sustainable forms of rural development”. In Box 1 below are reproduced the list of issues addressed by this Objective 2. Food cooperation among Mediterranean countries is a main issue. In the northern Mediterranean countries, agricultural and pastoral land abandonment and reforestation campaigns have been effective, while in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries the pressures on ecosystems remain strong, particularly in North African countries because of the high population pressure on land and water resources, urban sprawl, over exploitation of forests and overgrazing². In addition, desertification processes are exacerbated by climate change, causing increased aridity and extreme events (long periods of drought, devastating floods of land and livestock, large cold spells), with strong socio-economic impacts on farmers.

The Mediterranean agri-food sector consumes significant rural resources and constitutes one of the main drivers of environmental degradation through processes such as desertification of marginal lands and pollution run-off from farming. At the same time, the sector is a key player in the conservation of the Mediterranean agricultural landscape and in providing livelihoods and employment. All around the Mediterranean’s rural areas, food production and food security are of paramount importance. Given the importance of small and medium-sized farms in the rural areas of the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries and their mobilization of the family workforce, family farms contribute to food security of farm households and local communities by the supply of domestic markets. Furthermore, the intra-family and intergenerational solidarity prevailing in farm households contribute significantly to the fight against food insecurity and social vulnerability of rural populations. However, access to land is increasingly open to foreign capital and investors without much consideration of the effects on agricultural and rural societies at the local level. The southern and eastern Mediterranean countries are also vulnerable to changes in international agricultural prices due to their high dependence on cereal imports. This context makes agricultural and food security issues particularly sensitive.

² State of Mediterranean Forests 2013. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, Italy, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/i3226e/i3226e.pdf>

Furthermore, since the impacts of climate change are likely to include the degradation of agricultural water resources and loss of fertile soils, ensuring food security and rural vitality by adapting agriculture to climate change is also necessary. Small farmers will be directly affected by these impacts, which represent risks in terms of the stability of rural areas. This calls for adaptation strategies and services for agricultural and

rural areas, as well as public and private support for those adaptations, such as promotion of agro-environmental practices, alternative agricultural methods, crop diversification, controlling and limiting use of genetically modified organisms, and conservation of water and soil, limiting the consumption of such natural resources.

Box 1

List of issues addressed by Objective 2 of MSSD 2016-2025

Natural resources and ecosystem services

- Loss of biodiversity and local varieties of crops and indigenous breeds from:
- Overexploitation or illegal use of water and other natural resources
- Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation, and lack of appropriate valuation
- Alien and invasive species
- Genetically modified organisms
- Climate change
- Pollution of soil, water and air
- Degradation and fragmentation of terrestrial ecosystems, notably forests
- Protected areas at risk from insufficient spatial coverage, planning, management and funding
- Insufficient awareness of ecosystem services and their economic benefits from society, industries and policymakers, and lack of appropriate valuation
- Cross-border issues in the management of natural resources and livestock production

Rural development and food

- Vulnerability of small producers to economic and climatic changes and natural resource scarcity
- Low provision of social services and infrastructure in certain rural areas
- Loss of agricultural land, erosion and desertification
- Socio-economic inequalities affecting rural populations, particularly women and youth
- Logistical deficit at local, national and regional levels, including lack of access of local and small producers to land, water, credit, and markets
- Agricultural production and market controlled by large players, leaving limited access for small-scale producers and local products
- Loss of traditional know-how and aging farmers
- Insufficient collective organization and lack of participation of local communities in natural resource management
- Insufficient consideration of water, land and food security nexus

Strategic direction 2.1 : Promote the sustainable use, management and conservation of natural resources and ecosystems

MSSD 2016-2025 underlines the need for compliance of national legal measures with international and regional commitments to promote the sustainable use, management and conservation of natural resources and ecosystems.

It calls for effective and participatory management of protected areas and exploitation of renewable natural resources for a regulated development in rural areas, including through Environmental Impact Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment and permitting processes. The Strategy aims to address the limits to sustainable rural development caused by the unsustainable use of natural resources and ecosystem goods and services, particularly energy, food and water, through improving efficiency.

It recommends institutional and legal reforms fostering water cooperation programs among sectors and cross-borders. The Strategy also suggests adopting policies, regulatory measures and instruments for sustainable exploitation of non-renewable resources and related post-extraction restoration. The target under this strategic direction is to take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation and fragmentation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species, and take further action as needed by 2030.

Strategic direction 2.2: Promote conservation and use of indigenous or traditional plant varieties and domestic animal breeds, value traditional knowledge and practices in rural management decisions

MSSD 2016-2025 aims to promote conservation and use of indigenous or traditional plant varieties and domestic animal breeds, as well as to value traditional knowledge and practices in rural management decisions. The Strategy calls for establishing national seed banks and knowledge repositories and encourages them to engage in regional collaboration. It promotes the valorization of traditional knowledge and land races, emphasizing the need for supporting their integration in education and training for rural and agricultural practices.

Strategic direction 2.3: Promote networks of ecologically protected areas at national and Mediterranean level and enhance stakeholder awareness on the value of ecosystem services and the implications of biodiversity loss

Strategic direction 2.3 focuses on the promotion of networks of ecologically protected areas at national and Mediterranean level, as well as the enhancement of stakeholder awareness on the value of ecosystem services and the implications of biodiversity loss. The pressures on protected areas created by insufficient spatial coverage, planning and management processes call for, at the national level, programs that strengthen the protection of biodiversity and the actual management of such areas. Legal or financing mechanisms accompany actions that raise awareness on the economic, social and environmental value of ecosystem services. The promotion of national and regional networking processes aims at reuniting directors and managers for enhancing the synergies of their actions.

At the regional level, the Strategy supports further networking, as well as the promotion of the new “Green list” initiative agreed between IUCN and IUCN national committees to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of park management bodies created at the IUCN World Parks Congress³.

Strategic direction 2.4: Promote inclusive and sustainable rural development, with a specific focus on poverty eradication, women’s empowerment and youth employment, including equitable and sustainable access to basic local services for rural communities

MSSD 2016-2025 addresses the social and environmental consequences created by inequalities affecting rural populations, particularly women and youth, by developing skills and opportunities through participatory rural development programs that take into account traditional knowledge, skills and crafts in order to add value to rural territories and local cultural assets. Strategic direction 2.4 promotes inclusive and sustainable rural development, with a specific focus on poverty eradication.

At a national level, policy measures and fiscal arrangements should encourage rural multi-functionality, coupling tourism and agriculture, benefiting to women’s empowerment and youth employment. Such actions should also lead to equitable and sustainable access to basic local services for rural communities. A regional action focuses on international partnerships and networks to build capacity in the promotion of traditional knowledge, skills and crafts, as well as the establishment of capacity development programs for local communities.

Strategic direction 2.5: Ensure access of local producers to distribution channels and markets, including the tourism market

In order to ensure an equitable access of local producers and small-scale farmers to distribution channels and markets, including the tourism market, national programs supporting agro-ecological and organic technologies will add value to local assets, products, and processes. This will be achieved through the use of innovative products and processes, cooperation schemes, market instruments, marketing plans, and labelling schemes.

³https://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/gpap_home/gpap_quality/gpap_greenlist/

The Strategy focuses on the added-value of organic, labelled, and conservation agriculture, while controlling and limiting the use of genetically modified organisms. On the demand side, awareness-raising campaigns will be developed in order to sensitize consumers regarding local economic benefits.

What's next?

A strategy depends on its implementation mechanism. How can a proper implementation of MSSD 2016-2025 be ensured, at both the regional and individual signatory levels?

Facilitated by the MAP system, the participation of all stakeholders will play a decisive role in the delivery of the Strategy, from national and local governments to civil society, academia, private sector, and the support of regional institutions. A comprehensive and participative monitoring system will be put in place over the coming months under the auspices of Plan Bleu, through the development of a dashboard of sustainability indicators for the Mediterranean. For greater efficiency, data from different sources – scientific, institutional – will be cross-referenced by international bodies. Crowdsourcing will also be encouraged by inviting participation from associations, as well as big data technology.

It is a collective effort, through which the sum will be much greater than the addition of the parts, thanks to the synergies developed and economies of scale achieved. That is why we encourage the commitment of all concerned stakeholders for the implementation of the Strategy.

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