



The CIHEAM and the UfM work together for women in agri-food sectors and Mediterranean rural areas

20 November 2020

In the framework of the 5th Women4Mediterranean high level conference of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) on the theme “Accelerating gender equality in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic” that was held online between 16 and 20 November, the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) has organised with the UfM a side event entitled “[Mainstreaming Gender in Covid-19 Recovery Responses of Agro-Food Sectors and rural Areas](#)”.

During this side-event, the importance of the agricultural and food sectors was recalled, particularly with regard to the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. It was also reminded that women were on the frontline in agricultural professions, production, processing and distribution. They play an essential role in our food security that unfortunately strongly exposes them to infectious risks. It was also recalled that in rural areas, women had less access to education, health or social protection systems. Moreover, in the event of a crisis, this access is further compromised. Existing gender inequalities, but also development inequalities between urban and rural areas, have been identified as factors that aggravate the vulnerability of already vulnerable populations.

During the opening session, [Mrs Akissa BAHRI, Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries of Tunisia](#) seized the opportunity to highlight the fact that “*women who are active in the agricultural, fisheries and agro-food sectors suffer from the multiplicity of roles they must play in a context marked by a health threat and with rudimentary means to protect their homes, preserve the health of their families and ensure the continuity of agricultural and agro-food activities*”.

The intervention was followed by a presentation made by [Mr Plácido PLAZA LOPEZ, Secretary General of the CIHEAM](#), who recalled the importance of this theme for the CIHEAM and in his mandate. Indeed, a momentum associating the 5 bodies of the CIHEAM as well as partners such as the European Union, the FAO and the UfM is at work with the aim to meet the specific needs of women. The 12th Ministerial meeting of the CIHEAM will particularly focus on this issue.

He was followed by the interventions of Mrs Marcela Villarreal, Director of Partnerships and Collaboration with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Mr Leonard Mizzi, Head of Unit at the European Commission, Directorate General (DG) for International Cooperation and Development – Rural Development, Food Security and Nutrition. Two other sessions followed, giving the floor especially to representatives of intergovernmental organisations, civil society, the economic and research spheres.

The speakers stressed the need to improve accessibility to technologies, so as to bridge the digital gap in rural areas because mobile phones and Internet connections have proven to be essential to ensure the continuation of agricultural activities, to study or to train during this time of COVID-19.

Besides technological innovation, the speakers also called for investments in social and economic innovations that mobilise hybrid mechanisms, agile solutions and bottom-up approaches. They recalled that today, there is a new generation of intermediary bodies, locally based aggregators from



civil society and the entrepreneurial world which can help reinvent a better coordinated and more efficient modus operandi to respond to the challenges brought by the crisis.

Innovation in research was also discussed and good practices related to the mainstreaming of gender in agricultural research and life sciences were presented.

The speakers also called for the improvement of the mechanisms of representation and participation of women. They recalled the importance of involving rural women at the earliest stages as possible and throughout the life cycles of projects. Since this increased participation is only possible with the support of public authorities and cooperation and development stakeholders, the speakers recalled the importance of national and international public decision-makers to ensure the availability of data and analysis by gender, in order to support measures for equal access to productive resources, financial services and markets by targeting the economic activities of rural women as producers, processors, traders and entrepreneurs, or in women's leadership.

Lastly, the speakers commended the several emergency measures that have been implemented in favour of women in rural areas and in the agricultural sectors, such as extended health and social insurance, financial and economic aid or the digitisation of some services, and demanded that they be sustained to lead to systemic change.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE SIDE-EVENT [HERE](#)

CIHEAM

Established in 1962, the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agricultural Studies (CIHEAM) is a Mediterranean intergovernmental organization. As a player in multilateral cooperation in agriculture, food, fisheries and rural areas, its missions are based on four objectives:



Protecting the planet through the fight against all forms of waste, including knowledge and knowledge



Food and nutrition security by promoting sustainable agriculture and food



Inclusive development by investing in new generations and fragile territories



Crisis prevention and territorial resilience.

To carry out these missions, CIHEAM relies on the tools of specialized training, network research, cooperation and technical assistance, as well as political dialogue and partnerships.

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