



CIHEAM

International Center for Advanced
Mediterranean Agronomic Studies

31 March 2021

OECD-MENA Government-Business Summit

On March 31, 2021, the Secretary-General of the CIHEAM, Plácido Plaza participated in the OECD-MENA Government-Business Summit, a meeting part of the [OECD MENA ministerial week](#) on strategies for an inclusive and resilient economic post-COVID19 recovery. On this occasion, he recalled that the crisis is also an opportunity for the Mediterranean region to engage in initiatives for more sustainable and inclusive food systems, in particular by inviting young people and new technologies to play a central role.

“For 60 years, the CIHEAM has been monitoring the evolution of Mediterranean rural and agricultural territories and we are able to make the following observations:

- **The gradual abandonment of family farming and the low generational renewal**
- **The low attractiveness of jobs in the land and sea among young people**, with an undervalued social status that pushes them to leave, first inside and then often, outside their country
- **The precariousness of these low-paying jobs**, with a large share of informal and seasonal work, and the fact that many people have **neither the skills nor the capital** to create or access real jobs.

Besides, the **strong demographic growth** of the region leads to a constant increase in food needs, worsening the **very strong dependence of MENA countries on imports**. At the same time, the effects of **climate change and the constant degradation of natural resources** are also weighing upon food security.

The **Covid** crisis has shown in many ways that these sectors are essential for the balance of our societies. The **food issue** quickly emerged, with the fear of disruptions in supply chains and shortages, provoking debates on the **sustainability of our production and consumption patterns**.



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Among the young people we work with, we note that they are **increasingly attracted by new food paradigms**, driven by **new requirements in terms of health and environmental sustainability** – such as organic, local products, short circuits or urban agriculture.

In a region where the **youth and women unemployment rate** is among the highest in the world, these dynamics must not only be supported but also be among the priorities of our states. Responsible agriculture, fishing and agribusiness based on public-private dynamics can help **revive post-covid growth**.

To this end, we must rely on levers that can make a difference.

We all know the importance of social **protection mechanisms** and **financial aid aimed at promoting socio-economic integration**.

Certainly, they are necessary but not sufficient because they must be backed up by a **change of vision based on a shock of administrative simplification** and on **accessibility to decision-makers** who will support these young people and women.

They should not be considered as a risk to be managed but as **promoters of projects with high-added social value**, as **promoters of potential developments** that will have chances of success... provided that the adequate and necessary investments follow.

A paradigm shift is needed to go from a **logic of norms** to an **operational approach**.

The **digital** is among the levers to be mobilised:

The digital revolution offers food systems unprecedented job creation potential. Unlike previous technological development, the digital allow for a qualitative leap at all levels of agro-food value chains:

- Increased **precision and efficiency**, to help solve the difficult equation of “Producing **more** and **better** with **less**”.



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- Better access to **data, financial markets as well as inputs and products and last but not least**
- A strengthening of transparency and traceability which today are a **necessity in terms of food safety**

We must invest in these areas because they provide employment opportunities that create value for both youth and women: in the true sense of the word.

Healthy and sustainable food systems contribute to **the stability of territories** and the **balanced development of our societies** while building **bridges between these territories and our populations.**

Taking consideration of our **future generations**, they enhance our **heritage of natural and food resources.**

As such, we invite the Ministers of the OECD Member States and of the MENA region to adopt **a crosscutting approach to addressing agricultural and food issues when taking account of them in post-covid public policies**, in terms of training-research-development and job creation.

We must foster **the emergence of social and technological innovation ecosystems that encompass** the agricultural, fishing and agro-business sectors in which **youth and women can develop their full potential.**”