

C2A Notes

Agriculture and Food in question

Issue n°17 - April 2014

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF FAMILY FARMING: FOR THE POLITICAL RECOGNITION OF THE EFFICIENCY AND PERFORMANCE OF SMALL-SCALE FARMING!

Despite its considerable assets, family farming is all too often faced with persistent exclusion from access to natural resources and services. Its vulnerability to economic and climate crises, to free trade and investment policies and to price instability remains a prevalent reality, which often translates into poverty as well as food and nutritional insecurity for many peasant families in countries of the South. Yet far from the archaic understanding some still have of family and small-scale farming, it offers innovation and modernity to meet the food, climate, energy, environment and employment challenges of the 21st century.

The International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) promoted by the United Nations and France is the time to bring attention to the fact that small-scale family farmers are all too often marginalised, despite having already demonstrated their efficiency and performance. It must serve as an opportunity for States and international organisations to make brave political decisions to fight all forms of exclusion afflicting these farmers now more than ever, throughout the world.

Supporting small-scale family farming is not a utopian or ideological choice!

The small-scale family farming which we support (see box below) is the historical foundation of all developed countries' development. It currently produces 70% of the world's food, provides over 60% of jobs in the least developed countries, and secures the greatest animal and plant biodiversity conservation. Yet, today still, three quarters of the 842 million people suffering from hunger are small-scale farmers. Moreover, not only many governments of developing countries but also certain international organisations seem to doubt the performance and economic efficiency of small-scale farming. They prefer to support agro-industrialisation and the "dream" of private investment in agriculture by the market sector, thought to be better able to increase the sector's productivity and competitiveness.

This is not to claim that only one model of family farming can feed the world. It is nevertheless crucial to highlight the fact that small-scale family farming is best suited to face the challenges mentioned earlier, and to meet the demands of society.

The objectives that society worldwide can legitimately expect from the agriculture of the future are self-

evident. The first is to feed a population of 9.5 billion people in 2050, but that is not all! The agriculture of the future must also:

1. provide highly nutritious, varied, tasty and healthy food;
2. not jeopardise ecosystems' long-term productive potential, in addition to preserving biodiversity and limiting greenhouse gas emissions;
3. provide small-scale farmers with a decent income, and preserve and create jobs in rural areas in order to prevent both rampant urban growth without the possibility of this workforce being absorbed by the service and industry sectors, and often tragic migrations;
4. maintain developed, populated rural areas, to the benefit of society as a whole;
5. limit the vulnerability of certain areas and countries, which may depend on food imports;
6. and finally, contribute to inclusive, sustainable and fair growth, with farming which creates wealth and allows for redistribution throughout the supply chain.

While industrial and capitalistic farming can probably meet the food challenge, small-scale family farming

– where work and capital remain primarily in the family, with a very strong attachment to the land – is unquestionably better placed and even crucial to face these combined challenges.

Producing quality food in large enough quantities for a growing population

The small-scale farming model allows the family to produce most of its own food and thus to ensure its food self-sufficiency. Small-scale family farmers have also proven their capacity to sustainably increase their production with quality and varied products, to meet the needs of a growing population whilst limiting their own risk by preserving their self-sufficiency and avoiding dangerous specialisations. These small-scale farms have adopted agro-ecological production practices that preserve the environment and guarantee healthy products. There are at present an estimated 500 million small-scale farms producing 50 to 70% of the world's food¹. Family farming is therefore a major player in securing food and nutritional security and feeding the 9.5 billion human beings forecast for 2050.

Generating family and local income

On local and regional markets, small-scale family farming's competitiveness lies in its capacity to offer quality and typical products reflecting the specific know-how of men and women rooted in a territory. Through processing, these products have a higher added value on the market and provide the producers with fair prices and a decent income: local products, products with specific quality labels, organic products, protected geographical indication, products highly valued for their taste and healthiness, etc. Given their flexibility and their capacity to combine animal and plant food products and retail products, family farms are able to supply international markets with cash crops and animal products. Côte d'Ivoire, for example, is the world's main cocoa producer, owing to family farming.

Generating sufficient stable jobs in rural areas and curbing the rural exodus

Family agriculture is a large source of jobs. The CIRAD explains that "on a global scale the 800 million small-scale farmers with a family farming approach employ the overwhelming majority of the 1.3 billion agricultural workers by intensifying work on the farm, and are constantly demonstrating their capacity to evolve"². Family farming also creates the most jobs. With 17 million young people entering the job market every year in sub-Saharan Africa, choosing to support such farming to ensure decent standards of living and incomes is a crucial political choice, to combat youth unemployment and rural exodus.

Small-scale family farming also optimises available family workforce and choices made on the farm seek to best utilise the workforce present. Family

work generally takes place on small areas of land. Higher productivity per hectare ensues, owing to more intensive techniques and choices of crops and livestock better suited to the workforce availability.

Sustainably generating resources and boosting rural areas

By virtue of its patrimonial nature, small-scale family farming maintains a strong link between families and their land. It is characterised by a greater concern for the preservation of natural resources and better management of agro-diversity. This small-scale farming is also a source of historical agro-ecological knowledge and know-how. More than for any other actor in the agricultural sector, it has always been in these farms' interest to invest in their ecosystem, as their social reproduction directly depends on it. Small-scale farms are best able to support and achieve the agro-ecological transition now required. This model is undoubtedly better suited to the long-term preservation of the environment and limiting greenhouse gas emissions. It stands in sharp contrast with the

agro-industrial model which, for the sake of short-term efficiency, standardisation and economies of scale, promotes monoculture and intensive breeding with the use of external inputs, causing pollution, weakened biodiversity and soil depletion.

Finally, by maintaining a population in the area and through this population's relations with the other players of the agricultural and food chain at local and regional level, family farming strongly contributes to local areas' economic vitality.

« Small-scale farms are best able to support and achieve the agro-ecological transition now required. »

Family farming indeed, but beware: not all family farming is small-scale!

Some family farmers embrace intensification, based on the heavy use of capital and chemical inputs and excessive specialisation in one crop or breed at the expense of product variety and quality, and of the environment. Following growth-driven approaches, some are concentrating farmland at the expense of rural employment and the establishment of young farmers. On small-scale family farms the work remains predominantly in the family, and very strong attachment to the land is maintained. These farms also present or strive towards the following characteristics:

- a size and production volumes affording a fair distribution of production factors, particularly land, and of outlets between farmers;
- practices that are respectful of natural resources and biodiversity;
- operating in a way that is as autonomous and economical as possible and that generates high added value allowing for the creation or preservation of jobs, with the aim of obtaining satisfactory income for the family;
- varied and quality products, which contributes to ensuring adequate food for all.

¹ Source: Rapport FIDA 2011

² Article from the Monde 25/06/12, Etienne Hainzelin, CIRAD

Growing threats against small-scale family farming

The appropriation of land, water, forests and biodiversity, and the eviction of peasant populations for monoculture (soy, palm oil, etc.) or mining are increasing. Policies to secure “developed” countries’ food and water supply, along with transnational investment dynamics, land speculation and policies promoting agro-fuel production are all factors which, combined with the fragility of the institutional and legal frameworks of the countries concerned (often reinforced by their leaders’ connivance), encourage such grabbing.

Rules unsuited to international trade prevent the least developed countries from adopting regional market protection measures like those Europe chose in its day to defend its own agriculture. Moreover, access to local and regional markets is already restricted or difficult for many peasants of the South, with heightened concentration in the supply chains and the strengthening of some operators’ oligopolistic positions at small-scale farmers’ expense. The negotiations for economic partnership agreements between the European Union and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries now being concluded after ten years of deadlock offer no reassurance. Once ratified, the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) will force these countries to further open their markets to the EU, at the risk of being massively flooded with European food products, once again at the expense of small-scale farmers and with disastrous consequences on food security.

Finally, behind official discourses, **family farming is very often sidelined from public policy**. Many leaders of developing countries are now running after **private-sector market investment**, a new



Passive solar greenhouse in Mongolia - Arkhangai © AVSF Jean Mas

“mirage” to tackle the issue of the agricultural sector’s productivity and economic performance, and a dominant trend strongly supported by international organisations. Yet there is a great danger that some companies will reduce small-scale farmers’ role solely to that of contracted raw material producers, to benefit their shareholders first and foremost. Symbolic of this dangerous trend is the “**New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition**”, launched in 2012 by the G8 and joined by France, with the commendable aim of eradicating hunger in 10 African countries³. By promoting the influx of new private capital without sufficient regulation, this government-supported initiative has every chance of contributing to the eviction of small-scale farmers, to land grabbing and to the expansion of models of production far removed from agro-ecology.

What political decisions are needed to firmly support small-scale farming?

With these recurring and new threats, strong political decisions are needed from States and international organisations. Throughout 2014 – and beyond – C2A organisations and their partners in the South, NGOs and small-scale farming organisations, will reiterate their propositions to support small-scale family farming.

- Create instruments of coercion against land grabbing and the eviction of small-scale farmers. The implementation of the FAO’s Voluntary Guidelines on land tenure (May 2012) must involve an international effort to institute inescapable compulsory rules and bodies, and to fight against any form of investment that contributes to violating small-scale farmers’ fundamental rights.
- Postpone the Europe-Africa-Caribbean-Pacific Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) beyond 1 October 2014 and first and foremost support regional integration processes fostering the protection and growth of family farming and local industries, particularly in Africa. More generally, put an end to free trade commercial policies which are ultimately the death sentence of small-scale family farming and the food sovereignty of the countries concerned, particularly in the ongoing European negotiation processes with India, China, Mediterranean countries and Latin America.
- Challenge the levers of action of the G8’s ill-named “New Alliance for Food Security

³ 2012: Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania – 2013: Malawi, Nigeria, Benin – Senegal announced

and Nutrition” so that it may support not agro-industrial farming companies, but investment programmes and land tenure, farming and market public policies allowing small-scale family farming to reveal its full potential for food sovereignty and nutrition.

- Ensure that future sustainable development objectives pertaining to agriculture and food clearly support small-scale family farming.
- At the future Climate Conferences in Peru in 2014 and in France in 2015, support small-scale family farming as a priority for research and funding surrounding climate change alleviation and adaptation, rather than the Climate Smart Agriculture praised by the FAO, the blurred outlines of which pave the way for agricultural models that cause pollution and exclusion.

Achieving this presents a twofold challenge: along with our partners in the South, we have to convince governments, some of which are still strongly biased towards the green revolution and the “modernisation” of their agriculture in the sense of large commercial and mechanised farms. Evidence-based advocacy is required, to show them just how modern small-scale farming is. In France, our government also needs to take action within international fora (United Nations – CSA, Climate COP, WTO –, European Union, G8, G20) for the IYFF to lead to strong political decisions supporting small-scale family farming, recognised as one of

the pillars of fair development and sustainable food and nutritional security. This will afford coherence with the choice of family farming defended even in the new Loi d’orientation et de programmation relative à la politique de développement et de solidarité internationale (blueprint and planning law on development and international solidarity policy), adopted at the first reading in the Assemblée nationale during the first semester of 2014. The significant efforts undertaken throughout the world for the International Year of Family Farming – discussions and sharing experiences, communication and promotion – will ultimately have a real impact only if they are supported by some governments becoming truly aware of the modernity of their own small-scale farms, along with real coherence between the national and



Livestock in Velingara - Senegal © AVSF Christophe Lebel

As part of its mission to support the collective advocacy of its members, Coordination SUD has set up working committees. The Agriculture and Food Commission (C2A) brings together international solidarity NGOs working to realize the right to food and increase support for smallholder farming in policies that impact world food security: 4D, ACF, aGter, Artisans du Monde, AVSF, CARI, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, CFSI, CIDR, CRID, Gret, Inter Aide, Iram, Oxfam France, Peuples Solidaires in association with ActionAid France, Réseau Foi et Justice Europe, Secours Catholique, Secours Islamique, Union Nationale des Maisons Familiales Rurales, and one guest : Inter-réseaux.

The aim of the Commission is to coordinate the work conducted by its participants and to facilitate consultation among its members for their advocacy work with social actors and international policy makers. The members of the Commission reach agreements on who represents Coordination SUD in a range of arenas (Concord in Europe, FAO, WTO, UNCTAD) and share information on current international issues. The Commission is mandated by Coordination SUD to formulate the positions taken by the group during the major institutional meetings on the subject of agriculture and food.

This paper was written by AVSF.
Translated from French by Nonta Libbrecht-Carey



The C2A Notes are produced with support from the French Development Agency (AFD).
The information and views set out in this document do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the AFD.

