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The UN Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028: Family Farming and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

I. The UN Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028

1. The United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028 (UNDF) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2017 (Resolution A/RES/72/239).¹ The UN Resolution calls upon FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development to lead the implementation of the Decade in collaboration with other relevant organizations of the United Nations system and invites governments and other relevant stakeholders, including international and regional organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia, to actively support the implementation of the Decade.

2. The Decade builds on the success of the International Year of Family Farming of 2014 and on the improved knowledge about the multiple contributions of family farmers to sustainable rural life. For example, family farming produces more than 80 percent of the world's food. It also improves the environmental sustainability of agriculture, preserving and restoring biodiversity and ecosystems. Through its support for traditional and nutritious food, it contributes to a balanced diet and to the maintenance of cultural heritage in rural areas. The Decade will aim at focusing the efforts of the international community to work collectively on the design and implementation of comprehensive economic, environmental and social policies

¹ For more information, see: <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/decade/en/>.

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to create an environment conducive for family farming and to strengthen family farming's position in agriculture.

3. Family farming is, in relation to the Decade, understood as it was defined by the Steering Committee of the International Year in 2014:²

Family Farming (including all family-based agricultural activities) is a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production that is managed and operated by a family, and is predominantly reliant on the family labour of both women and men. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, social and cultural functions.

4. At the global level, the UNDFP provides an extraordinary opportunity for the United Nations to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The vision of the Decade is:³

A world where diverse, healthy and sustainable food and agricultural systems flourish, where resilient rural and urban communities enjoy a high quality of life in dignity, equity, free from hunger and poverty.

5. The Decade was launched at a global event in Rome in May 2019, at which a Global Action Plan for the Decade also was presented.⁴ The Action Plan aims at accelerating actions undertaken in a collective, coherent and comprehensive manner to support family farmers, who are key agents of sustainable development. The Action Plan includes seven pillars of work:

- 1) *Develop an enabling policy environment to strengthen family farming*
- 2) *Support youth and ensure the generational sustainability of family farming*
- 3) *Promote gender equity in family farming and the leadership role of rural women*
- 4) *Strengthen family farmers' organizations and their capacities to generate knowledge, represent farmers and provide inclusive services in the urban-rural continuum*
- 5) *Improve socio-economic inclusion, resilience and well-being of family farmers, rural households and communities*
- 6) *Promote sustainability of family farming for climate-resilient food systems*
- 7) *Strengthen the multidimensionality of family farming to promote social innovations contributing to territorial development and food systems that safeguard biodiversity, the environment and culture*

6. In the initial steps of the implementation of the UNDFP, synergies with other international bodies and processes will be created. Related processes include the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition 2016–2025, the UN Decade of Water 2018–2028, and the UN Decade of

² United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028 Global Action Plan, p. 7.

³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴ The United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028 Global Action Plan is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca4672en/ca4672en.pdf>.

Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030. The UNDDFF will also seek opportunities to support the implementation of and benefit from activities related to agreed-upon international frameworks such as the Voluntary Guidelines to support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security;⁵ the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT);⁶ the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication;⁷ and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.⁸

7. To oversee the implementation of the UNDDFF, an international steering committee was established, composed of representatives of Member States and family farmer organizations. The International Steering Committee of the UN Decade of Family Farming (ISC UNDDFF) is supported by the FAO and IFAD joint secretariat.

II. FAO support to the Decade in Europe and Central Asia

8. In Europe and Central Asia, the UNDDFF provides an excellent opportunity for FAO to further enhance its support to smallholders and family farms. Support for small farms is one of four priorities of FAO in the region. The programme response to this priority is addressed through the Regional Initiative on Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms for Improved Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction (RI-1).

9. In most of the countries in Europe and Central Asia, farm structures are dominated by smallholders and small family farms, and the large majority of farms use less than 5 hectares of land. The small farms have, at the same time, many needs and constraints and often require support in many technical fields. The Decade is a very good opportunity to create new partnerships and sustain existing partnerships and to mobilize additional resources to support the development of small farms into commercial family farms.

10. In 2018, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia conducted country studies on the needs and constraints of smallholders and family farms in eight countries in the region.⁹ Based on the country studies, a regional synthesis report has been prepared.¹⁰ This report identified three development paths for smallholders: i) the agricultural path – developing smallholders into commercial family farms; ii) the

⁵ Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-y7937e.pdf>

⁶ Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i2801e.pdf>

⁷ Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4356en.pdf>

⁸ Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1650694>

⁹ Country studies on the needs and constraints of smallholders and family farms were conducted in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Tajikistan. The country reports provided policy recommendations for enhanced support to smallholders and family farms based on the findings.

¹⁰ The Regional Synthesis Report, titled *Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms in Europe and Central Asia*, is forthcoming, to be published in the second semester of 2019.

diversification path – creating businesses and jobs in rural areas outside of agricultural production; and iii) the exit path – to leave agriculture and rely on social support. The programme of the Regional Initiative on Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms for Improved Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction will continue to support smallholders and family farms within the above-mentioned three development paths, strongly contributing in this way to the implementation of the UNDFP. In fact, the work programme for the Regional Initiative on Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms for Improved Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction (RI-1) can be considered as part of a regional action plan for the implementation of the Decade. The ongoing planning for the work in the region in the biennium 2020–2021 is the first opportunity to focus at the regional level on the implementation of the Decade.

11. The Global Action Plan envisages the establishment of 100 National Action Plans of Family Farming by 2024. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia is expecting to be requested by Member Countries in the region to support this work.

III. Family farming and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

12. The United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028 serves as a framework for countries to develop public policies and investments to support family farming and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To guarantee the success of the UNDFP as well as of the SDGs, action must be supported by coherent, integrated and cross-sectoral policies, concurrently addressing the environmental, economic and social dimensions of agriculture and rural development. This also requires that many actions – including FAO-implemented projects and activities in Europe and Central Asia – must be formulated and implemented in a more integrated and cross-sectoral manner.

13. Family farming is – both globally and in Europe and Central Asia – essential for achieving several of the Sustainable Development Goals. In this respect, a key SDG target in the region is SDG target 2.3 on doubling the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers by 2030.