

The International Symposium on Agricultural Innovation for Family Farmers: Unlocking the potential of agricultural innovation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

Chair's summary

The *International Symposium on Agricultural Innovation for Family Farmers: Unlocking the potential of agricultural innovation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* took place at FAO Headquarters, Rome, 21-23 November 2018 (<http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/agricultural-innovation-family-farmers-symposium/en/>).

The FAO Secretariat estimates that there were over 540 participants, including 286 delegates from 92 member countries and the European Union as well as representatives of intergovernmental organizations, private sector entities, civil society organizations, academia/research organizations and producer organizations/cooperatives.

The specific objectives of the symposium were to:

1. Serve as a global knowledge sharing and partnership platform to better understand the potential of innovation in agriculture to address the Sustainable Development Goals, with a special focus on supporting smallholder and family farmers;
2. Increase understanding of the drivers of innovation and the main constraints;
3. Propose processes, pathways and interventions needed to unlock the potential of innovation in agriculture and scaling up inclusive innovations;
4. Celebrate inspiring success stories of innovation and innovators in sustainable agriculture; and,
5. Act as a catalyst for boosting partnerships as well as public and private investments to foster and scale up agricultural innovation.

Discussions at the Symposium suggest that there is no universal definition for agricultural innovation. To enable common understanding it is important to note the operating definition as: *“Agricultural innovation is the process whereby individuals or organizations bring new or existing products, processes or ways of organisation into use for the first time in a specific context in order to increase effectiveness, competitiveness, resilience to shocks or environmental sustainability and thereby contribute to food security and nutrition, economic development or sustainable natural resource management”* (<http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/agricultural-innovation-family-farmers-symposium/about/fag/en/>).

In order to unlock the potential of innovation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, participants at the Symposium, during a series of plenary and parallel sessions, as well as an Innovation Fair, shared experiences and knowledge about different types of agricultural innovation, examples and case studies, criteria for success, the enabling environment and associated factors.

Analyses by FAO and other UN organizations suggest that by 2030 the global population will either reach or exceed 10 billion. Global scientific consensus indicates that different areas of the world will need to increase production by at least 60%, assuming current productivity levels for much of the major exported crop products. However, FAO and others have noted that Africa remains a key area where potential for increased production and productivity improvements could be achieved within current

available agricultural land. Accordingly, agricultural innovation becomes essential for sustainable adoption of information, scientific solutions and technologies for family farmers:

Key Elements for Sustainable Agricultural Innovation

1. Innovation requires long-term commitment by different actors, particularly for the sustainability of family farmers and enabling achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. Assessment of agricultural innovation systems (national and subnational) is required to inform appropriate interventions to unlock the potential of agricultural innovation for family farmers.
3. Innovative partnerships can accelerate transformation of agricultural innovation systems, recognizing that trust and equal recognition among partners/actors form the basis of successful partnerships.
4. Innovation is context-specific. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the diversity of family farmers (including peasants, indigenous peoples, traditional communities, fisher folks, mountain farmers, livestock keepers and pastoralists as well as farmers on marginal lands) and their different needs in different contexts for the scaling up of innovation.
5. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 2 (the Goal dedicated to ending hunger, improving food security and nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture) scaling up innovations through partnerships and use of a diversity of context-specific approaches such as agro-ecology, agricultural biotechnologies and information and communication technologies (ICTs), among others, is required.
6. Demand-driven innovation processes are required, especially, to empower family farmers to innovate (e.g. capacity development in leadership, negotiation, advocacy, data analysis, collective action etc.).
7. Inclusiveness is essential for effective innovation (e.g. gender, youth, indigenous groups etc.), particularly through appropriate policies that must ensure no one is left behind.
8. Formal and informal mechanisms for networking, co-learning and co-creation, knowledge exchange and information sharing are necessary to accelerate innovation.
9. Key elements for successful adoption and use of innovation must lead to efficiency, profitability and the sustainability of family farmers.
10. Lessons from innovation experiences are an essential component for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for family farmers and youth.

Recommendations

1. There is a need to strengthen the capacity of family farmers to innovate, including through adaptation, sustainable use of knowledge systems, indigenous resources, scientific solutions, co-creation and learning.
2. To facilitate innovation, bridging institutions (or innovation facilitators) must be strengthened (effectiveness, efficiency and impact) to enable their role as facilitators for networking and multi-stakeholder dialogue for good governance within the ecosystem.
3. There is a need for inclusive research and education systems that facilitate innovation for family farmers. To achieve this requires commitments by multi-actors, particularly resources and active participation, to enable sustainable use of new and existing scientific solutions and approaches in the innovation system.
4. Training and education form an integral part of capacity development (e.g. functional capacities and soft skills etc.) to enable effective use of new and existing information, knowledge, technologies and solutions that facilitate innovation.

5. Integrated policies, increased investments by public and private institutions and a holistic approach are essential for creating an enabling environment (e.g. access to land, finance, education, knowledge, market including infrastructure etc.) for innovation and scaling up.
6. Multi-stakeholder governance, including representatives of family farmers, is crucial for innovation, enabling information sharing, facilitating risk reduction of innovations/investments and liaisons between the different actors in the system in policy development.
7. Assessment of agricultural innovation systems is required to inform the need for increased investments to incentivize agricultural innovation.
8. Increased recognition, in particular, of the needs of youth and women and their greater involvement in the innovation processes is required.
9. Although complex, there is a need to develop appropriate indicators (qualitative and quantitative) to measure the outcomes and impact of innovation (e.g. innovation policies, employment, value chains, productivity, competitiveness, etc.)
10. Although context-specific, family farmers require assistance to mitigate risk associated with innovation (e.g. financial instruments, insurance schemes, innovation support funds etc.).

Youth as custodians of the UN Decade of Family Farming

The Symposium recognized the unique role and potential of youth in agricultural innovation. Accordingly, a special interactive event was held entitled “Youth as drivers of innovation” that provided a platform for young people to highlight their successes, concerns and drivers of innovation and contribute with their inputs to the outcomes of the Symposium.

One of the key points that came out of the event was the need to create a Youth Forum or Council where youth representatives from different nations of the world can discuss their insights and work, including those related to agricultural innovation, directly with FAO. The importance of increased partnerships and networks was also underlined.

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the years 2019 to 2028 mark the declaration of the UN Decade of Family Farming. Agricultural innovation will be a critical element towards enabling sustainable achievement of the outcomes that positively influence the Sustainable Development Goals. The global community, including through the facilitation of FAO, must promote active participation of youth in all aspects of agricultural innovation during the Decade of Family Farming for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.