Ce programme d'appui est mis en oeuvre par le CIHEAM IAM MONTPELLIER

Programme d'appui à l'initiative ENPARD MÉDITERRANÉE

Cette initiative est financée par l'Union Européenne

ENPARD SOUTH SUPPORT PROJECT II

AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL POLICIES IN SOUTHERN NEIGHBORHOOD COUNTRIES

PROSPECTS FOR ENHANCED REGIONAL DIALOGUE

CONCEPT NOTE

NOVEMBER 2018

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The ENPARD (European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development) was launched in 2011 by Dacian Cioloş, Commissioner for Agriculture, and Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy. The aim of this initiative was to strengthen the partnership between the European Union and the Neighbourhood countries in the field of rural and agricultural policy.

Launched in 2011, the ENPARD initiative for the Mediterranean was, for the Commissioner for Agriculture, a concrete EU response to the "Arab Spring (...) "and" clear sign of the European Commission's desire to place again agriculture at the heart of its priorities with regard to its relations with its [Mediterranean] neighbors" and to make it a partnership instrument designed to ensure the region stabilization and development. It is considered that countries on both sides of the Mediterranean face the same challenges in terms of food security, natural resource management accentuated by the climate change, diversification of rural economies and balanced development of territories.

The project to support the ENPARD initiative implemented by the CIHEAM-IAMM has thus enabled eight southern Mediterranean countries to benefit from support for reflection on agricultural and rural policies, especially, by valuing 50 years EU experience in this area.

In its Mediterranean component, this initiative was one of the European Union's tangible responses to the "Arab Spring" (cf. COM 200). It was a "clear sign of the European Commission's desire to place again agriculture at the heart of its priorities with regard to its relations with its [Mediterranean] neighbours" (Dacian Ciolos, Algiers, 2012) and to make it an instrument for partnership designed to ensure the stabilisation and the development of this sub-region by taking the view that on both sides of the Mediterranean, we faced with the same challenges of food security, natural resource management exacerbated by the pressures of climate change, diversification of rural economies and balanced development of the territories.

Through this initiative, the European Commission intended to accompany the partner countries in determining and applying public policies, revised with a view to providing a better response to these challenges and to strengthen the global governance of agricultural and rural issues, capitalising on more than 50 years of European experience in this field. This ENPARD initiative was an original proposal of partnership founded on the willing participation of the countries and a flexible approach guided by demand. It was also designed to promote three operational principles: the participation of all stakeholders, an inclusive approach and territorial anchoring.

The eight Mediterranean partner countries responded positively to this proposal, despite its relatively small budget, and displayed a profound interest in the ENPARD South Support Project (ESSP). This enabled them to benefit from accompaniment in formulating rural and agricultural policies based on international, and more particularly European, expertise and experiences and good practices sharing at sub-regional level.

Through the themes addressed (agricultural support mechanisms, development of the local economy, organisation of producers and value chains, strengthening of agricultural value chains, good agricultural practices, promotion and commercialisation, risks and insurance mechanisms, climate change, etc.), the ENPARD initiative and the ESSP II are pivotal to the construction of agricultural policies in the partner countries and are closely linked to current strategic considerations (on the regionalisation of policies in Morocco, the efficiency of support mechanisms in Algeria, market liberalisation in Tunisia, the promotion of agricultural products in Lebanon, etc.).

After a six-year implementing period in countries for which agriculture remains a key sector in terms of economic and social considerations as well natural resource management and food security and during which the challenges facing these countries are increasingly prominent, this summary document shares the main results and achievements of the ESSP II both at national and regional level.

The aim here is to illustrate the relevance and topicality of the original approach suggested to the partner countries and based on the coordination of an inclusive national debate with a view to fostering regional dialogue on rural and agricultural policies. It is also to discuss its contribution to European neighbourhood policies and to examine the involvement of the EU Delegations in this regional project. The final section

explores the prospects for enhanced regional dialogue on rural and agricultural policies in the Mediterranean basin.

Beyond the different activities implemented within the framework of the project, this summary also incorporates the results of two surveys conducted in September 2018 among the national partners and the EU delegations in each partner country on the subject of the ESSP II.

1. Promoting national dialogue with a view to stimulating regional dialogue on rural and agricultural policies

The final objective of the ESSP II was to foster exchanges of experiences and knowledge on cross-cutting themes and key Mediterranean challenges in terms of rural and agricultural policy through regional and sub-regional meetings.

To offset the lack of an ad hoc regional institution, the project adopted the principle of coordinated dialogue on rural and agricultural policies at national level, in turn fostering debate at sub-regional and regional level.

The specific objectives of the ESSP II were thus to 1) strengthen the participation of the different stakeholders of the agricultural sector in political dialogue; 2) enhance the capacities of these public and non-governmental stakeholders with a view to ensuring effective and sustainable use of information and know-how at national level; 3) share the relevant experience and best practices of the EU, the Member States and the partner countries; and 4) promote the initiatives of the EU, its Member States and other international cooperation relating to support for the sector and for rural development within the region.

> The ENPARD support South project aimed to promote regional dialogue on the major agricultural and rural challenges in the Mediterranean, based on the facilitation of a national dialogue in the eight partner countries.

2. A flexible method that has facilitated adaptation to specific national contexts

While farmers in the countries covered by the ENPARD initiative face common challenges, the perception of these challenges and the responses adopted are specific to each country and are implemented subject to the specific political and institutional situations resulting from their history, their economic and social structure and their local contexts. The political and social instability of some countries can lead to frequent changes within governments, thereby affecting the formulation and implementation of policies. Bearing these particularities in mind, the proposal was to call on a multi-stakeholder think tank in each country, commissioned directly by the Ministry of Agriculture and coordinated by a focal point close to the Ministry with the support of the ESSP II team. This proposal was well received in all cases.

> *The mobilization of national multi-stakeholder think tanks, mandated by the Ministers of Agriculture and led by the program focal points, has produced a set of analyzes and recommendations on priority themes chosen by each country.*

The think tanks were tasked with producing a series of analyses and recommendations intended for policy-makers on priority themes relevant to the rural and agricultural development strategies of each country and identified in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture. These themes were addressed in greater detail through regular workshops calling on recognised national and international experts and, where applicable, complementary studies. This flexibility in the choice of themes and the implementation of activities was greatly appreciated by the partners, ensuring both the success of the project and the involvement of the national partners by orienting the activities towards the priorities specific to each country. It also facilitated adaptation to the institutional changes observed in most of the countries, thereby ensuring the continuity of the activities in a context where, as one partner put it, “agricultural policies are not clearly and precisely defined”.

3. A new, inclusive forum for national dialogue and enhanced national capacities

In each country, the quality and involvement of the members of the think tanks encouraged the mobilisation of all key public and private stakeholders in the agricultural sector, in particular farmers' organisations and the private sector. The ESSP II thus provided a new, inclusive forum for national dialogue on rural and agricultural policies facilitating broader participation of public and private stakeholders in enhanced dialogue. Accordingly, some 80% of the partners who completed the questionnaire indicated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the representativeness of the participants in the national workshops and thus with the way in which this inclusive dialogue was conducted.

The ESSP II has enabled an inclusive dialogue on agricultural and rural policies, in each country, involving agricultural organizations and the private sector.

The national dialogue was based on workshops and studies and briefing notes production. These activities enabled knowledge sharing, national capacities building and the formulation of a set of policy recommendations.

The number of activities organised within the framework of the ESSP II increased, with 66 national and regional workshops and numerous work meetings, 10 studies, 21 summary notes and 55 reports, the involvement of 50 European experts, 12 master's placements supervised and various courses and study visits.

Beyond the extent of the activities, the partners also indicated that they were very satisfied with the quality of the interventions, and in particular the workshops and studies. The participants were very positive with regard to the benefits derived from these activities, as they were unanimous in stating that participation in the workshops enabled them to acquire more information and knowledge relating to the topic addressed, while 82% of them felt that the project produced useful new knowledge.

4. Tangible results in terms of support for the formulation of agricultural policy, available for immediate use

Very concrete results in terms of agricultural policy measures are one of the project achievements, particularly, concerning:

- *The reform of cooperatives in Algeria, Jordan and Tunisia*
- *Good agricultural practices in Lebanon (charter on pesticides use of for the apple industry)*
- *The agricultural council in Egypt*
- *Policies to support the agricultural sector in Tunisia, Israel and Algeria*
- *Value chains in Egypt and Lebanon*
- *Rural territories development in Morocco*
- *Trade negotiations and European market access in Tunisia and Palestine.*

One key achievement of the project relates to the tangible results obtained in terms of support for the formulation of agricultural policy, some of which can be put into practice immediately.

In Algeria, the activities conducted on agricultural cooperatives have resulted in the preparation of a roadmap to "stimulate the dynamics of agricultural cooperation", already inaugurated with the installation of agricultural cooperation promotion units within the chambers of agriculture. The studies conducted as part of the project have also given rise to specific applicable recommendations to improve the effectiveness of support mechanisms in the milk and potato value chains.

In Egypt, the work relating to "the improvement scenarios for the reform of the extension system in Egypt" has led to the creation of a project to be funded by the European Union. The study of the tomato value chain has also produced very specific recommendations to improve its effectiveness.

In Israel, calling on high-quality European expertise has helped the Ministry of Agriculture to take decisions concerning the agricultural policy reform with regard to changing methods of support, the reform of the dairy value chain, the implementation of a greener agricultural policy and the development of geographical indications.

In Jordan, the discussions concerning agricultural cooperatives should result in an initial draft of the national strategy within the framework of the on-going reform in this sector.

In Lebanon, the project has resulted in a national charter being adopted, entitled "Charter on good practices in pest control and traceability of apple production in Lebanon", signed officially by the Ministry of Agriculture along with nine cooperatives. Furthermore, the development of organisational action plans designed for six territorial value chains and the proposal to create local accompaniment structures for certain value chains should help enhance the incorporation of good agricultural practices.

In Morocco, the ESSP II has accompanied the dynamic, injected by the Moroccan government, of implementing a development strategy in disadvantaged rural areas. The activities undertaken within this framework have resulted in the formulation of territorial summary notes for each relevant territory of the regions identified and, in three cases, in the proposal of several local development projects to be presented to the technical and financial partners. A guide to implementing and evaluating local projects has also been developed and made available to the main public and private stakeholders in the relevant agricultural sector.

In Palestine, the involvement of six European experts for the workshop exploring the commercialisation of Palestinian agricultural products on European markets has facilitated an in-depth analysis of possibility of benefitting from advantages granted within the framework of the association agreement signed with the EU for six products destined for six European markets. Following the workshop, Paltrade, a structure supporting commercialisation, made contact with two sources of expertise concerning export potential to the EU.

The activities implemented **in Tunisia** have contributed to providing relevant elements of use during the ongoing negotiations concerning the DCFTA for the milk and citrus fruit value chains. Focussing on support for the agricultural sector by calling on a methodology promoted by the OECD, a third study provides a pertinent analysis framework which can be used by the Ministry of Agriculture in determining, evaluating and monitoring its agricultural policy. Finally, the recommendations relating to the legal aspect of the mutual companies providing agricultural services (MCAS), the state-MCAS partnerships and the accompaniment of the MCAS are now incorporated into a reform of the cooperatives.

5. Emergence of dialogue at sub-regional level

Over 30% of the partners that answered the questionnaire feel that the project's specific objective of "implementing and coordinating a regional framework for dialogue and the exchange of experiences relating to agricultural and rural development policies between the beneficiary countries and the European Union" has been achieved while almost 60% believed it has been partially achieved. Some comments underlined the insufficient time allowed to achieve this ambitious objective in full.

The emergence of a regional dialogue based on national activities has resulted in promising results essentially at a sub-regional level (Maghreb and Egypt / Lebanon), proving that it is possible to overcome complicated geopolitical situations.

This dialogue has fostered a convergence of common priorities and themes to several countries, as well as the identification and experiences sharing between these countries and relevant good practices implemented in Europe.

These answers show that the essentially sub-regional dialogue (only one seminar was organised at regional level) based on activities undertaken at national level as part of the ESSP II has produced promising results with two different approaches in the Maghreb and the Mashreq. Within these two sub-regions, it has facilitated a convergence of priorities and themes common to several countries while making it possible to identify and share experiences between these countries and good practices adopted in Europe.

In the Maghreb, the organising country chose the theme of its sub-regional seminar without this necessarily being deemed a priority in the country and without any dialogue between the countries. During the sub-regional seminars, the countries discussed their experiences with the following topics: the promotion of

agricultural products; the strengthening of the cooperative system in the Maghreb; risk management and insurance in the field of agriculture; and the adaptation of fragile territories in light of climate change.

This sharing of knowledge and experiences has, in particular, led to potential transnational reflection under the aegis of the Arab Maghreb Union exploring the benefits of implementing a sub-regional federation of producers' organisations. It has also given rise to a collective document identifying the policies supporting the organisation of producers in the three countries of the Maghreb. Finally, with a view to building the negotiating capacities of the three countries vis-à-vis the regional and international institutions, it was proposed during the climate change workshop to present joint projects eligible for climate funds aimed at adaptation and mitigating the effects of climate change on fragile territories (oases, mountainous regions, etc.).

In the Maghreb, four seminars, whose themes were chosen by the inviting country, were organized. Knowledge and experience Exchanges between the 3 countries led to proposals for joint actions concerning: agricultural products valorization; cooperative system strengthening; agricultural insurance and risk management; adapting fragile territories to climate change.

In the Mashreq, the discussion topics were chosen jointly by the two participating countries (Egypt and Lebanon) and corresponded to the priority themes identified in each country. At the start of each sub-regional workshop, the two countries therefore presented the activities undertaken at national level before addressing a specific theme in order to explore one activity in greater detail. The themes addressed were good agricultural practices; short circuits and market access; the role of extension and agricultural consulting in ensuring a more competitive agriculture; and pesticides use and management to create a more integrated agriculture.

In the Mashreq, *the themes were chosen jointly by the two partner countries (Egypt and Lebanon) and to tally with the priority themes developed in each country: good agricultural practices; short circuits and market access; the role of extension and agricultural consulting for more competitive agriculture; and pesticides use and management to create a more integrated agriculture.*

This dialogue has boosted the relationship between Egypt and Lebanon. The conclusions of the sub-regional workshops were, thus, brought to the Lebanese-Egyptian Interministerial Agricultural Committee in order to make it an official topic of political dialogue in the sub-region.

This sub-regional dialogue has boosted relations between Egypt and Lebanon, thereby opening the door to considerations on new methods of perceiving agricultural policies at sub-regional level. The two countries have jointly expressed their desire to intensify their agricultural dialogue and go beyond merely resolving their trade differences by clarifying and documenting the existence of common issues.

More tangibly, the two countries reported the conclusions of the sub-regional workshops to the Egyptian-Lebanese Inter-ministerial Agricultural Committee in order to create an official topic of political dialogue in the sub-region. Other suggestions voiced during these seminars were to develop a "knowledge bank" focussing on extension, good agricultural practices and short circuits; create Egyptian-Lebanese firm capable of competing with the main trade rivals of both Egypt and Lebanon; introduce a network of Egyptian-Lebanese exporters to promote the sharing of information, experiences and expertise; or to develop a charter binding the two countries and create a logo relating to the origin of the products.

Finally, at regional level, the seminars were initially designed as ESSP II milestone and implementation appraisal meetings. As this objective was subsequently abandoned, the project team opted to organise debates on key cross-cutting topics not deemed as priority by the countries. As a result of this, a seminar on the issue of women and youths in the Mediterranean was, for example, organised (ENPARD seminar, Brussels, October 2016).

Other actions have also gone beyond the sub-regional scope. Tunisia, for example, organised exchanges of experiences on the citrus fruit and milk value chains and on support for the agricultural sector, calling on representatives from Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey and Europe.

At the regional level, *it was chosen to discuss important cross-cutting themes that had not been adopted in a national level. For example, a seminar on the topic of "women and youth in the Mediterranean" was organized in Brussels in November 2016. Experiences exchange workshops in Tunisia or study visits for Algerian delegations also enabled to go beyond the sub regional framework.*

After two and a half years of implementation, and Even if the main part of this regional vision still remains to build and to realize, the ESSP II has shown that this goal is possible to achieve. The project indicated not only a way to achieve it, but also proposed on the one hand, a relevant original approach that satisfies the European Union inclusive principles and multi-stakeholder participation and on the other hand, the thematic elements to be discussed for a future regional cooperation strategy in the sector.

Algeria organised a study visit to Lebanon exploring the apple sector. Lastly, Egypt and Lebanon invited the Inter-ministerial Committee to support dialogue between the Maghreb and the Mashreq and to stay informed of the activities undertaken in the two sub-regions.

In conclusion, for a project lasting two and a half years, it would seem normal that the desired regional policy vision, founded on a bottom-up approach, develops progressively – first at sub-regional level as an accumulation of specific initiatives. All the pieces are now in place to envisage a coherent comparison of the two sub-regions' experiences, and it cannot be denied that these different stages pave the way for the construction of an agricultural and rural vision for the region as a whole.

Even if the majority of this regional vision is still to be developed and materialised, the ESSP II shows that this objective can be achieved and not only shows the way but also proposes both an original and pertinent approach in line with the inclusive and multi-stakeholder participation principles of the European Union and key thematic aspects for discussion in a future regional cooperation strategy within the sector.

6. Themes in response to the challenges faced by agriculture in the southern Mediterranean

The themes selected by the think tanks of each country allowed responding to the main challenges facing agriculture in the Southern Mediterranean and, in the same hand, to reach the objectives of the agricultural policies implemented in the different countries which concern: trade negotiations and market access; extension and agricultural consulting; climate change and natural resource management; agricultural insurance and risk management; rural territories development ; youth and women employment and rural development.

Summary of themes addressed at national, sub-regional and regional levels

	Regional	Sub-regional	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt	Lebanon	Israel	Jordan	Palestine
Employment, youths, women and rural development	●									
Good agricultural practices		●	(●)	(●)		●	●	●		
Organisation of producers (cooperative system)		●	●	●	●	●	(●)		●	
Promotion of agricultural products, value chains		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Trade negotiations and European market access		●	[●]		●			(●)	[●]	●
Policy of support to the agricultural sector		●	●		●			●		
Expansion and agricultural consulting		●	●	(●)	(●)	●	●			
Climate change and natural resource management		●	●	●						
Agricultural insurance and risk management		●								
Development of rural territories			(●)	●			(●)			

Note: ● = work themes chosen explicitly, [●] = work themes chosen but not addressed, (●) = work themes not chosen explicitly but addressed in the country's activities.

Chosen by the think tank in agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, the themes addressed through the ESSP II activities reflect the challenges facing agriculture in the countries of the southern Mediterranean and the agricultural policy objectives implemented in the different countries.

They concern good agricultural practices; the organisation of producers; the commercialisation and promotion of agricultural products; trade negotiations and market access; expansion and agricultural consulting; climate change and natural resource management; agricultural insurance and risk management; the development of rural territories; employment, youths, women and rural development.

While some topics have only been addressed by certain countries (trade negotiations and European market access, territorial development) or at regional level (employment, youths, women and rural development) or sub-regional level (insurance), other have been examined by most countries (cf. summary table).

7. Greatly appreciated sharing of European good agricultural practices

The specific objective of the ESSP II of "promoting the exchange of experiences within the beneficiary countries and with the European Union" has proved to be a key element of the method adopted to facilitate the organisation of political dialogue between countries. The experience shared by the international experts and the direct testimonies of stakeholders in the field of development are powerful levers conducive to multi-partner and multi-level political dialogue serving as a source of proposals.

Experiences exchange within beneficiary countries and with the European Union has been an important element for the emergence of political dialogue within and between countries. The experiences shared by international experts and the direct testimony of development actors have been powerful levers for a political dialogue which is multi-partner, multi-scales and proactive force.

Thus, 50 high-level experts were mobilized to present European experiences concerning good agricultural practices, cooperatives, agricultural consulting, insurance, value chains and market access.

Across all countries, some 50 European experts have been called on. In a few rare cases, representatives of the European Commission have also been involved. Some EU delegations even suggest that greater use should be made of this expertise.

Generally speaking, these exchanges of experiences have been greatly appreciated and have given rise to high-level debate on agricultural policy, in particular with regard to:

- good agricultural practices (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Mashreq),
- agricultural cooperatives (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Maghreb)
- support policy for the agricultural sector (Israel, Tunisia)
- value chains and markets (Israel, Tunisia)
- unfair business practices (Israel)
- water management (Palestine)
- geographical indications (Israel)
- EU market access (Palestine, Mashreq),
- agricultural insurance (Maghreb sub-regional workshop)
- youths, women and rural development (regional)

8. Themes coherent with the priorities of the ENP

As can be seen when re-examining the ENP, in light of the importance of the agricultural sector in terms of development employment and natural resource management and given the foreseeable effects of climate change in the countries of the southern Mediterranean, it is essential to continue supporting the development and implementation of agricultural and rural development policies that are both inclusive and sustainable and to invest in the modernisation and diversification of agriculture. In other words, it is impossible to talk seriously about inclusive and sustainable development in the countries of the southern Mediterranean without

The ESSP II responds well to the priorities of the European Neighborhood Policy and in particular:

- *Better progressive integration, particularly via CAFTA negotiations,*
- *Sustainable inclusive development through activities related to marketing and agricultural products valorization, good agricultural practices, or support for cooperative reforms,*
- *The consideration of climate change (an important focus of the 2021-2027 ENP program) and the management of natural resources, particularly water,*
- *Rural youth employment in connection with territorial cohesion and migration.*

addressing the reform of agriculture and rural development which are "(equally) important challenges", as emphasised by the ENI 2014-2020 programme.

A vast majority of the themes addressed both at national and regional level are perfectly in line with the priorities defined by the re-examination of the ENP and the 2014-2020 programme, in particular relating to the elements examined below.

8.1. Trade negotiations with the EU and trade integration

The studies conducted in Tunisia on the impact of the DCFTA on the milk and citrus fruit value chains contribute to the negotiations launched with the European Union aimed at progressive integration and must be conducive to more intensive sector-based cooperation. The work carried out in Palestine to promote its preferential access to the European market is another example of the interest in this theme.

8.2. Inclusive sustainable development

The different works carried out on the commercialisation and promotion of agricultural products aim to stimulate and diversify the agricultural and food value chains while encouraging economic diversification, value added, integration, competiveness and trade at national, regional and international level (cf. action plan to promote the tomato value chain, Israel's considerations on geographical indications and unfair business practices, the Maghreb sub-regional seminar on the promotion of agricultural products or the Mashreq sub-regional seminar on short distribution and commercialisation circuits for agricultural products).

The activities focussing on good agricultural practices and agricultural consulting primarily aim to take account of environmental and sanitary aspects linked to agricultural activity with a view to introducing more effective, sustainable and profitable agriculture (reform of the extension system in Egypt Mashreq sub-regional seminar on the role of extension and agricultural consulting, works on good agricultural practices in Lebanon which have led to the creation of the national charter of good practices and traceability in the apples sector).

The actions relating to the cooperatives also focus on inclusive development by strengthening the place of farmers at the heart of agricultural and rural development policies by providing them with services enabling them to implement sustainable agriculture offering them a viable livelihood (cf. the renewed agricultural cooperation dynamic in Algeria, the support for the cooperatives reform in Jordan, the new agricultural cooperation dynamic in Egypt, the analysis of the legal environment of mutual companies providing agricultural services in Tunisia, the Maghreb sub-regional workshop on strengthening agricultural cooperatives and the development of a Maghreb action plan for the self-promotion of agricultural cooperatives).

The study of the support mechanisms for the agricultural sector in Tunisia, the work carried out in Israel on the reform of the support policy for the agricultural sector in general and the milk sector in particular and the two studies conducted in Algeria on the support mechanism for raw milk collection and the rapid diagnostic of the agricultural production regulation system applied to potatoes all aim to rationalise and increase the effectiveness of state intervention.

8.3. Climate change and natural resource management

While climate change already figured in the 2014-2020 programme, it has become an essential aspect of the EU's cooperation instruments, including the ENP, as some 25% of the budget for these instruments is earmarked for objectives related to climate over the period 2021-2027. This theme has been addressed both at national and sub-regional level (cf. in particular the Maghreb sub-regional workshop on climate change and the

territories), and it can be hoped that, in light of the significance of this challenge for the countries of the southern Mediterranean, the question of the impact of climate change on agriculture will be one of the future partnership themes.

8.4. Youth employment and employability - migrations - territorial cohesion

This issue is a major challenge for the agricultural sector in the countries of the southern Mediterranean, both for the future of the sector and with regard to rural development due to the deep social and territorial disparities between urban and rural areas.

The question of employment, and in particular youth employment, also has repercussions on migration patterns as the current disaffection of rural youths with the agricultural sector is reflected in a rural exodus towards the cities, where sources of employment are limited, and drives some individuals to try and reach Europe. Rural poverty, the lack of prospects and the low level of employability of rural youths exacerbate the popular movement recently experienced in the region and encourage migration. At the same time, however, we know that agriculture is an economic activity with a strong potential for employment. Making agriculture attractive again, building value chains which reward the farmer's work and diversifying rural economies are relevant and efficient answers to territorial imbalances and migration.

9. The need for greater involvement of the EU delegations and their perception of the ESSP II

EU Delegations has been involved in the in a diverse ways which reflects the lack of formalization of relations, particularly with the ESSP II team. Nevertheless, their appreciation of the implementation process (think tank and choice of themes by the countries) and activities are rather positive.

For the EU Delegations, while the project helped to strengthen participants' competencies and to share good European practices, it has not increased their participation in the political dialogue. Likewise, the objective of" establishing and coordinating a framework for regional dialogue based experiences exchange on agricultural and rural development policies" between partners countries and with the European Union has only been partially achieved. However, a large majority of EU Delegations consider it useful to continue regional support for dialogue on agricultural and rural policies.

During this second phase, the principle of involving the delegations in validating the ESSP II activities has become an organisational element and has been perceived in a positive light by the delegations themselves, as illustrated by the answers to the appraisal questionnaire. Deemed a good means of remaining informed about the project, this relationship is also, as one of the respondents said, "a very useful means of ensuring coherence between the initiative and other actions/programmes."

Throughout the implementation of the ESSP II, the relations between the delegations and the project have varied considerably, reflecting a lack of formalisation of this relationship organised more according to affinities, interest for the topic or availability than in relation to the project needs. In general, they have maintained regular contact with the ENPARD project team. In most countries, a meeting was organised with the delegation at the start of the project while more or less formal meetings or contacts throughout the project have served to keep the delegation informed and provide a regular update on the progress of the activities. The delegations have also generally received the different documents produced (summary notes, studies, reports, etc.). Contact with the focal points or other local partners concerning the ENPARD project has, on the other hand, been very limited.

With regard to the implementation of the process, the choice of the Ministry of Agriculture as the point of contact has been deemed coherent in light of the project's objectives but while it has facilitated the implementation of the project, certain delegations feel that this choice has not always been conducive to dialogue with the other administrations or to the involvement of all the stakeholders concerned.

The EU delegations' perception of the proposed approach founded on the implementation of a think tank in each country commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture and on a flexible work programme is positive, although not to the degree of the partners' perception. In particular, the respondents question the representativeness of the participants in the work groups and highlight the fact that while pertinent or adapted to a changing institutional context, a flexible programme can jeopardise the stability and durability of the implementation and coherence of the work plan.

The appraisals of the delegations which participated in the national seminars are generally positive with regard to the quality of the organisation. The two weakest aspects are the representativeness of the participants (confirming the aforementioned criticisms) and the communication with regard to the event. The studies are also perceived in a positive light by the EU delegations, both in terms of the quality of the participatory approach and with regard to the experts involved, the analysis and the recommendations.

The answers relating to the achievement of the specific objectives of the project are somewhat mixed. Opinions are positive with regard to the use and sharing of European good practices, with one of the respondents stating that, "the subject is vast, even if the reform of the common agricultural policy provided a good opportunity with lessons to be learned and new directions proposed from which the Mediterranean countries must draw inspiration to be competitive." Capacity building among the institutions and the civil society is also seen positively. One respondent feels that "the issues are more clearly understood and the information is available." This has nevertheless not fostered increased participation in political dialogue.

Finally, according to the EU delegations, the specific objective of "implementing and coordinating a regional framework for dialogue and the exchange of experiences relating to agricultural and rural development policies between the beneficiary countries and the European Union" has only partially been achieved. One respondent claimed that "the initiative is barely linked to opportunities for sector-based political dialogue which might exist in the formal framework of the agriculture and fisheries committee of the association agreement, which meets once a year, or could be formalised through budget support and sector-based coordination with the technical and financial partners involved in the sector." Another feels that "regional dialogue focussed more on specific themes than a global framework." Despite these criticisms, a vast majority of the EU delegations feel it would be beneficial to pursue regional support for dialogue on agricultural and rural policies.

10. The important contribution of the CIHEAM-IAMM

Because of its geographical scope (the Mediterranean), its fields of activity and its network, the CIHEAM - IAMM added value to this regional project.

The mobilization of researchers' staff with their extensive agricultural sector knowledge, identified themes and the field and institutional context of the countries covered by the project, made it possible to build regular working relations with think tanks and thus contributed to the quality of the projects national and regional debates.

As indicated in the mid-term appraisal (report of 23 May 2017), the CIHEAM-IAMM - an intergovernmental entity focusing on the geographical scope of the Mediterranean and working in fields such sustainable agriculture, food and nutritional security, the development of rural and coastal territories and sustainable value chains - has provided incontestable value added to this regional project. Five of the eight countries covered by the ENPARD ISP are members of the CIHEAM (Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia), thereby creating longstanding regular work relationships on the themes addressed within the project.

The involvement of teaching research staff from the CIHEAM-IAMM supported by specialist experts is one of the project's strengths. Thanks to their activities at the CIHEAM-IAMM, the researchers enjoy extensive knowledge both of agriculture and the institutional context of the countries covered by the project. They also boast proven competence in the themes addressed (good agricultural practices, cooperatives, territorial approach, etc.) and a strong capacity for mobilising local competences and international expertise through their professional networks. By establishing regular working relations with the focal points and the think tanks

based on trust, these competences have provided tangible results in terms of stimulating dialogue on rural and agricultural policies at national and regional level while facilitating rapid adaptation to institutional change.

11. Prospects for enhanced regional dialogue on rural and agricultural policies

The economic and social importance of the agricultural sector and the pervasiveness of the common challenges facing agriculture in the South Mediterranean countries argue in favour of continued support for regional dialogue on agriculture and rural development, as confirmed by the project partners and the EU Delegations.

Several major lessons can thus be drawn from the ESSP II to feed reflection on how to continue this regional dialogue:
1. Starting from nationals debates to feed the regional one with field results.
2. Favor sub-regional platforms to organize the dialogue between countries
3. Strengthen dialogue within sub-regional platforms
4. Translate the sub-regional exchanges into concrete actions at national level
5. Enhance capacity building actions at national and regional level
6. Strengthen trade with Northern Mediterranean countries
7. Promote national and sub-regional dynamics through the organization of a regional political dialogue by including an ENPARD initiative continuation under the Union for the Mediterranean working plan.

The economic and social importance of the agricultural sector and the pervasiveness of the common challenges facing agriculture in the South Mediterranean countries, in particular adaptation to climate change, dependence on imports for supplies of food products, the strengthening of the value chains and openness of the markets, employment in the agricultural sector – primarily of rural youth – and territorial cohesion, of continued support for regional dialogue on agriculture and rural development.

These challenges, which the agricultural policies adopted in these countries attempt to overcome, have been at the very heart of the discussions initiated at national and regional level within the framework of the ESSP II, and are consistent with the priorities identified in the ENP 2021-2027, in particular with regard to climate change and natural resource management, market integration, the effectiveness of public policies, the promotion of produce and the introduction of good agricultural policies.

However, no other programme or institution handle these questions at regional level, which would both establish this priority and legitimise it as such through regional visibility and stimulate dialogue among policy-makers and non-state stakeholders on key themes. As such, the ESSP II has helped strengthen national dialogue on rural and agricultural policies while also initiating sub-regional dialogue and developing or promoting a common political vision of regional cooperation in the field of agriculture and rural affairs. The first achievements are promising, but this type of dialogue needs time to become firmly embedded.

The partners and delegations which answered the questionnaire feel that it is essential to pursue the coordination of a regional debate on the agricultural and rural questions, with a degree of fine-tuning.

At the end of the project, several key lessons can be learned with a view to fostering considerations on the best means of pursuing regional dialogue on the agricultural and rural policies initiated by the ESSP II.

11.1. Start at national level to foster regional debate with local repercussions

Both the approach developed in the project, using the national level to foster the debate at sub-regional and regional level, and the method, based on flexibility in identifying priority themes and joint-management of activities with the CIHEAM-IAMM supporting the focal points and think thanks, were approved by the national partners and most delegations and proved their effectiveness. They should be retained, albeit with certain improvements.

With a view to strengthening the inclusive dialogue at national level and improving the quality and utility of the activities undertaken to formulate rural and agricultural policies, particular attention must be paid to the composition of the think tanks. It should be negotiated, founded on the competences and engagement of the people involved in the project and extended to certain under-represented stakeholders of the sector. Capacity building should also be scheduled for the focal points and members of the think tanks (cf. point 11.5)

In order to strengthen national dialogue, it would also seem important to be able to increase the opportunities for exchange (national workshops, technical work groups, informal meetings, etc.). This intensification of work could justify the installation of a lightweight project structure in each country, which would also have the advantage of facilitating more regular contact between the project team, the focal and the think tank on the one hand (cf. the example of Lebanon with the presence of a "resident expert") and the EU delegation and other technical and financial partners on the other (cf. point 11.4).

11.2. Favour sub-regional platforms to organise dialogue between the countries

Due to the relations existing between the countries within the region and the experience acquired during phase II of the ESSP, it seems more effective, at least initially, to provide for the implementation of sub-regional platforms adaptable to themes and geopolitical situations. Reiterating a successful dynamic from the ESSP II, an initial platform could bring together the countries of the Maghreb with another federating Lebanon and Egypt with the possibility of extending it to include Jordan, according to the opportunities.

11.3. Strengthen dialogue within the sub-regional platforms

In light of the activities undertaken during the implementation of the ESSP II and in order to strengthen sub-regional dialogue, several actions could be implemented.

For example, it would be interesting to place national activities under a "sub-regional coherence" lasting over time (cf. the example of Lebanon and Egypt), with the same theme being discussed on a regular basis at sub-regional level on the basis of progress made at the national level.

In order to ensure the emergence of regional dialogue while retaining flexibility at national level, it has also been suggested to identify certain "umbrella" themes at regional level that can be divided into sub-themes reflecting the wide range of national sensitivities, for example "agriculture, rural development and climate change" or "agriculture, rural development and good agricultural practices".

It is also possible to increase the number of bilateral or multilateral field visits combining representatives of the institutions concerned, the producer organisations and the private sector.

Finally, to develop a regional dialogue, it is necessary to share the achievements of sub-regional dialogue at a political regional level (cf. point 11.7).

11.4. Translate sub-regional discussions into tangible national actions

While the activities undertaken within the framework of the ESSP II have, in several cases, displayed tangible effects in terms of determining agricultural policy (agricultural consulting reform in Egypt, reform of the cooperatives in Algeria and Tunisia, charter on the correct use of pesticides in Lebanon, guide to creating and evaluating territorial projects in Morocco, etc.), numerous partners have emphasised the fact that national considerations and discussions at regional level should then be translated into specific actions in the field at both national and local level.

This requirement would justify the promotion of closer relations between the project and the technical and financial partners, the European delegations first and foremost among them, while endowing the project with a capacity for funding "micro-initiatives".

Closer involvement of the EU delegations and the technical and financial partners (TFP) within the project would allow synergies to be developed with projects implemented in the countries, the achievements of the

project to be integrated in dialogue between the state and the TFP and specific actions to be defined which might be funded. At this level, two proposals can be highlighted: first, bringing together on a regular basis all EU projects involved either directly or indirectly in the agricultural or rural dynamics; and second, ensuring greater coherence between the initiative and the opportunities for sector-based political dialogue in the countries, in particular through the agriculture and fisheries committee of the association agreement or through sector coordination meetings between the TFP involved in the sector.

We could also imagine that the proposals voiced during the workshops, the study visits or discussions would be implemented in the form of micro-initiatives supported by the project, on condition that the funding required is not excessive (funding limit to be set according to the global funding available).

11.5. Accentuate capacity building actions at national and regional level

While the exchanges as part of the project activities through the workshops, the mobilisation of external expertise, the sharing of best of best practices, in particular those of the EU, and the preparation and dissemination of summary notes and reference documents contribute to building the capacities of the different players in the agricultural sector associated with the project, there have been very few specific capacity building and training actions during the second phase of the project. This is a request identified in the questionnaires in numerous countries which would need to be taken into account.

11.6. Strengthen dialogue with countries on the northern shore of the Mediterranean

The discussions with the countries of the northern Mediterranean are also an important achievement of the project which should be consolidated, primarily through more frequent sharing of the best practices of the EU and the Member States; the creation of a shared database relating to these practices and the experts called on; the dissemination of all interventions and summary notes produced via the dedicated blog; and the organisation of filed visits to Europe with regard to these good practices.

11.7. Promote national and sub-regional dynamics through the organisation of regional political dialogue

There is currently no international institution covering all the countries of the southern Mediterranean which addresses the fields of agriculture and rural development. While the UMA is interested in agricultural policies, it concentrates its efforts on the Maghreb, as it names suggests. The CIHEAM, with a remit focussing on agriculture and rural questions, only brings together five countries of the southern Mediterranean (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon and Egypt) in addition to seven European countries and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which is the only entity covering all the countries in the region[1], does not currently deal directly with agriculture and rural development. Incorporating any follow up of the ESSP into the dynamics of the UfM would provide it with the regional policy framework so cruelly missing until now.

On this point, it is interesting to note that the CIHEAM is currently a partner of the UfM and already places its “Higher education in the fields of food security and rural development” action under the UfM’s strategic priority of human development. Subject to obtaining its consent, we could envisage positioning regional dialogue on agriculture and rural development under the UfM’s banner of economic development and employment, thereby enhancing the UfM’s regional dialogue platform with a new theme. The European Commission would naturally be involved in this regional policy dynamic.

[1] Libya’s observer status should be noted

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