

Session on “Addressing the root causes of irregular migration”

Introduction by Julian Micallef, Assistant Director, Third Country Nationals Unit, Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security, Malta

The next session for today’s conference will focus on addressing the root causes of irregular migration. We cannot address, definitely not in this context, ongoing conflicts. I am sure that all of you agree with me that peace and stability are to be yearned for, and that individuals fleeing war need protection.

There are however other factors causing migration. And some of these can be addressed. The next set of speakers will not tell us that they are conducting information campaigns to dissuade people from making dangerous crossings. In fact, some will tell you that what they are doing has nothing to do with irregular migration (and privately, why did they invite me here?). What they will tell you about are their initiatives leading to sustainable lives and just economic models. A tall order for the world? Perhaps? Yet irregular migration is a symptom of underlying causes, and some solutions there might be, to the benefit of all.

Unfortunately, Ms. Bushra Halepota, UNHCR Representative in Somalia could not join us today. As a timely reminder that with all the good intentions of the world, destructive elements will remain, heavy conflict in Central Somalia erupted since the beginning of this week. She was requested to remain there to coordinate the resources that were necessary in such a situation. A similar message was received from Somalia’s Special Envoy on migrants’ rights, who had indicated her interest to attend for today’s conference.

I now give the floor to Dr. Ann Waters-Bayer who has been working as an agricultural sociologist for quite a number of years, having been involved with pastoralist development in Africa and Asia, as well as with reviewing programmes conducted by the various organisations in this field. Her work at PROLINNOVA and EFARD might be models that can be emulated and indicate the vitality of exchanging practices and models that benefit both small-scale farmers as well as their vital role in food security across their communities.

Assisting small-scale farmers: building on local strengths

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Small-scale farming: importance and characteristics

According to FAO (2013), about 2.5 billion people – more than one third of the total human population – derive their living from the food and agriculture sector. More than 90% of the roughly 570 million farms in the world rely mainly on family labour and use less than 2 ha of land per family plus community-managed pasture and forest. These small-scale farms occupy over half of the world’s agricultural land and produce about 80% of the world’s food. In Africa and Asia, small-scale farmers – a term that includes cultivators, livestock keepers, forest dwellers and fisherfolk – produce over 90% of the locally consumed food.

The Global Report on agriculture (IAASTD 2008) revealed that small-scale farming makes a huge contribution to the global agricultural economy. Not only is it the livelihood basis of millions of families; it also generates countless additional jobs within the local economies, often in the informal sector.

Few small-scale farmers operate purely on a subsistence basis, harvesting only enough to support the family. Most sell or trade part of their produce or generate income in other ways to be able to purchase other goods and services, i.e. they have some kind of link with a market economy. Farming is the family’s major but not only source of income. Their farming is low cost, uses few or no external inputs, uses mainly hand tools and draught animals for ploughing, and has a low ecological footprint. Small-scale farming usually involves cooperation with nature and with other people in the community, and women play key roles in this undertaking.

Small farms are often more productive per unit area than are large commercial farms. The farmers maintain a variety of plant and animal species in order to cover their dietary needs and reduce risk. The high agrobiodiversity is key for food security and environmental sustainability. Small-scale farming is a source of resilience for families and communities; this becomes particularly crucial during unstable conditions, such as war or the collapse of state institutions.

Push factors in small-scale farming

Most small-scale farmers have insecure land rights. This is especially the case for mobile producers such as livestock herders (pastoralists), who struggle to maintain access to pasture and water on what is often regarded by government and investors as vacant or underutilised land, and who are being ousted for projects such as irrigated farming. Land acquisition for large-scale commercial farming, combined with human population growth, has created pressures to push poorer people out of rural areas.

Most urban people and young people who have received a formal Western education hold small-scale farming in low esteem. Hopes of finding more respected and lucrative work in urban areas are pulling especially the young people away from farming, also those without much formal education. However, the frustrations in the teeming cities in Africa and Asia are pushing many young people even further – and some of the most enterprising and courageous set out for other shores, seeking a better life in Europe or America – as my grandparents did in the early 1900s when they emigrated from northern Scotland to Canada and formed a Diaspora there of people from the “Old Country” who supported each other in creating new livelihoods in the “New Country”.

For those who remain in the rural areas, small-scale farming and related small enterprises are the only alternatives to unemployment, food aid or starvation. In many cases, it is not an easy life. The working and living conditions of the rural families could be greatly improved if this type of farming were given more attention in development interventions.

Small-scale farming and the SDGs

In past decades, small-scale farming was regarded as a problem, and attempts were made to bring about a “Green Revolution” by “modernising” agriculture using high levels of external inputs. However, in many parts of Africa and Asia, this had negative effects in terms of the environment and, above all, in socio-economic terms, creating increased disparities between a small number of rich farmers and a burgeoning number of poor ones. These problems and their repercussions are becoming increasingly visible. Now, small-scale farming is considered part of the solution to achieve sustainable development (FAO 2014).

In order to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – above all to:

SDG 1: End poverty

SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security & improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women & girls

SDG 8: Promote inclusive & sustainable economic growth, employment & decent work

SDG 12: Reduce inequalities within & among countries

SDG 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt & reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

– supporting small-scale farming needs to be central in development efforts.

Small-scale farmers and agricultural research

The dominant approach in agricultural research was and still is oriented toward medium- and large-scale “modern” farmers producing for overseas markets. Many of the technologies developed through conventional research have not been suitable for small-scale farms, having disregarded the huge

differences in access to resources – above all, land, water and capital to purchase external inputs. Conventional development policies and programmes based on these research-generated technologies have marginalised small-scale farmers, confined their space and their motivation for development, and added to the push factors that drive people out of rural areas.

Meanwhile, many small-scale farmers are doing their own informal agricultural research and innovation, as they have done for centuries. They have developed and refined and adapted crop varieties, livestock breeds, farming techniques and natural resource management systems suited to different agro-ecological conditions, including highly efficient systems of using very scarce vegetation and water in arid areas. These systems – such as pastoralism in the Horn of Africa – continue to thrive to this day.

When government institutions conduct “formal” research, the crop farmers, livestock-keepers, forest users and fishers are seldom consulted about their development needs – or their achievements and the questions they are exploring in their own informal research. The disconnect between formal agricultural research and farmers’ own research and innovation processes means that scientists and farmers are often not aware of each other’s complementary knowledge and expertise.

Some initiatives by civil-society organisations (CSOs) have focused on recognising the local knowledge and innovativeness of small-scale farmers in finding better ways to use locally available resources to improve their farming. The CSOs stimulate collaboration between farmers and other actors in research and development, so that they become more aware of how they can help each other. This enhances innovation processes so that farmers can adapt more quickly to changing conditions, defend their resources and farming systems, and continue to produce food in a socially and environmentally friendly way.

It is a positive, strength-based approach that is designed to raise the esteem of small-scale farmers in their own eyes, in the eyes of their children and in the eyes of the wider society. It is an approach that celebrates small-scale farming and seeks to increase satisfaction and pride in a noble profession: providing food and other valuable products from crops, livestock and trees for their family, their community and their country.

Example: The PROLINNOVA network

An example is the network called PROLINNOVA, which was supported – among others – by the European Union through a project called INSARD (Including Smallholders in Agricultural Research for Development). INSARD involved several African and European CSOs – including farmer organisations – that facilitated farmers and scientists to explore research needs and opportunities together and to identify research activities that address priority topics of the farmers. The ultimate goal was to strengthen the voices of small-scale farmers in decision-making about agricultural research and development. The funding for the INSARD project came to an end in 2013, but the PROLINNOVA network continues.

Partners in PROLINNOVA try to uncover opportunities for agricultural research and development to respond to small-scale farmers’ needs. They take an approach designed to enhance the capacity of the farmers and their communities to innovate and to further develop their farming systems to achieve food security, sustain their livelihoods and safeguard the environment, building on local knowledge and creativity. It is an example of “farmer-led” research and development, in which farmers collaborate with other actors in agricultural innovation and have a strong voice in decision-making.

A CSO-led multi-stakeholder initiative

What is PROLINNOVA? It is a network for “**P**romoting Local **I**nnovation in ecologically oriented agricultural and natural resource management” that was initiated by CSOs as a Global Partnership Programme under the umbrella of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR). It focuses on research and development approaches in small-scale farming. The network members seek to make farmer-led joint innovation processes an everyday part of formal agricultural research and development as well as in institutions of higher education. The vision of the network is: ***a world where women and men small-scale farmers play decisive roles in agricultural research and development for sustainable livelihoods.***

The international network is multi-stakeholder: it involves not only CSOs but also people from research centres, advisory services, universities and the private sector. All are united in the conviction that farmers are creative and can develop relevant local innovations, i.e. locally new and better ways of doing things, in both technological and socio-organisation terms. The network believes that linking local creativity with other sources of ideas builds more resilient innovation systems to be able to continue dealing with change. Recognising local capacities lays the basis for true partnership with other knowledge-holders in agricultural research and development – in contrast to the conventional approach of transferring technologies from research stations to farmers.

A strength-based approach starting with local innovators

The initial focus of PROLINNOVA partners is therefore on local innovators: farmers who innovate on their own initiative, building on local knowledge and ideas from many sources. Local innovations are regarded as entry points for farmer-led joint research, a process that combines local knowledge and ideas with those from external experts – scientists, agricultural advisors, subject-matter specialists etc – in joint exploration of new possibilities.

The strengths of this approach are that it focuses on the positive: on farmers' innovativeness in using locally available resources in new and better ways. It stimulates farmers to value their own knowledge and skills, and builds mutual respect among all partners in the joint research. Research led by small-scale farmers produces innovations that are low cost, site-appropriate and manageable by the resource-poor. Above all, this approach enhances local capacities to continue the process of innovation to deal with never-ending change.

The PROLINNOVA network consists of 21 multi-stakeholder national teams in Africa, Asia and Latin America – the majority being in Africa – that create evidence about small-scale farmer innovation and research by identifying, analysing and documenting examples of this. The national teams plan and implement joint activities designed ultimately to scale up farmer-led participatory research and development. They build the capacity of all the people involved in farmer-led research, documentation, policy dialogue etc and engage in policy dialogue to promote integration of this approach at local and national level.

Local innovations as basis for farmer-led research

Over the more than ten years that the network has been operating, several hundred local innovations have been identified and documented, including documentation by farmers themselves. Most of the local innovations have been selected – after participatory assessment in the communities – to be shared more widely through village workshops, farmer-to-farmer visits, farmer innovation fairs, catalogues, posters, pamphlets, magazines, community radio, video and television. These have inspired other farmers to try out and adapt new ideas. A few of the innovations on which farmer innovators were still working, seeking answers to specific questions, were selected for farmer-led joint research.

A few examples of the topics chosen by farming communities and farmer groups for farmer-led joint research include:

- Salt lick for cattle using local minerals (Ghana)
- Low cost underground drainage of waterlogged fields (Ethiopia)
- Termite control using local predators (Uganda)
- New ways to manage soil fertility using organic matter (Cambodia)
- Improving traditional ovens to dry fish (Niger)
- Trapping wasps that hinder beekeeping (Nepal)
- Various herbal treatments for pest control (in several countries)
- Comparing locally developed “modern” beehives with introduced ones (Ethiopia).

For an example of innovation in Niger, including farmer-led research on improved ovens for drying fish, see “Arid Land, Fertile Minds” (www.prolinnova.net/resources/video/prolinnova4video#niger%20english).

Piloting Local Innovation Support Funds (LISFs)

During attempts to facilitate farmer-led joint research, some PROLINNOVA partners observed that, after learning to identify local innovations, agricultural advisors tended to promote the innovations instead of the approach of encouraging farmers to collaborate with others in farmer-led research. Scientists wanted to “validate” the innovations instead of helping farmers find answers to their own questions (Wettasinha *et al* 2008). Farmers still had little or no say in much of the “participatory” research. During one of the annual international meetings, PROLINNOVA partners hypothesised that the power balance would change if farmers had more control over funds for agricultural research. The network decided to pilot a mechanism through which communities of small-scale farmers could drive their own adaptation to change by accessing and managing funds for farmer-led research and innovation – deciding what would be investigated, how and by whom – also hiring technicians or scientists to support them, if the farmers saw a need for this.

In eight African and Asian countries, at several sites in each country, the national PROLINNOVA teams coordinated and facilitated the piloting of LISFs. Each national team developed and tested an LISF model that fitted its country-specific political and institutional realities. At each site, the team helped local people set up a Fund Management Committees (FMC) of 5–10 members each and built the capacities of the committee to manage the local competitive grant system. Each FMC defined the criteria for making grants to farmers for research and innovation. However, as they all followed the key principles defined jointly by the national teams in the international PROLINNOVA network, the main criteria for screening the proposals were similar among the FMCs, namely:

- the idea was driven by the farmer applicants (not by outsiders)
- the innovation to be explored appeared sound in economic, environmental and social terms
- the innovation could be applied by poor farmers (with locally available, low-cost inputs)
- the applicants were willing to share their results (as they were receiving public funds for public goods)
- the proposal was for local experimentation and learning, not for private farm investment.

The FMCs made open calls for proposals, and farmers – as individuals or groups – submitted simple proposals, usually of 1–2 pages with a simple budget. The FMCs sometimes wrote down applications made orally by illiterate farmers (e.g. women). The FMCs selected the proposals dealing with topics and questions of local priority, and provided the resources to carry out the proposed activities. The farmers who received the grants took the lead in carrying out the research or innovation and shared their findings within the community and beyond. A participatory impact assessment was carried out to learn from the piloting process and how it affected the livelihoods and innovative capacities of the farming communities involved.

How the local funds were used

The allocation decisions of the FMCs reflected the local preferences in use of the innovation funds. In order of frequency, most funds went to: i) small-scale experimentation and/or data collection by farmers only, individually or with other farmers; ii) improving local innovations with little or no systematic experimentation or data collection; iii) farmer-led experimentation together with scientists and/or agricultural advisors using more systematic methods and data collection, covering some costs of the support agents; and iv) learning and sharing by farmers through training by farmer innovators, farmer-led documentation and visits by farmers to other farmers or researchers to learn about local innovations and possibilities to improve them.

Over the course of four years in the eight countries, a total of 1224 applications were received from small-scale farmers, and 64% of the applications were approved. The average amount of an LISF grant was €84, ranging from €5 in Nepal to €1670 in South Africa. The smaller grants were used mainly to buy tools, inputs (e.g. seeds), record books or protective clothing (e.g. when dealing with bio-pesticides). The grants were larger if costs of external services were included, e.g. laboratory analysis or support by scientists.

Participatory impact assessment

The participatory impact assessments in the eight countries revealed that the involvement of the different actors (farmers, scientists, agricultural advisors, government officials etc) in the LISFs: i) led to strengthened social organisation around managing local research and innovation as well as managing funds to support this; ii) built small-scale farmers' capacities to formulate their own needs and to access relevant information for ARD; iii) increased the farmers' confidence to interact with "outsiders" in joint innovation; and iv) stimulated the interest of scientists and agricultural advisors – as well as a few government policymakers – to support farmer-led innovation. All of these results led helped to strengthen the overall innovation capacity in communities of small-scale farmers.

Some findings and lessons learnt

The experiences made with LISFs yielded several findings and lessons for implementing decentralised agricultural research and development. Foremost, the piloting showed that small-scale farming communities are fully capable of managing funds for locally relevant innovation development, if support agencies facilitate interaction between farmers and other actors so that farmers remain in the lead.

LISFs need to be custom-designed for each setting. The core principles – giving smallholders direct access to funds, supporting farmer-led innovation, and farmer co-management of funds – must be applied according to local realities regarding local capacities, the current level of community organisation and the availability of support services, as well as the existing policy and legal framework in the country. Setting up LISFs is easier if they are integrated into existing participatory programmes that can give the initial advisory support needed by the FMCs. The piloting of LISFs showed that involvement in this form of decentralised decision-making about use of innovation funds strengthens the capacities of small-scale farmers in governance of publicly funded agricultural research and development.

Outlook and recommendations

Farmers in small, family-run operations play a major role in feeding the world. In future, agricultural research and development – including activities supported by the new European Trust Fund for Africa to address root causes of irregular migration flow – should give strong attention to small-scale family farmers. Long-term public commitment is essential to support agricultural research and development in which these farmers and their communities have a strong say in determining how the funds are allocated, by managing decentralised funds. The Trust Fund and other public funds should also be used to raise worldwide awareness and recognition of the crucial role being played by small-scale farming in ensuring food and nutrition security, and encouraging the continuation and self-determined improvement of small-scale farming as a respected and attractive profession. In this way, it would be possible to continue to produce food for billions of people in Africa and Asia and to help the largest possible number of rural men, women and youth to be engaged in decent work and to lead meaningful, productive and satisfying lives.

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