

STATEMENT OF THE GOVERNORS' ROUND TABLE

Smallholder agriculture is on the global agenda to stay, and should be placed at the centre of development. Investing in smallholder family farming is essential not only to achieving food and nutrition security and poverty reduction, but also to revitalizing rural societies and connecting them to a rapidly changing world.

The thirty-seventh session of the IFAD Governing Council takes place during the International Year of Family Farming. The 2.5 billion people who depend on smallholder family farms for their livelihoods are an enormous untapped resource. They are part of the solution for reaching global development goals. Agriculture is now recognized as a profitable area for investment, which creates enormous potential to transform rural society and rural lives. Success will depend on a recognition that farming is a business, so that farmers can see their activity as a path to growth and prosperity and not just as a mode of subsistence.

This transformation has to begin with young people, upon whom the future depends. They must be encouraged, from a young age, to see farming as a viable and dignified profession, and to connect with their land and rural communities. This can be done through school programmes, extension and information technology. But it will also require investment in the rural space to create a range of jobs and employment opportunities so that young people choose to stay in rural areas and their communities thrive.

None of this will happen without leadership and an enabling environment. Governments need to "walk the talk" by increasing the share of national budgets devoted to agriculture, investing in public sector areas such as infrastructure and education, and by putting in place policies and legislation that are smallholder-friendly. This means policies that support secure land tenure for smallholder family farmers, facilitate access to financial services and help them connect to markets.

Harmonization of development efforts is critically important, with all activities coordinated and aligned with national priorities and strategies. As well as government, development institutions and the private sector, producers and their organizations need to be involved. Efforts should focus on promoting market-oriented production and a value-chain approach to build rural economies and help smallholders reach local, national and international markets.

Information technology is essential for smallholder family farmers to access knowledge, financial and extension services, and market information. In the context of climate change, IT connectivity can provide early warning to reduce risks and vulnerability.

All of this support aims at strengthening and transforming rural society itself, and therefore the vision must be holistic and inclusive. It is also essential to empower women, who make up a large part of the agricultural workforce. Rural and urban development go hand in hand, with rural areas providing food, natural resource management and environmental services to urban areas, while urban areas provide markets and finance, for example in the form of remittances.

IFAD is well-positioned to play an important role in all these areas, with a clear advantage due to its engagement at the country level, focus on innovation and knowledge-sharing, and pragmatic and results-oriented approach. It has already proved itself to be a valuable partner and should expand its role as an honest broker and use its convening power as the only institution of its kind that is exclusively focused on smallholder agriculture and rural development. It should continue to foster South-South cooperation, explore innovative modes of financing and new approaches such as its Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP), and expand its own programme of work with support from its Members.

The evolution of a new post-2015 development agenda gives Member States a special opportunity to advocate for rural investment and transformation at the global level. Through their participation they can take the next step toward ensuring that smallholder family farmers are at the centre of the development agenda.