

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



EU POLICIES ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE MENA

This document summarizes the findings of MEDRESET's WP5 on "Agriculture and Water", which aims at evaluating the effectiveness and potential of EU trade and assistance policies in the area of agriculture and water (including trade liberalization, EU-funded agro-food and water projects and cooperation initiatives).

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INTRODUCTION

The EU should modify technocratic and depoliticized approaches in its rural development agenda in countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) and be more cognizant of socioeconomic, cultural and legal contexts of development challenges, particularly regarding women.

For a long time technocratic and depoliticized approaches have prevailed in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). EU agricultural and rural development projects in SEM countries are a case in point. They are reluctant to tackle unequal access to land and controversial legal frameworks for land rights, especially for women. In the wake of the Arab Spring the ENP has been revised in 2011 and 2015. Security and migration have moved up the priority scale. This also applies to policies on agriculture and rural development. These policies are supposed to contribute to economic opportunities and ease migration pressures, particularly for young people. On the other hand, European stakeholders complain that concessions in agricultural policy are sometimes used as a transaction currency in negotiations on security issues (e.g., cooperation on borders and migration). The MEDRESET stakeholder consultations carried out in Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and EU countries show that such technocratic, depoliticized and securitized approaches are seen critically by stakeholders and have their limits. Increased agency of local actors is important.

In this policy brief, we outline the mutual agricultural trade and investment relationship and show how stakeholders conceptualize the notion of the Mediterranean. This conceptualization tends to be less lofty than in official EU parlance. More often than not, stakeholders in SEM countries portray and perceive the Mediterranean as a northern concept that is propagated with ulterior economic motives in mind. We then analyse how the stakeholders evaluate EU projects and

policies on agriculture and rural development in the SEM countries. In particular, we outline the evaluation of EU policies and projects in terms of instruments, actors and substance. Respondents in our stakeholder consultations saw a need for more inclusion of civil society actors in project design, a less prominent role of ministries in fund allocation and more consideration of gender issues. The work of women in agriculture often remains ignored, unpaid and not accounted for by national statistics. Female farmers face a series of restrictions, such as limited access to land, funding, markets and technological and managerial know-how that are not sufficiently addressed in EU project designs. We conclude with a set of policy recommendations in the fields of trade, agricultural projects, rural development and gender issues. The EU should give more room to context-based strategies that include local stakeholders, empower women and contribute to sustainable agricultural practices. The EU might also want to consider an enhanced role of the European Neighbouring Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) and make it more known among local stakeholders. Such outreach activities could include European producer associations and lobby organizations in outreach efforts in the region that aim to help local stakeholders to comply with EU food safety and environmental regulations. Thereby the EU could also ease concerns among EU producers about unfair competition from SEM countries in agricultural product markets.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) relates to EU agriculture in two major ways: On the one hand, it is the world's largest grain importer and a very substantial one for meat and dairy products. For many countries in the north of the EU it is a major market. On the other hand, the SEM is also an exporter of fruit and vegetables, such as citrus, strawberries and olive oil. For many countries in the south of the EU it is a competitor, either within the EU itself or on third party markets such as the Gulf countries.

Agriculture plays an important role in the engagement of the EU with the SEM. This does not only apply to trade policies. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) process and related programme assistance such as the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and the European Neighbouring Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) go beyond the narrow focus on agriculture and include water and rural development. The EU's policy has evolved from a protectionist trade stance to a more comprehensive developmental perspective. Export subsidies have been slashed from €10 billion in the early 1980s to only €160 million in 2011. Meanwhile, EU market access for developing countries has increased via preferential trade agreements.

However, the EU's assistance is geographically concentrated in a few countries, as a look at the allocation of the ENP's predecessor reveals. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument that was in force between 2007 and 2013 allocated by far the largest amount to Palestine, followed by Morocco and Egypt. Palestine also stood out on a per capita basis, followed at a distance by Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia. Turkey is not part of the ENP and its assistance programmes, as it is party to the current EU enlargement and as such has access to other related assistance programmes such as the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.

The Mediterranean is not a mere geographical reference. Like the notion of the Middle East it is an ideational construct of the West that can mean different things to different people and whose boundaries and content have changed over time. As such people on the northern and southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean do not necessarily perceive it in the same way. This also showed in MEDRESET stakeholder interviews in WP5. Lofty portrayals of a shared Mediterranean space did not figure prominently in their answers. Like the analysis in other work packages has shown, the EU is seen as dominating the Mediterranean space economically, but not geopolitically or ideationally.

Stakeholders in SEM countries perceived a bilateral relationship between their home countries and the European Union, rather than a shared Mediterranean space that could be developed jointly. In some interviews the notion of the Mediterranean was explicitly perceived as a northern concept. Stakeholders in the SEM countries also frame the region primarily in national interests and suspect utilitarian motivations behind the Mediterranean agendas of the EU. Stakeholders in the EU, such as producer associations and lobby groups, on the other hand, are equally reluctant to engage as they fear unfair competition on the part of SEM countries that flout European environmental, labour and food safety standards.

The EU and its member states support the agriculture and water sectors in the region under a variety of bilateral and multilateral frameworks. This multiplicity of programmes, scopes, objectives, names and stakeholders impedes the cohesion of the EU's policy. It leads to duplications that increase coordination costs and contribute to perceptions of the EU as bureaucratically rigid, complicating collaboration with local stakeholders. Name recognition of EU programmes among stakeholders in SEM countries and in the European Union itself is limited. More outreach activities would be required that are cognizant of socio-economic and institutional contexts of programme applications. Beside the ENP and ENPARD, EU agreements include the Association Agreements signed with all four countries, the Agricultural and Rural Development Programme signed with Lebanon, and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and PAPS-EAU programme negotiated with Tunisia.

These programmes have been criticized for their inadequate design spurred by the EU's lack of knowledge of the concrete needs and gaps of the agriculture sector in each country. To Moroccan and Lebanese actors, the numerous partnerships with the EU have disproportionately served EU commercial interests and were claimed to be a covert means for the EU to flood Mediterranean markets with high-priced products from the EU, while monitoring and intentionally reducing Mediterranean goods from entering the European market. Additionally, another identified gap in EU instruments concerns the lack of information on sustainable farming practices and alternative forms of fertilizers. Since many producers in Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon simply do not have knowledge of such alternatives, they find themselves unable to access European markets as many pesticides are banned under EU regulations.

The EU's technical and budgetary support has progressively moved away from direct project financing in the four countries. Instead, direct support to governments has become more important, which can be the source of mismanagement of funds as Lebanese actors mentioned. Professional agricultural organizations in Morocco and Lebanon criticized the EU's top-down approach. They reproached the EU of not being present in the field and only acting through public institutions. Additionally, local respondents in Lebanon claimed that the EU's investment patterns are more inclined towards studies rather than providing recommendations for alternative solutions and innovative projects. It seems that the studies conducted over the years have barely been used as the EU does not build on these studies nor does it get involved in implementation of projects corresponding to the needs highlighted in them.

All surveyed actors in SEM countries unanimously viewed the EU as a strategic partner; however, the EU's overly technocratic, depoliticized and securitized approach has been repeatedly criticized. This trend towards centralization and technocratic management was not well received. Several respondents in Morocco and Lebanon argued that it removed the EU from the local context and impeded a proper understanding of local challenges and dynamics. The EU is criticized for excluding certain actors such as local NGOs, while heavily including traditional public institutions such as the Ministry of Finance. Rather than including the knowledge and perceptions of stakeholders, the latter have little say in the matter and are subjected to top-down decisions of a centralized government.

Moreover, the EU's cooperation with national and local stakeholders in SEM countries is hampered by unclear and complicated contractual procedures, which sometimes conflict with the priorities of national governments. Another flaw in the EU's action in SEM countries lies in the lack of clarity in the EU's strategy and partners. Areas of cooperation between the EU and Tunisia are not easily

identifiable, for instance. Similarly, Lebanese NGOs claim that correspondence between national actors and the EU is minimal, thereby leading to duplication of efforts.

Among the EU stakeholders, producer associations and lobby organizations along the agricultural value chain are preoccupied with trade issues, especially non-tariff barriers, such as phytosanitary standards, labelling, traceability, product quality requirements and transparency in the quota of sensitive products such as tomatoes, cucumbers and strawberries. Trade tariffs that have already been greatly reduced in the field of agriculture played a secondary role in comparison. Such stakeholders were usually not aware of EU programmes for rural development in SEM countries, such as ENPARD, and showed no real interest in such programmes.

European NGOs are more involved in development projects in SEM countries, but also have limited knowledge of EU programmes. The same is true for public bodies on the international, national and regional level. They are interested in development in the SEM region, but have no deeper knowledge of the details of European programmes in the SEM, such as ENPARD. Instead they engage with broader issues of concern such as youth unemployment, climate change and water scarcity.

When it comes to the work of women in agriculture, it remains predominantly ignored, unpaid and not accounted for by national statistics, despite its importance. However, gender issues in agriculture go beyond this overarching problem. Female farmers face a series of restrictions such as limited access to land, funding, technological and managerial know-how and market opportunities. They also suffer from cultural and social restrictions that affect their inheritance rights and access to resources. Lack of infrastructure is another aggravating factor. These issues deserve more attention from researchers, policy makers and stakeholders, such as international institutions and agri-business.

Perceptions of gender issues differ between the North and the South of the Mediterranean. In European countries, the gender issue has been tackled by academic research institutions and has become part of EU policies, such as the EU's Gender Action Plan 2016–2020. In its accompanying toolkit the priority area 2 in section 2 pertains to food security and sustainable development. The EU is cognizant that a majority of farmers in developing countries are female and it tries to reach them via gender-sensitive and inclusive pro-poor agricultural policies. This includes gender-sensitive data compilation and policy commitments on a macro level, and ensuring that women have equal access to extension services, credit and other resources in related project designs on a meso level. On a micro level it includes awareness of gendered inheritance rights and agricultural workloads (e.g., women predominantly produce subsistence crops and men cash crops). However, according to the interviewed stakeholders, European engagement failed to address the issues faced by women in the agriculture sector in Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco and Egypt. Although programmes that mainstream a gender dimension have allowed for some job creation, they did not reduce rural women's poverty and dependence, nor did they uphold and improve the protection of workers' rights or women's working conditions. This failure to provide women with the required support, and women's dependence on male figures in order to benefit from EU support, highlights the need for both the EU's presence on the ground in order to assess the needs of women in the agriculture sector as well as a broader policy strategy that goes beyond projects targeted to women so as to deal with structural aspects.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the importance of agriculture and rural development in the ENP, the EU's policies often follow a technocratic and depoliticized script. They are careful "not to rock the boat" and offend political or cultural sensitivities in SEM countries. In order to overcome this technocratic and depoliticizing approach, a framework for cooperation was recommended. Additionally, priority

areas for support were suggested in addition to recommendations to make the EU's policies more inclusive and responsive to local needs and perspectives.

I. Improved framework for cooperation

1. **The EU should make collaboration with local stakeholders more transparent and clear and avoid a multiplicity of programmes that leads to duplications and increased costs.** In order for the EU's efforts to be more visible and to be acknowledged by the local population, the EU should shift away from providing direct technical and financial support to the Ministry of Agriculture in the target countries. Instead, more assistance should end up with local, tailored projects that are implemented by civil society and private actors.
2. **The EU should target European producer associations and lobby groups along the agricultural value chain to increase their knowledge of the development agendas that inform ENP programmes such as ENPARD.** These stakeholders should be included in outreach activities in order to help SEM producers to comply with EU food safety and environmental regulations. Thereby the EU could ease concerns among EU producers about unfair competition from SEM countries in agricultural product markets.
3. **ENPARD should remain at the forefront of all ventures of cooperation** and should be the main source of setting the policy framework and strategy for cooperation between actors in the agriculture and water sectors, as ENPARD is the most suitable and effective mechanism to facilitate the communication between the EU and its Southern stakeholders.
4. **The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)** offers budgetary assistance to support the implementation of policies but **should not be the decision-making body nor should it be the forum for policy discussions**, as this role should be allocated to ENPARD.
5. In SEM countries, particularly in Lebanon, **the EU must be sensitive to the fragile nature of political stability.** In its policy interventions, the EU should carefully assess and weigh this factor, so as not to appear to favour any political parties, ethnicities, religions, regions, etc.
6. Regarding EU projects on gender-related issues, in order to promote their effectiveness, **the EU should directly allocate a quota of operational work and funds to women's cooperatives and associations.** These organizations have specifically expressed discontent with the ineffectiveness and the lack of impact of the EU's projects that concern gender inequality.

II. Priority areas for support

7. Within ENPARD's framework, **the EU should give greater weight to context-based strategies that tackle structural challenges** in order to strengthen the agriculture and water sectors.
8. When setting the framework for its strategy in developing countries, **the EU should bear in mind that the current focus on the production of added-value crops, often for export, has diverted attention away from production of grains and other staple crops** that make an important contribution to these countries' food security.
9. The EU should address the (i) **effects of climate change on the agriculture and water sectors** in the SEM, (ii) **land ownership inequality** and (iii) **unsustainable agriculture models based on productivism** and export, which do not yet play a sufficient role in the EU's engagement with the region.
10. The EU should **explore avenues for labour regulations and implementation of social protection programmes with local decisions makers.** Rural work is informal in SEM countries, consequently waged workers in the agricultural sector are not protected and do not fall under the scope of the Labour Law. Decent employment and social protection of waged workers in agriculture, particularly women, should be adhered to.
11. **Support water management strategies and irrigation infrastructures that do not threaten already fragile ecosystems.** This can include expansion of drip irrigation systems in arid areas, provided the productivity gains are not used for production expansion, which could lead to increased water consumption.
12. **Support small farmers** who suffer from a lack of competitiveness locally and internationally due to out-dated equipment, inefficient modes of production and low margins. Include support in the latter stages of the production chain, such as marketing, branding, packaging and

transportation. Support the provision of training on fertilizer and integrated pest management, organic agriculture and other sustainable farming practices in order to assure compliance with EU standards.

III. Inclusive approach to EU projects

13. **More bottom-up approaches** in the EU's projects and their bilateral design in collaboration with local stakeholders are needed. This includes (i) better inclusion of direct beneficiaries and stakeholders, (ii) accumulation of contextual knowledge and (iii) thorough assessment of local needs. Most of the shortcomings of the EU's projects can be attributed to their non-participatory approaches.
14. **Increase use of already available research to avoid duplications and improve stakeholder consultations in newly conducted research** to avoid widely held impressions on the part of stakeholders that assessments and studies often primarily only benefit donors themselves.
15. **Directly allocate a quota of operational work and funds to women's cooperatives and associations in EU projects** as well as **oversee the implementation and evaluation reporting of projects that promote gender equality** to ensure the effectiveness of these projects.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Work Package No. 5 of the MEDRESET project analysed recursive multi-stakeholder consultations, and aimed to assess how stakeholders in the SEM and the EU perceive the EU policies for agricultural and rural development in SEM countries. To this end 122 semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of farmer associations, NGOs and public institutions in countries of the EU (17 interviews), Morocco (52 interviews), Tunisia (27 interviews) and Lebanon (26 interviews). Initially interviews with representatives of farmer associations, NGOs and public institutions were planned in Egypt as well, but this proved to be impossible as the Egyptian government did not grant research permission to our MEDRESET partner Cairo University. Besides the interviews the researchers undertook content analysis of the websites, publications and grey material of the stakeholder institutions. Of the 122 interviewees, 89 were male, highlighting the explicitly visible, disproportionate representation of men in related organizations. Interviews in the SEM countries were conducted between July 2017 and May 2018, and in Europe in January and February 2018. Among the European stakeholders, no gendered differences could be observed in the replies and priorities of the three women among the 17 interviewees. In contrast, the 30 female interviewees in the SEM countries found that the EU's support did not completely address their needs, and often did not consider the patriarchal nature of the agriculture sector and industry when providing them with support.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME MEDRESET: A comprehensive, integrated and bottom-up approach to reset our understanding of the Mediterranean space, remap the region and reconstruct inclusive, responsive and flexible EU policies in it

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FURTHER READING	<p>Bouzidi, Zhour (2018), “Role and Effectiveness of the EU Policies in the Fields of Water and Agriculture in Morocco: A Bottom-up Approach”, in <i>MEDRESET Working Papers</i>, No. 23, October, http://www.medreset.eu/?p=13651</p> <p>Chaaban, Jad, Ali Chalak, Tala Ismail, Yasmine Abou Taha, Irene Martinez and Eckart Woertz (2017), “Effectiveness and Potential of European Trade and Assistance Policies in the South Mediterranean Neighbourhood in the Fields of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development”, in <i>MEDRESET Methodology and Concept Papers</i>, No. 7, September, http://www.medreset.eu/?p=13457</p> <p>Chaaban, Jad, Ali Chalak, Tala Ismail and Salma Khedr (2018a), “Agriculture, Water and Rural Development in Egypt: A Bottom-Up Approach in Evaluating European Trade and Assistance Policies”, in <i>MEDRESET Working Papers</i>, No. 21, October, http://www.medreset.eu/?p=13639</p> <p>Chaaban, Jad, Ali Chalak, Tala Ismail and Salma Khedr (2018b), “Examining Lebanese Stakeholders’ Frames in the Fields of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development with regards to the Effectiveness and Potential of European Trade and Assistance Policies in Lebanon”, in <i>MEDRESET Working Papers</i>, No. 22, October, http://www.medreset.eu/?p=13646</p> <p>Chékir, Hafedh and Asma Noura (2018), “Effectiveness and Potential of European Trade and Assistance Policies in the South Mediterranean Neighbourhood in the Fields of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development: The Case of Tunisia”, in <i>MEDRESET Working Papers</i>, No. 24, November, http://www.medreset.eu/?p=13663</p> <p>Woertz, Eckart and Irene Martínez (2018), “Perceptions of EU Agricultural and Rural Development Policies in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean by European Stakeholders”, in <i>MEDRESET Working Papers</i>, No. 25, November, http://www.medreset.eu/?p=13659</p>