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EU Policies on Agriculture and Rural Development in the MENA

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Abstract

Agriculture plays a significant role in the relations of the EU with countries in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM). 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) focus not only on agriculture and trade, but are also inclusive of water issues and rural development. This MEDRESET paper analyses the views of stakeholders in Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt and the EU on such policies and how they conceptualize the Mediterranean political space. Stakeholders encompass supranational, national and regional public bodies, producer associations, lobby organizations along the agricultural value chain and NGOs and research centres. Their views and knowledge of the respective instruments differ considerably. While EU stakeholders are preoccupied with agricultural trade issues and have only limited knowledge of EU agricultural development programmes in the SEM, stakeholders in the SEM often criticize their overly technocratic, depoliticized and securitized approach. Granting more agency to local actors and improving communication with them are important issues in the refinement of such programmes.

Introduction

The agriculture sector in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) relates to the European Union 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 a significant role in EU and SEM relations. 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) focus not only on agriculture, but are also inclusive of water issues and rural development (Chaaban et al. 2017).

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With the more holistic approach of such initiatives, the EU's agricultural policies have evolved from a protectionist trade stance to a more comprehensive developmental perspective. Export subsidies have been slashed from 10 billion euro in the early 1980s to only 147 million euro in 2012 (European Commission 2015b: 58–9). Meanwhile, the EU's market access to developing countries has increased via preferential trade agreements.

However, prior to the Arab Spring, technocratic and depoliticized approaches to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) were the norm. In the wake of the Arab Spring, the ENP was revised in 2011 and 2015 such that security and restrictive measures on migration have moved up the priority scale. These restrictive measures also apply to policies on agriculture and rural development, which are supposed to contribute to an increase in economic opportunities and the easing of migration pressures, particularly for young people. European stakeholders complain that concessions on agricultural trade are sometimes used as a transaction currency in negotiations of security issues (e.g., cooperation on borders and migration). Stakeholders in the SEM on the other hand perceive some of the programmes and their implementation as overtly technocratic and depoliticized. The focus is often on agricultural productivity and market access. Unequal access to land and resources based on class and gender gets short thrift. Granting more agency to, and better communication with, local actors could benefit EU programmes in the SEM.

Work Package 5 of the MEDRESET project analysed recursive multi-stakeholder consultations, and aimed to assess how stakeholders in the SEM and the EU perceive the aforementioned EU policies. 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. 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 take into account the patriarchal nature of the agriculture sector and industry when providing them with support.

In this policy report, we first outline 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. Secondly, we 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. Thirdly, we discuss 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 (Moisseron et al. 2017, FAO 2016, Peet and Hartwick 2015). Fourthly, we conclude with a set of policy recommendations in the fields of trade, agricultural projects, rural development and gender issues.

1. The Conceptualization of the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean is not a purely 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 (Bonine et al. 2012). 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 the MEDRESET stakeholder interviews of WP5. Lofty lyrics 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 from SEM countries were aware of significant differences between their agricultural sectors, which in turn made the formulation of joint standpoints difficult. Apart from some exports to the Gulf, Lebanon's agriculture primarily caters to its domestic market, while Turkey and Morocco are export power houses for fruit and vegetables and Tunisia's exports focus on olive oil. Most European stakeholders did not display a clear-cut understanding of rural development challenges in SEM countries and related EU programmes, such as ENPARD. Instead they focused on the fundamental aspects of agricultural trade, mostly food safety standards and alleged environmental and wage dumping by SEM countries.

There was a clear preference among European stakeholders for bilateral treaties as opposed to negotiating with SEM countries as a group. Stakeholders in SEM countries similarly perceived a bilateral relationship between their home country and the European Union, rather than a shared Mediterranean space that could be developed jointly. Dr. Ali Chalak, Assistant Professor at the American University Beirut, remarked: "We don't call it the Mediterranean diet, we call it Lebanese cuisine".

It is worth contextualizing the pronounced North–South divide in perceptions of the Mediterranean historically, and taking a look at the evolution of the very term. In his 1937 book *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, Henri Pirenne argued that Western Europe did not decline due to barbarian invasions in the 4th century, but due to the Islamic conquests in the 7th century that destroyed the unity of the Mediterranean. The erstwhile Roman Lake had remained united after the conquests by Germanic peoples in the 4th century, according to Pirenne, as they perpetuated the institutions of the Western Roman Empire that were then "byzantinized" from Constantinople, which was the power centre of the imagined Mediterranean unity.

The Pirenne thesis has been criticized, if not debunked, for a number of reasons, chiefly evidence of earlier decline and lack of thriving commercial activity in the Western Mediterranean prior to the Islamic conquests (Frank 1993). Yet its underlying premise of a natural political and economic space that once was united and should be reunited has loomed large in the European imagination. It can also be found in the ideology of Mediterranianism that was championed by Italian fascists in the 1920s and 1930s (Harris 2005, Gillette 2002). It postulated a superior Mediterranean race and culture in dissociation from Nordistic racist theories of the time, and called for a reinvigoration of such imagined history under Italian leadership. Eminent historian Fernand Braudel also used Mediterranianism in the 1920s in justification of French colonialism in Algeria (Silverstein 2004).

In the post-war decades the political notion of the Mediterranean became less ambiguous and more inclusive. The first Mediterranean Games were held in 1951 in Egypt, which had been instrumental in proposing them. The notion of the Mediterranean diet was first coined in 1975 by American scientists Ancel and Margaret Keys, gained traction in the 1990s, and was acknowledged as intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO in 2013, with Morocco among the promoting countries, albeit the only one from the southern Mediterranean. The launch of the Barcelona Process in 1995 posited an enlightened vision of a shared and prosperous Mediterranean space and led to the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2004 with a balanced representation of southern and northern countries.

Thus the notion of the Mediterranean has come a long way. Today it is more inclusive and ideologically less ambiguous, yet the historical baggage looms large. Stakeholders in the SEM countries frame the region primarily in terms of national interests and suspect utilitarian motivations behind the Mediterranean agendas of the EU in fields such as migration policies or protectionism against agricultural exports of SEM countries (Bouzidi 2018). Stakeholders in the EU on the other hand are equally reluctant to engage as they fear these very exports, and suspect wage and environmental dumping on the part of SEM countries (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 23).

2. Evaluation of the EU's Role

2.1 Instruments

Agricultural trade and rural development are not only major pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the EU's domestic agenda, both also inform its cooperation with SEM countries as we have outlined in MEDRESET Methodology and Concept Paper No. 7 (Chaaban et al. 2017), on which this sub-chapter is partly based.

Trade liberalization is a key aspect of the Barcelona Process. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) aims to establish a Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA). With the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), in the wake of the expansion of the EU in 2004, and the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008, such efforts have intensified. In 2011 the Council authorized the Commission to enter negotiations with Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia about Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) that would go beyond mere trade liberalization and would also cover regulatory issues relevant to trade such as investment protection and public procurement.

Currently, southern and eastern Mediterranean countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership have duty-free access to the EU for manufactured goods, but only preferential treatment for their exports of agricultural, processed agricultural and fisheries products. More than 80 per cent of their agricultural exports enjoy duty reduction and even exemption in some cases. In turn about a third of EU agricultural exports enjoy preferential treatment in EMP countries (Compés López et al. 2013: 10).

Institutional adaptation to EU rules, such as the CAP and food safety and phytosanitary standards, is a crucial aspect of this process. It was critically highlighted by EU stakeholders who deemed it a major concern alongside alleged wage and environmental dumping by SEM

producers. In comparison, tariff issues and trade reciprocity were mentioned less prominently; among them were product traceability and transparency in the quota of sensitive products such as tomatoes, cucumbers and strawberries (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 17–8). Producer associations and lobby organizations in SEM countries, particularly in Egypt, were more preoccupied with non-tariff barriers, such as phytosanitary standards, labelling, traceability and product quality requirements, than with direct price barriers (Chaaban et al. 2018a: 21).

South–South trade liberalization is also part of the process towards the EMFTA and is encouraged by the EU, such as the Agadir Economic Agreement of 2004 between Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt or bilateral FTAs between Turkey and several MENA states (Compés López et al. 2013: 6). This can have ramifications in the competition in third-party markets. Several EU stakeholders complained that Russian sanctions against EU agricultural exports have enabled Turkey and Morocco to fill this void and capture market share in fruit and vegetable exports to Russia (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 18).

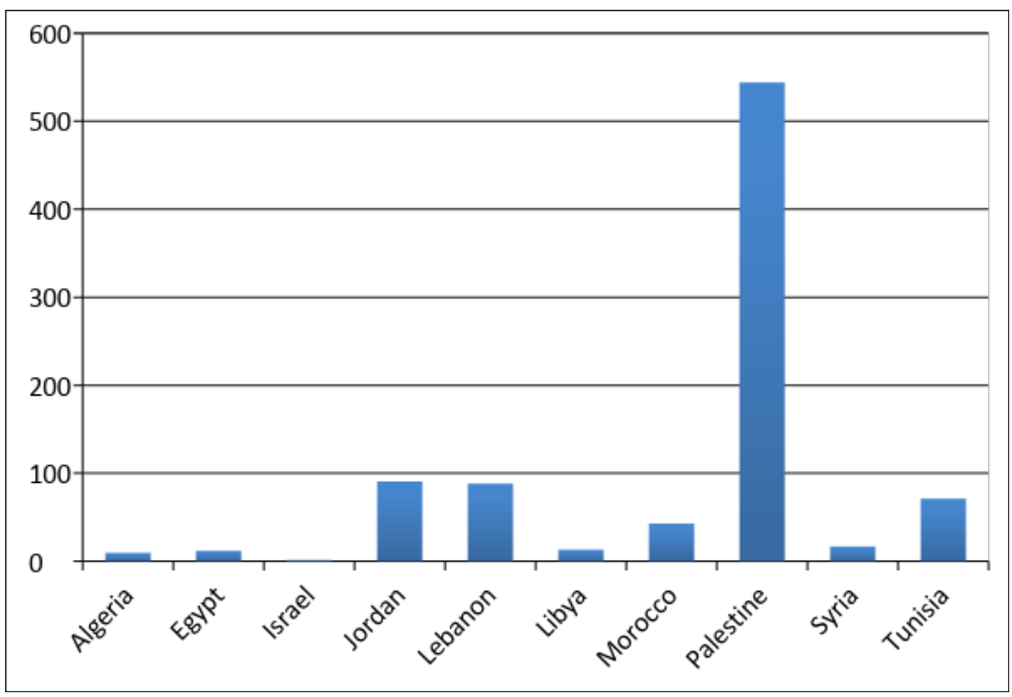
The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) that came into force in 2014 with a budget of 15.4 billion euro over the period 2014–2020 is the major vehicle for EU assistance in the region beside the European Investment Bank. The EU's assistance is geographically concentrated in a few countries, as a look at the allocations under the ENP's predecessor reveals. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, which was in force between 2007 and 2013 with a budget of 11.2 billion euro, allocated by far the largest amount to Palestine, followed by Morocco and Egypt (see Table 1). Palestine also stood out on a per capita basis, followed at a distance by Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia (see Figure 1). 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.

Table 1 | ENPI support in the Southern Neighbourhood programmed and committed (in million euro), 2007–13

Country	Programmed	Committed
Algeria	392	366.1
Egypt	1,007	1,007
Israel	14	13.5
Jordan	488	589
Lebanon	337	388
Libya	68	83
Morocco	1,234.5	1,431.1
Palestine	n/a	2,501.7
Syria	259	358
Tunisia	540	775
Regional Programme South	631	631
Total	**n/a**	**8,143.4**

Source: European Commission (2014: 21–37).

Figure 1 | Per capita ENI support (in euro), 2007–13



Source: European Commission (2014: 21–37).

Trade agreements and development cooperation do not happen in a socio-economic and political vacuum. In the wake of the Arab Spring the EU has seen the need to undertake a thorough and deep revision of the ENP that goes beyond trade issues and focuses on the "stabilisation of the region, in political, economic, and security related terms".[2] Interlinkages between development, security and political stability are highlighted. Job creation for the burgeoning youth population is seen by the EU as an urgent priority. While this is laudable, there is a danger that developmental aspects of EU policies on agriculture and rural development are reduced to their usefulness for security policies. During the MEDRESET stakeholder consultation in the SEM countries, some participants perceived an increased securitization of related EU policies (Chaaban et al. 2018b, Bouzidi 2018, Chékir and Nouira 2018).

The European Neighbouring Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD), which runs from 2014 to 2020, is a cornerstone of this revised ENP strategy in which agricultural livelihoods and rural development play a central role. ENPARD encompasses two axes: the first axis consists of improved agricultural productivity, market efficiency and food safety and quality standards, while the second focuses on rural development, including economic diversification and infrastructure support. Its focus areas include youth and women, governance of rural territories, good agricultural practices, extension and training, production chain organization and marketing of rural and agricultural products. MEDRESET stakeholders on both shores of the Mediterranean were mostly unaware that ENPARD even existed and the few who knew about its existence were unable to name any details and showed no real interest in such

2 See the European Commission website: *Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)*, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/tenders/consultation_en_en.

programmes (Woertz and Martínez 2018, Chaaban et al. 2018b, Bouzidi 2018, Chékir and Nouira 2018). There is clearly a necessity to improve the visibility of the ENPARD programme in target countries, but also within the EU itself, and to communicate its major thrusts.

Beyond specific humanitarian and developmental food security policies, it has been argued that the EU's food diplomacy should be better embedded in a clear strategic framework that takes broader implications into consideration, such as sustainability, climate change and security policies. The European External Action Service could play a leading role in coordinating such food diplomacy (Fattibene 2016).

EU policies are also articulated within national agricultural policies. The Green Morocco Plan (GMP) is a case in point where the EU's support was integrated into the GMP framework. The GMP was launched in 2008 by Moroccan authorities and is strongly supported by international actors, including the EU. The EU's assistance particularly focused on improving water management and irrigation techniques, institutional reforms, rural development and recommendations for the development of the agriculture sector. The EU's financial contribution supported the two pillars of GMP in the following ways, respectively:

- The EU pledged 16 million euro to the GMP's first pillar that comprises the advancement of agriculture through the growth of competition and modernization of the means of production. The pledge sought to reinforce the development of the agricultural sector and improve governance of the agriculture advisory body, as well as its outreach to small producers and its technical capacities.
- Seventy million euro were contributed to the GMP's second pillar that consists of developing sustainable agriculture practices and the alleviation of poverty. The contribution aimed at promoting sustainable agricultural practices and management of natural resources. It also sought to boost agricultural zones and sectors that benefit small producers (Bouzidi 2018: 9).

The EU-supported project, though ambitious and intent on generating agricultural and economic growth, has not alleviated rural poverty, while largely benefitting large-scale agricultural holdings and has widened the poverty gap that often is the source of divide between different actors and stakeholders in the agricultural sector. With close to no attention paid to food security and a rise in inequalities and poverty, rural populations are disappointed with a project that was vigorously supported by the EU, but did not include their perception and concerns, nor did it assess their needs (Bouzidi 2018). However, irrespective of the outcomes of the GMP, the EU's support to the Plan demonstrates the potentialities that such collaboration offers.

Furthermore, the EU's shift towards budgetary assistance to governments had the effect of reinforcing institutional actors and increasing their capacity. In particular in the GMP's case, this reliance on institutional actors enabled a convergence of interests and instruments between European and Moroccan institutions, as public institutions were encouraged to better tailor their strategies to achieve national priorities. Further, it empowered them with more ownership of their own national strategies for agriculture and water, according to institutional actors in Morocco (Bouzidi 2018).

However, many divergences appear between EU instruments and local needs. First, these instruments and methods are described, in Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon, as instruments favouring big agricultural holdings but not really helping smaller farms (Chékir and Nouira

2018, Bouzidi 2018, Chaaban et al. 2018b). Second, the instruments that the EU has used to support the development of the national agriculture sectors in Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, respectively, have been criticized for their inadequate design. According to many respondents, the main reason for this recurring problem is the EU's lack of knowledge of the concrete needs and gaps of the agriculture sector in each country. Indeed, the EU has been reported to neglect baseline and needs assessments and evaluations, which leads to its failure in addressing the most pressing challenges (Chaaban et al. 2018a, 2018b). As a case in point, interviewees in Lebanon, among them a permaculture association, required access to larger consumer markets to sell their products, but were instead given technical training on agricultural practices through EU-funded initiatives that do not help them sell their products (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 19). In fact, several stakeholders stated that they would appreciate a shift in the EU's assistance towards a focus on local support. For example, initiatives, such as Enabel in Morocco[3] have succeeded in employing more context-related, tailored approaches in order to better address the needs of the respondents (Bouzidi 2018: 21).

Another identified gap in EU instruments concerns the lack of information on sustainable farming practices and alternative forms of fertilizers. Indeed, while the use of many pesticides is banned under EU regulations, and thus prevents products from entering European markets, many producers in Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon simply do not have knowledge of alternatives and find themselves forced to renounce European markets. Respondents in Lebanon proposed that the EU take more space in overseeing a transition from chemical fertilizers to organic ones by imposing quality and sanitary standards, administering training on sustainable farming and helping organic fertilizers gain more visibility in local markets (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 25).

However, some respondents, particularly from Morocco and Tunisia, acknowledged the EU's capacity to support training and knowledge transfer, notably through joint research programmes. They also noted the EU's support in facilitating the production of goods, by providing assistance that ranges from agricultural best practices to support in the storage and marketing of products and their quality certification (Chékir and Nouira 2018, Bouzidi 2018).

The EU's technical and budgetary support has progressively moved away from single small-scale project support and financing in the four countries, and has been directed towards direct support to the governments and ministries of agriculture (MoAs). This shift was especially visible in Morocco, where direct assistance is being provided to the government to support implementation of the GMP (Bouzidi 2018). Granting direct budgetary and technical assistance to the governments is questionable and can often be the source of mismanagement of funds (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 20). Moreover, ambiguous criteria for funding, as well as the rigidity of the EU's application and correspondence procedures, hinders and discourages public organs from applying for funding. The EU's financial support is usually given to the ministries of finance, such that other public institutions have to request the assistance of that ministry. As the local stakeholder consultations highlighted, the financial assistance should be instead directly allocated to public institutions, which can more effectively allocate these funds with a larger autonomy to produce better outcomes (Bouzidi 2018, Chaaban et al. 2018b).

3 Enabel is a Belgian development agency that implements and coordinates Belgian international development policy. It works in Morocco. For more info, see the official website: https://www.enabel.be/content/enabel-morocco.

Additionally, local respondents claimed that the EU's investment patterns are more inclined towards studies rather than providing recommendations for alternative solutions or designing innovative projects. While studies are necessary to inform the design of projects, it seems that the studies conducted over the years have barely been used (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 20). Furthermore, organizations such as the EU do not build on these studies nor do they get involved in implementation of projects corresponding to the needs highlighted in them (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 20).

Moreover, several sets of problems arise during the process of implementation, most of which ensue from the EU's aforementioned failures in the approach to programmes. In many instances, local stakeholders complained about the absence or the weakness of implementation and the lack of follow-up for projects. Professional agricultural organizations criticized the EU's top-down approach and reproached the EU for not being present in the field and only acting through public institutions (Bouzidi 2018, Chaaban et al. 2018b).

Although the EU explicitly attempts to include and empower women in the agriculture sector in SEM countries, often through the ENP, these attempts are often futile as the support the EU provides often fails to address the needs of these women. This has primarily been attributed to the EU's absence in the field and its failure to both develop strategic target policies and to conduct evaluation and impact reporting on all projects and aid granted to the four countries.

In Lebanon, respondents found that the EU's programmes targeting gender equality and integrating a gender perspective in the agriculture sector are inadequate in implementation and evaluation, leading to a failure in conducting needs assessments to issues that challenge the development of gender equality. Despite these flaws, respondents in Lebanon found that the EU's projects targeting cooperatives have enabled women in rural settings to become more independent, and these projects also tend to have a large impact on society as a whole, such that knowledge transfers tend to trickle down to other members (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 21).

In Tunisia, respondents asserted that the EU does support programmes that feature gender dimensions, but does not ensure their implementation. Furthermore, many women's associations and cooperatives consider the EU's support of gender equality to be insufficient, such that it often fails to get rural women out of poverty and dependence, or to improve the protection of workers' rights or women's working conditions (Chékir and Nouira 2018: 13–4).

Similarly, the EU allocates significant funds to the empowerment of women in Egypt, such as 40 per cent of the budget allocated to the "Sustainable Development Strategy – Vision 2030", a joint initiative of the EU and the Government of Egypt, but due to the lack of clarity and emphasis on the role of women in the agriculture sector and the absence of implementation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms on the ground, there is no way to determine whether the EU initiatives succeed in enabling the economic mobilization and empowerment of women (Chaaban et al. 2018a: 22). Moreover, due to the preconceived notion that the agriculture sector and agricultural practices are male-oriented, women in Egypt face social and structural discrimination in their access to land and knowledge transfer through suitable agricultural workshops (Chaaban et al. 2018a). More targeted grassroots-level approaches should be employed to better understand the needs of women.

In the case of Morocco, respondents from women's cooperatives said that they are often provided with unsuitable technical agricultural training workshops, such that they are forced to send men from their villages to benefit from these workshops. Women in cooperatives require more targeted support in the form of marketing and valorization of their products. Another issue that respondents found to be a major impediment to the development of women's cooperatives in Morocco through the support of the EU is that of land access, where Moroccan law limits the inheritance and acquisition of land by women. Women often rely on indirect methods of acquiring land to be able to benefit from the aid provided to them through the GMP. These issues remain largely untouched (Bouzidi 2018).

This failure to provide women with the required support, and women's dependence on male figures to be able to benefit from EU support, highlight the need for the EU's presence on the ground in order to assess the needs of women in the agriculture sector. Nevertheless, female respondents in Morocco still expressed a strong interest in working with the EU, and viewed the EU as a great source of knowledge transfer and support. They stated that they require financing to be able to form an association among other cooperatives outside of Moroccan agriculture unions that are predominantly male and do not represent the interest of women's cooperatives, and are not inclusive of them with regard to decision-making (Bouzidi 2018: 14–5).

2.2 Actors

2.2.1 European Union

On the European side, EU stakeholders were identified in three categories: (1) supranational, national and regional public bodies, (2) producer associations and other lobby organizations along the agricultural value chain and (3) NGOs and research centres (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 13).

The first group encompasses institutions such as the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), its associated Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) and non-EU institution such as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMED) in Barcelona or the Center for Mediterranean Integration in Marseille. Public bodies on the national and regional level that are engaged in agricultural issues also receive substantial EU funding and belong in this group, such as the Institute for Agricultural Research and Training in the Andalucian Region in Spain or the government of the Puglia region in Italy (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 13–4).

The public bodies acknowledge the importance of agriculture and rural development in the ENP, but their suggestions often follow a technocratic and depoliticized script. They are careful "not to rock the boat" and offend political or cultural sensitivities in SEM countries. Controversial issues such as inequalities in land rights and socio-economic origins of gender inequalities are less likely to be discussed than market access and extension services.

> ARLEM argues that the ENP should be refocused along three strategic priorities, one of them sustainable territorial development, specifically in the southern part of the Mediterranean […]. CoR argues that the EU's cooperation policy cannot "repeat past mistakes". It demands that greater priority be given to rural development and food security in partner countries when preparing international aid strategies. (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 21)

International and national producer associations and other lobby organizations along the agricultural value chain (procurement, processing and distribution) represent the second category of EU stakeholders. Among them are the European Farmers and Agri-cooperatives Association (COPA-COGECA), the European Fresh Produce Association (FRESHFEL), the European association representing the trade in cereals, rice, feedstuffs, oilseeds, olive oil, oils and fats and agrosupply (COCERAL) and the International Olive Council. They play a powerful role in influencing decisions on agriculture in Brussels and figured prominently in the MEDRESET interviews that were conducted in Brussels, Madrid and Paris, and via telephone. "Their activities range from extension services and technical advice to advocacy issues and international cooperation. The pan-European lobby groups are particularly influential and occasionally include non-EU members such as Turkey or Russia" (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 14).

> Beside pan-European organizations like COPA-COGECA there are national producer associations […]. The associations of Spain, Italy and France have particular interest in the SEM as they form a cluster representing 60 per cent of the European fruit production, as a representative of a Spanish farming cooperative pointed out to us [in one of our interviews]. While Italian representatives also saw complementarity of interests between the three countries, they pointed to a pronounced North–South divide, with northern countries better organized within the EU and France playing on both sides, sometimes rooting for specific southern concerns like fruit and in other cases caring more for northern priority interests such as grain and dairy. (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 15)

Intra-European regulations, Mercosur and North America are most frequently discussed in publications of the producer associations (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 17). Specific discussions of EU policies in the SEM are rare in comparison; they are simply not as important as markets and competitors. Insofar as the SEM is referenced, "northern and eastern countries [of the EU] are concerned about export markets for cereals, meat and dairy and the southern countries about competition in fruit and vegetables, especially citrus and olive oil" (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 17).

In comparison to the producer associations, associations of the agricultural value chain perceive the SEM more as a potential market for input factors such as pesticides, rather than as a competitor. To this end some of them have organized workshops in SEM countries (e.g., Turkey) to foster compliance with EU regulations, but overall the SEM does not rank very high on their priority scale compared to the EU market itself and some larger agricultural markets such as North and South America.

> EU food safety standards and their dissemination in the SEM via the European Food Safety Agency are part of the neighbourhood policy. However, quality systems in SEM countries have struggled with low level of coordination along the value chain, only partial tracking systems and lack of technologies and infrastructure. (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 23)

> Like the eastern countries, the southern [EU] member states […] have a larger share of smallholders among their agrarian population and are institutionally less unified than the lobby groups of northern countries. Italy and Spain for example do not have one

> national umbrella organization, but several. This can put them at a disadvantage as they [do] not always speak with one voice, face higher transaction costs and suffer from information asymmetries. The Netherlands is particularly interested in trade liberalization and trade growth, as the country is the second largest agro-exporter in the world […]. This stance can clash with producer interests in the south of the EU that prefer a more protectionist [approach]. (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 17)

> Some of the interviewed producer associations […] fear that the main beneficiaries of the trade agreements with SEM countries are big food distributors, such as Aldi, Lidl and Carrefour, which freely navigate on both shores of the Mediterranean. They argued that these companies have been reshaping the production system in the SEM, shifting it from family businesses to big firms and intensive agriculture with focus on exports, rather than domestic SEM markets (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 21).

Beyond lip service, a deeper appreciation of gender issues is markedly absent as a major concern of the producer associations, which are predominantly occupied with regulations and technocratic issues.

The third group of EU stakeholders are the NGOs and research centres. The NGOs, such as Agrisud in France or ARUME (Asociación Rural Mediterránea), are focused on training, technical assistance and publications. They typically do not have position papers or documents related to EU agricultural policies in SEM countries. Their limited engagement with the ENP also showed in their declining of interview requests for the MEDRESET project, arguing that the macro and trade focus of the ENP would be beyond the scope and grassroots nature of their work.

In comparison to the NGOs and producer associations, research centres like CIHEAM show a much more pronounced interest in specific EU policies in the SEM. Such work has also informed the Mediterranean Sustainable Development Strategy (MSSD), which was launched by the Barcelona Convention in 2001 and adopted in 2005. However, there has been insufficient inclusion of the MSSD in national policies and strategies. A major stumbling block has been the "insufficient access of southern Mediterranean countries to European programmes and funding, partly because of their ineligibility, but also because they lack the kind of national development agencies that are instrumental for such access in northern Mediterranean countries" (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 23).

Among the research centres one can also find a much more prominent discussion of gender issues, including institution building, training, best practices and access to credit and markets. Technocratic and depoliticized approaches dominate here as well, but less so than in the case of the public bodies. Socio-economic conflicts around land and labour rights, negative side effects of official development programmes and legal disadvantages for women in official and customary laws could receive more attention (Woertz and Martínez 2018). Occasionally there has been cooperation between public bodies and research centres. The UfM and CIHEAM have jointly worked on a new publication on "Strengthening the Role of Women in Rural and Agricultural Areas" and IEMED has collaborated with other institutions such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization or the Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 21–2). An increase of such cooperation is clearly desirable to enhance the debate of public bodies and research centres alike.

2.2.2 SEM Countries

All surveyed actors in SEM countries unanimously viewed the EU as a strategic partner. Indeed, the point of convergence between them is their willingness to engage with the EU mainly due to the size, stability, diversity, wealth and strength of the European consumer market, which represents an immense potential outlet for SEM producers. Other reasons for this enthusiasm include the EU's technical knowledge of agricultural practices, its professionalism, competences, as well as a certain contextual knowledge of and its proximity to SEM countries (Chékir and Nouira 2018, Bouzidi 2018, Chaaban et al. 2018b).

While the country papers highlight large divergences between actors, patterns are difficult to identify by country or type of actor. A few country divergences can nevertheless be detailed here.

Moroccan respondents seemed very open and enthusiastic about forming partnerships with the EU (Bouzidi 2018). In contrast, Tunisian respondents adopted a more cautious attitude, stressing the requirement that the relationship be fair and mutually beneficial, in order to protect the agriculture sector from competitiveness with the European agricultural sector (Chékir and Nouira 2018: 14). While the Egyptian perception is unidentifiable, since data collection could not be carried out in Egypt, Lebanese respondents showed a certain enthusiasm tainted with the fear that EU aid may get caught up in corruption and clientelism, or sectarianism on the part of Lebanese interest groups and politicians (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 19–20).

Furthermore, the EU's cooperation with national and local stakeholders in SEM countries was repeatedly said to be impeded by heavy, unclear and complicated contractual procedures, which sometimes conflicted with national governments' priorities or procedures (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 20). Several actors, mostly NGOs and cooperatives in Morocco and Lebanon, also claimed that the EU is inflexible and rigid, and is not quick to respond and adapt to unforeseeable and changing local situations (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 19, Bouzidi 2018). This claim seems to indicate that the EU's much criticized securitized, depoliticized and technocratic approach remains the rule.

Further consolidating the complaints by several stakeholders in all four countries is that a top-down approach orchestrated from Europe does not leave much decision power to central governments, let alone to local actors. A number of respondents in Lebanon and Morocco explained that their contextual knowledge, opinions and remarks were not taken into account in the design of policies. As an institutional actor in Morocco explained, the EU fails to consider dynamics within the national context, for example by relying exclusively on public institutions to gain contextual knowledge, while the relationship between NGOs, cooperatives and public institutions is distrustful (Bouzidi 2018).

Besides, the shift in EU support towards centralized budgetary support to national-wide programmes has created a concentration of funds in the hands of one institutional actor per country, generally the Ministry of Finance (MoF). This concentration has enhanced MoF powers and authority while undermining, by excluding, the authority of other public actors/institutions arguably more relevant in the particular framework of the support granted, such as MoAs. This trend towards centralization and technocratic management has not been well received by a majority of respondents in the countries under study (Bouzidi 2018, Chaaban et al. 2018b).

Indeed, in all four countries, respondents found that the money spent by the EU in the agriculture and water sectors does not correspond to the outcomes achieved. In Lebanon, the majority of respondents maintained that though two billion dollars were spent over 20 years, little or no impact was effected and observed on the ground (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 20). Because of such discrepancies, the EU is accused by Lebanese stakeholders of practicing "Lebanese diplomacy", in other words of being focused more on public relations instead of promoting significant policy changes (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 19).

With regard to the EU's visibility as an actor, several respondents, particularly in Tunisia, were not aware of the EU's cooperation with their country (Chékir and Nouira 2018, Bouzidi 2018, Chaaban et al. 2018b). Indeed, the EU's support was reported as not being visible enough, and EU efforts were attributed to the UN or more generally the international community (Chékir and Nouira 2018). The EU is inaccessible and invisible to the local populations due to its engagement with MoAs and governments at the national level, rather than with smaller-scale local projects in the field, a problem particularly salient in Morocco where the EU supports the GMP (Bouzidi 2018). In contrast, some development agencies such as Enabel (the Belgian Development Agency) or USAID are more appreciated by the local communities, as they directly support smaller projects on a local scale (Bouzidi 2018: 21). Although Enabel and USAID provide less assistance than the EU, they are more accessible, thus more visible to local communities.

Furthermore, in the post-Arab Spring period, EU diplomats paid numerous visits to countries such as Tunisia, to affirm the EU's commitment to support the political transitions. This led local populations to anticipate genuine and significant support from the EU, and to subsequently to be disappointed by the EU's failure to meet these expectations (Chékir and Nouira 2018: 14).

Another flaw of the EU's action in SEM countries, according to SEM respondents, lies in the lack of clarity in the EU's strategy and partners. One proof of this trend is the inability to identify all areas of cooperation between Tunisia and the European Union, as well as the projects supported by the EU or its partners in Tunisia (Chékir and Nouira 2018: 13). Another example of this lack of clarity lies in the claim made by several respondents, including a Lebanese NGO and an EU respondent, that correspondence between international organizations such as the EU and national actors or stakeholders is minimal, leading to duplication of efforts and studies (Chaaban et al. 2018b). Communication channels with local implementation partners, which are meant to determine the needs, to monitor the progress, and to then evaluate the gaps and achievements of each project, are also deemed insufficient (Chaaban et al. 2018b).

Moreover, the EU's action in SEM countries is criticized for excluding certain actors such as local NGOs, while heavily including others, traditionally public institutions. EU's move towards more centralized, technocratic support has been judged by several respondents as moving the EU away from the local context at hand and impeding a proper understanding of local challenges and dynamics (Bouzidi 2018). Moreover, the focus on supporting ministries through budgetary assistance does not usually guarantee the actual inclusion and participation of farmers and smaller stakeholders in the assessment of needs, the design and the implementation of projects. In several cases, particularly in Morocco, these actors felt neglected, not taken into consideration during the policy decision-making process, and side-lined to the traditional role of beneficiaries (Bouzidi 2018). Rather than having their knowledge and perceptions included in bilaterally constructed policies, they are subjected to top-down imposed decisions of a centralized government with little say in the matter.

Moreover, a number of stakeholders deplore that policies encouraged by the EU do not benefit the actors who need them most. In Lebanon for example, the EU is accused of favouring certain political or religious forces, and of encouraging corruption and clientelism (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 19–20). EU policies, such as loan programmes, are also claimed by the Lebanese Association for Urban Agriculture to favour big agricultural holdings over small farms (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 15). In Morocco, only three out of 26 economic interest groups have benefitted from the EU's assistance since the launch of the GMP in 2008 (Bouzidi 2018: 16). At the same time, the EU significantly committed to supporting Moroccan agriculture through the GMP. Yet, this support intended to generate economic and agricultural growth rather than alleviate poverty or adopt sustainable agricultural practices. Consequently, the EU's assistance has largely benefited large-scale agricultural holdings while it has widened the poverty gap that often represents a major source of conflict and distrust (Bouzidi 2018).

This reported bias of the EU towards certain actors is said to come from these very actors' influence on the decision-making processes. For several respondents, the EU is prone to unknowingly fall into the traps of self-interested politicians, which then leads the EU support to be directed towards and exploited by political parties' needs rather that those of the population. This is particularly the case in Lebanon; several respondents accused the EU of disproportionately favouring organizations and areas in Lebanon that it has already worked with, thereby creating a habit of nepotism (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 19).

In addition, this was also reported to be the case with the EU's support for cooperatives and women's associations in Morocco, where members have voiced concern over the way in which the EU's support has been allocated, such that the women's cooperatives that have already been granted support are often times favoured over others. This creates a system of inequality that has resulted in the substantial development of certain areas with favoured cooperatives, while other areas are significantly lacking in development of initiatives and the presence of donors. This has then resulted in the failure of these EU programmes to alleviate the poverty of rural women (Bouzidi 2018: 15).

2.3 Substance

The SEM is not only one of the largest grain importers in the world, it is also a major producer in other areas such as fruit and vegetables, and is among the top ten agricultural producers globally. Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Syria account for more than 90 per cent of the SEM agricultural production, where Turkey alone accounts for 39 per cent of products (Belghazi 2013: 1, Chaaban et al. 2018b: 14). While farmers in the Mediterranean countries of the EU (Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, France) worry about the competition they must face in their trade in fruit, vegetables, olive oil and wine, SEM farmers are worried about the influx of cheap grain and meat products from the EU in protected domestic markets and fear that their revenue from fruit and vegetable exports could be restricted by the EU's regulations and food safety standards (Woertz and Martínez 2018: 11, Chaaban et al. 2018b: 14).

Competitiveness has moved from cost competitiveness on a firm level to effectiveness of transboundary value chains, which is necessary to assure that exported products are competitive in terms of quality (SUSTAINMED 2013, Chaaban et al. 2018b: 14–5). Apart from Turkey, the EU has an advantage in the agricultural trade balance with all EMP countries, and this trade advantage has increased over the past decade. This substantial increase in the EU's

advantage in competitiveness highlights the need for assistance to southern EMP countries to adjust (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 15).

Certain professional agricultural organizations and cooperatives in Morocco questioned the reasoning and objectives underlying the EU's assistance. They argued that instead of stimulating the socio-economic sustainable development in its neighbouring countries, the actual intention of the EU's activities was to reduce and limit the immigration of individuals from those countries, as a means to combat terrorism and the influx of drugs (Bouzidi 2018: 20). Some have also criticized the numerous partnerships between Mediterranean countries and the EU for disproportionately serving EU commercial interests (Bouzidi 2018, Chaaban et al. 2018b). To critics, the partnerships are 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 (Bouzidi 2018: 19).

Additionally, the EU's programmes often fail to address the actual needs of the agricultural sector. Therefore, the support that is provided is often inadequate and futile. In order for the agricultural sector in each of the four countries to grow and develop, they must have better access to local and international markets. Access to the European market in particular would be very beneficial. However, the EU's programmes do not facilitate this access and thus do not meet the needs of the agriculture sector (Bouzidi 2018).

The European engagement within the agriculture and water sectors of Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco and Egypt fails to address the majority of the needs and most pressing issues of these sectors, which consist of but are not limited to: climate change, access to land and structure of property, excessive use of fertilizers, depletion of soils and water, tariff barriers and a productivism-based agricultural model achieved at the expense of the environment and food security. These issues remain largely untouched by European assistance, although extremely important in each of the four countries (Chaaban et al. 2018a, 2018b, Bouzidi 2018, Chékir and Nouira 2018).

Also, 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 have not reduced rural women's poverty and dependence, nor do they uphold and improve the protection of workers' rights or women's working conditions (Chaaban et al. 2018b, Chékir and Nouira 2018). The issues that are most prevalent are land ownership, the patriarchal nature of the agriculture sector in all four countries, and lack of suitable knowledge transfer. Due to (i) the absence of needs assessments, to better understand the challenges faced by women in the agriculture sector, and (ii) the EU's lack of presence on the field, in addition to (iii) the EU's failure in developing strategic target policies to improve gender equality, certain projects have failed to reach their objective and to address issues that serve as major impediments to the development of gender equality and the advancement of women in the agriculture sector in these countries.

In contrast, significant progress has been made in the harmonization of the European and Mediterranean academia, such that there is mutual cooperation and consensus in the fields of higher education, research and professional formation (Bouzidi 2018). This has been accomplished by the Mediterranean integration of the Bologna system and its participation in European higher education programmes. In addition, several stakeholders, mostly in Tunisia,

"praised the ability of the European Union to strengthen [such] cooperation through the transfer of knowledge and training in modern technologies" (Chékir and Nouira 2018: 14).

3. The Gender Dimension

The work of women in agriculture, despite its importance, remains predominantly ignored, unpaid and not accounted for by national statistics (Moisseron et al. 2017). 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. Female agricultural labour is often restricted to the subsistence sector or low-paid farm labour with gendered wage differentials, while men often dominate the cash-crop sector. These issues deserve more attention from researchers, policy makers and stakeholders such as international institutions and agri-business (FAO 2016).

International institutions and academic scholars have spent considerable efforts to identify inequalities that affect women in agriculture and have made suggestions to address them via gender mainstreaming. No clear consensus exists and there are several competing approaches. The *Women in Development* paradigm takes a depoliticized and technocratic perspective. It enjoys considerable popularity within international organizations and development circles. Emanating from modernization theory and restructuring development programmes, it argues for an inclusion of women in commodification processes via measures that boost empowerment, efficiency and equity. In contrast other approaches such as that of *Women and Development* stress problematic gender aspects of these commodification processes, such as exploitation of women in low-paid jobs of global value chains and their dependency within patriarchal social relations. Here the argument is made for a strengthening of rights, and empowerment of local social movements and networks of solidarity (Peet and Hartwick 2015).

In its manual for governments and other stakeholders, *Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture and Rural Development*, the Commonwealth Secretariat (2001) identifies five issues that are of particular importance for gender mainstreaming in agriculture: (i) equal access to land and water resources, and to credit and support services; (ii) gender differences in roles and activities; (iii) gender and agricultural extension and research; (iv) gender, agricultural biodiversity and commercialization; (v) women's empowerment and equal access to decision-making.

The EU and others have successfully pressed to establish gender equality as one of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and the 2017 European Consensus on Development commits the EU and its members to include a strong gender component cooperation with developing countries.[4]

Much research has been done on identification of issues, but less consensus exists on the scope and origin of such problems and what measures could resolve them. Gender mainstreaming in agriculture has been included in the different MEDRESET country reports and the respective interviews with stakeholders. The goal was to gather information about prevalent stakeholder perceptions of policies and good practices from a gender perspective.

4 See European Commission website: *Promoting Gender Equality beyond the EU*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/promoting-gender-equality-beyond-eu_en.

Perceptions of gender-related issues in the agriculture and water sectors 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 (European Commission 2015a). In the Plan's accompanying toolkit the priority area 2 of 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 (European Commission 2009, Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2017). 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 raising awareness of gendered inheritance rights and agricultural workloads (e.g., women predominantly produce subsistence crops and men cash crops).

European farmer associations are developing sections for women in order to encourage more female participation in the institutions as well as to improve gender equity in the sector. Yet, there is still a long way to go. Practitioners and policy makers will need to update practices and incentivize the implementation of measures of gender mainstreaming in the rural sector. Limited coordination between public bodies hinders the development of a structured and clear gender agenda in the agricultural sector in the EU. Prevalent technocratic approaches also tend to focus on issues such as agricultural productivity or market access without acknowledging or prioritizing gender-specific challenges.

On the southern shore of the Mediterranean there are differences among the case studies. In Morocco, rural female workers face challenges regarding access to training, decision-making positions and targeted support (Bouzidi 2018). Their concerns focus on the positioning of their products in the market. They lack support with marketing strategies and market access. They are particularly worried about the inability to improve agricultural production and to position themselves in new markets. Moreover, the issue of access to land is particularly acute for young people and women. The women consulted for the report criticized the patronage and injustice in land allocation in projects that are EU-funded (Bouzidi 2018). This points to the considerable inequality of land ownership in Morocco, which is high by international and regional standards, as the country has never undergone meaningful land reform (Cammett et al. 2015, Waterbury 1970). The often depoliticized and technocratic approach of the EU in its Mediterranean policy might contribute to its relative neglect of social conflicts, such as (often gendered) land rights.

Land is an important asset and aspect of identity in the MENA region. A survey on women's inheritance rights in the region by the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions found that "land is not regarded merely as a piece of property or as a means to satisfy material needs; rather, it is seen as requisite to confirming one's ancestry, lineage and place in the community – indeed, one's fundamental identity" (COHRE 2006: 79). However, considerable gender inequality exists in inheritance laws of SEM countries. In Islamic law women typically inherit only half of what men with a similar degree of familiar relation receive (e.g., daughters get only half of what sons get). Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi has recently questioned

this practice in a bid to reform the respective laws in his country.[5] According to tribal law in Morocco, single women, widows, divorcées and those without sons cannot inherit land. The formal law related to "*hyazat*", possession, is also biased. The law, based on Islamic jurisprudence, specifies that any person living on or working land for a non-interrupted period of 15 years can benefit from the right to exploitation of this land, which needs to be formalized by two notaries in the presence of witnesses. The law stipulates that there be 12 witnesses to formalize the exploitation rights for men and 24 for women (Adnane 2018: 5). Land ownership in Morocco is controlled by a framework of regulations combining formal and customary laws, which leads to confusion and barriers to which women are particularly vulnerable (Adnane 2018: 5, Bouzidi 2018).

In Lebanon, stakeholders acknowledge the existence of gender mainstreaming in EU programmes; however, they see important flaws regarding accountability procedures. There are discrepancies among interviewed actors in terms of enforcement of the gender agenda. Some consider that the EU does in fact promote gender equality, but others argue that this is only a token interest of the EU that is not present in its Lebanese projects in practice (Chaaban et al. 2018b: 21).

Tunisian stakeholders perceived EU projects as beneficial for job creation, with an important gender dimension. They did not see them contributing to the protection of workers' right or the improvement of working conditions, but they acknowledged that the access to additional income can help support the financial independence of women. Some NGOs in the country acknowledged the presence of a gender dimension in the EU's project designs, but doubted that there was sufficient follow-up and accountability to ensure implementation in an effective way (Chékir and Nouira 2018: 13–4).

In the case of Egypt, agriculture is an important sector for women's labour, employing 37 per cent of women, which is more than the employment contribution of the industrial and construction sectors combined (Chaaban et al. 2018a: 4). Even so, the agricultural sector remains largely dominated by men, who wield decision-making power in agribusiness and act as the main representatives of farmholds in outreach services such as extension programmes (Augustin et al. 2012: 80). Case studies performed in rural areas of Upper Egypt demonstrated the structural inequalities faced by women, including limited access to agricultural cooperatives, long-term public loans and in some cases higher costs for inputs such as fertilizers (Augustin et al. 2012: 77). As part of its "Sustainable Development Strategy – Vision 2030" with the Government of Egypt, the EU has placed an overarching emphasis on women's empowerment in industries such as agriculture (EU Delegation to Egypt 2018). The EU has funded several programmes including the "Improving livelihoods of urban and rural women dependant on informal sector in Egypt" initiative. However, a lack of feedback and assessments on project outcomes indicates the need for greater monitoring mechanisms on that front. With respect to EU development policy, criticisms have surfaced over the focus on economy and security that has as a result positioned the issue of women's empowerment as an underlying theme rather than a targeted strategy (Abdel-Latif 2010).

5 "Tunisian President Proposes Inheritance Equality for Women, with Exceptions", in *Reuters*, 13 August 2018, https://reut.rs/2B3VNY3.

In sum, gender features prominently in agricultural and rural development issues, whether it is access to land, credit and other resources, or controversial inheritance laws. There is a clear rationale for the EU to follow a less depoliticized and technocratic approach in its agricultural development projects in the region and include more gender perspectives in related policy formulation.

4. Policy Recommendations

4.1 Framework for Cooperation

• While the European Union supports the agriculture and water sectors in the region, it does so under a variety of frameworks: it contributes to these sectors through bilateral agreements, such as the Association Agreements signed with all four countries, the Agricultural and Rural Development Programme signed with Lebanon, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, and the PAPS-EAU programme negotiated with Tunisia, etc. In addition, the EU's support is included in multilateral initiatives with Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Initiative, the European Neighbourhood Policy or the Neighbouring European Programme for Agriculture and Development (ENPARD). This multiplicity of programmes, scopes, objectives, names and stakeholders impedes the cohesion of the EU's different operations, resulting in a duplication of work that increases coordination costs, contributes to its representation as bureaucratically rigid, and complicates its collaboration with local stakeholders in SEM countries. In order to avoid or reduce these shortcomings in its endeavours in the agriculture and water sectors, the EU should make efforts to be more transparent with local stakeholders, particularly civil society actors.

• The development agendas that are investigated by the research institutes and inform ENP programmes (e.g., ENPARD for rural development) are not well known among producer associations and lobby groups along the agricultural value chain. The EU could push for more engagement and include such organizations in outreach activities to help SEM producers to comply with EU food safety and environmental regulations. Thereby it could also ease concerns among EU producers about unfair competition from SEM countries in agricultural product markets.

• ENPARD is seemingly the most suitable and effective mechanism to facilitate the communication between the EU and its Southern neighbours. As such, it should remain at the forefront of all ventures of cooperation and should be the main source for setting the policy framework and strategy for cooperation between actors in the agriculture and water sectors in the years to come.

• 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.

• 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.

4.2 Priority Areas for Support

• The EU has mostly supported policies and strategies that provide inadequate responses to structural challenges the agriculture and water sectors face in the four countries. Within ENPARD's framework, the EU has the ability to initiate, support and nurture political dialogue. It should use this advantage to assist the four countries in promoting and stimulating sustainable development through context-based strategies that tackle structural challenges in order to strengthen the agriculture and water sectors.

• The significant support that the EU provides to developing countries is often underestimated and perceived as inefficient, as it is diluted over a number of sectors, countries, activities, etc. To increase the efficiency of its programmes, the EU should ensure that it coordinates with other international and local organizations, civil society and other stakeholders. It should also seek to better understand the needs of the local population by prioritizing this factor when developing the policy and strategy frameworks of its projects. Such an understanding would enable the EU to better construct projects that respond to SEM people's needs and to target the right beneficiaries. For example, several respondents from Lebanon who were having difficulties selling and marketing their products, stated that though the EU did typically provide training on agricultural techniques, it did not provide them with assistance in marketing.

• The current focus on the production of added-value crops has diverted attention away from production of grains and other goods that typically ensure these countries' food security, thereby putting their food security at risk. As such, the EU should therefore encourage the production of grains and other goods that guarantee the stability of food security, and this should be one of the most crucial points the EU should bear in mind when setting the framework for its strategy in developing countries.

• The need for EU engagement with the effects of climate change on the agriculture and water sectors in the four countries has not been tackled. This engagement should include examination of the current unsustainable agriculture model, something that the EU has yet to do.

• Rural work is informal in SEM countries, and consequently wage 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 wage workers in agriculture, particularly women, should be adhered to. Accordingly, to ensure decent working conditions, the agriculture sector should be formalized such that wages and working conditions are regulated. This would address women's poor working conditions in the agriculture sector in Tunisia in addition to the rising concerns voiced by Lebanese agricultural workers of losing employment to the Syrian workforce. Another recommendation would be the implementation of social protection programmes, for instance cash transfers, to ensure that vulnerabilities faced by waged workers in the agricultural sector are addressed, such as job instability in addition to precarious working conditions.

4.3 Inclusive Approach to EU Projects

• Most of the shortcomings of the EU's projects can be attributed to their non-participatory approaches. According to a majority of respondents, this is the result of a lack of understanding of local needs. Traditionally, the solution to this is to (i) be more inclusive of the direct beneficiaries

and stakeholders, (ii) accumulate more contextual knowledge and (iii) thoroughly assess local needs. Respondents strongly argued for a bottom-up approach in the EU's projects to better address their needs.

• 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.

• The partnership relationships between the EU and the target countries, as well as their effectiveness, were also debated. The EU, in some instances, was accused of imposing policies or programmes in a top-down and unilateral manner, without considering the beneficiaries' opinions and needs. Several respondents recommend that the EU be more open to equal partnerships, in which projects are designed collaboratively or bilaterally by both parties.

4.4 Efficiency in the Implementation of EU Projects

• Several respondents suspected the EU of carrying out its projects without a proper implementation plan, and without clear deadlines, guidelines or defined roles. As such, even the most well-intentioned of projects are at risk of failing. The EU should take more time to assess its projects to ensure their adequate implementation through a carefully formulated plan, to avoid additional costs and to guarantee that the projects have an impact on the issues they tackle.

• The lack of oversight over the EU's projects has also been a source of frustration for many stakeholders. This is particularly the case with women's cooperatives and associations, which have expressed discontent with the ineffectiveness and the lack of impact of the EU's projects that concern gender inequality. Several projects are reported to have made little or no impact, due to the lack of oversight and enforcement mechanisms.

• Similarly, the EU and its counterparts from other countries, as well as NGOs active in the field, are said to frequently duplicate efforts, such that they often simultaneously work on the same issue independently, which leads to more inefficiency in the grand scheme of things. A careful analysis of existing policies and programmes, alongside a systematic coordination with other agencies, would contribute to improving the design of EU-led projects.

• The EU should continue its pursuit of cooperation in academic research in the four countries, as this is the aspect of the collaboration that was unanimously praised by respondents.

• The primary and most common reason for the respondents' general disappointment with the EU's support is that its assistance does not usually tackle the main issues that impede the development of the agriculture and water sectors in each of the four countries. These issues consist of but are not limited to climate change, water scarcity and depletion, an unsustainable agricultural model based on productivism and export, and land ownership. Instead of approaching these issues in such a way as to induce effective change, the EU's support is said to provide temporary fixes to bigger problems requiring political action. Therefore, more dialogue at a political level with national authorities in the SEM countries is required to achieve effective change.

• 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. It should also oversee the implementation and evaluation reporting of its projects which promote gender equality in terms of participation and opportunities in the agriculture sector, to ensure the effectiveness of these projects.

4.5 Communication and Coordination with Local Stakeholders

• There is consensus among the studied countries that the EU's contractual procedures are complicated, unclear and sometimes even contradict central government procedures. A simplification of these procedures would probably increase the EU's effectiveness.

• Moreover, the EU is often described as a competent, yet rigid and inflexible body that smaller institutions might be reluctant to work with. The EU must therefore demonstrate its trustworthiness, and a certain openness to (i) compromise, (ii) flexibility, (iii) constant scrutiny and (iv) changes during the course of a project following an assessment, etc.

• 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 MoA in each of the four countries, to providing them to local, more tailored projects that are implemented by civil society and private actors.

• The EU's activities in the Mediterranean are increasingly being seen as only benefitting the EU. As stated above, it is recommended that the EU work to improve its acknowledgement and understanding of local needs and its readiness to respond to them.

• To address the criticisms about its lack of transparency, the EU should reinforce transparency and accountability mechanisms that monitor both its partner institutions and governments as well as its own structures. This will then help change the EU's reputation from an organization that pursues relations with the countries in the Mediterranean for its own self-interest, to one that is transparent, communicative and trustworthy.

4.6 Improving Infrastructure

• Each of the four assessed countries is in dire need of water management strategies and efficient irrigation infrastructures. The EU can provide this financial support by contributing to effective infrastructure projects. However, it should bear in mind that some of these projects might worsen the situation by promoting an excessive use of water and as a result may damage the already fragile ecosystems. It should therefore focus on supporting projects that allow for more effective water management strategies, less leakage and more efficiency, without exhausting existing resources. Furthermore, the EU can facilitate access to more efficient irrigation systems, such as currently unaffordable drip irrigation to smaller agricultural holdings.

• Similarly, small farms in the Mediterranean region suffer from a lack of competitiveness locally and internationally partly due to outdated equipment and consequently inefficient modes of production that lead to low margins, or to an increase of production costs through

rental of machinery. Therefore, the EU can provide financial assistance to support these small farms in acquiring new machinery or can encourage relevant bodies (such as the respective government) to provide that support to boost domestic production.

4.7 Capacity-building

• Capacity-building needs to be prioritized in the EU's approach to setting policy strategies for the four countries. However, the EU should understand the stakeholders' needs beforehand, so that instead of providing assistance through knowledge transfers of agricultural best practices, they supply stakeholders with support in the latter stages of the production chain, such as marketing, branding, packaging and transportation.

• Additionally, by taking into consideration the lack of synodical and political organizations representing local farmers, as well as the low leverage and lack of advocacy skills demonstrated in the four countries, the EU can offer capacity-building to help farmers (particularly small and medium ones), and other stakeholders such as farmers' cooperatives and farmer' unions, organize to pressure policy makers into action.

• Respondents also highlight a lack of information on alternative forms of fertilizers, and often resort to using pesticides and other chemicals that are more accessible. The EU can support a transition to a sustainable use of pesticides by supporting the provision of training on integrated pest management, organic agriculture and other sustainable farming practices, to small and medium-size farmers.

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