

PRESS RELEASE

For more information, please contact:
Sarah Immenschuh, s.immenschuh@cgiar.org
David Paqui, d.paqui@ifad.org

Joint Workshop to Discuss Enhancing Resilience to Conflict in Arab Countries in the Context of Food Security

14 January 2014, Rome Italy—On 16 January, Ambassadors and representatives from Arab countries, researchers, and development partners will gather in Rome, Italy to discuss how the Arab region can work to reduce the impact of crises like conflict, natural disasters and global spikes in food prices, especially on the rural poor.

Organized by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions and Markets (PIM), the workshop, titled “Enhancing Resilience to conflict in Arab countries through research and Arab Spatial 2.0”, will examine ways in which policymakers and development agencies can collaborate to improve the lives of people in the region. The workshop itself is part of a three-year research project, “Reducing Vulnerability to Conflict in the MENA Region”, conducted jointly by IFAD, IFPRI, and PIM to promote innovative approaches and gain insights into rural poverty in conflict areas.

“We seek to figure out how we can apply research to development,” said Khalida Bouzar, Director of the Near East, North Africa and Europe Regional Division at IFAD. “How can IFAD's work in the relevant Arab countries complement research undertaken by IFPRI and its CGIAR sister agencies and how can the findings be used on the ground, within the context of IFAD's investments to make them more sustainable and impactful?”

The numbers speak for themselves: An estimated 21 million people in Egypt, or some 25.2 percent of the country’s population, were suffering from poverty and poor food consumption at last count. In Yemen, the number of people who do not know where their next meal is coming from has spiked to 44 percent, up from 32 percent in 2009.

However, new research shows that the story is a complex one: While political crises certainly lead to food insecurity, the lack of reliable nutrition can also be one cause of conflict. Notably, food insecurity was one of the factors that led to the Arab awakening, during which people took to the streets demanding “more bread, dignity and justice”.

The workshop will also see the launch of Arab Spatial 2.0, an open-access and interactive online tool that provides food security and development-related information in the Arab world at national, subnational and pixel levels.

New features include:

- a gallery of downloadable and pre-made graphs about Arab nations' development and food security;
- customized analytical tools that allow users to compare and explore data by indicators, regions, year, and download the results;
- new multi-layer maps that dynamically track IFAD development projects geographically in the context of more than 200 food security and development indicators; and
- enhanced user experience, with simpler navigation and greater interactivity.

“Arab Spatial 2.0 is only a start,” said Karen Brooks, Director of PIM. “We believe that improved data quality and open access to it will help policymakers and researchers understand how to decrease vulnerability, fight against food insecurity and poverty, and ultimately bring better lives to people in the Arab world.”

According to the research findings that will be presented at the workshop:

- Food insecurity at national- and household-levels is one of the main causes of conflict in Arab countries, in contrast to other regions where factors such as income inequality and poor governance carry the highest risk of social unrest.
- Weather shocks, especially droughts, increase the risk of local civil conflicts. Climate change adaptation strategies and rural off-farm income generation are critical for preventing conflicts.
- Without food subsidies, household resilience to shocks in Egypt would be much lower. However, the current subsidies are expensive, poorly targeted, and may indirectly contribute to malnutrition.
- The National Food Security Strategy of Yemen needs to be urgently implemented in order to support a successful transition process and to tackle hunger, poverty, and chronic malnutrition.
- Knowledge sharing and coordination between and within development communities and projects can help enhance resilience to conflict and improve the efficiency of project interventions.

“Building resilience to conflict requires improving food and nutrition security through a smart and country-specific mix of trade, agricultural and social policies and interventions,” said Clemens Breisinger, project leader and research fellow at IFPRI.

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The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) works with poor rural people to enable them to grow and sell more food, increase their incomes and determine the direction of their own lives. Since 1978, IFAD has invested about US\$15.6 billion in grants and low-interest loans to developing countries through projects reaching approximately 420 million people and helping to create vibrant rural communities. IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized UN agency based in Rome – the United Nations' food and agriculture hub. It is a unique partnership of 172 members from developing countries, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. IFPRI was established in 1975 to identify and analyze alternative national and international strategies and policies for meeting the food needs of the developing world, with particular emphasis on low-income countries and on the poorer groups in those countries. It is a member of the CGIAR Consortium. www.ifpri.org.

The CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions and Markets (PIM) is a ten-year initiative to identify ways in which the foundations for decisionmaking in food systems can be strengthened to serve the interests of poor producers and consumers. When policies, institutions, and markets fail, key public goods and services are undersupplied, incentives are biased against agriculture, consumers pay too much for food, and relationships that create wealth are ruptured. PIM's researchers seek solutions to these problems. The program combines the resources of 11 CGIAR centers and numerous international, regional, and national partners to provide an integrated approach to policy research for a food secure future. This program is led by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).