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MED

MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUES

PROMOTERS



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and International Cooperation of Italy

ISPI
ITALIAN INSTITUTE
FOR INTERNATIONAL
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COOPERATION FORUM

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THE HEALTH-NUTRITION- AGRICULTURE NEXUS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

On the occasion of the 6th edition of the “ROME MED - Mediterranean Dialogues” conference, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI/DCGS) and CIHEAM Bari will organize the “**Development Cooperation Forum**” event focused on the nexus between **health, nutrition and agriculture in the Mediterranean Region**.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, health has become an imperative topic in the international agenda. The current emergency is forcing us to pay greater attention to the risks, often under-estimated, associated with the spreading of new infectious diseases in a globalized world. Among the critical issues, the link between **diseases, pollution and environmental degradation** features prominently. Zoonotic diseases represent only a small portion of human pathogens, but data reveals that there were three times as many outbreaks in the 1990s compared to the 1940s. Since 1990 the cases have continued to rise steadily.

In December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2020 as the **International Year of Plant Health (IYPH)**. This year presents an opportunity to raise awareness on the importance of plant health, and how protecting it can help achieve the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, plants account for **80% of the food we eat** and are the source of **98% of the oxygen we breathe**. However, according to FAO, plant pests and diseases are responsible for the loss of **40% of global food crops**, and for significant monetary losses from trade in agricultural products: over USD 220 billion every year. Emerging and recurring infectious diseases, and specifically **zoonoses** thus represent a serious threat to global public health, security and economic growth.

Over the past months, researchers claimed that unsustainable development models have accelerated environmental degradation and the subsequent **spillover of viruses**, causing infectious diseases to arise and spread. In fact, the **high pressure on ecosystems** leads to major risks for plant, animal and human health. Most recurring and emerging infectious diseases originate in animals, specifically from human or livestock interaction with wildlife. Examples include SARS, Avian flu, Ebola and HIV, MERS and Zika and there is a high likelihood that SARS-CoV2 originated in bats. Three key trends are contributing to the rise in these pathogens: increasing ecological disruption through human activity; larger and more intensive agricultural systems lacking appropriate sanitary systems; and an ever more globalised world. The combination of **increased zoonotic outbreaks** and **increased international connectivity** has greatly amplified the risks of pandemics.

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To cope with these challenges, the United Nations have developed the “**One Health approach**”, based on the nexus among human, animal and plant health.

This approach seeks to integrate multiple sectors to have a more **coordinated response** and achieve better public health outcomes. Within this context, plant health is a crucial facet – not only does it contribute directly to our health through the food we eat, but also indirectly through the health of the ecosystems that we live in. Healthier plants means healthier people.

As advocated by FAO, **holistic and ecosystem-based approaches** that focus on prevention and the health of the ecosystem are to be preferred, as these present a cost-effective solution. Therefore, it is today more urgent than ever for the international development cooperation to promote cross-sectoral programmes using agro-ecological approaches and focusing at the same time on human well-being.

In this framework, the event intends to promote a common understanding on the **nexus among food, agriculture and health** and on their systemic connection. Panellists will be asked to provide their views on **models, tools and methodologies** to address this nexus in the Mediterranean region, in line with the objectives of the UN 2030 Agenda. In particular, all the aspects relating to **sustainable agricultural production, food-systems and lifestyles** will be addressed, with a focus on: research and innovation, knowledge management, value chain development, networking and partnerships, capacity building and training. Based on the experiences, views and best practices outlined by the speakers, a new model of technical assistance to provide solutions on the nexus nutrition, agriculture, and health will be outlined, with particular focus on the Mediterranean region and good potential of replicability in other regions of the world.

9.00 | OPENING SESSION

Emanuela DEL RE, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Maurizio RAELI, Director, CIHEAM Bari

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Bing ZHAO, Director, Smallholder and Food Systems Support, WFP

9.20 | PANEL DISCUSSION

Monique ELOIT, General Director, OIE

Marcela VILLARREAL, Director, Partnerships and UN Collaboration Division, FAO

Ayoub AL JAWALDEH, Regional Advisor Nutrition EMRO, WHO

Stefano SCARPETTA, Director, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD

Chair: **Antonio POLITO**, Journalist, Corriere della Sera

Q&A SESSION

10.20 | CONCLUSIONS

Giorgio MARRAPODI, Director General for Development Cooperation, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Working Language: English (translation from/to Italian will be provided)

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