

Forum: General Assembly 4  
Issue: Protecting farmers in developing countries from being exploited  
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# RESEARCH REPORT

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General Assembly 4



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## Introduction of the chairs

We hereby welcome you to KOPPELMUN 2019 and the General Assembly Fourth Committee in particular!

My name is Raphael and I will be serving as your Chair. I am a student at the Stedelijk Gymnasium Haarlem (SGH), in my fifth year. I have participated in 21 conferences. I take part in the organisation of my schools very own HMUN as Head of Content. Furthermore, I am initiator of the annual TEDXYouth@Haarlem conference, of which we will organise the second edition this year. I am also a part of the Learning Across Borders organisation, the charity of the SGH. I was politically engaged from a young age, which my parents stimulated tremendously, by always encouraging me to question things and debate about issues we disagreed on. This interest has now grown out into somewhat of an obsession, that I have been able to express in MUN and many other organisations I have been part of.

My name are Giras Bowo and I will be serving as your Deputy Chair for the duration of the conference. I am a first-year student from Indonesia at Leiden University majoring in International Relations and Organisations. This is going to be my ninth conference yet my first-time chairing a MUN. Hence, I am thrilled to serve as your deputy chair this February and very excited to meet all of you soon. Good luck!

## Background

Agriculture has always been central to increasing human wellbeing and national economic growth. Its importance is in part due to its multi-functionality as livelihood provider and source of income and jobs for rural households. Agriculture's contribution to rural communities' cohesion, through the maintenance of ecosystem services (e.g. water supply and purification, pollination, pest and disease regulation) and transformation of local economies, illustrates the importance of agricultural issues.

Within the agricultural sector, small-scale farmers and pickers have remained central to agricultural development and continue to play important roles promoting an ecologically rational and socially just food system. Small-scale farmers and farming systems themselves are extremely diverse, as influenced by geographical region, national governance system and management type.

It is difficult to categorize smallholders and family farmers or pickers according to a common typology of attributes or components. Their productive and social structures often do not follow rigid patterns. Smallholders and family farms vary in terms of the activities they engage in, the assets and resources available to them (such as land area and quality, water resources, animal stocks, infrastructure and machinery, financial assets) and their access to these productive resources. They also differ according to land tenure – the type of contractual arrangements which can include renting or share-cropping; the control of the natural resources used; the scale of production; the share of family labour utilized (who in the family manages what and how); the extent and nature of wage labour employed; the degree of market integration; and the distance of holdings from the family residence. Furthermore, the interaction of these variables with national standards of living must also be considered.

Keeping in mind the diversity described above, any definition of the characteristics of small-scale farms and family farming will depend on the definitions that each region/country adopts for itself, settled in extensive and binding consultations with relevant stakeholders.

Nevertheless, scale measurements of the farm size are often used to classify producers.

According to the IAASTD (2009), there are 1.5 billion men and women farmers working on 404 million small-scale farms of less than 2 ha. However, the 2-ha farm size is not a universal characteristic. Smallholding sizes vary across regions from an average of 0.5 to 10 ha – and even 500 ha is considered a smallholding in Australia.

In performing economic, social, cultural, environmental and reproductive functions, family farming can itself be a means of maintaining family patrimony and social status, cultural heritage, territories, landscapes and communities. As a result, the motivations of family farmers and pickers often go far beyond maximizing economic profit to encompass other social, cultural and ecological motives. Agriculture (in its broad sense) is a critical foundation for family farmers and pickers' livelihoods due to its important role in providing income and employment, food supply and a direct household basic consumption source. However, smallholders and family farmers often diversify their activities to complement incomes or reduce risks, participating in non-farm activities or bearing temporary migration. For these

reasons, the view of a small-scale farmer as much more than an agrarian economic actor is gaining in prominence. Rather, a small-scale farmer can be thought of as a nuclear unit for the environmental management of land and its biodiversity, an important source of cultural value and a fundamental pillar of the national development. As such, smallholders and families become a means and unit of organizing agriculture, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production systems. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, reproductive, social and cultural functions.

## Farmers and pickers' demands

As described above, agriculture has been a central component of civilization development, not only because of its basic function as a food provider, but as a provider of income generation, provision of vital goods and services, promoter of rural development, source of employment and biodiversity custodian. At the same time, industrial practices and a hegemonic and unilateral approach to food production has emerged. The increasing corporate control of natural resources favours short-term gains at the expense of social and environmental endowments, while exacerbating inequalities and degrading the natural resource base. In spite of the findings that the world faces a sustainability crisis, smallholders and family farmers have been disenfranchised and disregarded.

In the midst of this global food system crisis, small-scale and family-farmer organizations gained the attention of the global community at Rio+20 by illustrating the interconnections between agriculture and food systems and the social, environmental, economic and good governance aspects of sustainability. There is a need to tackle food security and poverty eradication objectives that remain unfulfilled, and cope with fundamental natural resources scarcity and ecological limits, while mitigating and adapting to climate change. In particular, the need to enhance agricultural system resilience and food self-reliance has been highlighted, alongside the problems of coping with increased costs of fossil fuel-based agricultural inputs. Agricultural development can and must be reshaped in order to cope with this expanding global crisis in a sustainable way.

Smallholders and family farming organizations recognize themselves as key actors in fostering sustainable development. They assert that family farming is the base of sustainable food production – able to guarantee food security, food sovereignty and environmentally sound management of land and its biodiversity, while preserving the important socio-cultural heritage of rural communities and nations. In summary, small-scale and family farming represents a strategic sector due to its economic, social, cultural and environmental functions which reflect all dimensions of sustainable development.

## Economic claims

The multitude of crises currently facing humanity has demonstrated the limitations of the economic growth paradigm. Within the food and agriculture sector, unequal competition has been introduced by international trade liberalization, while distorting subsidies remain. A lack of priority given to smallholders and family farming in national policies has diminished access to financial resources leading to the marginalization of a large section of the world population, specifically smallholders. The neoliberal model of industrialised agriculture has not “trickled-down” into more social well-being. In contrast, it has contributed to the global environmental and employment crisis and disconnection from local realities. Farmers’

organizations at Rio+20 put forth their ideas on how to cope with these challenges and improve agricultural performance.

The challenge is to ensure timely and appropriate policies which take into account the current characteristics of small-scale holders at each level of intervention. This requires consideration of market power of family farmers, their types of production, the role of intermediaries, up to date food regimes, and tariff and non-tariff barriers. As providers of nearly 70 percent of the world's food supply, smallholders and family farmers need an adequate and just framework that enables them to produce and market their products collectively, and that facilitates investing in building their individual and organizational capacities. This includes improving interactions among local, national and regional market agents, and supporting the creation of value-added smallholder productions in order to improve incomes and create alternative labour or employment opportunities. At the same time, the vulnerability of smallholders to food and energy price volatility calls for reforming and integrating regional markets to protect them from global imbalances and disparities.

## Definition of key terms

### **Smallholder farming**

Definition of smallholders differs between countries and between agro-ecological zones. In favourable areas with high population densities they often cultivate less than one ha of land, whereas they may cultivate 10 ha or more in semi-arid areas or manage 10 head of livestock. Often, no sharp distinction between smallholders and other larger farms is necessary. Smallholders represent a large number of holdings in many developing countries and their numbers have increased in the last two decades. Evidence from the World Census of Agriculture for a small number of selected countries in Africa shows that between 1980 and 1990, the percentage of agricultural holdings of less than one hectare had increased from 50 percent to about 78 percent.

### **Community-supported agriculture**

A partnership between farmers and the local community, providing mutual benefits and reconnecting people to the land where their food is grown.

### **Market power**

A company's ability to manipulate price by influencing an item's supply, demand or both. A company with market power would be able to affect price to its benefit. Firms with market power are said to be "price makers" as they are able to set the price for an item while maintaining market share.

### **Family farming**

Single-family agricultural business mainly operated within one community, selling in small numbers, and usually locally.

## **Sustainable development**

Development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

## **Key Participants**

### **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**

FAO’s active contribution to the preparatory process of UNCSD has contributed to the inclusion of food security across the priority areas under consideration. In addition, FAO carried out an analysis of the interactions between the green economy and the food and agriculture sector, including opportunities and constraints to address the key points in this regard.

### **National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG)**

Based in Brazil, CONTAG is the largest confederation of rural workers in Latin America. It represents and defends the interests and rights of more than 4,200 unions of rural workers within the trade union action for the construction of an alternative project for a Rural Sustainable Development and Solidarity (PADRSS). It focuses on ensuring integration between rural and urban areas, the recovery and strengthening of family agriculture and their organizations, and the improvement of the living conditions of the rural dwellers.

CONTAG has worked alongside four regional farmers’ organizations to carry out several activities to strengthen the voice of family farmers and rural organizations, and to support the participation of representatives of its members in several activities.

### **The Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries – CPLP**

The CPLP is an inter-governmental organization of eight Portuguese-speaking countries that have made a commitment to fight against food insecurity within their own countries by promoting locally-based sustainable agriculture models. As part of their efforts, they work closely with CSOs of smallholder and farmer organizations at different levels.

### **La Via Campesina (LVC)**

La Via Campesina is an international movement with a constituency in the world’s largest grouping of smallholders and farmers. It comprises about 150 local and national organizations in 70 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. LVC represents about 200 million farmers in total. It has a long track record of lobbying and working in the global institutional spaces of the United Nations to fight for, propose and defend policies and positions in favour of smallholder-based sustainable agriculture and fisheries and food sovereignty. Therefore, LVC is now recognized as a main actor in the food and agricultural debates.

## The AgriCulture Network – ILEIA

The AgriCulture Network, formally known as the Institute for Low-External Input Agriculture (ILEIA), shares knowledge and provides information on small-scale family farming and agro-ecology production models. It emphasizes the fact that agro-ecology uses a holistic approach and has long been considered trans-disciplinary, meaning it integrates progress and methods pertaining to the social and natural fields of knowledge; the agroecosystem is viewed as a socio-ecological system.

### Timeline of Key events

1945	FAO is founded
2000	The African Union Model Law on Rights of Local Communities, Farmers, Breeders and Access
2001	Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act
2003	Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Rules

### Previous attempts to solve the issue

There have been a few previous attempts to solve the issue, namely a few acts or resolutions that have stated farmers rights. However, these acts have yet to establish an international binding framework to which all member states are obliged to adhere. Until now only agreements have been reached and intentions have been established.

Multiple conventions and a special organisation were established in order to improve the quality of agriculture but also the quality of the conditions for farmers. The FAO focuses on the quality of food and the just handling of food. Its focus does not revolve around the protection of farmers even though it is dire for the just handling of food.

The conventions focus on the intellectual property of the farmers and their developments and less on their protection against financial exploitation. This is of course a difficult point, but one needs to stray from the companies and set strict regulations.

### Possible Solutions

The first solution one could consider is national support or mandate of the fair-trade label, seeing that products that carry the label are always brands, whose manufacturing process has been carefully evaluated before they were able to use this label. This ensure that brands will seek support from this fair-trade label. Before a brand is able to obtain the label they will have to better their ways.

Furthermore, one could consider the governmental check-ups on the payments made to farmers in their country in order to ensure that multinationals do not underpay farmers. In conjunction one could establish certain sanction for multinationals that ignore these instated minima.

A more extreme measure would be to governmentally employ the farmers and let governments handle the selling of the crops to multinationals. This seems like an extreme measure, but in nations where it is difficult for governments to oversee all farming and trading activities in its borders it may be a solution.

Sources :

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