

Books and Reports Review

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Introduction

The last two years have seen a growing attention toward small scale farming-related issues, mainly due to three important international events and processes:

- First of all, the 2014 was the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF), that had the purpose to increase the international community's awareness on smallholder farming by focusing the attention on its significant role in achieving sustainable development, namely thanks to its fundamental contribution in eradicating hunger and poverty, providing food security and nutrition, improving livelihoods, managing natural resources, and protecting the environment. In such a perspective, the goal of the 2014 IYFF was to reposition family farming at the centre of agricultural, environmental and social policies in the national and international agendas, at the same time identifying constraints and opportunities that it offers to reach a sustainable and inclusive development everywhere.
- Secondly, the launch of the post-2015 agenda setting process at the end of 2013 has represented a key step in promoting awareness toward small farming, as food and nutrition related issues have rapidly raised as priority themes to be addressed, in an international situation characterized by a widespread economic crisis and bearing in mind the food crisis of 2008. With the OWG outcome document and the following UNSG Report, the international community has recognised the need for food security and sustainable agriculture to address the disparities that often marginalize rural people – and especially smallholder households and rural workers – excluding them from national and even local political, economic, social and cultural developments, also with the proposition of a specific target by the OWG (by 2030 substantially increase small-scale food producers' productivity and incomes, particularly of women, family farmers and pastoralists through secure access for all to productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services and markets).
- Finally, the 2015 Expo to be hold in Milan, on “Feeding the planet, energy for life”, with its vast array of initiatives, is expected to represent a key opportunity for a further debate on approaches and strategies and for the capitalisation of best practices related to small sale farming, aimed at paving the way for new partnerships between development actors, the

private and the public sectors, with the aim to efficiently use innovations for a sustainable food system, founded on livelihood improvement and the empowerment of the rural poor through sustainable farming and strategies of inclusive local development.

In the wake of such a centrality of the issue within these ongoing processes, a vast literature on small farming related issues has been recently produced. The analysis of these documents suggests that, even if smallholder farmers are generally included among the vulnerable groups to be protected from marginalisation, all the involved actors recognize that they could play a significant role in the global food production, being probably the more promising candidates to become pivot of a switch to a more socially, environmentally and culturally sustainable agriculture that can produce more diversified and nutritious quality food. To realize such a potentiality, it's nevertheless fundamental to analyse differences between different types of small producers, in order to effectively address the major constraints that limit the full development of the smallholders' potential: first of all, the scarce access to resources, the need for a better integration of smallholder within markets and the global value chain, the need for responsible investments that boost productivity and allow poverty reduction, and the need to preserve at the same time the role of guardians of biodiversity and actors of environmental sustainability that small producers play.

HLPE: Investing in smallholder agriculture for food security (2013)

The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition provided an interesting in-depth analysis on smallholder agriculture and investments. The HLPE was established in 2010 as the science-policy interface of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) with the aim to improve the robustness of policy making by providing independent, evidence-based analysis and advice at the request of CFS. In October 2011, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) requested the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) to prepare "*a comparative study of constraints to smallholder investment in agriculture in different contexts with policy options for addressing these constraints, taking into consideration the work done on this topic by IFAD, and by FAO in the context of COAG, and the work of other key partners*".

The HLPE published in June 2013 a report on *Investing In Smallholder Agriculture For Food Security*, calling for a "new deal" for smallholders, that even today constitute the majority of farm families in the world, giving a fundamental contribution to household, national and global food security and offering great opportunities for sustainable intensification, if the constraints related to lack of investments are overcome. More specifically, the report provides five key components to be addressed:

- conservation and enhancement of soil health;
- sustainable management of all water sources and launching a “more crop and income per drop of water” movement;
- extending appropriate technologies and inputs;
- providing the needed credit and insurance;
- ensuring assured and remunerative marketing opportunities.

The Report also proposes a reflection on the meaning of smallholder agriculture, arguing that there are many variations in each specific context at the regional, national and local levels and so refusing a “one size fits all” definition based only on farm size. The adjective “small” should be rather connected to the scarcity of resources, which in turn means a production mainly destined to self-consumption if no adequate investment levels are guaranteed. The reasons for investing in such a kind of agriculture is based on its central role as a foundation of food security in many countries, also taking into account future challenging population and urbanization patterns. Consequently, there is the need to contribute to its transformation towards a new paradigm that stresses its role on the territory and for rural community from a social, cultural and economic point of view, if sustained with appropriate policies and strategies.

This also means, as the report underlines, the need for a trend reversal of the current investments patterns, with larger enterprises mostly oriented at agro-exports have been favoured, while the smallholder sector, mainly (although not exclusively) producing for the domestic market, has been neglected. In this sense, the report reiterates the widespread interest in making more effective use of public-private partnerships (PPPs), in order to better mobilize and orient private investments towards collective goals.

However, it is important to assess the constraints to investing in smallholder agriculture, and elaborate strategies to overcome them. At a policy level this means coherence and integration between different thematic areas related to agriculture, and the design of a governance that takes into account the multi-functionality of small-scale agriculture, in order to deal with the ongoing transformations and make it profitable for small owners: improved access to resources and markets are the two key themes.

IFPRI: From subsistence to profit (2013)

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), a recognised provider of research-based policy solutions to sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition, published in 2013 the report *From subsistence to profit* that analyses

different strategies and development pathways put in place for smallholder farmers in developing countries, and offers policy recommendations to help potentially profitable smallholders face emerging challenges and risks.

The starting assumption of this work is that, even if smallholder farmers play a key role in meeting the future food demands of a growing and increasingly urbanized population, they are not a homogeneous group: while some of them have the potential to engage in profitable commercial activities, others should be supported in exiting agriculture and by providing nonfarm employment opportunities (diversification of income as a risk management strategy).

Referring to smallholder farmers with profit potential, their ability to be successful is threatened by many challenges such as climate change, price shocks, limited financing opportunities, and inadequate access to nutritious food and basic social services. The only way to allow smallholders moving from subsistence to commercially-oriented agricultural systems and so helping to feed the world's hungry, is the overcoming of these constraints. The policy recommendation provided by the report to reach these achievements are mainly related to the creation of a fair investment environment that promotes context-specific farm size, supports productive social safety nets, improves risk-mitigation and adaptation strategies, promotes pro-smallholder value chains, and increases smallholder-friendly financing and investment.

FAO: Smallholder integration in changing food markets (2013)

Several authors and actors tackle the issue of market integration. The FAO published at the end of 2013 a report on *Smallholder integration in changing food markets* in order to give adequate attention and to investigate the significant heterogeneity of smallholder producers, both in terms of their access to the productive assets required to be able to increase production, especially the production for sale. This report focuses on the implications of smallholder heterogeneity with respect to their participation in markets, and the key message is that to understand the determinants of smallholders' involvement in agricultural markets is an unavoidable step to formulate appropriate measures to facilitate their participation, and the adoption of productivity enhancing technology by smallholder producers.

The first part of the report examines the characteristics of smallholder farming from a market perspective, stressing the differences between smallholder categories and the different constraints they face when approaching markets, while the second part analyses the determinants of smallholder participation in the light of the rapidly evolving agricultural markets, also introducing examples of solutions that may be implemented to facilitate the participation at different levels of formalization.

These solutions include arrangements such as producer organizations in order to aggregate smallholder production to market, support services such as market-based risk management instruments, market information systems and extension, also examining

how such mechanisms might best be delivered to smallholders, with prominence given to the role of the public sector, broadly defined to include government, donors and civil society.

The key message of the report is that smallholders' integration in markets is fundamental for food security and poverty reduction, and that attempts to increase their productivity will fail if, at the same time, a mechanism that reinforces smallholders' links to markets is not put in place. Such a mechanism should face the vulnerability of small farmers in a risky environment, and should take into account the differences of constraints and opportunities that the different categories of farmers meet.

ODI: Linking Smallholders to markets (2013)

The Overseas Development Institute published in 2013 the report *Linking Smallholders to markets* as the outcome document of the Leaping and Learning: Strategies for Taking Agricultural Successes to Scale Programme, that aimed to contribute to debates about smallholder development in Sub-Saharan Africa, as contribution towards a greater understanding of the factors that are necessary and of the actions to support smallholder agricultural development projects to boost food and nutrition security and support poverty reduction.

The report analyses the constraints that smallholders face in approaching markets, namely remoteness, low production, low farm-gate prices, and lack of information, and some solutions to address and overcome these market failures, trying to answer the question: how can smallholders use a combination of agricultural growth and links to markets to raise their incomes and reduce poverty and hunger?

The report presents analysis and investigation into different examples of linking smallholders to markets, in order to provide recommendations addressed to governments, donors, NGOs, large-scale agriculture investors to tackle future actions informed by the successes and challenges discussed.

The findings underline the importance of an enabling investment climate and the provision of rural public goods, provided by the state, as necessary (but not sufficient) conditions to ensure fair and efficient market linkages. Moreover, most smallholders have limited access to inputs, technical advice, insurance, credit and other financial services, and to output markets. Improving their access is a major challenge for smallholder agricultural development. Consequently, successful links between smallholders and markets require consideration and planning around some key factors in order to reach the poorest and highly vulnerable:

- The focus on creating jobs, building assets, improving health and education, and providing social protection;

- A scaling up process that does not lie in a particular and specific arrangement: replicating and adapting are processes of enabling, facilitation and learning;
- Support by a necessary architecture that includes catalysts of change, forums to consider and address specific problems and mechanisms to group farmers.

IFAD-UNEP: Smallholders, Food Security, and the Environment (2013)

The report on *Smallholders, Food Security, and the Environment* was prepared for the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) under the guidance of senior management of UNEP's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), with the aim to improve the understanding among policymakers and practitioners of the relationships between smallholders, food security and the environment, as the environmental aspect of family farming represents an important and widely recognized asset of this kind of agriculture, and there is a need and an opportunity to enhance the role that smallholders play in food production and natural resource stewardship.

In fact, thanks to their collective experience and intimate knowledge of local conditions, smallholders hold many of the practical solutions that can help place agriculture on a more sustainable and equitable pathway. Nevertheless, to do this, they need help to overcome market failures and other disincentives for sustainable land use, including insecure land tenure, high transaction costs and weak institutional support. A major challenge will be to address the discrepancies of scale between decisions made at the farm level and impacts at larger ecosystem scales.

The document underlines the importance of multi-functional agriculture, that deliver other services than crop production, such as climate and water regulation and biodiversity conservation, many of which provide benefits on regional or global scales, and stresses the need for targeted investments to favour the transformation toward a global, greener economy centred on smallholders, and the central role played by farm- and community-level mechanisms through which smallholders can address the trade-offs between individual productivity and increased collective sustainability at both local and global level. This requires the design of market-based mechanisms that provide smallholders with proper incentives to invest in sustainability, thus transforming the rural landscape and boost a new and sustainable revolution in agriculture.

EU: Family Farming In Europe: Challenges And Prospects In-Depth Analysis (2014)

Even in developed countries, smallholders have changed but have not disappeared, even if they have been neglected by policies often favouring larger farmers. Small producers remain numerically important depending on the prevailing national context, often combining farming with other activities in the rural non-farm economy. The EU document on *Family Farming In Europe: Challenges And Prospects In-Depth Analysis*, prepared by Sophia Davidova and Kenneth Thomson, discusses the challenges and future prospects of family farming in the EU focusing in particular on those specific to family farmers: smallness, lack of power within the food chain, and intergenerational farm succession.

The document has been prepared for the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (COMAGRI) in relation to the UN International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) and it provides a definition of the concepts of family farming and an overview of the main figures available, then going ahead with the examination of the current and new challenges in economic, demographic, sociological and territorial terms, and concluding with an analysis of the future prospects for family farming in Europe. The data used has been derived from the EU's Farm Structure Survey (FSS) and Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN).

The analysis shows that farmers in EU are often part-time, and frequently pluriactive and/or diversified, thus the importance of farming in total household income varies widely, from being almost the sole source to being only a minor component. However, even in this context, the main economic challenge remains the access to farming resources such as land and capital, and access to markets, particularly in terms of bargaining power in the food chain, and the scarce competition in terms of innovation and entrepreneurship. The main social challenge is represented by intergenerational succession, another important issue to be considered when reflecting on small farming globally, with huge urbanization flows in both developed and developing countries, and the consequent feminization of rural work and rural poverty.

The note concludes stressing the need for family farms to collaborate through producer organisations, such as cooperatives, in order to gain scale economies and negotiating power on markets and for policy, in order to overcome the complex challenge represented by the requirement for both economic viability and environmentally sustainable management.

FAO- IIED: Making the most of agricultural investment: A survey of business models (2010)

The opportunities of integration of smallholder farmers into agro-food supply chains is the main theme of a 2010 report *Making the most of agricultural investment: A survey of business models* that provide opportunities for smallholders, published by the FAO and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), in cooperation with IFAD and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

The authors Sonja Vermeulen and Lorenzo Cotula examine different business models that determine the structure of agricultural investments in lower- and middle-income countries. Investments impact are considered as an alternative to large-scale land acquisitions, and in such a perspective, the inclusive effects of business models are analysed. The way in which a company structures its resources, partnerships and customer relationships in order to create and capture value are considered as more inclusive if they involve close working partnerships with local landholders and operators, and if they share value among the partners.

The investment projects may involve complex combinations of various models. The wide range of arrangements are discussed under six broad headings: contract farming, management contracts, tenant farming and sharecropping, joint ventures, farmer-owned business and upstream/downstream business links. The report focuses on the way in which the different types of business models share value between the business partners – particularly between an agribusiness investor and local landholders and operators. What results to be attractive to investors while working for smallholders is very much context-specific and no single model emerges as the best possible option to improve role and impact on smallholders in all circumstances. Context conditions include tenure regulations, cultural and historical aspects, institutions and policies, biophysical, geographical and demographic considerations.

The concluding remarks propose some steps to move forward. The first one concerns getting a more thorough understanding of more inclusive business models and of the conditions for their better working. This require much more detailed data than is available in the literature, therefore development agencies should support case studies and facilitate exchange of experience among practitioners. The second set of steps concerns national policies and programmes to support more inclusive business models, including security of local land rights, more detailed regulation for available arrangements, and flexible model contracts and support to smallholders in their dealings with agribusiness. The conclusive steps concern action at the international level that should go beyond minimising the possible negative impacts of large-scale land acquisitions, promote models of agricultural investment that maximise opportunities for local smallholders and strengthen the negotiating capacity of host governments and smallholder groups.

EADI: Global Value Chains Linking Local Producers from Developing Countries to International Markets (2013)

A further in-depth analysis of smallholder farmers integration opportunities is provided by the interesting contributions included in *Global Value Chains Linking Local Producers from Developing Countries to International Markets*, edited by Meine Pieter van Dijk and Jacques Trienekens and published in 2013 by the Amsterdam University Press for the European Association of Development Studies (EADI).

The first part gives an overview of the main theoretical issues concerning the value chain approach and the concept analytical framework for the research on the present and potential role that small farmers can play in developing sustainable and inclusive value chains. A specific chapter discuss the possible combination of the value chain and the Bottom of the Pyramid approaches

The following sessions include six empirical chapters, of which four chapters deal with agricultural value chains, separated in national and global value chains and ordered from a very simple local value chain to potential regional value chain to a more mature bio-fuel chain, which could eventually lead to exports.

The last chapters draw some conclusions about value chain upgrading. The editors review the strategies that had been discussed in the book, by distinguishing four different options: upgrading through an increase of value added; upgrading by improving market access; upgrading through better value chain governance structures, and upgrading through partnerships. The scheme is proposed as a practical tool to address analyses of empirical cases such as the examples presented in the book that are meant to show the diversity of approaches. The analysis of global value chains is considered a new methodological tool for understanding the dynamics of economic globalization and international trade that could integrate poverty and environmental concerns.

FAO: Processor driven integration of small-scale farmers into value chains in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (2014)

Also the report *Processor driven integration of small-scale farmers into value chains in Eastern Europe and Central Asia* prepared by Jon H. Hanf and published by the FAO in 2014 is based on the analyses of case studies and give an interesting overview of small farmers integration dynamics in the transition economies.

In such countries small-scale farmers face difficulties in directly and effectively participating in markets, due to pressures from larger processors and retail chains to supply raw materials in required quantities and quality. This paper explores the role of small and medium-sized food processors in favouring the integration of small farmers into supply chains and proposes recommendations for policy and support options. The five country cases present successful examples though problems linked

to a unfavourable business environment where contracting is constrained by market and contract enforcement as well as service and infrastructure provision is still to be improved.

All the reports revealed as the future development of small-scale farmers largely depends on the economic performance and development of small and medium-sized processors. Recommendations are therefore oriented to the enhancement of these specific enterprises.

A first remarks regards cost leadership strategies that are not considered an options for SMEs. They rather have to be very customer oriented and need to have very good market knowledge and marketing capabilities. Also forward integration could be an appropriate option for small and medium-sized processors. By building their own retail networks, small processors are able to secure their own retail channels and thus offset the price pressure of large retailers to some extent.

The replacement of middlemen is supported by processors. However, although the formation of groups has proved successful, all of the country reports show that cooperatives are not very successful. The establishment of traditional cooperatives cannot be recommended as they are perceived as top down, inefficient and corrupt. One alternative could be to establish cooperative structures based on the ideas of “New Generation Cooperatives” at different stages of the value chain.. The success of informal groups proves that bottom up collective action is achievable and durable.

The provision of financial assistance for processors and smallholders is of high importance. Governments could provide credit programmes and create a positive investment atmosphere to attract new investments from other sector and countries. The wide range of policy recommendations includes the question of the overall rural infrastructure, such as the road network, education issues and improvement of circulation of information to small farmers in order to enable them to adopt their production schedules in time to meet market needs.

G. Prain, N. Karanja and D. Lee-Smith: African Urban Harvest. Agriculture in the Cities of Cameroon, Kenya and Uganda (2012)

Another very interesting report based on case studies was published by Springer in 2012. Gordon Prain, Nancy Karanja and Diana Lee-Smith, editors of *African Urban Harvest. Agriculture in the Cities of Cameroon, Kenya and Uganda*, presented the results of rigorous researches conducted in the three African countries that carefully explore the dynamics of urban and peri-urban agriculture through three complementary lenses – livelihoods, health and policies/institutions.

The scholarly studies reveal a rich diversity of food and non-food agricultural systems that have emerged in different urban settings and that often, but not only, involve smallholder farmers as the main players. Africa is experiencing a rapid

growth of urban areas that is transforming also poverty and nutrition patterns. Poverty is going to be primarily a urban phenomenon with the depths of income poverty, health risks and food insecurity in the African informal urban settlements that is going to be much worse than in stressed rural communities.

In such a context urban and peri-urban cultivated areas are still essential to provide food to cities. This depend partially on systemic failures in markets linking rural and urban areas, and partly on the remaining market structures where local food play the main role despite the increasingly integrated global food systems. Moreover, after having been discouraged for decades by national and local authorities, urban agriculture is now attracting a growing interest. This book represents a contribution to that paradigm shift, by providing a large body of evidence. The case studies show how urban agriculture can represent a sustainable engine for human development and economic growth. They also demonstrate that urban agriculture can be at the same time a subsistence strategy for the poor and a lucrative economic activity for local investors and entrepreneurs.

The complexity of the examined sub-sector highlights the importance of understanding agro-ecological, political, institutional and historical context before designing interventions. The case studies also reveal the complex and dynamic two-way demographic and economic interactions between rural and urban areas, as well as the multi-level nature of power relations. The case studies of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency interventions presented in the volume contribute to underline some key points for policy reform that include the negotiations between key stakeholders on urban land tenure and land-use systems, water rights, structure and operation of food markets and the design and enforcement of health and food safety measures.

And finally, some multimedia

Many publications and report are available as a free web download. This is also the case regarding many interesting audios and videos.

What follows is just a small selection for the purposes of illustration and orientation on a quite interesting video making reality.

Stefano Liberti, Mathilde Auvillain (2014), *The Dark Side of Italian Tomatoes*, Al Jazeera English

A multimedia take on how Italy's tomato business is thriving - at the expense of African migrant workers and Africa.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2014/06/dark-side-italian-tomato-20146261186932592.html>

Various authors

In connection with the Family Farming International Year 2014, a collection of audio and video hosted by FAO, a sort of portal on the challenges faced by smallholders and what are the rewards.

[http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/resources/audio-video/en/?page=9&ipp=10&no_cache=1&tx_dynalist_pi1\[par\]=YT0xOntzOjE6lkwiO3M6MToiMCI7fQ==](http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/resources/audio-video/en/?page=9&ipp=10&no_cache=1&tx_dynalist_pi1[par]=YT0xOntzOjE6lkwiO3M6MToiMCI7fQ==)

The Gaia Foundation and the African Biodiversity Network (2012), *Seeds of Freedom*.

The film seeks to challenge the mantra that large-scale, industrial agriculture is the only means by which we can feed the world, promoted by the pro-GM lobby. In tracking the story of seed it becomes clear how corporate agenda has driven the take over of seed in order to make vast profit and control of the food global system.

<http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/seeds-of-freedom/>
