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Sustainable agriculture key to green growth, poverty reduction – UN officials



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United Nations officials today called for boosting support for sustainable agriculture, including smallholder farmers, as a way to drive green growth and reduce poverty.

According to the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the challenge of feeding more than nine billion people by 2050, along with tackling climate change and maintaining productive land and sufficient water resources require a “more intelligent pathway” for managing the world’s agricultural systems.

“Agriculture is at the centre of a transition to a resource-efficient, low-carbon Green Economy,” [said](#) UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. “The challenge is to feed a growing global population without pushing humanity's footprint beyond planetary boundaries.”

Mr. Steiner called for galvanizing support for smallholder farmers, who are an “untapped resource” in addressing food security and today’s environmental challenges.

Investments through official development assistance (ODA) are one way of stepping up support for this important group, as is scaling-up and accelerating government policies for unleashing investment flows from the private sector, he noted.

“Well-managed, sustainable agriculture can not only overcome hunger and poverty, but can address other challenges from climate change to the loss of biodiversity,” said the UNEP chief.

“Its value and its contribution to multiple economic, environmental and societal goals needs to be recognized in the income and employment prospects for the half a million smallholdings across the globe,” he added.

The world’s rural poor and especially farmers of the 500 million smallholdings in developing countries feed one-third of the global population and account for 60 per cent of global agriculture.

Smallholder farmers also provide up to 80 per cent of the food consumed in Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa.

“Smallholders in developing countries – the majority of them women – manage to feed 2 billion people, despite working on ecologically and climatically precarious land, with difficult or no access to infrastructure and institutional services, and often lacking land tenure rights that farmers in developed countries take for granted,” said Kanayo F. Nwanze, President of IFAD.

“Right now, we are squandering the potential of rural poor people to contribute to global prosperity. Investing in sustainable smallholder agriculture is a smart way to right this wrong,” he stated.

IFAD also stressed that investments in sustainable smallholder agriculture must go hand-in-hand with policy and institutional reforms, investments in infrastructure and improvements in market access. They must also be informed by the knowledge and needs of the rural poor.

On 5 June, UNEP will celebrate World Environment Day (WED) in India with one of the fastest growing economies in the world and whose 1.2 billion people continue to put pressure on land and forests, especially in densely populated areas where people are cultivating on marginal lands and where overgrazing is contributing to desertification.

This year’s theme – ‘Forests: Nature at Your Service’ – underscores the intrinsic link between quality of life and the health of forests and forest ecosystems.

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