



**155TH GOVERNING BOARD MEETING  
12 JULY 2024, MALTA**

# **CIHEAM SPECIAL DEBATE**

**MEDITERRANEAN APPROACH TO FOOD  
SOVEREIGNTY: CONCERNS AND IMPACTS ON  
SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS**



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## **SUMMARY AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**



**FOR THE 12<sup>th</sup> MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE CIHEAM  
MEMBER STATES - Rabat, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

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## CIHEAM Special Debate

### *Mediterranean Approach to Food Sovereignty: concerns and impacts on Sustainable Food Systems*

#### a) Context: upcoming ministerial meeting

*Prelude to the Ministerial Meeting: Setting the Stage for the October Gathering of the CIHEAM.*

The CIHEAM Special Debate on *Mediterranean Approach to Food Sovereignty: Concerns and Impacts on Sustainable Food Systems* served as a crucial prelude to the upcoming ministerial meeting of CIHEAM scheduled on 25 October in Rabat (Morocco), also focusing on this specific topic. It builds upon the outcomes of an extraordinary CIHEAM Governing Board meeting held via video conference at the end of May, during which discussions took place to define, refine, and prepare the subject matter of the ministerial meeting. The CIHEAM Special Debate underscored the commitment of the organization to foster informed dialogue and lay the groundwork for substantive policy discussions.

#### **CIHEAM Ministerial Meeting: Advancing Sustainable Agriculture in the Mediterranean**

*The ministerial meeting of CIHEAM represents a significant gathering of member states and stakeholders, where key decisions are made to advance the organization's mission of promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development in the Mediterranean region. It serves as a platform for high-level exchanges, policy coordination, and the adoption of concrete measures to address the region's most pressing agricultural and environmental challenges.*

#### b) Involvement of CIHEAM partners and other stakeholders

*Engagement of CIHEAM Partners and Stakeholders: Enhancing Dialogue and Preparation.*

The output from CIHEAM partners and other relevant organizations plays a pivotal role in enriching this debate and better preparing for the ministerial meeting. Collaboration with various stakeholders allows for a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and opportunities within the thematic focus. By incorporating diverse perspectives and insights, the CIHEAM ensures that the discussions are grounded in real-world experiences and best practices. This inclusive approach not only enhances the quality of the debate but also contributes to more effective policy formulation and implementation strategies.

## Participants

### Moderator:

- **Mr Justin ZAHRA**  
*Former Maltese Delegate, CIHEAM Governing Board  
Senior Director, European Agriculture Program, Environmental Defense Fund Europe*

### Panellists:

- **Dr Maha Al-Zu'bi**  
*Regional Researcher, International Water Management Institute - IWMI*
- **Mr Abderraouf LAAJIMI**  
*Deputy Executive Director, International Olive Council - IOC*
- **Mr Maurizio MARTINA**  
*Deputy Director, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations - FAO*
- **Mr James ACIDRI-GLOBAL**  
*Head of Humanitarian Food security & Livelihoods - Save the Children International*

## Questions addressed during the debate

### **Interdependent Food and Agriculture Systems**

- How do you and your organization balance the global, regional, and local dimensions of the unprecedented sustainability and food sovereignty multi-crises?

### **Mediterranean Vision on Sustainable Food Systems**

- Why is having a Mediterranean vision on the global commitment to shift to sustainable food systems important?
- How do bottom-up networks for cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and cross-border action help address the international challenge?

### **Equitable Access to Nutritious and Affordable Food**

- What are the best pathways to identify and quickly and effectively scale food sovereignty needs across the region?

### **Promoting Small-Scale Farming**

- What are the key levers to promote small-scale farming for resilience and food sovereignty?
- Which strategies for empowering youth and women participation can best feed into additional rural community benefits?

- What role can short-value chains and sustainable agricultural practices play in promoting local food systems?
- What are the key elements of a just transition for small-scale farming in a globally competitive food landscape?

### Climate Risk and Solidarity-Based Strategies

- Which solidarity-based strategies work best for Mediterranean farmers at the front line of climate risk?
- Can the drive to integrate farming into circular economies reward farmers?
- What capacities are necessary to support Mediterranean farmers to become nature and climate-positive actors, and how can they be financed?

### c) Recommendations

*Mr James Acidri*

*“The dimensions of food systems and food sovereignty are crucial in all contexts—whether they are stable or conflict-ridden. Without food availability, we cannot even begin to talk about access.”*

#### 1. Bridge Policy to Implementation Gap

- Emphasize the need to address the discrepancy between policy formulation and practical implementation.
- Ensure policies are effectively translated into actionable plans on the ground through inclusive regional cooperation frameworks.

*Dr Maha Al-Zu'bi*

*“Our focus is on ensuring global commitments remain relevant on the ground, addressing gaps in policy engagement, awareness, and capacity to localize actions effectively.”*



#### 2. Bridge Global to Local in Systemic Approach

- Advocate for a systemic approach that connects global strategies with local realities.
- Encourage tailored solutions that consider specific regional and local contexts through inclusive regional cooperation frameworks.

*Mr Maurizio Martina*

*“Food security and the operational implementation of solutions at the ground level are the real challenges we face today.”*



### 3. Focus on Access to Finance for Farmers for Resilience Through Extreme Climate Events

- Prioritize financial support mechanisms for farmers to enhance their resilience against climate extremes.
- Develop funding programmes aimed at helping farmers recover from and adapt to adverse climate conditions through climate-resilient financing instruments.

*Dr Abderraouf Laajimi*

*"The Mediterranean region suffers from uneven resource availability... Extreme phenomena such as droughts and floods further threaten agricultural production systems".*

*"The CIHEAM could play an extremely important role in the dissemination of know-how, technologies, and information. It is not enough to provide funding or machinery to small farmers if they do not have the capacity to use them."*

*Mr Maurizio Martina*

*"Without access to financial tools, it's impossible to reorganize the agri-food system on the ground. Less than 3% of climate finance goes to agriculture, and only 1.7% of that reaches small farmers [...]. Innovative mechanisms are needed, such as green bonds, climate funds, and new public-private partnerships to support investments, particularly in small-scale farming."*



### 4. Ensure Innovation for All for a Just Transition

- Promote inclusive innovation that benefits all stakeholders, not just a select few.
- Ensure that technological advancements and innovative practices are accessible to everyone involved in the food system.

*Mr Teodoro Miano*

*"CIHEAM's role is to foster innovation through multi-stakeholder projects addressing the entire food system, from production to consumption and energy access [...]. We need a technological revolution that benefits all, not just a select few. This revolution must be inclusive; otherwise, it risks widening the gap between stronger and weaker players in the agri-food system."*



## 5. Enhance Capacities for Smallholders in Tech and Know-How

- Strengthen the technical and knowledge capacities of small-scale farmers.
- Provide training and resources to enable smallholders to adopt modern agricultural techniques and technologies through digital and practical skills training.

*Mr Justin Zahra*

*“Capacity Building: There is a need to enhance capacities across the board to ensure accessibility and democratization of resources and knowledge.”*

*Dr Abderraouf Laajimi*

*“Capacity building is a cornerstone of sustainable development, and institutions like CIHEAM can be pivotal in leveraging it for the benefit of Mediterranean agriculture.”*

## 6. Improve Finance and Risk Access for Small Farmers

- Create financial instruments and risk management tools tailored for small farmers.
- Facilitate access to credit and insurance to support smallholder farming operations.

*Mr James Acidri*

*“Another key area we focus on is financial inclusion. We are working on initiatives to bring small farmers into the ‘money economy’, encouraging them to produce for commercial purposes, which in turn enhances their ability to access credit. Additionally, we promote anticipatory action linked to early warning systems, helping farmers to prepare for climate-related risks rather than reacting after crises occur.”*

## 7. Design Policies Using Systems Thinking Approach in Fragile Contexts

- Develop policies that use a systems thinking approach, especially in fragile and vulnerable contexts.
- Consider the interconnectedness of various factors affecting food systems when designing interventions.

*Mr James Acidri*

*“We must shift towards strengthening food systems if we are to make meaningful progress, especially in crisis contexts like Syria and Yemen [...]. Our focus isn’t just on life-saving interventions but on transitioning from consumptive to productive actions, promoting resilience. This is especially crucial in protracted crises where handouts can no longer be the main solution.”*





## 8. Implement Data-Driven Water Management with New Organizational Tools for Small Farmers

- Utilize data-driven approaches for efficient water management in agriculture.
- Introduce new organizational tools and technologies to assist small farmers in managing water resources effectively.

*Mr Maurizio Martina*

*“One of our main focuses is using data and technology to improve water management. This combination is critical. Without data, it’s impossible to manage water effectively, especially in countries facing acute shortages.”*



## 9. Address Sustainability Challenges with Generational Renewal

- Focus on generational renewal to tackle sustainability challenges.
- Encourage the involvement of young people in agriculture to ensure the continuity and innovation in sustainable food systems by promoting youth involvement in sustainable agriculture.

*Ms Frida Krifca*



*“One key point that hasn’t been addressed enough is the age of farmers. Across Europe and the Mediterranean, the average age of farmers is around 52 years old. We need to make farming more attractive to younger generations. CIHEAM plays a critical role here by working with young people and fostering innovation.”*




## Key Figures

- **Mediterranean Water Scarcity**  

**Three-quarters** of water resources are located in the North, while only **a quarter** are in the South.

- **Budgetary Expenditure on Food**  

**8-10%** in developed Mediterranean countries vs. **30-40%** in less developed nations.

- **Climate Finance Allocation**  

**Less than 3%** of global climate finance goes to agriculture, and **only 1.7%** reaches smallholder farmers.

- **Youth in Farming**  

The average age of farmers in Europe and the Mediterranean is around **52 years**.

- **Food Import Dependency**  

In the next decade, **20%** of calories consumed in Mediterranean countries will be imported.

### d) Interactive Polling

During the debate, a poll was organized to identify the biggest challenges the Mediterranean faces in achieving food sovereignty. The poll also aimed to determine the priority topics from the following headings: Regional Cooperation and Solidarity, Food Security and Access, Promotion of Local Food Production, and Environmental and Climate Sustainability.



## 1. Addressing Challenges in Achieving Food Sovereignty in the Mediterranean

Key Challenges Identified:

→ **Natural resources management: water**

Water Scarcity: Implement integrated water resource management strategies to optimize water use and improve water efficiency across agricultural practices.

Water Waste: Develop and promote technologies and practices to minimize water waste in irrigation and other agricultural processes.

Natural Resource Management: Enhance policies for the sustainable management and conservation of natural resources to ensure long-term agricultural productivity.

→ **Climate Change**: Strengthen adaptation and mitigation strategies to address the impacts of climate change on agriculture and food systems.

## 2. Priority Topics for Focus

→ **Promotion of Local Food Production**: Invest in initiatives that support local farmers, enhance local food supply chains, and encourage the consumption of locally produced foods.

→ **Environmental and Climate Sustainability**: Prioritize environmental protection and climate resilience through sustainable agricultural practices, conservation efforts, and policies aimed at reducing the carbon footprint of food production.

### Conclusion

The polling results highlight that achieving food sovereignty in the Mediterranean requires addressing key challenges related to natural resource management and climate change. Effective strategies must include integrated water resource management, minimizing water waste, and sustainable conservation policies.

Additionally, focusing on the promotion of local food production and environmental sustainability will support local farmers, enhance food supply chains, and ensure long-term agricultural productivity while mitigating climate impacts.

Prioritizing these areas will foster resilience and sustainability in the region's food systems.

## **ANNEX 1 Definition of the topic of the special debate**

### ***Collaborative Efforts for Food Security in the Mediterranean***

This topic explores the collaborative efforts and shared responsibilities among Mediterranean countries to ensure equitable access to nutritious food, promote local food production, and support small-scale farmers. It considers the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental factors in achieving food security and sustainability in the region.

### ***Regional Cooperation and Solidarity***

Explore how Mediterranean countries can collaborate and demonstrate solidarity to address challenges related to food sovereignty and sustainable food systems collectively.

*Sharing knowledge, Collective action, Shared challenges, Cross-border partnerships, Mutual support, Interconnectedness, Regional Strategies and Common goals, Innovation, networks.*

### ***Food Security and Access***

Discuss concerns regarding equitable access to nutritious food within the Mediterranean region and examine the impacts of solidarity approaches on improving food security for all populations.

*Access to nutritious food, Hunger alleviation, Food assistance programs, Food distribution networks, Food affordability, Nutritional diversity, Food deserts, Food aid, Food sovereignty, Mediterranean Diet, One health.*

### ***Promotion of Local Food Production***

Examine initiatives aimed at promoting local food production and supporting small-scale farmers as a means to enhance food sovereignty and sustainability in the Mediterranean context.

*Local food production, Fragile Community agriculture, youth and women empowerment, Farm-to-table, Food sovereignty, Small-scale farming, Sustainable agriculture, Urban farming, Agritourism, Farmer's markets, Agroecology.*

### ***Environmental Sustainability (green and blue transitions)***

Address the environmental concerns associated with current food production and distribution systems in the Mediterranean region and assess how solidarity-based approaches can contribute to more environmentally sustainable food systems.

*Ecosystem preservation, Renewable energy, Biodiversity conservation, Climate resilience and emerging threats, Climate-smart livestock, Circular economy, Sustainable development and Just Transition for farmers, Natural resource management.*

## **ANNEX 2 Short biographies**

### **Dr Maha Al-Zu'bi**

*Regional Researcher - Sustainable & Resilient Water Systems, Co-Lead CGIAR Fragility to Resilience, International Water Management Institute - IWMI*

Maha Al-Zu'bi is a distinguished expert in climate change governance, natural resource public policy development, environmental science management, and the interconnected fields of water, energy, land, and food systems. With more than 15 years of professional experience, she has overseen portfolios, programs, and projects across diverse development sectors including water, energy, agriculture, and the environment. Her career has been enriched by collaborations with esteemed organizations such as UNDP, GGGI, World Bank, GIZ, FCDO, EU, and USAID.

In addition to her practical work, Maha has spent over 5 years directing academic and research initiatives. Notably, she managed the Global Research Initiative in Sustainable Low Carbon Unconventional Resources at the University of Calgary, Canada. Her research, concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa and Central Asia, focuses on advancing local climate policy and governance frameworks to enhance climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts.

Her passion is to actively foster interdisciplinary approaches to real-world energy, water and environmental issues. Maha has published book chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles mainly related to climate change governance, green roof policy, and energy-water-food nexus.



### **Mr Abderraouf LAAJIMI**

*Deputy Executive Director, IOC*

Prof. Abderraouf LAAJIMI is currently Deputy Executive Director of the International Olive Council and previously Head of Cabinet and General Director for Financing, Investments and Professional Organizations, Ministry of Agriculture, Hydraulic Resources and Fisheries (Tunisia).

Prof. LAAJIMI graduated as an Agricultural Engineer in Tunisia and was awarded a Master of Science in Agro-Food Marketing by CIHEAM-Zaragoza in 1991. In 1995 he completed his PhD in Applied Economics at the University of Zaragoza (Spain). He has extensive experience in the academic and research fields in Agricultural Economics and has held several positions of responsibility at the National Agronomic Institute of Tunisia as Head of Department of Agriculture and Food Economics and Professor of Agricultural

Economics. He has collaborated with many international, academic and research institutions in several projects and networks and has published extensively at both national and international levels. In addition, he has international expertise as visiting professor, consultancy, expertise in projects evaluation and organizer of several scientific and professional seminars, conferences, trainings, etc. and has conducted applied research granted by relevant funding agencies. His involvement in the Ministry of Agriculture has afforded him the opportunity to become familiar with the elaboration of regulatory and policy frameworks related to encouraging investments in the agricultural sector.

Prof. LAAJIMI has a solid experience in managing public investments portfolio devoted to enhance agricultural development and in working and collaborating with international funding agencies and international institutions, such as the World Bank, FAO, IFAD, AfDB, GIZ, IsDB, AFD and others.



**Mr Maurizio MARTINA**

*Deputy Director, FAO*

Maurizio Martina has been Deputy Director-General of FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, with headquarters in Rome since December 2023.

Previously Assistant to the Director-General of FAO from 2021 to 2023.

He served as a member of the Chamber of Deputies for the Democratic Party.

From 2014 to 2018, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies, with a mandate for Expo 2015. He was Deputy Secretary, and Secretary of the Democratic Party in 2018.

In 2013, he was appointed Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies.

From 2010 to 2013 he held the position of Councilor in the Lombardy Regional Council.

In 2020, he published the book "Cibo Sovrano" with Mondadori, and in 2018 "Dalla Terra all'Italia".

Mr Martina was born in 1978 in Calcinate, in the province of Bergamo, and graduated in Political Sciences from the University of Macerata.



**Mr James ACIDRI-GLOBAL**

*Head of Humanitarian Food security & Livelihoods, Save the Children International*

James Acidri is a leading food security and livelihoods specialist with extensive Household Economy Approach expertise. His career over the last two decades has involved technical support to both governments and humanitarian agencies in the areas of food security, livelihoods and poverty analysis.

James has also held senior food security management roles at national and regional levels. James has produced numerous National Vulnerability Situation reports and, over the last twenty years, James has applied food security, livelihoods and poverty analysis in both humanitarian and development context, especially in rural Africa alongside work in Afghanistan and Iraq. Most recently, he worked with Evidence for Development and was involved with USAID/FEWS-NET food security early warning programmes; UNHCR research in Burkina-Faso and support to Self Help Africa programmes in Uganda and DFID-HyCRISTAL Climate programme for East Africa.

He has also worked with UNHCR on targeted humanitarian assistance through the Comprehensive Refugee Response policy framework in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Ethiopia and Djibouti.



**Mr Justin ZAHRA**

*Former Maltese Delegate, CIHEAM Governing Board*

*Senior Director, European Agriculture Program, Environmental Defense Fund Europe*

Justin Zahra leads Environmental Defense Fund Europe’s efforts on Food and Farming in Europe. EDF is a global Climate NGO, with a long history working with farmers in adopting climate-smart and resilient agricultural practices while protecting their livelihoods, futures and food security.

A lawyer and former senior civil servant, he served for 19 years through his expertise in EU Agriculture Policy & Implementation, particularly through various reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Previously, Justin served in Malta’s Agriculture Ministry since 2003, overseeing the Paying Agency for CAP funds and Agriculture Department. He represented Malta at high-level at the Special Committee on Agriculture (SCA) at the Council of Ministers in Brussels, and internationally at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM).