



No. 4

GPFS – AT WORK:  
SMALLHOLDER /FAMILY FARMING

No clear definitions for smallholders or family farmers exist. Characteristics of family farms differ widely between continents in terms of farm size and definition of a family. For SDC's target population – the poor in developing countries – there is a wide overlap between the two.

FAO:

Smallholders are small-scale farmers, pastoralists, forest keepers, fishers who manage areas below 10 hectares. Smallholders are characterized by family-focused motives such as favouring the stability of the farm household system, using mainly family labour for production and using part of the produce for family consumption (FAO).

This series is meant to give guidance and reflects the position of the GPFS.

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Seventy percent of the world's poor live in rural areas and depend mostly on agriculture for their living. Smallholders produce about 50% of the food worldwide and 500 million small farms are located in developing countries, where hunger is most prevalent. In comparison to large scale agriculture, smallholder farmers' fields yield about one third less. At the same time, there is growing international consensus that the reduction of world hunger and poverty could be drastically reduced by supporting smallholder agriculture.

The SDC supports smallholder agriculture and family farms by focussing on:  
**The adaptive capacities of smallholder farmers, as their natural and economic environment are rapidly changing. Globalisation, climate change, changing consumption patterns and increased integration of food value chains present threats, but also opportunities for smallholders and family farms.**

To enable smallholders and family farms to capture opportunities SDC supports the following aspects:

- **An international regulatory framework that is conducive to smallholder agriculture implemented on national level.** In this respect access and control over appropriate seeds and international trade regulations play an important role.
- **Secure access to and control over natural resources** as described in the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests are the most important prerequisite for investments in smallholder agriculture, be it by the farmers themselves, the private or the public sector.
- **Strengthening smallholder farmers' organisations** in their ability to 1) deliver demand oriented services to their members; and 2) advocating for policies and regulations in favour of their constituents on national and regional level.
- **Increasing the access to support services for smallholder farmers.** Small producers, and particularly women, have a huge unused potential for food production due to their limited access to education, training, advisory and financial services.
- **Improve access of women and youth to the benefits from farm and non-farm income generating activities.** Women perform about 50% of the agricultural work in Africa and Asia but have limited access to productive resources. As a consequence their fields yield in average 20-30% less than fields managed by men. Giving women the same access to productive resources as to men could increase agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4% and thereby reduce the number of hungry by 12-17%.
- **Post-harvest management to reduce losses at household and community level** and in the whole food supply chain. By reducing food losses at the early stages of the food supply chain, farming households can benefit from a higher food security and increased income from sales.
- **Research and advisory services on technologies and approaches that are accessible to smallholder farmers** and allow increasing their agricultural productivity in ways that conserve the natural resources for coming generations, are economically viable and socially balanced.
- **Investment in the development of decentralised, rural, non-farm activities** to support smallholder's access to alternative sources of income. This will contribute to consolidate the farming economy and enhance a structural transformation of smallholder agriculture, while ensuring its viability.