

IFAD launches \$16.64 million program to fight water scarcity

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EIRUT: The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has launched a \$16.64 million rural development program in Lebanon to combat water scarcity.

The Hilly Areas Sustainable Agricultural Development Project, launched last week, will help small-scale farmers and rural communities address the growing problem of water scarcity in the areas of Akkar-Dannieh, North Baalbeck and Hermel, South and Lower Litani, and Mount Lebanon.

IFAD will grant a \$4 million loan and provide a \$600,000 grant to finance the project. The financing agreement was signed by Kanayo F. Nwanze, President of IFAD, and Dr Hussein Hajj Hassan, Minister of Agriculture of Lebanon, at IFAD's headquarters in Rome.

To reduce the problem of water scarcity, the project will introduce improvements in soil and water management and help develop small and medium-sized water harvesting and conservation measures. It will also aim to improve linkages for small farmers through the provision of technical support services, while strengthening farmers' organisations and building local institutional capacities.

"To improve water-use efficiency and land productivity, the project will create opportunities for isolated and poor farming communities, including small farmers who incurred losses during the 2006 war," said Abdelaziz Merzouk, IFAD country program manager in Lebanon. "It will enable the local communities to increase their production of fruits, vegetables and other high value crops; thus improving livelihoods by increasing incomes for their families," he added.

Some 6,280 low-income households will benefit from the project, which will focus on raising productivity, improving the quality of produce and lowering production costs for existing farming systems. With \$8.4 million of co-financing from the OPEC Fund for International Development, the project will also help add value to farmers' produce through post-harvest support services.

With this latest project, IFAD will have financed four projects in Lebanon worth a total of \$36.4 million.