IFAD INNOVATION LAB:
EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AND AGRI-FOODS ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Thursday, May 22, 2025 | 9:30 – 17:00 CEST
IFAD HQ, Oval Room | Hybrid Format

[REGISTER HERE]

Introduction:

The Innovation Lab, hosted by IFAD, is a dynamic platform designed to inspire and enable students to develop innovative solutions for sustainable development. This one-day event, taking place on May 22, 2025, will bring together students from two prestigious universities—Tor Vergata and Roma Tre—to engage in a series of hands-on, interactive sessions. The focus will be on leveraging emerging technologies, public-private partnerships, and social innovation to create impactful solutions for rural development.

IFAD, in collaboration with the universities, aims to offer an opportunity for students to explore the intersection of innovation and sustainable development, while equipping them with practical tools and methodologies that will help them in their future careers. The goal is to nurture a new generation of innovators who will contribute to the development of scalable and sustainable solutions, especially in rural areas.

All students must register in advance using the following link, indicating their mode of participation (in-person or virtual): https://ifad.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_3FjqJ3s3Tp-EVvakSnpkNg

Event Structure and Objectives:

The IFAD Innovation Lab is designed to create a collaborative space for students to think critically and creatively about emerging technologies, public-private partnerships, and social innovation. Students will be introduced to real-world challenges in sustainable development and will have the opportunity to propose innovative solutions using ideation tools, collaboration, and expert insights.

Morning session (9:30 - 13:00):

9:30 – 10:00: Welcome Coffee

10:00 – 10:20: AI and other Emerging Technologies for Sustainable Rural Development | Brenda Gunde, Lead Global Technical Specialist ICT4D, PMI
This session will introduce IFAD's ICT4D/Digital portfolio and showcase how emerging technologies and Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs) are transforming rural development. Students will learn about the potential of these technologies to improve agricultural practices, promote market access , increase financial inclusion, and promote private sector engagement for sustainable livelihoods in rural communities

10:20 – 10:40: IFAD's Approach to Strategic Partnerships | Graziella Zabatta, Partnership Officer, Members Engagement, GPR
This session will highlight IFAD's strategic approach to partnerships which aims to achieve inclusive rural transformation by collaborating with governments, private sector entities, and international organizations. IFAD's partnerships focus on strengthening policy agendas, leveraging financial resources, enabling country-led development, generating knowledge and innovation, engaging the private sector, and enhancing visibility. Through its partnerships, IFAD seeks to co-create solutions that build local capacities, improve skills, and drive social innovation in underserved communities. Participants will learn about how to build effective partnerships through careful planning, monitoring, and review, with formal agreements to ensure clear communication and shared goals to lead to success.

10:40 - 11:00: Community-led Innovation – The power of combining participatory approach, experimentation process and digitalization: | Marie-Aude Even, Senior Biodiversity Specialist, ECG
This session will highlight how communities can drive innovation from the ground up by managing and utilizing agricultural data to address local challenges. Drawing on real-life examples, the session will explore participatory approaches to data collection, analysis, and application in rural contexts. Students will gain insights into the power of community-driven solutions to improve decision-making, resilience, and sustainability in agriculture.

11:00 – 13:00: IDEATHON. Introduction to lean innovation and the lean canvas and group work | Gladys H. Morales, Senior Officer Global Head of Innovation IFAD
Students will use innovative tools and techniques to diagnose challenges in rural development and ideate potential solutions. The IDEATHON will provide a practical, hands-on experience where students can apply methodologies such as design thinking and agile risk management to address real-world problems.

13:00 – 14:00: Lunch break

Afternoon Session (14:00 - 17:00):

14:00 - 15:30: Introduction to Storytelling. Group work on the "Perfect Pitch" | Gladys H. Morales, Senior Officer Global Head of Innovation IFAD
Students will continue refining their ideas, building on the morning's discussions, and preparing their solutions for presentation.

15:30 - 15:45: Coffee Break

15:45 - 17:00: Dragon's Den: Pitch Your Idea | Gladys H. Morales, Senior Officer Global Head of Innovation IFAD
In this exciting finale, students will pitch their ideas to a panel of experts from IFAD and academia, simulating the process of presenting innovative solutions to potential investors and stakeholders. This will provide participants with valuable feedback and the opportunity to develop critical presentation and communication skills.

Common Goals of IFAD and the Universities

1. **Promoting Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** Both IFAD and the universities aim to nurture an entrepreneurial mindset among students by encouraging them to develop innovative solutions to challenges faced by rural communities. This event seeks to instill the importance of creativity, problem-solving, and resourcefulness in addressing global development issues.
2. **Leveraging Technology for Sustainable Development:** The collaboration will expose students to the transformative power of emerging technologies, such as AI, blockchain, and digital tools, in promoting sustainability. IFAD's commitment to leveraging technology for rural development aligns with the universities' goal to equip students with the knowledge and skills to harness digital tools for global development.
3. **Building Public-Private Partnerships:** A key goal is to introduce students to the value of partnerships between the public and private sectors in achieving sustainable development goals. Through case studies and discussions, students will understand how these collaborations can scale up social innovation and drive impactful change in communities.
4. **Fostering Social Innovation:** Social innovation lies at the heart of this Innovation Lab. By focusing on designing new solutions that create social, economic, and environmental value, both IFAD and the universities aim to empower students to become leaders in the field of social innovation. The event will emphasize the importance of thinking outside the box to improve the well-being of individuals and communities, especially in rural areas.

Expected Outcomes:

Upon completion of the Innovation Lab, participants will gain:

1. **Methodologies and Tools for Innovation:** Students will acquire practical tools and frameworks to generate, design, and test innovative ideas, which they can apply in their academic and professional careers.
2. **Enhanced Understanding of Social Innovation and Sustainable Development:** Through the various sessions and activities, participants will develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of rural development and the role of innovation in solving global challenges.
3. **Improved Leadership and Collaboration Skills:** The collaborative nature of the event will help students build essential leadership and teamwork skills, while the pitch session will enhance their ability to communicate and present ideas effectively to diverse stakeholders.
4. **Innovation Culture and Mindset:** The event will help shift students' mindsets towards an innovation-driven approach, highlighting the importance of creating a supportive environment for the generation and testing of new ideas.