FAO breaks new grounds in rural poverty reduction

FAO is breaking new grounds in rural poverty reduction through an enhanced support to employment creation and social protection, and partnerships with counterparts outside its traditional domain, says the report of a recent evaluation by the Office of Evaluation. However, greater consideration of poverty analyses and pro-poor approaches in the design of country programmes and projects would pave the way for a more targeted response.

The evaluation, which was concluded in March 2017, assessed the strategic relevance and progress in implementing FAO’s new approach to rural poverty reduction under the Organization’s Strategic Programme 3 during the period 2014-2016.

Building on its knowledge, institutional relationships, policy incidence and field networks in agriculture, FAO promoted rural employment, evidence generation on social protection and institutional building for the empowerment of vulnerable groups. For example, in Nigeria and Senegal FAO supported national programmes for youth employment in agriculture, which have potential for creating over 750,000 and 100,000 jobs, respectively. In Zambia, Lesotho and Malawi, it suggested improvements to the design of social protection programmes, policies, investment plans and budgetary allocations, which are facilitating greater coherence and synergies between agriculture and social protection. In Guatemala, it helped design the Probosque Law, which mandates the country to use at least one percent of its national budget over the next 30 years to support forest producers, and in Malawi a new land bill that could empower millions of rural dwellers.

Adopting a multidisciplinary approach, FAO built a string of useful partnerships with the government, civil society, the private sector, donors, academia, other UN agencies, and more importantly, non-traditional partners such as the ministries of labour, social affairs and finance. Working with partners such as ILO, UNICEF, IFAD and UN Women, it provided tailored assistance, leading to the recognition of FAO’s added value as a relevant actor in rural poverty reduction.
The Organization collaborated with ILO on rural employment in Nigeria, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania and with UNICEF to conduct impact evaluations of national cash transfer programmes in several sub-Saharan Africa countries. With IFAD and UN Women, it strengthened its long-standing collaborations on global and field level activities in a broad range of topics relating to rural women empowerment and poverty reduction.

The evaluation however noted that in some countries, supported policies and programmes were not sufficiently adapted to specific agricultural and rural settings, or lacked robust multidimensional poverty analysis.

It therefore recommended that FAO should ensure that poverty analyses are conducted in programme countries, and based on such analyses, context-specific pro-poor approaches with theories of change are built into the design of programmes and projects. It also recommended that an analysis of the best gender equality practices under different contexts be undertaken to provide more tailored guidance to programme managers and partners. According to the report, the suggested actions should be implemented in a few countries to ensure a more effective use of capacities and resources, consolidate the progress made and demonstrate effectiveness of the new FAO multidisciplinary approach to poverty reduction.