The work of FAO on Rural Institutions, Services and Empowerment (RISE) contributes to global efforts to eradicate poverty, hunger and malnutrition. This is achieved by promoting inclusive socio-economic development and sustainable livelihoods in rural areas.

More specifically, the RISE team strives to unlock the development potential of rural areas, reduce inequalities and contribute to the socio-economic empowerment of rural women and men.

Our guiding framework is anchored in territorial and place-based approaches to national policies and planning that address the spatial dimension of rural poverty and hunger.

Inclusive development and socio-economic empowerment of rural people entail concerted efforts to develop conducive policies and institutional frameworks, as well as inclusive rural services and finance systems. Social mobilization and the development of organizational capacities of rural women and men are also crucial for ensuring their active participation in development processes.

The challenges

The majority of the rural poor are small family farmers, fishers, livestock and forest users who live in disadvantaged geographic areas and who depend on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods.

Being marginalized and geographically dispersed, resource-poor rural women and men face constraints in seizing social and economic opportunities. Operating on a small scale - with insufficient access to productive resources, basic infrastructure, finance, services and information – they often struggle with low productivity, limited investments, high crop losses, and poor access to markets, with adverse impacts on their livelihoods.

Women, youth and indigenous people tend to face particularly disadvantaged conditions in terms of access to land and resources, education and opportunities to participate in development processes.

What FAO is doing

FAO supports national territorial and place-based policies for improved food security and nutrition (FSN) to allow for more inclusive, effective and tailored planning and investments.

Wide geographic disparities of food security and nutrition levels across and within countries - in both urban and rural contexts - testify to an untapped solution to eradicate hunger and food insecurity around the globe. This phenomenon is particularly trying for people in rural areas where the majority of the poor depend on natural resources and live with limited livelihoods.

In this area of work, FAO advocates for the mainstreaming of a territorial approach in national development policies and planning, notably in poverty-reduction and food security and nutrition policies.

Acknowledging the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and food security and nutrition, the RISE team promotes partnerships - both within and outside of FAO - to increase effectiveness and impact of the Organization’s support to member countries.

At the global level, RISE actively participates and contributes to international policy dialogue aimed at promoting awareness, exchanging experiences, and fostering evidence-based knowledge on the contribution of territorial approaches to the achievement of poverty reduction and hunger eradication by 2030. This entails the participation in and organization of international expert meetings, the development of evidence-based knowledge and their dissemination, including through publications.

At the country level, FAO offers support to governments, policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders in the design of policies and inclusive governance systems capable of providing sustainable solutions to end geographical disparities and inequalities among women, men and youth in rural contexts. Thereby facilitating better access to a wide range of services that relate to food, employment and social inclusion to name a few.

FAO focuses on supporting national governments at central and decentralized levels and non-government institutions with strengthening their capacities in the implementation of territorial approaches and inclusive policy processes.

FAO promotes sustainable and inclusive rural financial systems and agribusiness investments to enable poor rural families to improve their livelihoods, increase resilience, and shift towards more profitable production systems.

The RISE team focuses on understanding the strengths and obstacles that hinder the development of capacities within producer organizations and their members; financial institutions; business development service-providers (BDS) and policy-making in order to achieve greater financial inclusion, seize investment opportunities and mitigate risks.

RISE also facilitates dialogue within various professional networks to identify and reduce knowledge gaps and make evidence-based policy recommendations to promote sustainable and inclusive rural financial systems and agribusiness investments.

At the country level, the team supports FAO Member States to achieve greater financial inclusion by disseminating evidence-based knowledge generated from its global activities. RISE works with a wide range of actors in agricultural value chains including financial institutions, farmer organizations, agribusiness companies and policy-makers to facilitate greater finance flow able to reach the rural poor.
FAO supports strengthening rural institutions and improving service provision to enable small producers and their organizations to increase productivity, benefit from business opportunities and link to markets.

FAO recognizes the plurality of service providers, public and private, that cater to the diverse needs and demands of small producers and their organizations. Pluralistic service systems (PSS) – in which a wide range of services are provided by different actors and funding sources – have the potential to make services more inclusive, demand-responsive and market-oriented.

Producer organizations play a central role in PSS, both as service providers and mediators with other actors. They help articulate demands, augment producers’ voice and power to influence policies and decisions on service provision.

At the global level, FAO works with development partners to identify good practices, analyze experiences and generate evidence that guide policy recommendations and transformative investments towards inclusive pluralistic service systems that are gender-sensitive and responsive to the demands of small producers.

At the country level, FAO provides technical support to Member States: to promote a conducive policy and institutional environment for collective action and enhancing rural service provision in pluralistic settings; and to develop institutional capacities that enable small producers and their organizations to access services, engage with markets and improve their livelihoods as a means for reducing rural poverty.

FAO provides technical support through field projects and regional initiatives on policy and institutional analysis of PSS; capacity development programmes for POs and related support institutions and services; and facilitation of linkages and networks among POs, service providers and other actors to enhance coordination and improve service provision to small producers.

FAO contributes to empowering women, men and youth through social mobilization, participatory communication and community governance mechanisms, as essential instruments for combating economic and social exclusion and gender inequalities.

Better access to information and opportunities to participate in two-way communication processes help to mobilize and motivate rural people. The rural poor can become agents of change only when they are able to voice their needs and concerns, participate actively in decision-making and take responsibility for their own development.

FAO facilitates this empowerment process by supporting social communication mechanisms and by developing the capacities of rural populations - particularly women - to participate in producer and other community organizations.

FAO’s Dimitra project brings together the expertise FAO needs to provide countries with this support. Through Dimitra, FAO undertakes information dissemination; experience exchange and participatory communication activities to promote gender equality, community mobilization and collective action.

In particular, the Dimitra approach contributes to increasing rural women’s visibility as agricultural producers and leaders, their access to information and their economic and social empowerment. In general, the clubs enhance rural people’s voice, self-confidence and participation in community life and governance.

At the country level, FAO-Dimitra activities are being implemented in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Niger, Senegal and Mali. FAO-Dimitra also publishes a biannual newsletter for global knowledge sharing on gender-transformative participatory approaches.

For more information


FAO, 2016. New directions for inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems


FAO Dimitra. Dimitra newsletters and Video Series on the impact of the Dimitra Clubs

OECD, FAO, UNCDF, 2016. Adopting a Territorial Approach to Food Security and Nutrition Policy

OECD, 2016. Regional Outlook (Chapter 10) “Global dimensions of malnutrition: Territorial perspectives on food security and nutrition policies”

FAO, 2016. Innovations for inclusive agricultural finance and risk mitigation mechanisms: The case of Tamwil El Fellah in Morocco

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