Decent rural employment is key to achieving food security and alleviating poverty. FAO has committed, through its Strategic Framework, to foster the enabling environment in support of decent rural employment (DRE), with special focus on rural youth and women’s economic and social empowerment. One of the FAO’s flagship programmes in this area is the Integrated Country Approach (ICA) for promoting decent rural employment. The ICA programme has been implemented so far in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, mainly funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, under the FAO Multi-Partner Support Mechanism.

An integrated approach

The ICA approach mobilizes several core functions in synergy, with the aim to induce sustainable policy change. The integrated nature of ICA also refers to its multilevel scope (global, regional and national).

At global and regional level, ICA contributes to FAO’s overall efforts to promote DRE issues in the agricultural and rural development discourse. Such active mainstreaming goes hand in hand with FAO’s normative work on DRE, setting international standards connected with food and agriculture.

At country level, ICA focuses on enhancing the employment content of national strategies, policies and programmes for agricultural and rural development. This will optimize, in the medium to long term, the contribution of the sector to improve the quantity and the quality of rural jobs.

Addressing the employment challenge requires increased capacities across several institutions, as well as more responsible public and private investments in agri-food systems and in rural development. For this reason, ICA advocates for the need to harness the untapped employment potential of agriculture and other rural sectors, supports capacity development of core rural institutions, produces knowledge documents and guidance materials, and facilitates the establishment of private-public partnerships and multi-stakeholder mechanisms for dialogue. Interventions are tailored to country demands and capacity development needs through in-depth scoping exercises conducted during the inception phase of the Programme.

Gender equality and environmental sustainability are mainstreamed as cross-cutting issues. ICA activities and approaches are designed to guarantee that the knowledge products developed and technical support provided are gender aware and actively contribute to reduce gender inequalities in the rural labour market.

An inclusive approach

The ICA programme actively encourages dialogue between agriculture and labour stakeholders. It also fosters cross-sectoral policy coherence towards decent rural employment, in particular among agriculture, employment, social protection and youth and gender-related policies.

The ICA partners with national public and private institutions, including ministries responsible for agriculture, youth, gender and labour issues, producers’ organizations, youth groups, national statistic offices and research centres. Rural young women and men are the ultimate beneficiaries of the Programme, especially the
poor, unemployed and underemployed. Through their organizations, the rural youth are also engaged in policy dialogue and in multi-stakeholder working groups.

Finally, ICA promotes collaboration among FAO and other United Nations Organizations, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) or the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and other development partners to bring their specific expertise to the benefit of the rural youth employment cause.

A phased approach

ICA has been implemented in five countries in different phases. The progressive refinement and adaption of the Programme to different contexts has contributed to a systematized but flexible approach for employment-smart rural transitions.

- A first phase of the Programme was implemented in Malawi and Tanzania, in the period 2011-2014. Based on participatory needs assessments, FAO facilitated the commitment of national stakeholders to a long-term employment theory of change, providing systematic support on decent work inclusion into the design of policies, strategies and programmes, such as the Tanzanian National Agricultural Policy (2013). In particular, technical support was provided on youth employment, child labour prevention in agriculture and gender equality promotion. This first implementation phase enabled the definition and field-testing of different methodologies and tools, which have been collected into the DRE Toolbox.

- The second phase of the Programme (2015-2017) targets Senegal, Uganda and Guatemala. Building on the lessons learnt of the previous phase, the support provided is more selective. Only one major entry point is selected - youth employment - and two/three core processes to be supported are agreed with the Government during the inception phase. The focus is on providing policy and strategic support to enhance the enabling environment for youth engagement in agriculture. Depending on the specific country or regional priorities, ICA could be easily tailored to other thematic entry points, such as child labour prevention, rural women economic empowerment or labour improvements in family farming.

Resources

Core tools developed under the ICA programme are:

- The DRE Toolbox is a repository of practical tools including case studies, guidance materials and other useful resources, organized in different modules that cover the main components of FAO’s approach to mainstreaming decent rural employment.

- The DRE database of policies, programmes, studies and institutions, which comprises an internal version for FAO staff and an external version for the general public.

- The DRE e-Learning Course (forthcoming in 2016), which provides knowledge and guidance on how to promote DRE to FAO’s staff as well as policy-makers and technical staff in developing countries.