



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Strengthening rural institutions and empowering people to reduce poverty and inequalities

**Vision, mission and activities of FAO on
Rural Institutions, Services and Empowerment**



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

Being both **marginalized** and **geographically dispersed**, the rural poor face major constraints in **seizing social and economic opportunities** to improve their lives and those of their families. This is especially true for **women, youth and indigenous peoples** as they often bear the brunt of the socio-economic disparities that hinder equal access to land, resources, education, information and opportunities to participate in development processes.

The work of FAO on **Rural Institutions, Services and Empowerment (RISE)** contributes to the Organization's efforts to eradicate poverty, hunger and malnutrition and to unlock the development potential of rural areas. This is tackled through the promotion of inclusive, gender-transformative socio-economic development and sustainable livelihoods in rural areas.

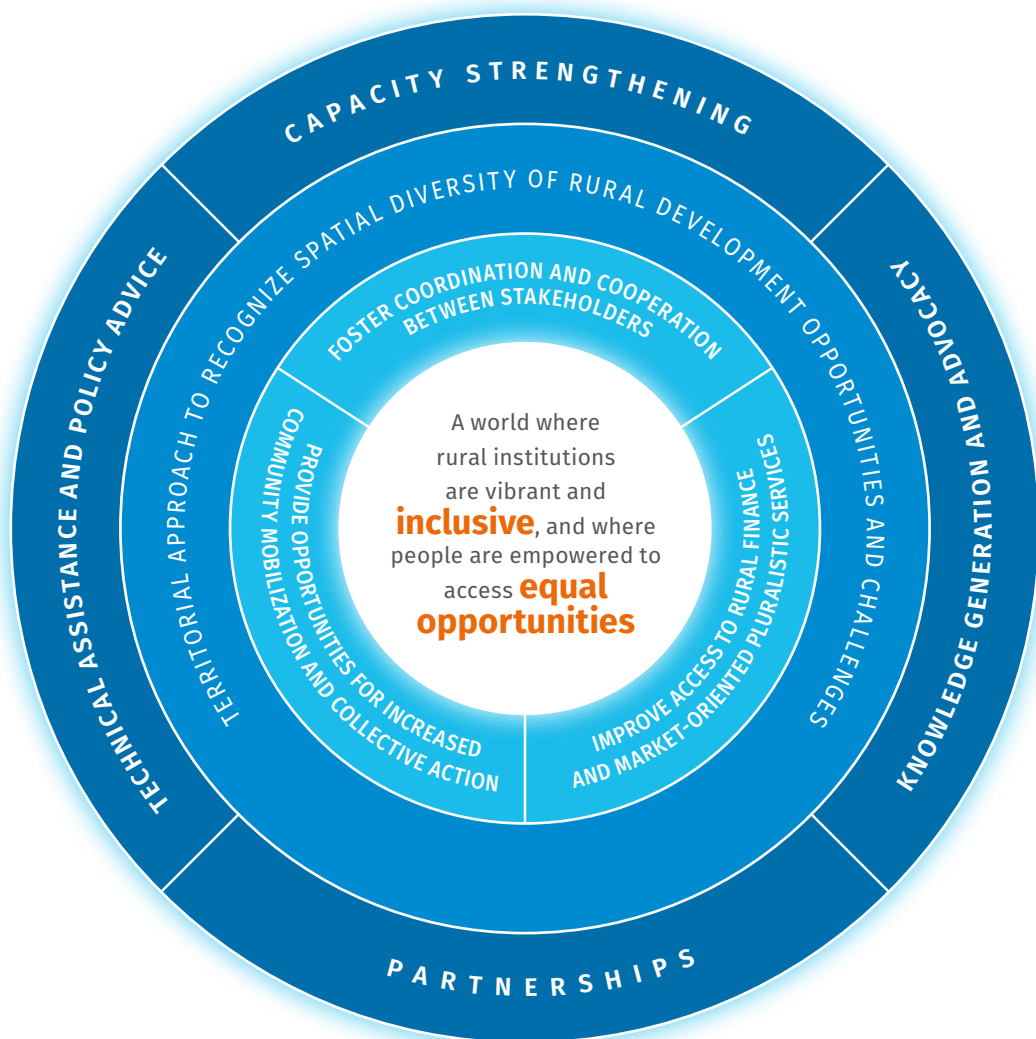
What **FAO** is doing

- **FAO supports territorial and place-based policies** to reduce within country disparities in poverty, food security and nutrition levels and allow for more inclusive, effective and equitable governance of natural resources.
- **FAO supports development of pluralistic market-oriented service systems, with an emphasis on collective action and producer organizations**, to enable small-scale family farmers to increase productivity, link to markets and improve their livelihoods.
- **FAO develops capacities for sustainable and inclusive rural financial systems and agribusiness investments** to assist poor rural families better manage their current livelihoods, ensure economic resiliency and to shift towards more profitable production systems.
- **FAO promotes the socio-economic empowerment of women, men and youth** through inclusive social mobilization, participatory communication, women's leadership and voice in decision-making and community governance.

Rural Institutions, Services and Empowerment (RISE) Team

Our vision is a world where rural institutions are vibrant and inclusive, and where people are empowered to access equal opportunities.

Our mission is to unlock the development potential of rural areas by strengthening rural institutions and organizations; promoting access to rural finance and market-oriented service systems; and supporting community mobilization and collective action.



Our guiding framework is anchored in a territorial approach that recognizes the spatial diversity of rural development opportunities and challenges as a means to reduce rural poverty and inequalities. We draw on community-based and gender-sensitive participatory approaches to promote the active participation of women and men in development processes, where voices are amplified to influence decisions. Creating a world where rural institutions are vibrant and inclusive – and where people are empowered to access equal opportunities – requires coordination and cooperation with stakeholders; access to rural finance and market-oriented pluralistic services; and community mobilization and collective action through a territorial development perspective. **Knowledge generation and advocacy; capacity strengthening; technical assistance and policy advice; and partnerships** are the vehicles used to realize this vision.

Recent publications and resources

Territorial approach

OECD, FAO, UNCDF, 2016.

Adopting a Territorial Approach to Food Security and Nutrition Policy

OECD, 2016. Regional Outlook 2016 (Chapter 10)

Global dimensions of malnutrition: Territorial perspectives on food security and nutrition policies by Vito Cistulli, Stina Heikkilä and Rob Vos

Pluralistic service systems

FAO, 2017.

Pluralistic Service Systems - Market-oriented services for reducing rural poverty

FAO, 2016.

Towards inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems

FAO, 2016.

New directions for Inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems

Rural and small-scale agribusiness finance

FAO, 2017.

Innovative risk management strategies in rural and agriculture finance
– The Asian Experience

FAO, 2016.

Innovations for inclusive agricultural finance and risk mitigation mechanisms
– The case of Tamwil El Fellah in Morocco

FAO, 2016.

Estrategias innovadoras de gestión de riesgos en mercados financieros rurales y agropecuarios – Experiencias en América Latina

Socio-economic empowerment of rural people and community mobilization

FAO, 2015.

Dimitra Clubs: A unique approach

Dimitra newsletters

Video Series on the impact of the Dimitra Clubs

Territorial approach:

A framework for reducing inequalities and achieving sustainable food security and nutrition



The FAO Rural Institutions, Services and Empowerment (RISE) Team offers support and advice to governments, policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders in the design of policies and inclusive governance systems capable of improving food security and nutrition levels and providing sustainable solutions to end inequalities for rural women, men and youth.

Recognizing the spatial diversity of rural development opportunities and challenges matters

Food insecurity, malnutrition, poverty and income opportunities are highly context-specific and interrelated. Diverse geographic areas react differently to specific policies, as well as to shocks (both external and internal). This can explain why despite these problems have received considerable attention and investment at the global and national scale, the results have been mixed and particularly alarming in terms of income inequalities and geographic disparities, including within-country disparities. The territorial approach provides an alternative framework for capturing the variety of conditions across

urban and rural regions as well as across different territories. Consequently, this approach promotes policies that reflect regional differences as well as the multi-dimensional nature of food insecurity and poverty (i.e. *multi-sector, multi-actor and multi-level governance*). By engaging local institutions and communities in policy processes and planning and promoting co-ordination between local and central levels, a territorial approach contributes to unlocking the territorial developmental potential, creates ownership of women, men and youth, and ensures livelihood improvement and sustainability.

FAO at work

Knowledge generation and advocacy

This area of work is based on the production of analytical tools that allow for diagnostic studies and territorial performance assessments from economic, social and institutional perspectives. Territorial diagnostic studies have been completed in eight countries (Benin, Cambodia, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Morocco, Niger, and Peru) and were published in *Adopting a Territorial Approach to Food Security and Nutrition Policy*. An analytical tool has also been developed for the territorial assessment of food security and nutrition systems (FSNA) and is expected to be applied in selected countries.

Capacity strengthening

Awareness-raising on the possible benefits of adopting a territorial approach to food security and nutrition policies has served to boost country engagement in the design and implementation of programmes related to this area of work in selected regions of their countries. Dialogue with eight governments of emerging and developing countries (Benin, Cambodia, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Morocco, Niger, and Peru) has helped develop national programmes for the implementation of the recommendations put forward in the diagnostic studies.

Technical assistance and policy advice

The outcomes of the diagnostic studies have been instrumental to advocate for territorial approaches in developing countries. Several international expert meetings, including during

EXPO-2015, have been organized to discuss the feasibility, the conditions and the methodologies required to implement territorial approaches to food security policies. Additionally, the development of a toolkit is planned to be completed, which will serve to strengthen national capacities in territorial approaches.

Partnerships

Given the multi-dimensional nature of food security and territorial approaches to FSN, partnerships with other international organizations able to complement FAO's expertise and capacity have been essential for raising awareness about place-based issues and solutions for reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition. A joint initiative between FAO, OECD and UNCDF to assess FSN policies has been launched in 2010 to implement a multi-year programme to pilot, assess and scale up innovative policy approaches and governance mechanisms to improve food security and nutrition in rural areas. The programme consists of three phases: the first phase financially supported by Germany consisted in knowledge generation and advocacy and was completed in 2016 with the publication *Adopting a Territorial Approach to FSN Policy*. The second phase consists of the implementation of a territorial development programme in selected countries and the third phase in the dissemination of the results of the programme. The financial support for the implementation of the second and third phase is under discussion with resource partners for fund mobilization.



Pluralistic service systems:

Market-oriented services for reducing rural poverty



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The FAO Rural Institutions, Services and Empowerment (RISE) Team provides support to member countries on the development of policies, capacities, and institutional arrangements for pluralistic service provision by a wide range of services providers, to enable small-scale family farmers to increase their productivity, manage their farms as sustainable businesses, link to markets, and act collectively to improve their livelihoods.

Improving the productivity and livelihoods of small-scale family farmers through services and institution-building

The current institutional landscape for rural service provision reflects a growing diversity of service providers, with private actors, civil society and producer organizations playing an increasingly active role alongside traditional public sector providers. Pluralistic service systems – in which a wide range of rural services are provided by different actors and funded from different sources – recognize this plurality of service providers and its potential to make services more inclusive, responsive to demands, and adapted to the diverse realities and needs of small-scale family farmers. This is especially evident when considering the

range and complementarity of market-oriented services needed to assist small-scale family farmers in overcoming the production, market and environmental risks imposed by the changing agricultural (and climate) landscape and rural economies. Beyond technical change, the pluralistic market-oriented service system approach emphasizes social and institutional innovations that bring actors together, get products to the market, enhance competitiveness and profitability and establish linkages and networks among small-scale producers, service providers and market actors to improve rural livelihoods.

FAO at work

Knowledge generation and advocacy

The team works on documenting experiences to facilitate exchange and learning, generating evidence to inform policy recommendations, and developing assessment tools to guide programme planning and appraisal. The team engages in global dialogue and policy advocacy for increased investments to improve access to rural services as a pathway out of poverty. The publication *Towards inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems* provided insights to inform global dialogue at the FAO Expert Consultation on New Directions for inclusive Pluralistic Service Systems held in May 2016, and a side event at the 7th GFRAS Annual Meeting in October 2017 in Limbé, Cameroon.

Capacity building

The team supports country assessments and stakeholder consultations to guide formulation and implementation of capacity development strategies and programmes to improve access of small-scale family farmers to services and markets. The Conceptual Framework on Pluralistic Market-Oriented Services provides a means to assess the status of rural services in a given context, and the needs and capacities of the diverse actors involved, from demand side (service clients/users), supply side (service providers) and the local/national policy and institutional environment that govern service provision. Capacity development interventions support policy processes, organizational development and skills enhancement for service providers, producer organizations and small-scale family farmers within a market-oriented framework.

Technical assistance and policy advice

The team provides policy and technical support to member states and regional initiatives on improving provision of market-oriented services and promoting collective action to improve productivity and livelihoods. Country assessments guide the formulation and implementation of field projects and programmes to support small-scale family farmers and their organizations to access services, develop their business and entrepreneurial skills, and integrate in markets to improve productivity and income. Recently, the team is providing support on developing capacities of producer organizations in service provision and market access to a FAO regional project in Lebanon, Oman and Sudan. On the other hand, a project is under formulation in Iran to promote viable farming and agribusiness practices through developing human and organizational capacities of small-scale family farmers and improving their access to market-oriented services.

Partnerships

The team seeks to build partnerships and collaborative relations with development partners, regional organizations and relevant stakeholder platforms, such as Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) and its regional networks and country fora. To promote a systems approach to strengthening rural service provision, RISE collaborates with different FAO technical divisions and regional initiatives on improving *Access to Services to reduce rural poverty* within the framework of FAO Strategic Programme 3.



Rural and small-scale agribusiness finance:

Improving the lives of the rural poor

The FAO Rural Institutions, Services and Empowerment (RISE) Team supports and facilitates dialogue and capacities within producer organizations, financial institutions, business development service-providers (BDS) and policy-makers to achieve greater financial inclusion, seize investment opportunities and mitigate risks. FAO's work also includes identifying and reducing knowledge gaps and making evidence-based policy recommendations to promote sustainable and inclusive rural financial systems and agribusiness investments.

Rural finance and agribusiness: a winning combination for fighting poverty

Increasing finance and investments in rural areas is a vital part of addressing food security and poverty reduction. However, a number of factors continue to thwart the development of vibrant financial markets in the rural areas of most countries, thus having an impact on the range of financial services offered - and used - by people at all income levels. Concrete examples include high transaction costs associated with dispersed populations, inadequate infrastructures and the specific needs and high-risk factors inherent in agriculture. FAO advocates and supports the development of entrepreneurship in agricultural support

services and assists FAO member countries with appropriate policies, strategies and methodologies for strengthening and delivery of services. FAO also assists farms and agribusiness in developing managerial and technical skills for supporting production and financial operations related to developing and improving efficiency, effectiveness, competitiveness and profitability of agricultural and food enterprises. Rural financial systems and agribusiness investments models allow rural families to better manage their current livelihoods, become more resilient in the face of climate change and natural disasters and to be able to adopt new and more profitable production systems.

FAO at work

Knowledge generation and advocacy

The team regularly publishes research work and case studies on innovative approaches to agricultural financing and investment in an effort to share up-to-date information about new strategies, tools and arrangements that facilitate the provision of financial services to rural dwellers. One publication called *Innovative Risk Management Strategies in Rural and Agricultural Finance: the Asian Experience* presents a series of innovative financial risk mitigation measures developed through public-private collaborations that were implemented in the agricultural sectors of several Asian countries (Vietnam, India, China and the Philippines).

Capacity strengthening

RISE offers trainings on various specialized subjects related to rural finance and investment to a wide variety of stakeholders, such as banks, development finance institutions, producers' organizations and NGOs to name a few. A specialized course, called the *Agri-Loan Analyzer Training*, is one example of how the team builds the capacities of local banks in various rural contexts. This specific training provides local loan agents with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively use a freeware software designed to assist them with loan estimations for the provision of agricultural credit.

Technical assistance and policy advice

RISE provides technical assistance in the design, implementation and evaluation of field projects that include a rural finance and investment focus or sub-component. Recently, the team has played a leading role in the design of a Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) aimed at establishing a public-private agricultural insurance scheme in three Caribbean countries (Jamaica, Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) in an effort to help smallholders increase their risk mitigation capacities against natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods.

Partnerships

RISE has established important partnerships with development finance institutions, UN organizations, NGOs, universities and a variety of other prominent actors in the global rural finance and investment sector. The most tangible example of this is the CABFIN partnership (Improving Capacity Building in Rural Finance); a joint collaboration between FAO, IFAD, UNCDF, GIZ and World Bank, that aims to foster knowledge dissemination and capacity development in the domains of rural and agricultural finance and investment, all the while facilitating dialogue among relevant stakeholders in the sector.



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Socio-economic empowerment of rural people and community mobilization:

Making all voices count

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The FAO Rural Institutions, Services and Empowerment (RISE) Team contributes to gender-sensitive rural transformation processes by supporting member states with specific policy, programmatic actions and approaches to empower rural people. In particular, FAO emphasizes the importance of collective action by formal or informal organizations, as a pathway out of poverty and hunger.

Why is socio-economic empowerment of people important?

Gender and social inequalities hinder the rural transformation that is needed for reducing rural poverty and hunger. Rural women, in particular, have limited access to resources, information, technology and finance that would enable them to take full advantage of socio-economic opportunities. FAO promotes community mobilization

and gender-transformative participatory communication approaches, in particular through the Dimitra Clubs. These clubs facilitate rural people's access to information, active participation of the most excluded in community life, collective action and governance mechanisms so that rural people take ownership of their own development.

FAO at work

Knowledge generation and advocacy

This area of work is based on the production and wide dissemination of the 'Dimitra Newsletter' that collects stories, case studies and information in the fields of participatory communication approaches, gender and people's empowerment. The newsletter is disseminated worldwide twice a year in English and French to over 12 000 organizations, institutions and individuals. Specific communication products are also developed to illustrate experiences related to gender, resilience, nutrition, and other strategic topics, including videos on the results and impact of the Dimitra Clubs in sub-Saharan Africa. Evidence-based participatory research work is also being conducted to measure people's empowerment.

Capacity strengthening

More than 300 000 rural women and men (two thirds are women) have been trained through the Dimitra Clubs on gender, participatory communication, development and technical topics (nutrition, climate-smart agriculture, etc.) and their capacities developed through sensitization, social mobilization, and dialogue. The capacity development process has resulted in positive behavioral changes in various fields, including gender roles and relations, nutrition practices and improved livelihoods.

Technical assistance and policy advice

Backstopping is provided to governments and non-state actors on the use of participatory and gender-sensitive approaches, in particular the Dimitra Clubs, in country programmes, policies and field projects for people's empowerment and rural development.

Partnerships

Key partnerships with governments, private sector and civil society, as well as within FAO (Farmer Field Schools, resilience, nutrition, South-South Cooperation) and outside FAO (UNICEF, UNFPA, EU, WFP, WB, and IFAD) are key to promoting rural people's empowerment, women's leadership and social mobilization. In Niger, in the framework of the UN Joint Programme on Rural Women Economic Empowerment (RWEE), the Dimitra Clubs have been chosen by four UN agencies (FAO, IFAD, WFP and UN-Women) as the main entry point for implementing field activities. A host of support requests to implement and upscale the Dimitra Clubs approach coming from within FAO, UN agencies, governments and development organizations testify to the effectiveness of this innovative approach for rural transformation processes.





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Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division (ESP)

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Services and Empowerment

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