FAO’s support for value chains aims at agricultural diversification in the East Caribbean States

FAO’s support for agricultural and food value chain development has aimed at strengthening agricultural diversification in Barbados and member countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), but this work on value chains needs to be more market-oriented in order to succeed, says an evaluation report.

Conducted by the FAO Office of Evaluation in 2015, the evaluation assessed FAO’s contributions in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Interviewed government stakeholders expressed strong satisfaction with FAO’s technical support, particularly the knowledge about food and nutrition security, pest and disease management, livestock and information systems development, and the support for development of non-traditional crops.

They appreciated FAO’s strong leadership role in the coordination of a regional response to address the decline of agricultural production and the rise of a costly food import bill in the Caribbean countries. In October 2010, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) adopted a Regional Food and Nutrition Security Policy (RFNSP), which led to the revision by OECS of its Regional Plan of Action for Agriculture to align it to the CARICOM RFNSP. In the years that followed all the countries developed or revised their country-level food and nutrition policies, to reflect priorities of the new RFNSP.

Between 2010 and 2015, FAO supported the development of several value chains, particularly in cassava, small ruminants, pineapple, breadfruit and breadnut. It provided technical support, training and market research through a participatory approach that helped identify value chain development opportunities with involvement of the Value Chain Coordination Committees (VCCCs).

A successful example is the partnership in Dominica for the pineapple value chain with a small producer organisation, the Nature Island Pineapple Producers Association (NIPA). A cadre of trained pineapple farmers emerged as a result whose activities are helping to increase production level.

The small ruminant value chain has helped expand from a focus on animal health to artificial insemination and research on alternative forage, which was assessed as relevant to the broad needs of the underdeveloped livestock sector and beneficial to small farmers.
Processing of cassava mash and flour for bakery products as replacements for imported wheat flour appeared attractive to many stakeholders, but the wide price difference between cassava flour and wheat flour will be difficult to overcome in the short-term, the report says. Some traditional cassava products such as farine may offer good development opportunities among the Caribbean diaspora and beyond, e.g. as a gluten-free porridge, it added.

The evaluation notes that FAO’s support for fisheries, forest management and disaster risk management are relevant and are already showing some promising results, but their scope is limited when compared with the opportunities and needs.

The report recommends that the value chain development projects pay greater attention to market forces and opportunities and should be tailored to enhance partnerships with the private sector and farmer organizations. In a context of agriculture diversification, it suggests prudent support for several value chains, and even several branches within each value chain, rather than focusing resources and emphasis too narrowly on one or two commodities selected in a normative fashion by government officials.

It advises FAO to build upon the strongest elements of its programmes in the region and devote greater attention to areas that received little support in the last programming framework such as fisheries, forest management and disaster risk management.

The small financial size of the programmes in OECS countries and Barbados does not warrant a dedicated FAO representation in each country, but the growing portfolio is straining the system of national correspondents and resulting in insufficient follow-up, the report says. It therefore recommends that FAO strive for greater continuity of engagement, reform the national correspondent system to reflect the demands of an expanded portfolio, improve communication channels with non-agricultural sectors, and improve coordination with other partners.