



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# Dimitra Clubs: leaving no one behind through community engagement and women's empowerment



## Meeting the challenge

The world is not on track in making the pledge of leaving no one behind a reality, particularly in **rural areas** where most of the **extreme poor** live. Rural people in low-income countries increasingly face structural constraints in seizing socio-economic and political opportunities. In addition, **gender discriminatory social norms** prevent rural women and girls from realizing their full potential as leaders and economic agents, constraining the livelihoods and well-being of entire rural societies. In this context, development and humanitarian actors tend to overlook the use of **community engagement and gender-transformative approaches**, despite the fact that these are cost effective and have high returns. Considering these pressing challenges, it is of paramount importance to promote collective action at community level – ensuring ownership and **sustainability** – to trigger transformative changes in terms of gender equality, **women's leadership and social inclusion**.

## In action

The Dimitra Clubs are action-oriented safe spaces in which rural women and men of all ages engage in **dialogue** to address community challenges and take **collective action** to overcome them, using their own local resources. In this way, they can influence decisions and shape community life.

For more than a decade, FAO has promoted the Dimitra Clubs' model as a crucial enabler for **gender equality** and **people's empowerment** in rural communities affected by high rates of poverty, food insecurity and protracted crisis.

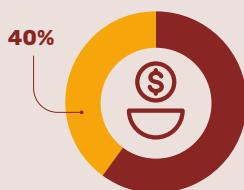
The model is unique, enabling rural people to engage in **self-development** and bring about lasting, community-owned improvements to their lives, thereby **leaving no one behind**.

## Looking at the evidence

In 2022, **659 million** people lived in **extreme poverty**, of which **60%** in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>1</sup>



In 2022, people living in **fragile and conflict-affected economies** represented almost **40%** of the **global poor**.<sup>2</sup>



**Women** are more than **twice as likely** as men to experience **discrimination** on the grounds of sex and gender.<sup>3</sup>



In 2020–2021, only **4%** of total bilateral **aid** was dedicated to programmes with **gender equality** as the principal objective.<sup>4</sup>



# Comparative advantage

FAO has first-hand experience in addressing cross-cutting issues related to **youth, gender, and inclusivity**. These themes are key in FAO's Strategic Framework to eliminate poverty, reduce inequalities, and promote inclusive economic growth and rural transformation. The Organization has strong expertise and technical capacity in promoting **enabling environments at community-level** for collective action and the empowerment of women. Through its long-standing presence in remote rural areas of low-income countries, FAO can address the needs and priorities of **the most marginalized**, with an emphasis on gender issues and **collective action**. The Organization has pioneered the Dimitra Clubs, which today are recognized as an FAO landmark community-led and gender-transformative model. Over the years, FAO has built **country-led expertise** in scaling-up the model by relying on its unique capacity to promote inclusive consultation processes with rural communities, partnering with state and non-state actors as well as UN agencies.

“Before the Dimitra Clubs were created in our village, we were not able to express ourselves in front of an audience. Since their creation, we feel confident about taking the floor in public, even as young girls.”

**Nafissa Adamoi**

*Young female leader of a Dimitra Club, Niger*

## Best practices and results

- 1 The Dimitra Clubs model has been integrated as an inclusivity, empowerment and gender transformative approach in over **70 FAO and UN joint initiatives in 16 countries** in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia.
- 2 Positive **impact** has been demonstrated in **various areas** such as: food security and nutrition, gender equality and women's leadership, resilience, peace and social cohesion, and climate change adaptation.
- 3 It is estimated that the model has improved the livelihoods of over **7 million rural people**.

## Expected results

- Enhanced individual and collective **agency and action for rural people** – especially women, youth and other marginalized groups – in their communities and in organizations; and their enhanced active **participation in local decision-making** processes and governance.
- **Evidence-based knowledge and good practices** generated and disseminated on community-led and gender-transformative approaches to better inform their upscale.
- **Community-led and gender-transformative approaches** increasingly used in development and humanitarian programmes, initiatives, and strategies to enhance rural people's agency, inclusive participation and empowerment towards gender equality, and to contribute to the objectives of FAO's main areas of work and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### Contact

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## Contribution to the SDGs



## Partnerships to scale up impact

- decentralized public sector services and local authorities, including administrative and customary authorities;
- the private sector, including companies in the information and communications technology sector;
- civil society organizations, including national and international NGOs, and community radio stations;
- the United Nations system (IFAD, ILO, UNDP, OCHA, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UN Women, the World Bank and WFP); and
- academia and international research organizations (CGIAR).



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