

Participatory policy development for sustainable agriculture and rural development

Guidelines from the
Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development –
Farming Systems Evolution Project



Rural Development Division, Sustainable Development Department
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Foreword

There will be no viable rural development if rural people, and especially the poor, have no voice in the design of policies and institutions that affect them.

This manual describes an approach that will help give them a voice. It shows how to involve the poor and disadvantaged, along with a range of other stakeholders, in designing agricultural and rural development policies.

“Sustainable agriculture and rural development” (SARD) is a global action programme. It is a key chapter of Agenda 21. It was adopted by the international community at the Earth Summit in Rio, and ten years later reaffirmed and revitalized in Johannesburg at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. Two of the major features of this global action programme are: (1) the design and implementation of actions undertaken under it must be based on a participatory approach; and (2) it considers not just one aspect of development, but is holistic: it takes economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions into account. This manual describes this approach, and provides tools to develop policies that can help achieve a more sustainable rural development.

The manual is based on a series of case studies that analyse the policy and institutional constraints of farming systems development conducted in Honduras, Mali and the Philippines. These case studies enabled local stakeholders to explore the changes – both positive and negative – that have occurred around them. The procedures used in the case studies enabled the stakeholders to suggest ways to improve policies and to move towards goals they themselves had set. Their policy recommendations encompassed a whole range of topics: from enhancing the competitiveness of agricultural products to focusing agricultural research and improving extension services, and from regulating the use of roads by heavy vehicles to conducting literacy campaigns. These recommendations will be of value not just to local and regional authorities, ministries of agriculture and rural development, but also to those responsible for planning and finance, environment, land, education, etc.

This manual is conceived as a handbook for those mandated to promote and carry out participatory policy development to address agricultural and rural problems. It is intended to be of interest to all those who are interested in involving a broad range of stakeholders, including local people and particularly the rural poor, in the development of local, regional or national policies. They may include policymakers at the national and local government levels, staff of non-governmental organizations who hope to influence the policymaking process, research institutions and universities, and donor agencies.

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Introduction

THE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT - FARMING SYSTEMS EVOLUTION (SARD-FSE) PROJECT

This manual is based on the experiences and techniques developed through an FAO project entitled “Sustainable agriculture and rural development: Institutional, social, economic and environmental aspects influencing farming systems evolution” (SARD-FSE). This project was undertaken in 2002–2005 with funding support from the governments of France and Japan.

The SARD-FSE project had three aims:

- To enhance the capacity of government and non-government institutions to plan, implement and evaluate sustainable agriculture and rural development policies and strategies.
- To develop capacities of stakeholder groups concerned by rural development to participate in the processes of decision-making.
- To promote an environment favourable to open policy dialogue among stakeholders, particularly those at the local and regional levels, and to ensure that the necessary conditions are in place to foster such dialogue.

The project conducted case studies in three countries: Honduras, Mali and the Philippines. Partner organizations in each country worked with a range of stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels to analyse a selected farming system and develop policy recommendations that would steer it towards the goal of sustainable agriculture and rural development (as defined by the stakeholders themselves). The partners followed broad common guidelines for the steps in the process, but experimented with and developed their own procedures. The capacity building occurred through key activities such as making institutional arrangements, field implementation and comparative analysis at critical stages with national teams, and regional workshops with some eight countries in each region to assess the methodology and recommendations.

The three farming systems were:

- **Maize/bean-based farming system, Honduras** – This traditional food production system is pervasive throughout Central America. In Honduras, 80 percent of the land planted to this system is found on sloping terrain. Two of the poorest departments, Lempira Sur and Santa Barbara, in mountainous northwest Honduras, were selected for the study.
- **Cereal/root crop-based farming system, Mali** – This farming system is crucial for food security and poverty reduction in West Africa. The Sikasso region in south Mali was selected for the case study. This is an area where a cash crop, cotton, has intensified land use, altered the ecosystem balance, and driven the socio-cultural transformation of the region.
- **Lowland rice-based farming system, the Philippines** – This system feeds 860 million people throughout the world. It covers 44 percent of the rice cultivation area in the Philippines. Nueva Ecija in central Luzon was selected for the study. The evolution of this system at the local level has to be managed within the broader development objectives of reducing poverty and ensuring environmental sustainability.

WHAT IS IN THIS BOOK?

This manual draws on these experiences, as well as on other sources. It presents them as a series of steps and a set of tools that you can follow to conduct your own participatory policy planning exercise.

The manual is divided into four Parts.

- **Part 1** introduces the principles and concepts of sustainable agriculture and rural development.
- **Part 2** describes the steps that you can use to ensure that local people can provide inputs into developing policies for sustainable agriculture and rural development.
- **Part 3** outlines some tools that are useful in the various steps.
- **Part 4** lists some resources that you can use for more information about the approaches and techniques in this book.

This manual is intended for all those who are interested in involving a broad range of stakeholders, including local people, in the development of policies. They may include policymakers at the national and local government levels, staff of non-governmental organizations who hope to influence the policymaking process, research institutions and universities, and donor agencies.

The approach described in this manual is very flexible. This is necessary because situations vary from place to place and from topic to topic. An approach that works well with stakeholders in highland Central America may not work at all with farmers in semi-arid Africa or lowland Southeast Asia. There can be no “one size fits all”. Be prepared to select, adapt, experiment and introduce new techniques.

The approach has been designed for sustainable agriculture and rural development, but there is no reason that it cannot be adapted for other situations. For example, urban planners may want to use a similar set of procedures to encourage local participation in planning the provision of water, sewerage and other services.

The manual also describes a number of tools that can be applied in several different contexts. Many of these (such as logframes or focus groups) are already widely known. Others may be less familiar. Feel free to use and adapt them for other circumstances too.

The case studies in Honduras, Mali and the Philippines took over 15 months and involved a large number of consultations and stakeholder workshops at different levels. In part this was because of the nature of the topic covered: agriculture and rural development is a complex subject. But it was also because the project was learning and experimenting with new procedures. By drawing on the techniques in this manual, you should be able to shorten the time needed considerably. The duration of such studies depends on the depth of analysis that is requested by the sponsors, and on the resources available. The most rapid, low-cost studies of this nature probably would require only a few weeks.

PART 1

Sustainable agriculture and rural development

WHAT IS SARD?

The definition of sustainable agricultural and rural development – SARD – was agreed upon by FAO member countries in 1989 (Box 1).

Box 1. Definition of sustainable agriculture and rural development

Sustainable agriculture and rural development is “the management and conservation of the natural resource base, and the orientation of technological and institutional change so as to ensure the attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations. Such sustainable development (in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors) conserves land, water, plant and animal genetic resources, is environmentally non-degrading, technically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable”.

Source: FAO (1989)

“**Agriculture**” is defined broadly to include production, conservation, processing and marketing of crops, livestock, forestry and fisheries products. “**Rural development**” is understood as a process of transformation of the rural areas. It encompasses a wide scope of activities and actions by various actors, in addition to agriculture:

- **Development of other productive sectors** – non-agricultural industry, mining, tourism, natural resources, environmental management, etc.
- **Development of services** – education, health, training, research and extension, credit, environment, transportation, etc.
- **Enhancement of governance** at the local, district and provincial levels, including linkages with the private sector, civil society and government line agencies.
- **Development of rural infrastructure** – roads, electricity, telecommunications, housing, water, sanitation, etc.

The concern to promote such rural and agricultural development led the international community at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio (United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development) to adopt a **global action programme** on sustainable agriculture and rural development. This programme is Chapter 14 of the Agenda 21. It constitutes an overall framework for designing policies, programmes and other endeavours that aim at satisfying human needs for the present and future generations, while managing and conserving the natural resource base. The implementation of the Agenda 21 action programme for sustainable agriculture and rural development is the responsibility of national governments as well as of regional (or provincial) and local authorities and other stakeholders in civil society and the private sector.

Ten years after the Rio Summit, all participants in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002) reaffirmed the relevance and the urgent need to continue the implementation of this action programme.

Two founding principles of the Agenda 21 programme's approach on SARD are the following:

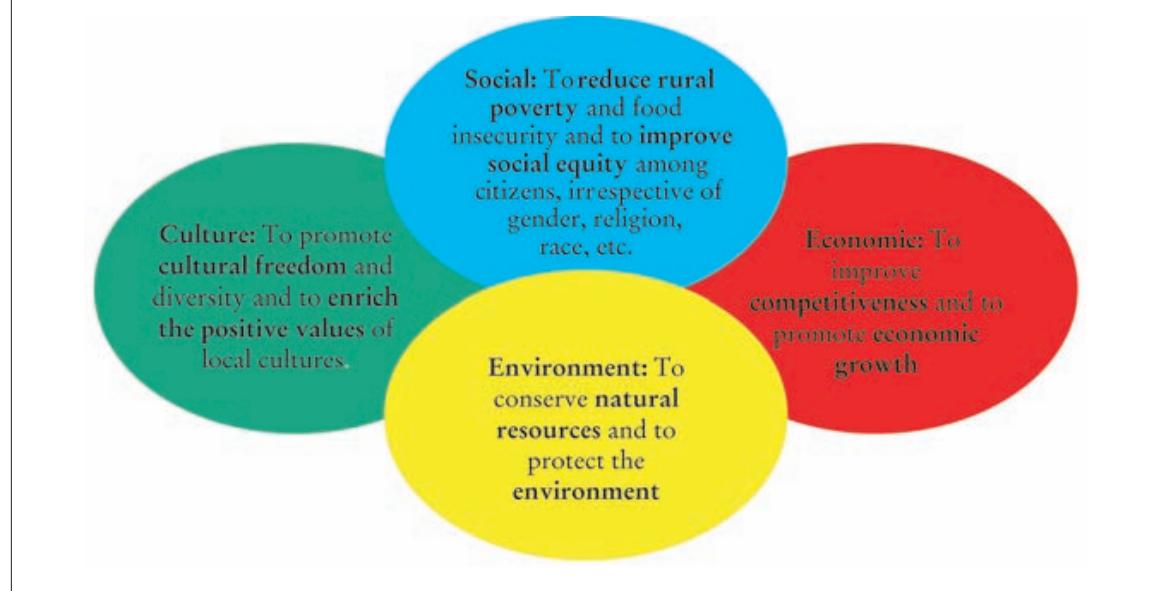
- It is **people-centred**, which entails that the design and implementation of policies, programmes and other actions must be based on participatory methods.
- It considers not just one aspect of development, but is holistic: it takes key **economic, environmental and social** dimensions into account. These dimensions are often referred to as the “pillars” of sustainable agriculture and rural development. The basic goal is to improve the livelihoods of rural people in a sustainable manner.

PILLARS AND OBJECTIVES OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The approach recommended by this manual relies on four “pillars”, adding the “cultural” to the previous three of Agenda 21, to underline the critical importance of culture as the source of people’s values, aspirations, etc, in driving this analysis since it is generally neglected. Each pillar has at least two specific objectives:

- **Economic** – To improve **competitiveness** and to promote **economic growth**. To be viable, farm and other non-farm economic activities have to be profitable. Farmers and rural workers need to use local and external resources efficiently, manage their enterprises and markets well, and diversify their options so they can optimize their income and minimize their risks.
- **Environment** – To conserve **natural resources** (e.g., land, water, forests, biodiversity) and to protect the **environment** (e.g. prevent air and water pollution, manage wastes, provide environmental services).
- **Social** – To **reduce rural poverty** and food insecurity and to improve **social equity** among citizens, irrespective of gender, religion or race. Equity requires a special focus on the poor and vulnerable groups in rural society in terms of greater access to resources and greater involvement in local governance institutions.
- **Culture** – To promote **cultural freedom** and diversity and to **enrich the positive values** of local cultures. This involves considering what people treasure in their lives, their values, or what they mean by “wealth” in human, social or physical terms. Culture is expressed in religious beliefs, perceptions, community relations, creative arts, as well as in people’s food and nutritional practices. Cultural freedom embraces all these dimensions.

FIGURE 1
Pillars and objectives of sustainable agriculture and rural development



Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development requires an approach that is participatory, holistic, interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral and gender-sensitive:

- **Participatory and bottom-up** – Involving and building ownership among local people and stakeholders in the public, private, and non-government sectors. Though the primary focus is on the poor and marginalized (e.g. women, indigenous people, disabled, young people, landless), the constructive participation of the elite, powerful and middle classes is also essential to bring about meaningful change. Donor agencies are another key group of stakeholders. Awareness of possible conflicts and of measures to negotiate and build consensus is essential.
- **Holistic** – Covering all four pillars, taking into account their interactions and tradeoffs, as well as the interdependence between the local, regional, national and global systems.
- **Cross-sectoral** – Focusing on a wide spectrum of potentials and opportunities in agriculture, natural resources, industry and services, and including the linkages among these sectors and synergies with the urban sector.
- **Interdisciplinary** – Promoting interaction among biophysical, social and other disciplines to gain an understanding of complex systems, people's needs and objectives, and development potentials.
- **Gender-sensitive** – Recognizing the importance of gender issues (men/women, children/adults/elderly) in terms of public policy and development programmes, access to assets, management of production, distribution of benefits, and their potential roles for sustainable development.

SARD COMPONENTS AND INTERVENTIONS

Rural society, its environment and economy can be analysed as consisting of five major components: i) people, ii) natural resources, iii) production of goods and services, iv) markets for inputs and products and, v) finance and investment.

- **People** – The human resources (human capital) of rural areas (and people in cities who interact with them): their skills, knowledge, wants, needs, values, and interactions and networks (social capital). “People” include men and women, children and the elderly, the rich and powerful, small producers, workers and the vulnerable (the poor and very poor, the landless, the disabled, indigenous people). A focus on the poor should not exclude the important roles the rich and the powerful must play in addressing poverty. It is the people – rural communities, households and individuals – who define the values, priorities and tradeoffs in sustainable agriculture and rural development. The government and other development actors should listen to their problems, and build on, strengthen and promote the solutions they propose.
- **Natural resources** – This includes land, water, forests, minerals, petroleum and biodiversity. Development should be based on the rational management of local resources taking account of market constraints and opportunities, and then improved with external resources and inputs. The potential of natural resource management for income and employment generation is also crucial.
- **Production of goods and services** – Improving production involves a combination of agricultural and non-agricultural options. Diversification is a key way of increasing productivity of labour, enhancing assets and reducing risks. Linkages between the countryside and towns and cities can enhance productivity and sustainability of production by generating employment, income and investment.
- **Markets for inputs and products** – The structure and functioning of markets for produce, inputs, land, capital, etc.; the transaction costs involved, and who sets prices, what standards are set by the market and consumers, and whether farmers and other producers have the market facilities (transport, storage) and standards to meet them.
- **Finance and investment** – This involves how resources are mobilized from taxation, central government, the private sector, foreign direct investment, overseas development assistance and international financing institutions, and remittances from abroad. It also includes how

resources are invested, e.g. on human, social and physical capital. Infrastructure is always a major constraint for attracting investment, e.g. roads, electricity, telecommunications, energy, irrigation and marketing.

There are many possible **interventions** by governments, civil society and other key stakeholders to achieve the goals of sustainable agriculture and rural development. Here are some major types of interventions:

- **Policy and legislation** – National government and local authorities set directions or courses of action to establish rules of the game, or to achieve specific objectives in areas such as macro-economics, taxes, natural resources, etc. Other organizations such as firms, NGOs and donors have policies too, and these may have significant impact on rural areas.
- **Institutional development** – Many different formal and informal organizations work in rural areas: government (national, regional and local), schools and universities, churches and mosques, the police and courts, research and development agencies, banks and credit organizations, communications providers, and so on. The structure and funding of these organizations, the types of services they provide, their personnel, how they interact with their clients, their capacity and responsiveness – all these may be subject to control or influence by government or donors. With the right approach, rural people may also be able to influence them to some degree.
- **Programme priorities and implementation** – It may be possible to adjust programme priorities and activities – for example, by switching the focus of a credit programme from one group to another that is more deserving. Possible interventions include redefining objectives, managing operations and resources, engaging with stakeholders in a different way, focusing on the scope and quality of work, and ensuring that services are delivered in a timely way.
- **Technology promotion** – It may be possible to develop new technologies (or improve the dissemination and increase the use of existing ones). Technologies are not just agricultural production practices; they may also include innovations in management, marketing, communications, training and other services. Innovations may come from research institutions or universities, as well as from farmers and other rural people themselves. Rather than trying to introduce something new, it may be better to promote indigenous technologies that are appropriate to a particular area.
- **Partnership development** – Much can be achieved through partnerships between different organizations that have mutual interests and opportunities. Partnerships may consist of “light” interaction (sharing information, networking) or “heavier” interaction (e.g. coordination, mobilizing resources and joint investment, joint implementation). They also create valuable opportunities for learning from each other. Different organizations have different roles and strengths; partnerships should build on these.

Table 1 shows how the components and interventions described above can be related to each other. The specific combination of actions in each cell (technical assistance, capacity building, implementation, infrastructure development, etc.) depends on the circumstances and priority goals in each country and rural community.

WHY PARTICIPATORY POLICY DEVELOPMENT?

Policies are often set by national, regional or municipal governments after a series of consultations, e.g. with parliaments, “experts” (such as academics or industry insiders) and lobby groups. The decision-making process often fails to take into account the views and experience of a wider range of stakeholders. In particular, it often neglects the rural poor and disadvantaged – who are often the very people most affected.

Participatory policy development aims to bring these stakeholders into the policymaking process. It creates an environment where various stakeholders can define their goals, express their opinions, consider the options, and come up with a set of recommendations that government can implement.

TABLE 1

Matrix for defining action programmes for sustainable agriculture and rural development

Components	Examples of key interventions				
	Policy	Institutions	Programmes	Technologies	Partnerships
People	On governance, human rights, rural people, education, culture, youth, indigenous peoples, gender	For capacity building for farmers & communities, gender, youth, HIV/AIDS, advocacy	For governance, education, skill development, health, housing, etc.	For education, health, knowledge management, preparedness	Among national and local governments, NGOs, community organizations, religious organizations
Natural resources & environment	On land use, tenure, natural resources, energy, livestock, fisheries, protected areas, biodiversity, climate change	For land tenure, natural resource management, environmental protection, climate change	For integrated natural resources management, water, livestock, forests, fisheries, bio-prospecting	For agro-forestry, land rehabilitation, sustainable forest/livestock/ fisheries, water use, energy use, waste management	Among national and local governments, NGOs, community and grassroots organizations, research institutes, universities
Production & income generation	On foreign exchange rate, interest rate, labour laws, migration, remittances	For credit, research, extension, input and business services	For indigenous knowledge, good agricultural practices, technology development, diversification, production services	For germplasm efficient use of labour, soil, water, energy, livestock, integrated pest management, processing, tourism, environmental service payments	Among government, private sectors, research institutions, universities, FAO
Markets & trade	On agricultural and food prices, risk management, trade agreements, food safety, exports	For marketing, price stability, governance and management of food chains, fair trade	For market development, marketing information and services, trade promotion	For communication, market promotion, diversification, food safety and standards	Among governments, private sectors, World Trade Organization, FAO, etc.
Finance & investment	On fiscal expenditure, investment, interest rate, foreign investment, debt, remittances	For savings, credit, banking, insurance, contract farming, mortgages, infrastructure	For foreign investment, user/tourist fees, environmental service payments, Kyoto "clean development mechanism"	For supply and access to food, monitoring and evaluation, enterprise/financial management	Among national government, multilateral and bilateral, business sector, local governments

Sustainable development in a rural area is complex. It is necessary to look simultaneously at cultural, social, economic and environmental factors. The process described in Part 2 of this manual helps stakeholders analyse the current situation in their area, identify the changes that have taken place in the past and the factors that have caused these changes, set their goals, and then determine what changes in policies are needed to achieve those goals.

The process involves a broad range of stakeholders at all stages. Because of this, it stands a good chance of producing recommendations that are realistic and acceptable to all involved. Involving policymakers and other actors at all stages increases the likelihood that the policy recommendations are actually adopted.

Participatory policy development can be done in many ways. The process in Part 2 is based on a particular location or farming system. It is also possible to use the same general approach to focus on a different topic, such as a particular commodity or set of institutions.