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ELEMENTS OF AN FAO RURAL EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY – PRODUCTIVE, FAIR AND JUST EMPLOYMENT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD SECURITY

1. The majority of the world's 1.5 billion poor and food insecure live in rural areas and depend on agriculture, forestry, fisheries and livestock for their livelihoods. Agricultural and rural non-agricultural employment are critical for reducing poverty and food insecurity, as labour is often the only asset that poor women and men own. Yet, many rural jobs do not ensure decent levels of income and sustainable livelihoods. Instead, rural employment is often characterized by poor working conditions, un-enforced labour legislation, limited access to social security and protection and weak social dialogue. These and other factors make agriculture one of the three most hazardous employment sectors, with at least 170,000 work-related deaths per year, beyond injuries and disabilities from work-related accidents. More than 132 million children, 70 percent of all child labourers, work in agriculture. Gender inequalities in the extent and quality of participation in rural labour markets are also a major reason why women, globally, are disproportionately represented among the poor.

2. The Millennium Development Goals have helped to raise awareness of the importance of decent employment, particularly in rural areas. While the International Labour Organization (ILO) takes the lead in promoting the Global Employment and Decent Work Agendas, FAO has a crucial complementary role to play in enhancing decent and productive rural employment in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, livestock, agro-processing and rural marketing enterprises and industries. FAO's rural employment strategy responds to the Chief Executive Board's call for greater policy coherence and convergence on decent work across the UN System. It is also a direct response to the Independent External Evaluation's (IEE) recommendation to refocus FAO's work on value addition and employment for income generation and food access. The International Labour Conference (97th Session, 2008) underscored the importance of FAO-ILO collaboration.

3. Many divisions have relevant experience in supporting policies and programmes that benefit self-employed producers, part-time farmers, fishers and forest users and other rural workers. The Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division (ESW) is corporate focal point for

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rural employment. Much of FAO's work directly or indirectly promotes employment or improved working conditions.

4. However, the impacts of FAO's work programme on employment are not always explicitly articulated and an integrated focus on rural employment is relatively new to the Organization. This integrated focus can be achieved through the **decent work framework** which embraces four pillars, namely:

- Employment generation and enterprise development;
- Social protection, including worker health, work conditions and occupational safety;
- Standards and rights at work; and
- Governance and social dialogue.

5. FAO undertook a "self-assessment" (2007-08) of the employment dimensions of its work at headquarters and decentralized levels using the UN-System wide Toolkit for Mainstreaming Employment and Decent Work. It found that FAO has a wealth of expertise in pillar 1: employment creation and enterprise development related to agriculture and rural development. In the area of social protection, FAO plays a major role in promoting occupational safety and health, as a leading contributor to negotiated and voluntary standards and codes of practice related to chemical (mostly pesticide) use, distribution and disposal, equipment safety, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), logging, and safety at sea (on board of vessels), as well as technologies that reduce drudgery and facilitate the work of those with lower physical strength due to gender, age, or health status (HIV/AIDS, disability). However, FAO has more limited experience in the other two pillars: standards and rights at work, and governance and social dialogue. The assessment found that several areas could be strengthened to maximize the decent work benefits of on-going regular programme activities.

6. For this reason, FAO's strategy focuses on enhancing decent work across the Organization's diverse policies and programmes to enable Member Governments to promote agricultural self-employment and wage labour in small-scale and commercial farming, fishing, and forestry, agro-industries and market-oriented rural infrastructure. Emphasis is placed on generating more and better jobs, since both the quantity and the quality of employment are central to human well-being. FAO-supported policies and programmes will provide opportunities for productive work that deliver a fair income, improved workplace security, social protection for workers and their families, better prospects for social integration, personal and skills development, equal opportunities and treatment for women and men, and freedom for people to organize and participate in decisions that affect their lives.

7. FAO's main emphasis in the first phase (2009-2011) will be on maximizing the decent work benefits of key regular programme areas within the Organization's comparative advantage, including:

- a) Supporting employment generation and enterprise development by strengthening policies to address agricultural labour allocation, productivity and remuneration. Critical components include support for agro-industrial investment, entrepreneurship and an enabling environment for agri-business, rural microfinance services, market-oriented rural infrastructure, labour-saving or workload distributing technologies, diversification and improvement of rural livelihoods, as well as vocational training in business skills. Development of capacities for collection and analysis of rural labour data and policy support to ensure that benefits reach vulnerable segments of the labour force, such as youth, women, waged workers, small business operators and people with disabilities, will also be essential.
- b) Contributing to social protection by continuing to mainstream occupational safety and health throughout FAO's standards and codes of practice related to chemical (pesticide) use, logging, and safety at sea and by promoting safer technology for

small-scale and commercial agriculture, fisheries, forestry and livestock in extension support programmes, starting with the Farmer Field Schools.

- c) Supporting adherence to core labour standards, specifically to reduce gender and youth-based discrimination and to eliminate child labour in agriculture.
- d) Enhancing social dialogue by strengthening producer organizations, cooperatives, and rural workers' organizations in decision-making processes.

8. Partnerships with ILO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and others with expertise and mandates that complement FAO's are an essential part of the strategy. For example, a jointly organized workshop on "Gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty" (2009) will generate new thinking and policies on rural employment, identify elements of a longer term research agenda, and help establish a network of partners to promote gender equitable rural employment in the future. Through such actions, FAO's rural employment strategy should enable member countries to generate decent and remunerative employment opportunities that enhance rural wellbeing and sustainable livelihoods.