



TWENTY-EIGHTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Guatemala City, Guatemala, 26 to 30 April 2004

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AS THE BASIS FOR FAO ACTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

I. Summary

1. This document explores the institutional and operational factors that enable a rural development project (RDP) to function as a fundamental ingredient of public policies geared towards the economic and social development of rural populations. It also examines the approaches and modalities that are required if actions are to be scaled up, without losing the coherence of a national development strategy.
2. Specific examples are given of how projects have been able to serve, and could serve, as inputs for feedback mechanisms that draw upon experiences gained from their implementation. The lessons are used to reinforce government activities to enhance implementation capacity, adopting an integrated rural development approach.
3. Key elements include the role of projects as instruments for adjusting and updating laws, regulations and thus public policies; the existence of a body of past experience that is accessible and easy to understand; awareness of the existing problem and institutional environment; and the role and importance of monitoring and evaluation systems. Each of these elements is vital for turning lessons learned into national policies and public investment projects.

II. Structural reform and building new consensus

4. **Disappointing results of reform.** During the last twenty years, new forms of integration into the global economy, withdrawal of the State from productive activity and the predominance of markets for resource allocation have become the central thrusts of development, taking over from the enfeebled pattern that characterized the region from the Second World War¹. However, almost two decades of sweeping economic reform have produced disappointing results. On the economic level, we can highlight success in achieving price stability, increasing exports, raising foreign investment and boosting macroeconomic institutional structure, but economic growth and increased productivity have been slow and inconsistent. On the social level, there is two-digit

¹ Pizarro, R. (2001) La vulnerabilidad social y sus desafíos: una mirada desde América Latina. Serie estudios estadísticos y prospectivos (6). ECLAC.

unemployment, poverty reduction has slackened from the pre-1980 period, the gap in income distribution has widened, and no significant advance has been made towards food security.

5. **Deepening rural crisis.** Recent reforms for greater economic and political liberalization were expected to eclipse past macro-policies and their heavy bias against agriculture. It was expected, with the economic liberalization of agriculture, that: (i) the reduction in protection would be accompanied by real devaluation, with activities producing goods for export or import, and thus agricultural goods, benefiting in net terms; (ii) the stronger role of the private sector and markets would remedy the inefficiencies that government interventions had produced in certain areas, again benefiting agriculture; (iii) the sharp distortion in agricultural prices would be corrected and its attendant fiscal deficit and inflationary pressures reduced.

6. However, expected real exchange-rate behaviour failed to materialize, as the opening up of markets triggered an increased flow of capital into the region and the use of a strong exchange rate as an instrument for stabilizing inflation. The combined impact in the 1990s was a move towards real revaluation throughout most of the region. At the same time, the elimination of support prices failed to completely eliminate distortions in domestic agricultural prices in relation to international prices. Lack of market information, insufficient and inefficient storage and transport infrastructure, agricultural subsidies in developed countries and high financial costs meant that producers very often received lower prices than their international benchmarks.

7. Likewise, efforts to give a greater role to private operators and the market in the agricultural sector by eliminating special agricultural credit lines and interest rate subsidies; the withdrawal of State activity in the marketing of agricultural products; and greater decentralization of support policy for local infrastructure projects and services to small farmers, with the active participation of NGOs and farmer associations, generated *institutional vacuums* in the extent that implementation of these new policies was not mirrored by the development of new institutional structures able to boost the confidence of different social players.

8. **Relegation of social policies.** These poor results are partly the consequence of not having attached sufficient importance to the need to accompany economic reforms with social policies that build a solid social base from which different players can adapt to new economic conditions. As is now often reiterated, one unfulfilled action is the introduction of schemes that will reduce the social and regional inequality and the high transaction costs that exist in the rural sector. This will require linkages permitting economic reorganization and, more specifically, diversity of contractual commitment and association. Recognition of contractual plurality will in turn require an enabling legal framework that provides the necessary guarantees.

9. **Importance of equality.** There is increasing agreement in ministerial forums and summit meetings that development in the region needs to be driven by equality, in other words the reduction of social inequality in all its forms. This is particularly true if we consider that the region has the worst income distribution in the world. Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean from the 1970s to the 1990s was 10 points higher than in Asia; 17.5 points higher than in the 30 OECD countries and 20.4 points higher than in eastern Europe². The richest decile of our population accounts for 48 percent of total income, while the poorest decile only receives 1.6 percent³. Inequality of access, in general, and of income, in particular, are important contributing factors to the continued existence of food insecurity and underdevelopment in rural areas. The increase in hunger is not the result of lower food production but of inequality in the distribution of resources and income.

10. **Obstacles to rural investment.** Six major obstacles to effective rural investment were identified at the Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey in 2000:

- aid conditionalities tied to institutions or sectors associated with donors;
- imposition of donor regulations for the delivery of funds;

² Measured using the Gini coefficient.

³ Perry, G., Ferreira, F. and Walton, M. (2003) *Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: Breaking with History?* World Bank.

- political and macroeconomic instability and vulnerability;
- lack of transparency and confidence;
- lack of coordination in development objectives; and
- deficiencies in national execution.

11. **Deficiencies in national execution.** Key deficiencies in national execution include high centralization of implementation, incidence of political considerations, bureaucracy and lack of transparency.

12. **The added value of multilateral organizations.** The lack of appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems is a chief reason for poor RDP impact. Other reasons are low beneficiary participation, operational centralization and excessive bureaucracy in design and decision-making. The Monterrey Conference agreed that RDP implementation needed to be improved and its real impact demonstrated if the flow of donor funds for such activities was to continue. Many also question the effectiveness of multilateral organizations in implementing RDP resources, as no appreciable impact from their management has been noted. What, then, is the added value that these organizations offer when they intervene in and implement RDPs?

13. **Balancing supply and demand.** The ensuing review and re-evaluation of RDPs and the key factors that determine their success have defined the scope and role of these projects in the context of rural development. There is broad agreement that the most important factor is the balance between supply and demand. Historically, development has been directed towards the poor within a top-down technical perspective, with experts seeing to the design, defining the targets and goals, carrying out the implementation and evaluating the results on behalf of the investors and State.

14. **The evaluation criteria.** The criteria for measuring the accomplishment of a project's objectives have been based on the fulfilment of its activities and on the funds pledged and delivered in relation to specified goals and time frames. There is not enough timely evaluation of ongoing impact so that programmes can be adjusted "while in progress". *Ex post* evaluations require consensus on approaches so that comparative studies can be made between programmes within a country and between countries of the region. Finally, a fundamental element of impact evaluation is the duly registered and statistically important assessment of the programme stakeholders themselves⁴.

III. Elements of the new development paradigm

15. **Integrated development.** The search for more stable, dynamic and competitive economic growth should include efforts to bring about development that is socially more integrated and environmentally more sustainable. Identifying the achievement of a more equitable society as an objective of development underscores the validity of economic, social and cultural rights and corresponding values of equality, solidarity and non-discrimination, and indicates the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of these rights with civil and political rights.

16. **Citizens as development beneficiaries and players.** The search for greater equality means building social fabrics that will produce more integrated societies, with systems of protection and promotion of opportunities and quality of life generated in those areas that society considers important and that enable all citizens to participate as development beneficiaries and players. The objective is therefore broader and the priorities different from those of macroeconomic stabilization and economic liberalization, but the positive results of these two processes also need to be maintained.

17. **A people-centred approach.** It is recognized that development cannot be achieved without the participation of the beneficiaries, which means that poor households become subjects rather

⁴ Binswanger, H. and Aiyar, S. (2003) "Scaling up Community-Driven Development: Theoretical Underpinnings and Program Design Implications", World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3039.

than objects of their development – nothing new to those familiar with the thinking of the Brazilian Paulo Freire. The difference today is that studies exist that not only uphold the validity of his reasoning but also demonstrate its effectiveness. It is therefore legitimate to talk of giving authority to communities and local governments as a way of facilitating and adjusting the use of resources, and thus enabling them to participate in the decision-making that affects their lives. Empowerment means broader access of the poor to productive assets and capacities, so that they are in a position to negotiate with the public and private institutions that influence their lives and hold them responsible for their actions. Empowerment requires political commitment, sound design and implementation capacity.

18. **Critical factors for participation.** There are six critical factors for empowerment: i) devolution of authority and resources; ii) real participation of the most needy; iii) communication that is two-way; iv) co-financing by communities or organizations to guarantee local participation and appropriation; v) access to negotiated technical assistance and training, with beneficiaries determining the nature and quality of related services; vi) development of markets for the poor, including their organization and incorporation into structures that will give them access to national and indeed international markets.

19. **A change of culture.** It is important therefore to promote a different development culture, with good practices in project execution brought to light and special emphasis placed on continuous learning, innovation and improvement involving all stakeholders: from beneficiaries to governments. The intention is to build institutional capacity for projects to serve as instruments of learning and for lessons to be drawn from practices and their daily impact, in order to bring about timely operational, normative, legal and instrumental adjustments to local, national and regional policy. Such a culture of learning requires:

- formulation based on lessons from past experiences;
- response to needs and priorities identified collectively by rural populations;
- the design from inception of a system of monitoring and evaluation of impacts;
- emphasis on communication as a tool for the management and dissemination of information;
- inter-institutional coordination; and
- transparency and social monitoring throughout the project cycle.

20. **RDP as an essential tool.** With this in mind, RDPs – as fundamental instruments of development – need to be refocused on the design and formulation of policies and strategies that aim to achieve sustainable advance in human development and economic growth in the rural sector, in a democratic and participatory manner and within a context of fair distribution of wealth.

IV. Recommendations and lessons learned

21. Recent FAO field experiences in member countries have identified seven areas of recommendation for the improvement and strengthening of RDP execution and success in the region.

A. The project as medium for learning: Land Fund Management Unit (PACTA), Honduras

22. **Projects as instruments of learning.** Governments run high risks when they commit themselves to large investments or loans in order to act on ideas and proposals for change that they import without testing or validation. Prior testing or experimentation is needed, and this is where governments could usefully benefit from FAO collaboration in evaluating the experimental phase by means of monitoring and evaluation systems that indicate changes needed to ongoing implementation and provide feedback from lessons learned.

23. The PACTA project arose in response to pressure from Honduran peasant farmers for land. The Government negotiated with the World Bank the funding of a project to establish a national

land market, a market financed by a private bank but sponsored by the State. The Government of Honduras was interested in promoting market mechanisms through which poor or landless small farmers could acquire land as part of its rural development strategy. The project was therefore part of the Government's programme to promote rural development in the country. The aim was to create a land market for smallholders and landless farmers that would enable them to set up productive operations on the land they acquired. Project implementation would require a specially trained team and institutional capacity at the level of the private bank, technical services, farming households and government agencies.

24. Involved in project formulation were the Treasury Department, the Agriculture Department and the National Institute of Agrarian Reform. Also involved were a team from the World Bank and staff from the FAO offices in Tegucigalpa, Santiago and Rome.

25. The project proposal was and is a sensitive initiative within the Honduran context where farmer associations have traditionally been strong and obviously have to be negotiated with. FAO's role has been to serve as neutral technical forum to facilitate negotiations, which have had to be pursued on different levels and with different social players. It has also been important to develop experiences and practices, as well as to identify and structure regulations and lessons learned, so that these can be incorporated into the regulations and practices of a national policy that has already been validated in the field and will therefore have far greater chances of success when implemented on a national scale.

B. The project as validation process: Community Forestry Development, Ecuador

26. **The validation of proposals for change.** Governments have often been pressured into adopting sometimes radical changes whose consequences are generally unknown and for which there has been no significant prior experience. Many countries have paid a high price for adopting such changes on a national scale, not only because of their intrinsic nature but also because they have introduced them at an inappropriate pace of change. FAO, with its vast array of methodologies and practical guides, can facilitate implementation of projects on a sufficiently large in scale to be relevant to national needs.

27. The Community Forestry Development in the Ecuadorian Andes Project has been implemented since October 1993 with the direct involvement of FAO and the Ecuadorian National Institute for Forests, Nature and Wildlife (INEFAN). Financial support has been provided by the Government of the Netherlands. The main objective of this project is to help improve the quality of life of peasant farmer communities by means of community forestry development.

28. Besides material progress in forestry, there have also been significant impacts on social and environmental aspects, which have had positive repercussions on economic, institutional, cultural, community management and, particularly, human aspects. If we consider that technical, environmental, economic, cultural and human aspects are basic determinants of quality of life in highland communities, the project has turned a forestry proposal into support for enhancing conditions of life in many participating communities.

29. Since 1994, experiences in community agroforestry nurseries and plots have been processed as have the experiences of small forest by-product industries, such as mushrooms, medicinal herbs, baskets, trout and capers, which have helped improve household income. The technical experts have managed to honour their commitment to work beside the communities at all times, adapting to their work needs and schedules. This has created a team of field technicians and experts who enjoy high acceptability, technical credibility and undeniable community support.

30. The achievements have been the result of an administration that is noted for its transparency, efficiency and effectiveness. Project outreach these last two years has been considerable, especially as regards the training of its field staff, the validation of social and

technical proposals, inter-institutional partnerships and the development of alternative economic uses of forest resources.

C. The project as channel for the large-scale implementation of policies: National Family Farming Programme (PRONAF), Brazil

31. Once approaches, technologies, methodologies and strategies have been validated, FAO is also in a position to help with their large-scale application which, depending on the size and structure of the country, can range from local to regional to statal. Fundamental to this process are human training and the adjustment of laws and regulations, because the ultimate objective is to change human behaviour. The process of learning associated with large-scale application must therefore occur with rural promoters in the field, so that they can adopt new customs. The adopted approach to learning is practical and channelled towards changing the culture and behaviour of the rural promoters. Ideally, changes in the field require concomitant changes in education and training (theory and practice) but FAO's approach is directed more towards finding the practical, discovering what works and supporting its systematic application and resulting feedback. FAO in this sense is a partner in "how to do things better".

32. In the early 1990s, the Government of Brazil asked FAO to evaluate its programme of small-farmer settlements, which was the second phase of agrarian reform begun in the mid-1980s. The evaluation involved a sample selection of 44 settlements in the five different regions of the country. Ten months later the results were presented to the Government which promptly published a report.

33. The results were surprising. The evaluation reached the conclusion that despite its many problems of design and implementation, agrarian reform had been economically favourable. The evaluation showed that the average income of families in agrarian reform settlements was 3.70 minimum wages, equivalent to approximately US\$280. The study also showed that the income of a worker on an agrarian reform settlement was significantly higher than that of a normal wage labourer.

34. In the early 1990s, a series of cooperation activities with FAO were initiated, with full funding from the Government of Brazil, for the provision of technical assistance to INCRA. The initial purpose of this cooperation was to devise new agrarian policy guidelines that would integrate the theme of land tenure into a package of measures to promote and strengthen family farming. It was hoped that land redistribution could be incorporated into a policy of more comprehensive rural development, which meant modernizing policy instruments to resolve land access issues and the technical challenges that would make family farming economically more viable.

35. At the same time, the centralized agricultural policy that had been inherited from the military regimes of the 1950s and 1960s was hampering the development of a policy capable of responding rapidly and effectively to family farming needs within and outside the new agrarian reform settlements. In addition, INCRA, as a centralized public body, was ineffective and averse to involving the grassroots in planning or decision-making.

36. These fundamental challenges set the scene for the Government's efforts to support family farming through new decentralized policy instruments.

37. The Government embarked on extensive public consultation throughout the country before acting upon this initiative. FAO and INCRA organized a series of seminars over a period of six months with 5 000 representatives of social movements, universities, NGOs, research institutes, as well as the state and municipal governments. Discussions led to the modification of several aspects of the initiative and the inclusion of other aspects that had not been considered. The final initiative presented alternative options for agricultural policy adjustment and identified possible institutional improvements.

38. Several of the proposals put forward in 1995 were adopted by the Federal Government. The most important of these included: (i) the creation of an integrated credit programme for

smallholder families (PRONAF); (ii) a new type of agricultural extension system able to respond to the needs of a large number of smallholders (LUMIAR); (iii) the creation of new instruments of land access that did not rely solely on confiscation of unproductive land but also enabled families to purchase more productive land by mortgaging land acquired or leasing it under favourable terms (SOF); (iv) the decentralization of certain government responsibilities for the development of infrastructure in rural settlements to state and municipal governments; (v) the improvement of institutions in terms of transparency and financial accountability and policy directed towards agrarian reform beneficiaries (PROCERA); and (vi) the establishment of rural development boards at municipal and state level in which the Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG) and others were invited to participate in decision-making.

39. With the change in government of January 2003, FAO clearly found political resonance in its general objectives of reducing hunger. FAO signed three Technical Cooperation Projects (TCP) in support of both implementation of the Special Ministry of Food Security and Hunger Alleviation (MESA) and the structuring of the lead programme for hunger reduction, the *Fome Zero* Programme. This complex Zero Hunger Programme comprises a series of actions implemented through various ministries in the three spheres of government (federal, state and municipal) and civil society. Key actions include: unification of programmes of transfer of income to the most needy, including (a) the school grant for education, food grant and food card; (b) with the Ministry of Health, the food grant programme is now administered through the food card; (c) with the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Finance, the Food for Workers Programme (PAT) is being expanded; (d) with the Ministry of Urban Areas, actions are being coordinated for food banks and soup kitchens; and (e) with the Ministry of Education, literacy campaigns are being conducted in municipalities involved in the distribution of the food card.

40. The Ministry of Agrarian Development and Secretariat of Family Farming have broadened the focus of PRONAF. Its budget has been raised to R\$5.4 billion, its implementation made less bureaucratic and new lines of credit introduced in various areas, such as PRONAF Food in collaboration with CONAB (National Supplies Corporation) to address *Fome Zero* demand; PRONAF Semi-Arid to improve conditions in the semi-arid northeast; PRONAF Women to integrate gender into rural development; PRONAF Rural Youth for young people; and other lines of credit in support of fishing communities, forestry, agro-ecology, family livestock production, rural tourism and the purchase of machinery and equipment. At the same time, to enhance the quality of actions, the Brazilian Government and FAO have signed a UTF project agreement with a value of US\$5 800 000 to provide technical backstopping to ongoing activities and to evaluate the results of the Zero Hunger Programme.

41. What motivated the legislators to take up the recommended actions? First, the message was dramatic and unequivocal. The fact that the recommendations were based on proven scientific facts was convincing evidence that, for all their constraints, family farms were more efficient users of land than large estate owners.

42. Second, the policy recommendation came at the right time as the recently installed government had pledged to reform the sector, with a special emphasis on smallholders and the landless.

43. Third, past attempts to deal with the concentration of land ownership had failed and the cost of political failure increased with each government. Given that the social movements had access to all relevant information, it was increasingly difficult for the government to ignore the recommendations.

44. Fourth, the broad consultations carried out before finalizing the recommendations served two crucial purposes. They confirmed the validity of the recommendations, known to all key players in Brazil's agricultural sector, and they modified the text in such a way that they were socially acceptable to all. This gave the policy recommendations substantial political weight when they were presented to the government.

45. Finally, FAO's involvement was important not only because of its technical know-how and experience in policy-making, but also because this highly controversial issue required the participation of a politically neutral body such as a United Nations agency.

D. The project as cooperative action for monitoring and evaluation: the Rural Alliance in Mexico

46. Associated with these processes are monitoring and evaluation which have traditionally not received their due attention. If this is to change in the implementation process, especially where there are differences of opinion on objectives and impacts, FAO can serve as a neutral body capable of ensuring quality control and thus feedback for national reflection, without the process becoming overly politicized. Efforts are under way to identify ways of supporting country strategies and facilitating institution building in time frames that go beyond normal government periods of office or coalitions.

47. In October 1995, the Office of the President of the Republic approved the "Rural Alliance" programme for the revival of Mexican agriculture. This programme is an effort on the part of the Mexican Government to increase rural incomes and to capitalize and modernize agriculture. The programme was decentralized and called for close interlinkage and collaboration between Federal Government institutions and state governments.

48. The Federal Government's implementation strategy included an evaluation of the Rural Alliance to examine its performance, effectiveness and efficiency and to determine how its design, planning, operation and monitoring unfolded in practice. Evaluation also focuses on impact on agricultural production and productivity; farmer income; generation of employment; better use of natural resources; and other development objectives. The evaluation process records impacts and results, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and suggests remedial measures, and thus supports the process of planning and programming. To this end, the Government requested FAO technical support in carrying out annual programme evaluations. The first evaluation of the Rural Alliance was conducted with the support of a unilateral trust fund (UTF/MEX/045/MEX) for the activities of 1998 and 1999. Subsequent evaluations have been conducted with other unilateral trust funds.

49. These evaluations have led to concrete recommendations to improve the design and execution of the Rural Alliance programmes and thus achieve greater impact.

E. The project as mechanism for organizing and managing agrarian information: System of Information for the Monitoring of Food and Nutritional Security (SISSAN), Nicaragua

50. **Support in compiling and managing databases.** One of FAO's historical roles has been to compile information on the silvo-agricultural and rural sectors. This function continues to be relevant today, with FAO helping member countries conduct their agricultural censuses which, in recent years, have included a gender dimension. The Organization continues to be involved in improving the management of national data on the state of food security and, in these times of global warming, it is also working on early warning systems applied to natural events, such as droughts, flooding, forest fires and hurricanes. Monitoring the impact of these events on rural economies is especially important.

51. The Government of Nicaragua has undertaken to develop a National System for the Monitoring of Food and Nutritional Security (SISSAN) with FAO support, so that the Food and Nutritional Surveillance System (SICIAV) initiative will include an interdisciplinary and intersectoral application integrating the different spheres of food and nutritional security.

52. The following specific objectives have been identified: a) to improve coordination of the information system to raise its quality and improve its timeliness; b) to facilitate the production and dissemination of information to increase the number of users; c) to support the institutional framework for the organization of the system at central and departmental level, integrating

information on availability, access, biological use and vulnerable groups; d) to ensure that the system is integrated into international networks of monitoring food and nutritional security; and e) to ensure the sustainability of the system through appropriate training of personnel at both central and departmental level.

53. This project is still in execution but the process of building and developing SISSAN has already produced results that confirm its viability. These include: a) awareness of the food security issue and engagement of the main participating public and private bodies; b) an important package of indicators proposed for most components affecting food security, which will soon permit the inputting, analysis and dissemination of factual information; c) participation and commitment of multidisciplinary working groups, made up of delegates of participating ministries, for the development and consolidation of the SISSAN, which will help reduce food insecurity among the Nicaraguan population; e) demand for training and resources identified for improving and strengthening the components and/or programmes that will improve the quality of SISSAN indicators; f) new SISSAN information suppliers and users interested in joining this initiative: universities, NGOs, international cooperation and technical bodies; from an operational perspective, potential users will be able to access the benefits of the system whenever they wish; g) qualified technical experts training ministerial officials in system use; h) available dissemination material.

F. The project as mechanism for training decision-makers and technical experts: Training in Economics and Agrarian and Rural Development Policies in Latin America (FODEPAL)

54. **Transfer of FAO know-how to the people.** FAO is seeking ways of processing its wealth of field training experience for the benefit of Member Nations and the people. Various actions are under way, the most important in this region being the FODEPAL project which is developing distance training together with academics and universities of the region. This project mainly targets development programme implementers, rural leaders and decision-makers.

55. National policy-makers and priority-setters rarely have the time to keep abreast of topics and trends that can impact on: trade negotiations with other countries; investment with multilateral banks; donor assistance policies; and, increasingly, national negotiations with decentralized governments and decision-making centres. FAO recognizes that these people need information and that they need to be kept up-to-date on rural development issues, but in ways that will not distract them from their daily duties and responsibilities.

G. The project as mechanism for integrating lessons learned: Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS). Selected countries

56. FAO is ordering and focusing its efforts to deal with the level of food insecurity in the world. We now know that we have the know-how and the resources to eliminate this scourge from the surface of the planet: the unknown factor is whether the political will to do so actually exists. We also understand that this is a matter pertaining to national sovereignty. There are few countries that require external humanitarian aid to resolve this problem among its citizens and any existing need is because of internal institutional weakness. FAO is therefore concentrating its efforts on marshalling resources to support national strategies for building food security for all. Countries such as Brazil and Mexico have flagged this as a national priority led by their Presidents, and FAO has undertaken to support them by mobilizing all its capacity and know-how around the approaches described above.

57. FAO is ready to partner governments in the process of readjusting their rural actions and redefining the role of projects. FAO's key instrument for doing this is constraints analysis and an operating framework for all components of the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS). This framework and its approach mean identifying the socio-economic problems that face rural families as they seek food security, which are then addressed by the SPFS through a cycle of field trials and adjustments. As experience is gained, activities are gradually expanded to a larger area

and a wider range of components. SPFSs are geared towards generating inputs and experience that will shape an investment policy or programme for food security and rural development. SPFS National Action Plans are currently being implemented in Central America, Mexico, Venezuela and Ecuador and being initiated in Brazil and the English-speaking Caribbean.

58. The following table lists a small sample of projects to summarize FAO's role and show how it can help its Member Nations.

FAO EXPERIENCES

Approach	Type of project	Example	Benefit to the country
Policy definition	Instrument for learning	PACTA Honduras	Enables new policies to be tested before these become overly expensive in political, economic or other terms
Field validation	Field "crucible" (demonstration area)	Community Forestry Project, Ecuador	Field trial of approaches, technologies and methodologies, identification of constraints and other key elements for widespread application
Adoption as national policy	National scaling-up and search for national consensus	PRONAGER, Brazil	The process of large-scale application of policy, methodologies and instruments to secure acceptance of approach and implementation on a national scale
Tracking (technical audit)	Monitoring, ordering and evaluation	Rural Alliance, Mexico	Monitoring and supervision of implementation of rural development programmes on the basis of international standards
Database	Gathering and collating information.	SISIAV, Nicaragua	Generation of information from data collection systems for use by decision-makers
Information and education	Feedback from databases and lessons learned through training and instruction.	FODEPAL, Regional	Organization of national and field information generated by projects for feedback and instruction to decision-makers, technicians, players and educators.
Synthesis	Integration of these approaches into a national food security strategy.	SPFS	Processing of inputs for a national food security strategy with a special focus on the rural sector.