

Concept Note

Symposium on South-South & Triangular Cooperation
11-12 February 2016, Brussels, Belgium

Co-organized by the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) Secretariat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF), with the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC) and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLC)

“Integrated Rural Development: Strengthening Women and Youth Empowerment through Jobs and Entrepreneurship”

1. Background and Rationale

Countries in the South offer a myriad of development solutions - knowledge, experiences and good practices, innovative policies, technology, know-how, and resources - that have proven cost-effective and have huge potential to be up-scaled for the benefit of others. South-South Cooperation (SSC) is playing a greater role than ever before in the international development cooperation landscape, and innovation in the South is generating new tools and partnerships for tackling issues of food insecurity, poverty and sustainable agriculture. There are good practices and solutions at the policy, institutional and grassroots level to share, that place women and youth at the centre. SSC is complementary to North-South cooperation and in many cases involves Triangular Cooperation (TrC), which also has a critical role to play. This Symposium will aim to advance the ACP’s strategic priorities for women and youth in agriculture and rural areas using a sustainable food systems approach, and mobilize SSC and TrC as key mechanisms for delivering on this agenda.

Given that the major role that women and youth play in an agricultural and rural development context, an integrated approach is required to ensure their inclusion, based on the challenges they face. Worldwide, women comprise about 40 percent of the agricultural labour force and play a crucial role in food production, as well as in food processing and the marketing of produce along agricultural value chains. Women also make critical contributions to the food and nutrition security of their households through their reproductive roles, which include child-care and household responsibilities. Yet, across all regions, rural women and girls continue to face significant discrimination compared with men and boys, with women being more likely than men to hold low-wage, part-time, seasonal employment. This persistent gender discrimination limits women’s potential as farmers, producers and agents of development. The “gender gap” is evident in access to assets, knowledge, services, employment and markets, imposing high costs on overall agricultural production, households’ well-being, and socio-economic development in general.

Together with addressing women’s empowerment, skills development and promotion of decent rural youth employment in rural areas should be key components of national strategies to reduce rural poverty. There are more young people today than ever before - 1.8 billion, - and the vast majority of them live in less developed countries (89 percent), while most live in rural areas. However, young women and men face enormous challenges, such as: (i) insufficient access to knowledge, information and education; (ii) limited access to land; (iii) inadequate access to financial services; (iv) difficulties accessing green jobs; and (v) limited access to markets and youth’s limited involvement in policy dialogue. If empowered with the right policies, tools and skills, youth can be the driving force of agricultural and rural transformations needed for more inclusive and sustainable food systems. Yet, to draw young women and men into agriculture, conditions must become more productive and congruent with their aspirations for a better future.

It is well known that agro-industrialization opens many employment and job growth opportunities for women and youth. Food processing is skewed toward much higher levels of women employees and youth, who are less attracted to the small farming practices of their parents and more inclined to seeking wage-earning opportunities in agribusinesses. However, the challenge remains to develop agri-businesses in rural areas so that value addition and job opportunities are available. This requires conducive business environments, agro-investment promotion and financing and private public collaboration, as well as skills training.

Investing in the development of sustainable value chains and food systems through sharing best practices, including through SSC and TrC, offers a key pathway to achieve food security and improve nutrition, particularly if said practices are inclusive of rural women and youth. More specifically, key pathways would be: (i) linking commercial-oriented smallholder farmer to rewarding markets; (ii) creating and facilitating entry to decent jobs for women, men and youth, including for vulnerable groups; and (iii) improving value addition and food processing of small and medium enterprises, by producing nutritious, readily available foods for consumers, at affordable prices. Taking a food-systems approach allows investments to be targeted and effective, while achieving impact at scale. Such an approach facilitates broader interventions along the value chain, e.g. on food safety and quality standards, food losses and waste.

2. Objectives of the Symposium

The specific objectives for the event will be to:

- highlight the importance of SSC and TrC as key mechanisms to empower women and youth in agriculture;
- share best practices and identify priority areas for upscaling practical solutions for women and youth empowerment through jobs and entrepreneurship in agriculture;
- chart the mechanisms through which SSC and TrC can support the exchange and transfer of the best practices and priority areas identified, including sessions on:
 - Skills development and enhancing institutional capacity;
 - Access to technology and lands;
 - Access to efficient business services;
- Develop an action plan for the ACP to support SSC and TrC programmes.

3. Organizers

This Symposium will be organized by ACP, FAO and OIF with the support of COMSEC and CPLC.

4. Format

The Symposium will bring together a panel of high-level experts from the ACP, CPLC, the COMSEC, FAO, and OIF, as well as national governments, and development partners, including, the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) and a range of non-state actors (civil society, private sector). Experts will set the scene for a moderated discussion on the key issues and highlight practical, workable development solutions for women and youth for upscaling, in particular through SSC and TrC.