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The issue

The majority of the world's rural poor face significant hurdles when it comes to accessing resources and seizing economic opportunities to improve their livelihoods. Poverty is multidimensional, so should not be viewed solely from an income perspective, but as a series of challenges that affect people's wellbeing. These include factors such as inadequate living standards, poor nutrition, lack of voice and capacity to influence decisions (agency) and weak participation in community life. Addressing the non-economic dimensions of poverty and food insecurity is essential to overcoming the barriers that perpetuate poverty, social exclusion and gender inequalities. There is growing recognition of the connection between collective action and poverty reduction. Collective action is a crucial step in empowering the most vulnerable, particularly women and youth, ensuring they fully participate in development. Most developing countries agree on the need to intensify efforts in this area. Innovative and flexible gender-transformative development models are needed to reinforce individual and collective agency, and to empower people through community mobilization and self-development activities to critically improve their livelihoods and nutritional status.

The action

The programme builds on the success of the Dimitra Clubs initiative, assisting countries in adapting and implementing the model for community mobilization, gender equality and empowerment. FAO has been implementing the Dimitra Clubs model since 2008. To date, almost 3 500 clubs in seven countries have enabled an estimated 2.5 million rural people to actively participate in local governance and development. The model helps to empower people through community mobilization, dialogue, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), collective action and self-help activities to improve livelihoods and gender equality. Support is provided to strengthen rural people's organizational skills and access to decision-making, as well as to promote collective action and self-development activities, as identified by the communities themselves. The model triggers sustainable results in a variety of areas, including nutrition, climate-adaptation agriculture, resilience, gender relations, social cohesion and peace. The successes achieved with this model, will be scaled up by: (1) supporting member states and partners in integrating the model into development programmes and strategies, (2) building regional and national expertise for model adaptation and implementation, and (3) documenting the impact of the Dimitra Clubs through a monitoring and learning framework.

ECONOMIC INCLUSION

Dimitra Community Clubs

Promoting collective action through a gender-transformative approach to improve rural livelihoods

The issue in numbers



736 million
people live in extreme poverty worldwide



56%
of the extreme poor live in sub-Saharan Africa, most of them smallholders



405 million
of the extreme poor are women with little or no public voice

Programme targets



10 000
Dimitra Clubs worldwide



300 000
club members empowered
(two-thirds of them women)



13
new countries using the Dimitra Clubs model (+200%)

The budget



USD 9 million



4 years



19 countries

Expected results

- Enhanced capacity of rural people, particularly women, youth and the elderly, to engage in community life and socioeconomic development through their organizations, including in protracted crisis situations;
- Increased participation, voice and influence of rural women and youth in local decision-making (rural organizations and communities) to improve sustainable smallholder farming and rural livelihood systems;
- Integration of the Dimitra Clubs model into rural strategies and programmes as a way of promoting empowerment and community self-help, as well as improving gender equality, nutrition and food security;
- Enhanced capacity and ownership of national and regional institutions and development partners to use the Dimitra Clubs model for empowering rural women and youth and rural livelihood systems.

Geographic focus

Asia-Pacific: Cambodia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea

Latin America and the Caribbean: Haiti

Near East: Oman

Sub-Saharan Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, the Niger, Senegal, Uganda

In partnership with

Governments, line ministries, local authorities, religious and traditional authorities, producer organizations, private-sector companies (especially in the ICT field), research institutes, radio stations, non-governmental and civil-society organizations, as well as UN agencies, such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme, UN Women, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund



SDG contribution



Community action on erosion in Senegal

Erosion has intensified in recent years around the village of Saré Boubou, Tambacounda, Senegal, resulting in collapsed roads, degraded fertile top soil and gullied croplands. While the community would have once contracted workers to undertake a 'quick fix', Dimitra Clubs identified the need to address the problem in a more sustainable way. They decided to reach out to the Institut National de Pédologie (INP) to discuss erosion control measures and a medium- to long-term restoration project. Villagers worked collectively and voluntarily under the supervision and guidance of an INP expert to build stone defences. These erosion control measures have proved successful, demonstrating the support that the Dimitra Clubs approach can give communities, with a focus on women's voice and participation, with regard to taking collective decisions and action.



Why invest?

FAO's Dimitra Clubs model has proved its versatility and efficiency in enhancing rural people's involvement in community life and improving the voice of the most marginalized, particularly women and youth, in local decision-making and governance. The model is unique, enabling rural people to engage in self-development and bring about lasting, community-owned improvements to their lives. To date, the initiative has been financially supported by Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland (through FAO's Multi-Partner Programme Support Mechanism), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Peace Building Fund and bilateral partners. Further investment in this successful, gender-transformative model is required to respond to the increasing demand in new countries and help local organizations, governments and programme managers to adapt and mainstream the model to strengthen their rural development strategies.

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