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Working on the transfer
**Strengthening the competences:
Experiences gained by the FAO**

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Learning Sustainable Development through strengthening the competences: experiences gained by FAO

"Sustainable Development is the management and conservation of the natural resource base, and the orientation of technological and institutional change in such a manner 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."¹

More precisely FAO defines SARD (Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development) as a process which meets the following criteria:

- Ensures that the basic nutritional requirements of present and future generations, qualitatively and quantitatively, are met while providing a number of other agricultural products.
- Provides durable employment, sufficient income, and decent living and working conditions for all those engaged in agricultural production.
- Maintains and, where possible, enhances the productive capacity of the natural resource base as a whole, and the regenerative capacity of renewable resources, without disrupting the functioning of basic ecological cycles and natural balances, destroying the socio-cultural attributes of rural communities, or causing contamination of the environment.
- Reduces the vulnerability of the agricultural sector to adverse natural and socio-economic factors and other risks, and strengthens self-reliance.

The emergence of the concept of SARD is mostly due to the raising awareness about environmental situation degradation, as well as to the evaluation of the rural people's specific situation. This both fact are at the roots of SARD legitimacy.

Today the world is committed to address the challenges confronting processes of economic and social development in a human rights context, with a focus on eradicating poverty and hunger (Millennium Development Goal or MDG 1), promoting human resources development (MDGs 2-6), ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG 7), and establishing a global partnership for development (MDG 8). Challenges which SARD-related work will have to take into account within this new framework include: globalization and trade regimes, the growth and concentration of private agro-industrial enterprises, commercialization of agriculture, the livestock revolution, urbanization, the information technology revolution, restructuring of the institutional

¹ This definition was adopted in 1989 by FAO, according to the FAO Trainer's Manual, Vol. 1, "Sustainability issues in agricultural and rural development policies," 1995

architecture for rural development (withdrawal of the state, growth of civil society), climate change and volatility, increasing prevalence of health pandemics, conflicts and complex emergencies, and the burgeoning productivity of science-based innovations.

An integrated approach is thus a better way to implement sustainable project. As a consequence, FAO's programmes and projects have been gathered around three priorities, in order to provide a framework for implementing them in an integrated manner by articulating and promoting SARD good practices. The recommended priorities are:

- Thrust One: Sustainable Livelihoods (contributes to MDG 1) – Mainstreaming good practices from, *inter alia*, the Livelihoods Support Programme (LSP), the Forests, Trees and People Programme (FTTP), the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP) and the Pro-Poor Livestock Facility.
- Thrust Two: Sustainable Intensification of Integrated Production Systems (contributes to MDGs 1 and 7) – Development and mainstreaming of FAO's multisectoral GAP approach and other action to enhance sustainability and safety of food chains.
- Thrust Three: Integrated Natural Resource Management (contributes to MDGs 7 and 1) – Development and mainstreaming of an ecosystem approach for conserving land and water resources, protecting biodiversity and conserving and sustainably managing agricultural heritage systems.

In a sense, SARD takes into account all members of society. It takes all of us to transition the unfortunate situations such as hunger, poverty and environmental degradation to a world that is truly sustainable, vibrant, and peaceful. Stakeholders are those individuals and groups that either have an influence on the process or are influenced by it – be they women, youth, indigenous peoples, farmers, fishers, peasants, workers and trade unions, local authorities, non-governmental organizations, science and technology, business and industry, education, or media, government or intergovernmental agencies.

We have long been engaged in supporting farmers, governments and their extension services to define, use and promote sustainable agricultural practices. More recently, in response to growing consumer concerns that agricultural production practices could adversely affect sustainability of the natural resource base and/or the quality and safety of food products at their point of entry into the food chain, we began work on defining its approach to Good Agricultural Practices. FAO's efforts to develop a multisectoral GAP approach fit well within the more comprehensive framework of SARD. SARD is concerned with good practices in both agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, and with the sustainability and equity of both processes and technologies; GAPs cover the subset of SARD good practices that need to be adopted at farm level, with specific attention to the resulting safety and quality of food. The basic premise of this approach is that adoption of agricultural practices which protect the environment and ensure the quality and safety of food as well as increasing productivity should enable farmers to increase their incomes from existing markets

and take advantage of new market opportunities, thus achieving sustainable improvements in their livelihoods

In order to really address the rural people's needs, sustainability learning should include, besides education and scolarization programs, training activities and extension programs to disseminate sustainable agricultural technologies. We can thus conceived sustainability learning as a continuum of personnel development ranging from a general education to specific training. While training is concerned with those activities which are designed to improve human performance on the job that employees are at present doing or are being hired to do, education is concerned with increasing general knowledge and understanding of the total environment. Education is the development of the human mind, and it increases the powers of observation, analysis, integration, understanding, decision making, and adjustment to new situations.

Education for Rural People focus is thus broader than Agriculture Education and encompasses all those who live and work in the rural space and not only people directly involved in agriculture. The new way of looking at education needs is therefore people centered rather than sector centered. While it is clear that agriculture will continue have its special needs for education and training the emphasis will increasingly be on ensuring that basic education is provided for all in the rural space. Agriculture Education it is thus seen as one important pillar of Education for Rural People, among others.

The idea of a continuum encompassing formal, non-formal and informal education, which is widely accepted today in the context of lifelong learning. Non-formal education is defined as "any organized and systematic educational activity situated outside of the traditional education system and aimed at providing certain types of education to specific population groups, adults as well as children".

Extension is a non-formal educational function that applies to any institution that disseminates information and advice with the intention of promoting knowledge, attitudes, skills and aspirations, although the term "extension" tends to be associated with agriculture and rural development. Extension is multidisciplinary political and organizational instrument utilized to facilitate development. It combines educational methodologies, communication and group techniques in promoting agricultural and rural development. It includes technology transfer, facilitation, and advisory services as well as information services and adult education.

A move from a teaching to a learning style has profound implications for agricultural development institutions. The focus is less on *what* we learn, and more on *how* we learn and *with whom*. This implies new roles for development professionals, leading to a whole new professionalism with new concepts, values, methods, and behavior. Extension agents thus receive regular training to enhance their technical skills, which they then hope will pass to all farmers through regular communication with small numbers of selected contact farmers. Extension will need to build on traditional communication systems and involve farmers themselves in the process of extension.

Knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) surveys are used to understand and assess farmers' local indigenous knowledge, values and belief systems and how these affect their farming practices. KAP surveys are useful tools for identifying the technological interventions which are important in an area and which are likely to create a significant impact. By analysing the words farmers use to communicate their knowledge, attitudes and practices in regard to specific elements of a farming system, it is possible to identify those elements which may be good, those which may need to be improved, or those which may need to be discouraged.

With this information, demonstrations can be more effectively designed. It may not be necessary, for example, to provide all farmers with a complete set of technology recommendations, as some of the farmers may already know, agree with, and/or have acted upon the necessary information. On the other hand, KAP surveys can identify elements of the technology package that are not known to the majority of farmers, the reasons for their negative attitudes, how and why they have practised recommended technologies inappropriately, and so forth.