**Harnessing the role of Rural Organizations in Social Protection**

***Call for proposals for an INVENTORY of practices***

Social Protection (SP) is a set of measures of social assistance, insurance, financial and social services, indispensable for alleviating destitution, poverty and vulnerability for rural smallholders and labourers. Governments are increasingly adopting SP as a strategy to trigger and sustain agricultural growth. However, the institutions in charge of SP in developing countries are still unable to fully satisfy the need of the rural poor. In particular, they struggle to ensure extensive **coverage** for all regions affected by poverty and **inclusiveness** to reach the poorest citizens[[1]](#footnote-2). ILO advises that representatives of SP beneficiaries, including Rural Organisations, should participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of SP beyond consultation, in order for SP services to be relevant and adequate to the need of beneficiaries[[2]](#footnote-3).

**Rural Organisations** (ROs) are intended as formal and informal groups of rural people acting together to attain agreed socio-economic objectives, improving their access to inputs, services and markets and providing means to make their voices heard. ROs also represent poor and vulnerable smallholders or rural workers whose livelihood mostly depends on productive activities in the sectors of agriculture, livestock, fisheries and forestry. These members are potential recipients of SP programs.

Rural Organisations (ROs) can contribute to delivering SP both as a service provider for 1) the State, by performing tasks within national SP systems through participatory mechanisms; and 2) their members, by conducting collective practices of risk management and mutual assistance.

Evaluations of SP programs rarely focus on the **local institutional set-ups** that should be put in place to deliver SP successfully. Accordingly, the scarce literature that exists is insufficient to understand the current and potential contribution of ROs within the range of institutions that are or should be involved in the SP agenda. This study aims to address this gap by documenting existing experiences and good practices from developing countries in order to generate evidence for policy making. This study is aligned with FAO’s objective to increase its knowledge on SP and inform the design of SP systems for reducing poverty and ensuring food and nutrition security[[3]](#footnote-4) under its Strategic Objective 3 “Reduce Rural Poverty”.

***Rationale***

ROs can play **two roles** that contribute to ensuring social protection for the rural poor. These are particularly relevant in rural contexts that are more difficult for governments to cover and are highly characterised by informal economies.

1. They can represent the rural poor at higher levels and advocate for their needs, with the potential to conduct external services for national SP systems. Through the establishment of **participatory mechanisms**, ROs can be approached to inform the design of SP programs and implement tasks within SP programmes (e.g. targeting, registering, monitoring). Participation in SP systems can take different forms. Consultation can occur through social councils/commissions/committees, also with the participation of ROs’ representatives, that are responsible for watching over inclusion and exclusion errors and informing about priority SP needs (e.g. *Oportunidades* in Mexico). In some cases, social councils are responsible for the monitoring of supporting infrastructures and the performance of oversight activities (*Fome Zero* in Brazil). Collaboration occurs when governments decide to assign some tasks to ROs, according to their capabilities and potential to improve some aspects in the delivery of SP. For instance, ROs collaborate in programs of local and institutional procurement that create markets for poor smallholders and provide food to children in schools (e.g. PAAin Brazil). Community targeting is commonly used to improve the transparency and accountability of targeting processes, although it can be hindered by local power structures and stigma against certain groups (e.g. women, disabled, indigenous groups). In some cases, governments opted for the devolution of the autonomous management to community organisations of community cash transfers, while providing advisory support and general supervision (e.g PNPM in Indonesia and TASAF in Tanzania).
2. ROs also conduct **collective practices of risk management** supporting their members in managing, preventing and coping with risk, smoothing consumption and stabilising their incomes. Collective practices of SP exist but are often disregarded by national SP policies. Conversely, governments could build upon existing nets of protection, using and/or complementing their structures instead of substituting them. The following can serve as examples. **Microinsurance organisations** have the function of helping rural people cope with shocks and crisis, preventing loss or reduction of their incomes, saving lives in cases of severe shocks and destitution. Their services include compensation schemes covering the loss of personal assets, crop failures, health, death, loan protection, and shelter provision[[4]](#footnote-5). **Microfinance organisations**, e.g. the Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs), offer opportunities for accessing indispensable liquidity to sustain or start productive activities to vulnerable citizens, often excluded from the formal banking system. **Producers’ organisations** (**POs**), including farmers’ organisations and agricultural cooperatives, **traders’** and **processors’ organisations** establish collective arrangements with several functions: stabilizing prices (grain reserves and warehouse receipt systems), promoting production through loans (revolving funds) and increasing incomes (local procurement markets). They also run microinsurance schemes focusing on specific commodities or livestock. Several **informal groups** of rural poor are not formally registered through national policies and laws, but are integral to the social structures of local communities. In some cases, these groups offer access to liquidity for community members in times of disaster or need, to resist shocks or to start subsistence activities. They can take the form of community savings and loan schemes, such as the Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs), the Accumulated Savings and Credit Associations (ASCAs), Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) or provide basic social services (e.g. burial associations, shared tenancy groups).

By looking broadly at ROs, there is a risk to distort the nature of SP including any practice of livelihood promotion. For this reason, **we will refer to SP where practices strictly address situations of poverty and vulnerability, *i.e.* when, if such practices were not put in place, targeted beneficiaries would not be able to provide for their basic needs (food, health, shelter, basic education), or would seriously risk incurring in such situations**.

The inventory responds to the specific interest of achieving a better understanding of bottom-up and local solutions for providing SP to the rural poor. It will increase FAO’s knowledge and allow FAO to better inform governments and other development practitioners on SP policies and interventions promoting a variety of local arrangements. Finally, it will constitute a by-product of FAO’s 2015 State Of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) dedicated to Social Protection[[5]](#footnote-6).

***Objectives and audience***

OBJECTIVES – The main objective of the inventory is to **build a knowledge base on the current and potential role of ROs in SP**. This will be achieved by providing a broad collection of good practices that capture: (i) participatory mechanisms in national SP systems where ROs have a consultative, collaborative or decision-making role; and (ii) collective practices of risk management provided by ROs. The inventory also serves to **inspire and mobilise resources for future in-depth country analyses**. These analyses are indispensable to derive relevant evidence and guiding principles on local institutional set-ups upon which effective SP systems can be built. The inventory will feed into the debate over the **promotion of a higher involvement of relevant stakeholders,** as suggested by ILO. In particular, this should encourage policymakers to better define the roles for ROs in SP policies, laws and programs.

AUDIENCE – The inventory is for easy access and use by **decision-makers**, **practitioners, evaluators** and **donors**. They will be able toconsult the inventoryto strengthen and replicate good practices, design inclusive institutional arrangements for SP policies and programs that leverage on the comparative advantages of ROs, and evaluate RO’s involvement and performance in SP programmes which have emphasized their inclusion.

***Why you should apply - Deliverables of the inventory***

The inventory will be published in two formats. Practices will be documented in several **information sheets** published on line (in the form of short case studies) containing technical information for FAO’s and other practitioners’ learning and possible replication. Good practices will also be analysed and synthesised a **report** containing a broad analysis of success factors, risks, challenges and lessons learned. The report will also contain general recommendations for development practitioners, decision-makers, evaluators and donors in view of the possible adaptation and replication of good practices.

Applicants for the call have the opportunity to identify, document, analyse, and showcase relevant experiences contributing to building a knowledge base. The inventory will constitute the meeting point for applicants and other interested actors to share experiences and improve practices. It will facilitate the establishment of **expert consultations** and an **e-forum** that will be linked to FAO’s technical network on Social Protection.

***Methodology***

This call for proposals is issued for FAO’s technical units, decentralised offices and other relevant partners. It contains two annexes to guide applicants in documenting their practice. ANNEX A refers to participatory mechanisms in SP systems; ANNEX B refers to collective practices of risk management (please see at the end of this document)[[6]](#footnote-7). This phase will be followed by the selection, analysis and editing of the practices, and a process of validation with participants, followed by an open e-forum consultation with external experts and practitioners.

Please refer to the following criteria to make sure that your practice is relevant for this study.

*Criteria for selecting relevant organisations (more details in the ANNEXES)*

* Practices refer to one organisational type listed in the rationale: microinsurance and microfinance organisations; producers’, traders’ and processors’ organisations; and informal groups. Existing social committees established within SP systems and where rural people’s interests are represented should also be considered.
* The organisation must be member-based and show some extent of regularity of meetings.
* The organisation operates in rural areas and in favour of smallholders or rural labourers whose livelihoods depend, to some degree, on agriculture, livestock, fisheries and forestry.

*Criteria for selecting relevant practices (more details in the ANNEXES)*

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| ***Participatory mechanisms in SP systems***   * The practice refers to one or more participatory mechanisms of consultation, collaboration and devolution of decision-making power[[7]](#footnote-8). * Poor and vulnerable members are represented in participatory mechanisms. | ***Collective practices of risk management***   * The practice addresses situations of poverty and vulnerability * It provides one or more of the following: reducing, adapting and coping with risk; food security; income stability; essential services (e.g. health, education). |

Participants will be asked to describe and assess the practice following the instructions in the ANNEXES. The assessment is made according to criteria of: effectiveness; efficiency; technical feasibility; sustainability; equitability/participation; replicability and adaptability; and gender sensitiveness. **Weaknesses in relation to some of the criteria do not mean that the practice is not ‘relevant’**. Good performance on some of these indicators, as well as the reasons why the practice fails to comply with other indicators, would contribute to the learning process.

***Who can apply?*** The call is opened to FAO technical units, Decentralised Offices and development partners. Development partners can be: ROs, other international agencies (e.g. WFP, UNICEF, IFAD, ILO, WB, EU, and UNRISD), NGOs, charities, governmental agencies, local administrations and other relevant stakeholders. You are also kindly invited to flag any other experiences that you deem relevant for this study, that are carried out by your partners and other local organisations.

Good practices can be submitted in English, French, and Spanish.

**NB: Please use separate sheets (Annex A or B) if you wish to describe more than one collective practice of SP or participatory mechanisms.**

1. HLPE, 2012. *Social protection for food security. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security*. Rome: HLPE. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. ILO’s Conventions No. 102 and 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. FAO, 2013b. FAO’s Work in Social Protection. Note endorsed by the 148th Session of the FAO Council (2-6 December 2013). Rome: FAO. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. ICMIF, 2012. Sowing the seeds of mutual protection. *The ICMIF development magazine*, 10, p.1-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. For more information see: i) Vinci, I. et al, 2014. Local solutions to social protection - The role of rural organisations. Universitas Forum, 4 (1).; and ii) Bernier, Q. & Meinzen-Dick, R., 2014. Networks for Resilience - The Role of Social Capital. Washington: IFPRI. (Bernier & Meinzen-Dick, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. These templates are adapted from FAO. 2014. Good practices template. 5 pp. (also available at [www.fao.org/3/a-as547e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/a-as547e.pdf)). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Civil Society Organisations where ROs are represented are also relevant for this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)