

Public policy recommendations 2022 Women and cooperativism



Rural women are key players in the fight against poverty, hunger, in achieving sustainable, resilient, inclusive and viable food systems and in protecting biodiversity. In order to achieve this, the underlying causes of discrimination and inequality should be addressed, such as access to and ownership of property and land, limited access to credit and access to factors of production, involvement in decision making or health care and education.

They are unique service providers and resilience builders, combining income-generating work with unpaid household responsibilities: this is the “triple role” of rural women – working, taking care of their families and providing for their communities.

Cooperatives are a type of collective organisation that contribute to overcoming the economic and social disadvantages identified by individual producers, as well as improving incomes, access to resources and knowledge, and the revaluation of the value of producers in society.

The United Nations Decade for Family Farming 2019-2028 (UNDF) reaffirms that the empowerment of women and girls will make a critical contribution to sustainable development, stressing the importance of policies and strategies to recognize their fundamental role in food security and nutrition and address it through integral responses.

It is therefore crucial to put in place policy frameworks that enable the development of cooperatives and the empowerment of rural women. This document presents policy recommendations, based on the project Enabling FFPOs to champion rural women economic empowerment and resilience through associativism and cooperativism, funded by the Forest and Farm Facility. The project was carried out by the World Rural Forum and six regional family farming organisations, members of its network, in which 23 successful experiences of women's cooperatives were identified, and the importance of these frameworks was confirmed.

BACKGROUND



INTRODUCTION

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective, sustainable, and institutionally anchored policies are key to the advent of the cooperative model, and to unleashing the potential of women family farmers. This favourable policy and institutional environment should be based in holistic and multidimensional approach, defining the social, cultural, political and legal context in which cooperatives operate, and having a direct impact on the cooperatives performance, supporting or constraining their capacity to address family farming challenges.

Governments' efforts to support cooperatives should not be taken for granted and should be a pillar for strengthening family farming, especially women in family farming.

Social and economic policies implemented by governments as well as legislation are recognized as ones of the main factors influencing the development of cooperatives. Appropriate policy and legal framework are vital for successful farming cooperatives and other associations.







Governments can act as promoters and facilitators through policies and programmes supporting cooperatives, developing adequate infrastructure and social services, and eliminating barriers to cooperative development. Public policy support may include capacity development, technical assistance, competition laws and taxation, regulations in market sector, education and training.

We call for the strengthening of public policies focused on the promotion of cooperatives and other social and solidarity economy so that they can contribute more decisively to a new model characterised by equality, inclusion, sustainability and resilience of food systems.



I. Policies fostering economic sustainability for women family farmers

Women organise themselves into cooperatives mainly for economic and technical reasons, in order to share and optimise costs, resources and income. The sustainability of rural women is key to their economic and social empowerment, the prosperity of their activity, and consequently the stability and improvement of their living conditions, those of their families and therefore those of their community.

-  To encourage the initiatives of rural women producers in their communities
-  To enable credit, loans, savings, finance, seed, insurance, savings
-  To facilitate equipment, technical services and information, access to inputs such as seeds
-  To enhance access to markets: local, subregional, national; private and public, through integrating family farming products in public purchase
-  To implement appropriate structures and infrastructure for the development of women's cooperatives such as public transport
-  To promote the cooperative model for women's economic empowerment.



II. Policies enhancing women participation to cooperatives and productive activities

Rural women are often restricted to domestic activities, even though they do have a triple role, notably productive, but which is often invisibilised: tasks considered minor, such as picking, raising small animals, agricultural work with the family and therefore perceived as domestic, and gender norms confining them to caring roles. It can thus be frowned upon for women to take part in economic, productive activities 'outside' the family.

This requires both long-term changes in attitudes and policy frameworks that promote access to productive activities.



Access to land for women is fundamental. Public policies must enable women's equitable and effective access to land



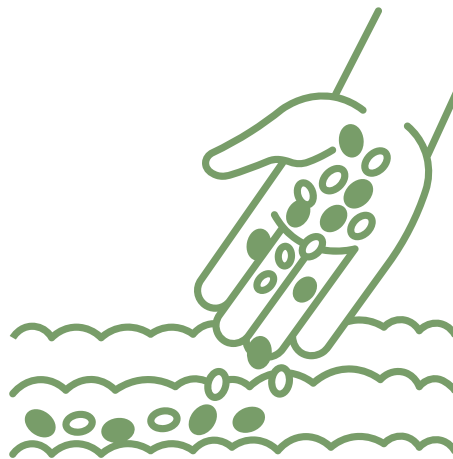
To foster access to services: health care, child care, legal aid, capacity building



To promote cooperatives as a tool for women's social and political empowerment




To establish statutes for women working in agriculture, allowing for their visibility and remuneration: co-farmer, co-partner.



III. Policies favouring organisations that support women empowerment

Farming organisations are key for family farmers, and for women family farmers in particular. They provide close support to women and women's organisations, offering them their technical and administrative expertise, as well as their advocacy capacity and their knowledge of the various political actors. These local and national grassroots organisations must also be supported by public policies so that they can maximise their impact on rural women.

It should be noted that while, as mentioned above, cooperatives are created for economic reasons, they contribute to the social and political empowerment of women, and this must be reinforced by appropriate policy and legal frameworks.

-  To encourage the work of organisations accompanying cooperatives: recognition of their status, promoting their training activities
-  To foster their access to national and local spaces for dialogue and regulation, facilitating their advocacy activities
-  Facilitate women's access to support organisations through the access to information
-  Facilitate access to information for organisations on: existing legal statutes for farming activities, forms of financing, policies being developed and to be implemented.



IV. Policies recognising the role of women as pillars of communities

Although cooperatives have an economic function, they fulfil many roles related to the benefit of their communities, roles that must necessarily be recognised and enhanced by governments: financing of community events, of infrastructure for the community, participation in social activities and events, exchange of services with the community.



To legally recognise the status of women's cooperatives



To promote their access to local and national decision-making processes



To support awareness-raising activities in favour of gender equity.

