



**Thematic Group on
Rural Development
and Food Security**
Established: 1997

MEMBERSHIP

UN: CEPAL; FAO; ILO;
UNAIDS; UNDP; UNESCO;
UNICEF; UNIDO; WHO

Activities: Formulation of
WFS follow-up initiatives.

Uruguay



IFAD/G. BIZZARRI

Forming alliances with civil society

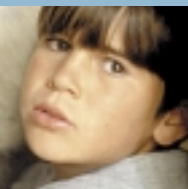
Civil society – whether farmers' organizations, research institutes, trade unions, consumers' organizations and universities – is an essential partner in combatting hunger and ensuring food security. Around the world, representatives of civil society are joining forces with over a third of Network Thematic Groups for goal-oriented collaboration.

But how is the participation of civil society encouraged and sustained?

In Uruguay, the Thematic Group – comprised solely of UN partners – has opened dialogue with civil society in attempts to share visions, experiences and strategies that work in development. The Group has used a two-pronged approach; conducting a workshop and undertaking a field mission to determine local needs for joint development projects.

The Thematic Group convened a National Workshop for Productive Alliances for Food Security and Sustainable Rural Development (Montevideo, 30 May 2001), in

conjunction with the Federation of Agrarian Cooperatives (CAF), a food producers' union with a substantial national membership, and the Centre for Study, Analysis and Documentation in Uruguay (CEADU), an NGO whose work in the food sector includes campaigning for organic agriculture. At the event, participants from the UN and civil society organizations analysed the state of food insecurity in the country; evaluated case studies highlighting the experiences and strategies of national agricultural producers; discussed common elements and synergies among national stakeholders; and debated the ways and means of engaging civil society fully in development. The workshop stimulated debate on the cross-cutting issues to be considered in addressing national food security: consumer habits, food production and supply chains, and the need for the dissemination and promotion of best practices on how alliances are built amongst all sectors of society.





Recommendations arising from the meeting included the establishment of a multi-stakeholder forum on food security and rural development in Uruguay, which would act as a coordination mechanism between the UN system and NGOs/CSOs and would plan a strategy and actions for productive alliances between partners. Participants designated CAF and CEADU to be national coordinators of NGOs/CSOs in this effort. In addition, the civil society participants agreed to become members of, and to participate actively in, the work of the Thematic Group in Uruguay and stressed that future workshops should seek to involve the participation of government institutions. The Thematic Group has prepared a CD-ROM, which contains workshop presentations, case studies, findings and recommendations, along with supplementary information on themes related to rural development and food security in Uruguay. This product will be distributed at the local, national and regional level.

Just as the Thematic Group is encouraging the involvement of national civil society in its meetings, so is it also beginning to reach out to civil society through field trips. In June 2001, for example, Thematic Group members visited the province of Tacuarembó, one of the most deprived areas of Uruguay, to undertake an on-site evaluation of the development priorities of local communities and to assess on-going and planned programmes. This informal 'Committee' conducted interviews with local authorities – including the provincial governor of Tacuarembó, health and social workers – in order to explore possible areas of cooperation between the UN system and

partners at the local level, taking into consideration the comparative advantages of each constituency.

All partners agreed that an ideal focus for a joint development effort would be a pilot project for a rural school in Caragatá, an area with a widely dispersed population in the eastern part of Tacuarembó. By targeting this area for action, the Group is complementing and building on existing development efforts by UN and non-UN partners: a network of health services initiated by WHO (working to combat the endemic parasitic 'Chagas' disease infesting local homes), an EU housing project, as well as the working relationships being nurtured by UNESCO.

A further field trip to the region was fielded by an inter-agency team with the aim of developing a preliminary report in collaboration with local authorities. This was followed by a meeting of UN agencies to update partners on the status of the pilot project and to define the exact contribution of each agency in the execution of joint technical assistance and cooperation.

In the meantime, the Thematic Group has made contact with the governors of other provinces in Uruguay to explore the possibilities of duplicating exercises similar to the one undertaken in Tacuarembó in other parts of Uruguay.

Networking with civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean

The model of the National Workshop on Productive Alliances for Food Security and Sustainable Rural Development is not unique to Uruguay. Indeed, national Thematic Groups affiliated to the Network in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as Costa Rica, Colombia, México, Nicaragua and Peru have used similar national forums to develop dialogue and initiate networking with civil society for joint development efforts.

Throughout Latin America, Network Thematic Groups continue to actively seek and encourage the views and involvement of civil society in various ways to follow up the WFS Plan of Action. The Thematic Group in Ecuador, for example, has helped formulate a draft of National Strategy on Food Security with the participation of a broad range of stakeholders – from farmers and indigenous people rights' groups to Members of Parliament. Once approved, the text will be incorporated into the National Development Plan – Ecuador 2025. In Bolivia, the Thematic Group is carrying out research into the perceptions of rural development amongst various national stakeholders – particularly civil society – which is to be debated and consolidated by Group members.

