



Capacity building for women's cooperative entrepreneurship in Swaziland

A new ILO project co-financed by AGFUND and DFID through regional cooperative programme COOPAfrica was recently approved and will be implemented very soon in Swaziland.

The project's beneficiaries are rural women who are members of existing or newly formed cooperative societies. The majority of cooperative members in Swaziland are women. Women have proven to be very committed to their cooperatives. They are considered as a very regular savers and reliable lenders willing to engage in collective and community activities.

The project will "start from what the people know". Swazi women are very familiar with the ancient local tradition of working and saving together. Cooperation is nothing new to them, what might be new is the cooperative as a modern, business-oriented institution. The project will help rural women to develop and enhance their traditional knowledge and skills through collective action and collective learning process.

Lack of management and organizations capacity building has been identified as the central problem encountered by Swazi cooperative movement. Consequently, capacity building will be the cornerstone of the project's work programme.

Through capacity building and advisory services, the project will enhance the performance, economic viability and governance of these cooperatives, thus improving their services to members and ultimately contributing to higher incomes and better livelihoods in rural areas.

At the end of the project, viable cooperative organizations will have been established and will be capable of providing such services to their members as rural production support, marketing and supply services, financial services and skills development.

The new project will be attached to the Cooperative Development Centre which is supervised by a Commission for Cooperatives in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. Where desirable and feasible, the project will collaborate with other agencies and projects involved in cooperative development such as IFAD and the FAO.

The 2003 Cooperative Act and the 2006 Cooperative Regulations of Swaziland are fully in line with the ILO Recommendation 193 on the Promotion of Cooperatives which creates a positive environmental frame for the new project.