

BRICS countries have an important role to play in achieving SDGs

The Ministries of Agriculture in five of the world's most important emerging economies - collectively known as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) - have an important role to play in achieving the international goals to eradicate hunger and poverty by 2030, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).



©Ryan Carter via [123RF](#)

These five countries form an important economic block. They account for more than 40 percent of the world's population and over 20 percent of global GDP. Together, they produce more than one-third of global cereal production. Last year, Russia became the largest wheat exporter in the world.

"The BRICS countries play an important political role in the international arena. Developing countries around the world look to your successes in economic development over the past few decades as an example to follow," said Kundhavi Kadiresan, assistant director-general and FAO's regional representative for Asia and the Pacific, in a statement to the seventh Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Agriculture, in Nanjing, China. "Your experiences provide a path that can help us all meet our global collective commitments, namely those of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - and the Paris climate accord."

Accelerating rural development key to achieving SDGs

Kadiresan pointed out that, despite trends towards urbanisation, poverty in the world today is primarily rural. As a result, accelerating rural development will be key to achieving the SDGs.

"The question is how can we do this? Our experiences in countries in different parts of the world have shown that it can best be done through a combination of agricultural growth and targeted social protection, but also through growth in the rural non-farm economy," Kadiresan said. "Agriculture can be a driver of sustained and inclusive rural growth. In low-income countries, growth originating from agriculture is twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth originating from other sectors of the economy."

Equally important is that all the tools, approaches and technologies developed must be useful and accessible to poor family farmers in developing countries so that they can increase production and productivity. It was noted that government-led initiatives such as South Africa's Fetsa Tlala, which aims to support subsistence and smallholder farmers expand cultivated land to food production, was an excellent example.

BRICS strong in agricultural research

The ministers heard that achieving agricultural growth would also require investments in research and development, and the BRICS countries could play a leading role in this, as all five countries have strong agricultural research systems that are working on many of the challenges faced by developing countries, such as feeding a growing population in a sustainable way.

Biotechnology would also play a key role in these advances, as would agro-ecological approaches. Climate-smart agriculture will be essential to adapt to the uncertain changes facing our farmers, and it will rely heavily on cutting-edge research.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are becoming more widespread by the day, and they offer a promising approach to address many of the challenges smallholders face with regard to information on prices, weather forecasts, vaccines, financial services, and much more. FAO is collaborating with the G20, the OECD and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in order to make sure these technologies benefit smallholders.

Agricultural growth cannot solve these issues on its own

Agricultural growth, as important as it is, cannot eradicate hunger and poverty all by itself - social protection programmes can also play a key role in rural development. These programmes have important poverty reduction and health benefits, and can also strengthen the confidence of family farmers, encouraging them to become more entrepreneurial. Brazil's Fome Zero and India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act are global references in this regard.

Kadiresan stressed that it is important not to overlook the key role played by the rural non-farm economy in fostering rural development. "As economies transform, most farm households obtain significant income from activities other than farming. The income from these activities provides not only a higher standard of living but also a more stable one in many cases. Governments play a key role in encouraging this transformation by investing in rural health and education," Kadiresan said. "While these investments are typically not within the Ministry of Agriculture's mandate, we must support such investments, as they are in the interest of our rural constituents. Where would any of us be today without the opportunities provided by our former teachers and a strong educational system?"

International trade an effective instrument in promoting food security

The ministers heard that international trade could also serve as an effective instrument in promoting food security and act as an adaptation tool to climate change. When an inevitable bad harvest occurs, as it does in every country at some stage, timely imports can help to rebalance the domestic food economy. In this regard, the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), a G20 initiative led by FAO, makes an important contribution to ensuring well-functioning and transparent global food markets.

Kadiresan welcomed the Government of China's Belt and Road Initiative, which she said would create a great opportunity for South-South Cooperation among all countries involved. She also acknowledged the government's leading role in supporting FAO's South-South and triangular cooperation programme.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>