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CSD-16 on [Agriculture, Rural development, Land, Drought, Desertification, and Africa](#).  
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**Subject:** Switzerland's Statement on **Rural Development**  
**Date and time:** 06.05.08, Conference Room 4  
**Person responsible:** François Pythoud, Head International Sustainable Agriculture, Federal Office of Agriculture

1. The Swiss constitution sets out the multifunctional tasks of agriculture. Rural development is one of the main responsibilities of Swiss agriculture, along with ensuring food supplies, conserving natural resources and preserving the rural landscape.
2. And it is the poorer mountain areas in particular which benefit from special projects financed by the Government. Mountain areas are rural zones that are especially sensitive and they play an important role for the lowland areas since they are an important source of positive externalities such as high-quality water, landscapes, a rich flora, high-quality products and renewable energy sources. Agriculture is the main economic sector in mountain regions and therefore plays a central role for a decentralized settlement.
3. If we want to improve the mountain communities' welfare we must have policies, legislation and institutions that are adapted to their needs, taking into consideration all agricultural, economic, social and cultural issues. The FAO's sustainable agriculture and rural development in mountain areas project is a concrete example of concerted efforts at international level. The aim of the SARD-M project is to promote the conception, implementation and evaluation of policies based on these principles and adapted to the specific needs of mountain communities.
4. The promotion of rural development is also one of Switzerland's main areas in development cooperation. As was agreed at the World Food Summit, a favourable political and economic environment is the basis for improving food security. The poor classes in the rural population, i.e. 70% of the world's poor, most of whom live on agriculture or livestock production, have very little political power. Inhabitants of rural areas are dispersed, not well informed and lack infrastructure; they have difficulties defending their interests in political processes. As no-one defends their interests, they remain on the margins of development, which takes place in urban areas and in a few prosperous economic sectors. Although small-scale farming occupies an important part of the population, it is often ignored by political elites.

5. If agricultural production is ensured by a large number of small-scale family farms, it can help eliminate poverty by generating jobs and income as well as providing foodstuffs at low prices. This is why a major part of the Switzerland's ODA investment goes to public and private institutions such as national and international research and training centres capable of responding to farmers' needs.
6. Women play an essential role in agricultural production; to a large extent, they are the ones who meet their families' food requirements. However, they are often excluded from land tenure and access to financial services. In addition, they rarely receive the attention they deserve from agricultural extension and research. In its support for increasing the purchasing power of poor farmers, Switzerland contributes to the strengthening of women through technical competence, the possibility of making choices, their activities and the salaries they are paid.
7. Information is a central factor for farmers. Switzerland helps make information accessible for and usable by poor farmers.
8. Finally, as agriculture is part of rural development, Switzerland's development cooperation integrates its support in favour of agriculture with its activities related to decentralisation, empowerment, improvement of fiscal systems, access to resources such as knowledge and genetic resources, financial services, as well as trade promotion.

Thank you for your attention