

Engaging with farmers' organizations for more effective smallholder development

Farmers' organizations



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Burundi – Transitional Programme of Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Introduction

Over the last 20 years, new and independent farmers' organizations (FOs) have emerged in many developing countries and are increasingly being recognized as representatives of farming communities at the national, regional and international levels. National FOs from all continents have structured into regional and global networks, such as the regional FOs EAFF, PROPAC, ROPPA, SACAU and UMNAGRI¹, and the continental platform Pan-African Farmers' Organization (PAFO) in Africa; the Coordinator of Family Farm Organizations (COPROFAM) in South America; and the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA) and the Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network (PIFON) in Asia and the Pacific.

¹ EAFF: Eastern African Farmers' Federation; PROPAC: Plateforme sous-régionale des organisations paysannes d'Afrique centrale; ROPPA: Réseau des organisations paysannes et des producteurs agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest; SACAU: Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions; UMNAGRI: Union Maghrébine et Nord Africaine des agriculteurs; COPROFAM: Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Productores Familiares del MERCOSUR

Many of these national, regional and continental FOs are now members of global movements, such as La Via Campesina (including 164 FOs from 79 countries, with a membership consisting of 200 million farmers), the World Farmers' Organisation (including 57 FOs from 57 countries) and the Intercontinental Network of Organic Farmers Organisations.

FOs play an invaluable role in *influencing and shaping policies* for agriculture and sustainable development, thus ensuring that smallholders have a say in the decisions that impact their lives. Also, FOs can be *significant economic players*, providing a wide range of key economic services to their members to support profitable engagement in markets, thus contributing to sustained growth processes and tackling the challenges of reducing rural poverty. Evidence can be found in many examples.

FOs can make a significant contribution to GDP: in **Brazil**, for example, 37 per cent of agricultural GDP is produced through cooperatives;² and in **Uruguay**, cooperatives are responsible for 3 per cent of GDP, and produce 90 per cent of the total milk production and 30 per cent of wheat, with 60 per cent of cooperative production exported to over 40 countries around the world.³

FOs can generate income and employment through the services they provide. For example, in **Morocco**, the Coopérative Agricole et Agroalimentaire (COPAG) adopted an integrated business model that ensures the provision of services to its members, as well as the processing of dairy products from the milk collected. Today, COPAG holds a 25 per cent market share in milk and derived products, generates a turnover of approximately US\$310 million (3.1 billion *dirhams*) (2011/12) and creates employment for 5,600 people.

An impressive example in the same sector is also provided by the Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union, widely known as Amul, which is the largest food product marketing organization in **India**. Managed by the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation, it has an annual turnover of US\$3.4 billion (2014/15). Its daily milk procurement is approximately 14.85 million litres from 18,536 village milk cooperative societies, 17 member unions covering 31 districts, and 3.37 million milk producer members. The "three-tier" model of Amul dairy development has helped India to emerge as one of the largest milk producers in the world.

In **Niger**, the Mooriben federation developed a package of services for its members consisting of training, grain banks, shops, credit lines and community radio stations. In particular, the grain banks and shops have substantially changed farming practices. Previously, farmers had consumed or sold all of their harvest and accrued debts to traders. This dependence has declined since the creation of the grain banks. The Mooriben shops have improved farmers' access to quality seeds and other farm inputs, and farmers are now able to make informed choices between the various inputs to improve productivity. This partly explains why Mooriben is one of the civil society organizations the Ministry of Agriculture has often turned to for the distribution of seeds to manage food crises. Their experience with the creation of grain banks and input shops enabled them to cover the food needs of about 37 per cent of the poor population during the critical months of famine in 2005.⁴

Box 1. Definition of farmers' organizations

FOs are autonomous membership-based professional organizations of smallholders, family farmers and rural producers, including pastoralists, artisanal fishers, landless people and indigenous people. They are structured beyond the grass-roots or community level, at the local, national, regional and global levels, on either a commodity or a territorial basis. They include all forms of producers' associations, cooperatives, unions and federations.

² Source: FAO (<http://www.fao.org/partnerships/cooperatives/en/>).

³ Instituto Nacional de Estadística, *Censo Nacional De Cooperativas Y Sociedades De Fomento Rural, 2008-2009* (<http://www.ine.gub.uy>).

⁴ P. Develtere, I. Pollet, and F. Wanyama. *Cooperating out of Poverty: The Renaissance of the African Cooperative Movement* (ILO/The World Bank Institute, 2007).

The examples above show how FOs, and agricultural cooperatives in particular, can play a key role in improving the lives of millions of smallholder farmers and their families. Globally, cooperatives create jobs for over 100 million people and contribute to increased agricultural productivity and expanded access to financial services and critical utilities.

Supporting the development of FOs is thus a key strategy for empowering smallholders to improve their market presence and to capture more value added in the agricultural sector.

Recognition in the international arena of the role of FOs in agriculture and sustainable development

The role of FOs as representatives of the farming community at the national, regional and international levels is increasingly recognized today.

The United Nations declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives and 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming. In the resolution adopted on the occasion of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa, July 2015), the United Nations General Assembly called upon relevant agencies to further coordinate and collaborate to strengthen efforts to “enhance food security and nutrition and focus [...] efforts on smallholders and women farmers, as well as on agricultural cooperatives and farmers’ networks” by improving access to markets, enabling domestic and international environments and strengthening collaboration across the many initiatives in this area such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).⁵

These events acknowledge the invaluable role that FOs play in shaping policies for agriculture and sustainable development, providing services to smallholders, generating employment and social integration, reducing poverty and enhancing food security.

FOs and IFAD: a long-standing partnership fostered by the Farmers’ Forum

IFAD has long recognized FOs as central stakeholders defending the interests of poor rural people, and has stepped up its support to build their capacity. It has also increased its collaboration with FOs as interlocutors and partners in development programmes and in policy dialogue, both as representatives of rural producers and as institutions delivering services to their members and playing a major role in rural development.

Since 2006, the IFAD Farmers’ Forum (FAFO) has been the framework guiding the partnership and providing direction for its development (see box 2 for further details).



⁵ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 July 2015. 69/313. *Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda)* (http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/69/313).

The FAFO process has directly contributed to the improvement of operational partnerships at the country level and therefore to the effectiveness of IFAD-funded programmes. The partnership between IFAD and FOs is today part of the *modus operandi* of IFAD.

The critical importance of social and economic empowerment of rural people, both individually and collectively, is further recognized in the IFAD Strategic Framework 2016-2025. The document reiterates the Fund's willingness to "intensify its assistance to rural institutions and producer organizations [and to] help them become more inclusive and effective in sustainably enhancing rural peoples' capabilities, and their access to the assets, technologies, services and markets that are most important for achieving profitable farm and non-farm enterprises".⁶ IFAD will also continue to actively promote the capacity of FOs to take part in policy, institutional and programming processes at the local, national and international levels that affect agriculture and rural economies.⁷

Why is it key for IFAD to engage with FOs?

Partnership with FOs increases the relevance, effectiveness and long-term sustainability of the actions supported by IFAD. The characteristics of FOs outlined below indicate why they are considered key partners of IFAD-funded projects.⁸

- **FOs as smallholder organizations: improving targeting of IFAD operations.** FOs are membership-based institutions that aggregate smallholders, who represent IFAD's target group. One of the key premises of IFAD's policy on targeting is that national ownership is critical for positive impact and sustainability of development activities. The degree to which poor rural people themselves and their organizations share a commitment to reducing rural poverty "strongly determines the extent to which these priorities are put into practice".⁹ Working with FOs is thus key to ensuring that IFAD-supported projects and programmes reach and benefit their target groups.
- **Representativity of FOs: improving the relevance of projects.** Representative and smallholder-based FOs constitute a key entry point in understanding smallholder needs and defining their priorities in terms of rural and agricultural development in a specific area. Partnership with them is thus relevant to adapting project activities to smallholder needs and ensuring the relevance of IFAD action.

Box 2. The Farmers' Forum (FAFO)

The Farmers' Forum (FAFO) was established in 2005 as a platform for dialogue and consultation between IFAD and farmers' and rural producers' organizations. The FAFO is an ongoing, bottom-up process that spans IFAD-supported operations on the ground and policy dialogue. Fully aligned with IFAD's strategic objectives and rooted in concrete partnership at the national and regional levels, the FAFO meets every two years for a global consultation in conjunction with IFAD's Governing Council.

The FAFO is a key instrument for accountability of development effectiveness, in particular in the area of empowerment of poor rural people and their organizations. It is also an interface between pro-poor rural development interventions and the process of enhancing the capacity of farmers' and rural producers' organizations (including organizations of artisanal fishers, pastoralists, landless workers and indigenous peoples). The FAFO is guided by the principles of inclusiveness, pluralism, openness and flexibility; it is built on existing forums, where possible, avoiding duplication in these cases; and it respects existing organizations and the creation of new spaces, where needed.

Further information is available on the IFAD website: https://www.ifad.org/topic/farmersforum/overview/tags/farmers_forum

⁶ IFAD Strategic Framework 2016-2025, *Enabling inclusive and sustainable rural transformation*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ A more comprehensive set of "principles to better engage with FOs" is provided in the IFAD/WCA publication *How to engage in efficient partnerships with farmer organizations*. [French]

⁹ IFAD Targeting Policy. *Reaching the rural poor*.

- **Role of FOs: reinforcing the impact of IFAD interventions.** FOs are key to linking smallholders to market opportunities on better terms as they create important economies of scale upstream and primary production downstream, and can expand farmers' control over value-adding segments of value chains. Also, FOs have a key role to play in representing their members' interests not only in contract negotiations with buyers but also in discussions on important policy issues with government authorities. Partnership with them thus represents a key priority for the Fund as a means of both enabling smallholders to gainfully participate in markets and promoting "better governance, policies and institutions for agriculture and rural development".¹⁰
- **Profitability of FO economic services: FOs as business partners.** FOs provide members with a range of economic services (e.g. input supply, storage facilities, collective marketing opportunities, credit access, equipment, agricultural advisory services) that enable smallholders to increase productivity, reduce risk, manage their produce and increase their income. For downstream stakeholders in agricultural and food value chains, FOs are relevant business partners as they can increase the quantity and quality of supply, thus facilitating its collection. Partnership with FOs represents a key aspect for the achievement of the IFAD strategic objective of increasing poor rural people's benefits from market participation.¹¹
- **Sustainability of activities.** FOs are the main stakeholders in the agriculture and rural development of their regions because they are rooted in the agricultural, economic, political and social dynamics of the country. It is thus essential to engage in partnerships with them in order to foster sustainability of IFAD-funded activities.

Over the last decade, the partnership between IFAD and FOs has been influenced by the FAFO process, in which FOs have expressed clear concerns, requests and recommendations to improve the modalities of collaboration. The partnership between IFAD and FOs is articulated in the following types of collaboration:

- Supporting the systematic participation of FOs in formulating country strategies and designing projects
- Supporting the development of tripartite partnerships between governments, IFAD and FOs for the implementation of IFAD-funded investment projects
- Directly supporting FOs through regional grant programmes and supporting FO engagement in policy platforms and policy dialogue.

Supporting the systematic participation of FOs in formulating country strategies and designing projects

The evolution of the frequency of FO participation in formulating country strategies (country strategic opportunities programmes – COSOPs) in the last biennium shows a positive trend, while results are less positive in terms of FO involvement in the design of IFAD-funded projects.¹²

A very positive case is presented by IFAD's portfolio in **Mali**. In recent years, FOs have been greatly involved in the review and design of the COSOP. This has been possible because of the following two key elements: (i) the overall process was piloted by the apex FO CNOP-Mali, which involved all FO networks, including the chambers of agriculture; (ii) all choices and actions were developed and widely shared with IFAD staff. FOs have also been involved in the design of projects. In the case of the Rural Youth Vocational Training, Employment and Entrepreneurship Project (FIER)¹³ in Mali, input and recommendations were discussed and shared by FOs at an ad hoc workshop organized between two formulation missions and subsequently integrated into the design.

¹⁰ IFAD Strategic Framework 2016-2025.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Source: Survey data for IFAD *Partnership in Progress: 2014-2015* report to the FAFO.

¹³ Formation professionnelle, insertion dans les filières agricoles et appui à l'entreprenariat des jeunes ruraux.

In **Latin America**, and particularly in the MERCOSUR subregion, the REAF-MERCOSUR¹⁴ initiative (see below and the How To Do Note for further details) and the implementation of the regional-level policy decisions at the national level had positive impacts on the targeting strategy of IFAD country programmes. Based on the experience in **Brazil**, where for many years national registers were successfully used for targeting, similar national registers of family farmers were created in **Argentina, Paraguay** and **Uruguay**. This enabled IFAD projects in the countries concerned to significantly improve their targeting methodologies, and thus strategy and project design.

Supporting the development of tripartite partnerships between governments, IFAD and FOs for the implementation of IFAD-funded investment projects

Partnerships supported through the implementation of ongoing IFAD-funded projects represent the most important relationship between FOs and IFAD. Several examples can be found in IFAD's portfolio.

In **Guinea**, the National Programme to Support Agricultural Value Chain Actors (PNAFA)¹⁵ is an IFAD-funded project where FOs are strategic partners in charge of the implementation of project components and are members of the steering committee (with a majority share), as well as being responsible for planning, monitoring and reporting.

In many countries of IFAD's Latin America and the Caribbean Division, for example **Honduras, Nicaragua** and **Paraguay**, IFAD-funded projects support farmers' groups and their associations through a combination of business plan financing and institutional capacity-building. The approach is flexible, demand-driven and empowering and, for the most part, funds for the implementation of business plans are directly channelled through FOs.

In East and Southern Africa, farmer-driven processing enterprises with FOs as shareholders are also being promoted.

In **Rwanda**, PRICE¹⁶ supports tea cooperatives' investment as shareholders of tea factories, scaling up and improving the public-private-producers partnership (4Ps) business model developed within PDCRE.¹⁷ In **Uganda**, the Kalangala Oil Palm Growers Trust works within VODP2¹⁸ as an intermediary with the private sector on behalf of smallholders and provides technical support and financing to foster the development of farmers. In **Madagascar**, national umbrella organizations and regional-level organizations, in partnership with the regional chambers of agriculture, sign agreements with AROPA¹⁹ to implement their professional development plans related to service provision for their members.

¹⁴ La Reunión Especializada de Agricultura Familiar del MERCOSUR.

¹⁵ PNAFA: Programme national d'appui aux acteurs des filières agricoles.

¹⁶ PRICE: Project for Rural Income through Exports.

¹⁷ PDCRE: Smallholder Cash and Export Crops Development Project.

¹⁸ VODP2: Vegetable Oil Development Project, Phase 2.

¹⁹ AROPA: Support to Farmers' Professional Organizations and Agricultural Services Project.

Directly supporting FOs through regional grant programmes, and supporting FO engagement in policy platforms and policy dialogue

As requested by FOs in the context of the FAFO, FOs are also direct beneficiaries of specific grants, mostly directed to regional FO platforms, as detailed below.

Regional grants in Africa and Asia

- **The Support to Farmers' Organizations in Africa Programme (SFOAP)** was launched as a pilot (2009-2012) to strengthen the capacity of African FOs to influence policies and support programmes affecting agriculture, rural development and food security. SFOAP has significantly contributed to improving the professionalization and consolidation of core FO functions, and resulted in a significant change in terms of their engagement in policymaking, especially at the level of CAADP processes. The programme's main phase (2013-2017)²⁰ builds on the successes and lessons learned from the pilot phase and scales up programme activities and outreach. In addition to its institutional and policy support components, it supports the development of economic services for FOs to facilitate the integration of smallholders in value chains. The support focuses on a limited number of cases, and is aimed at assessing their results and impact and systematizing successful experiences through knowledge generation and sharing. Knowledge generated is expected to be catalytic in developing contracts and partnerships with other players in the value chain, thus enabling the positioning of FOs as effective brokers in the provision of services that have an impact on livelihoods at the farm level. The uniqueness of the approach lies in its exclusively demand-driven nature and the support it provides to FO strategic plans. SFOAP's main phase is implemented by regional FOs (EAFF, PROPAC, ROPPA, SACAU, UMNAGRI and PAFO) and their national members in 49 countries.
- **The Medium-term Cooperation Programme (MTCP)** was launched in 2009 as a response to FO demands to promote the inclusion of smallholder farmers and their organizations in policy dialogues at various levels and to strengthen regional, subregional and national FO platforms in Asia. On the basis of the positive achievements of the first phase of the programme, national FOs and their regional networks proposed a second phase (2013-2017)²¹ to consolidate results and further develop the range of services offered to their members. The Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development and La Via Campesina are today implementing the programme, which supports more than 150 FOs, representing 20 million farmer members, from countries in South Asia, South-East Asia and the Pacific region.



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Viet Nam – Programme for Improving Market Participation of the Poor

IFAD's increased partnership with FOs through grants has also enabled the development and strengthening of key alliances with relevant stakeholders for the benefit of FOs and their members. In particular:

- The strengthening of [important partnerships and alliances with other donors](#), such as the European Union, the French Development Agency and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, has contributed to an increase in financial support for FOs and ultimately reinforced FOs worldwide through directly supported capacity-building
- The [strengthening of the technical partnership with AgriCord](#) has been instrumental in building the capacities of FOs at the national level, particularly through a joint programme²² supporting the participation of FOs in IFAD country programmes and projects, and improving the monitoring and evaluation of their involvement in them. AgriCord is currently implementing two grants channelled through IFAD, namely Farmers Fighting Poverty/AFRICA (FFP/AFRICA)²³ and Farmers Fighting Poverty/ASEAN (FFP/ASEAN).²⁴ FFP is highly complementary to SFOAP and MTCP since it uses a demand-driven approach for single initiatives and supports mainly local-level FOs, while SFOAP and MTCP have a strategic approach and concentrate efforts mainly on national and regional FOs.

Supporting FOs policy engagement

IFAD supports the engagement of FOs in policy platforms and the development of advocacy positions and policy standards that promote sustainable family farming, as illustrated by the following examples.

- [The REAF-MERCOSUR programme](#) has been promoting inclusive regional policy dialogue in southern cone common market countries for nearly 15 years. One of its main achievements is the creation of the REAF, a platform that includes high-level government and farmers' representatives who make significant contributions to the development of public policies in support of family farming. A new grant was developed during the period 2012-2013 to allow continued support for the inclusion of FOs in policy dialogue and the sharing of the REAF-MERCOSUR experience with other countries and regions
- [Support was given to EAFF in the development of the East African Community Cooperative Societies Bill](#). EAFF coordinated several sources of donor funding (including IFAD sources under SFOAP) during a long policy process leading to the development of regional legislation on cooperatives, which was approved by the Assembly of the Eastern African Community in January 2015.

²² Strengthening capacities of Farmers' Organizations in relation with IFAD country programmes project.

²³ The programme is supported by the European Union (EUR 11.9 million) and AgriCord (EUR 8,3 million) for a total of EUR 20.2 million.

²⁴ The programme has a budget of EUR 7.5 million financed by the EU (EUR 7 million) and by direct support to AgriCord members (EUR 0.5 million) from bilateral aid agencies.

Purpose of the toolkit

This toolkit aims at providing guidance on developing sustainable partnerships with FOs within IFAD projects that consider FOs as relevant partners and not simply as beneficiaries of IFAD-funded activities.

- **Target audience.** The toolkit is intended for country programme managers (CPMs), project design teams, peer reviewers, project managers and project management units (PMUs) who will be designing projects that support the development of FOs and their capacity to provide economic services for their members and to link poor smallholders up with market opportunities.
- **Type of FO.** The toolkit takes into consideration only: (i) existing FOs in selected intervention areas that include IFAD target groups and have a minimum level of structuring and capacity to grow; (ii) cooperatives, unions, federations and farmers' associations that represent local farmers' groups. It does not refer to local farmers' groups at the grass-roots level.
- **Focus of the toolkit.** Even though smallholders enter into market relationships with other stakeholders under a multitude of arrangements (e.g. spot or atomized markets, contractual farming, contracts with lead farmers), this toolkit refers to a specific marketing arrangement: through FOs belonging to smallholders who play a role in the value chain.
- **Approach and key issues.** The toolkit aims to support those needing to address the following issues when engaging in partnerships with FOs: (i) how to improve the identification of FOs in the geographic areas concerned; (ii) how to improve the understanding of the strengths and challenges faced by FOs in delivering services to link their smallholder members to market opportunities; and (iii) how to design the types of support needed to enhance sustainable development of FOs (e.g. type of activities, implementation arrangements, institutional set-ups). Given the complexity and diversity of both country contexts and FOs, the toolkit is not intended to be rigidly prescriptive. Rather, it provides an overview of the different approaches IFAD uses when building partnerships with FOs for the purposes of designing its strategies and programmes and implementing IFAD-supported projects.

This toolkit complements the following instruments developed by IFAD's Policy and Technical Advisory Division in terms of both focus and type of FOs covered:

- *How to analyse and develop the social capital of smallholder organizations.* This How To Do Note focuses on local and farmers' groups at the grass-roots level and provides a conceptual framework and practical suggestions and tools to help practitioners systematically collate and summarize information captured during design missions. In particular, it provides guidance on how to conduct an analysis of smallholder institutions and organizations and how to use the information collected to elaborate a plan for capacity development.
- *How to do commodity value chain development projects: Sustainable inclusion of smallholders in agricultural value chains.* This How To Do Note offers valuable guidelines to help practitioners analyse/design value chains in the context of country strategies and project/programme implementation.
- *How to do public-private-producer partnerships (4Ps) in agricultural value chains.* This How To Do Note provides project design teams with guidance on how to design a 4Ps component and how to support the implementation of 4Ps within IFAD-funded projects.
- *How to strengthen community-based commodity organizations: decision-making strategies and organizational design options.* This How To Do Note was developed to help practitioners and farmers choose the most appropriate type of organization and organizational arrangement for effective private sector engagement during the design and implementation of projects/programmes.

Structure of the toolkit

The toolkit consists of this **Teaser**, which provides an overview of IFAD's engagement with farmers' organizations for more effective smallholder development, and the following parts:

- **How To Do Note: Engaging with farmers' organizations for more effective smallholder development.** This includes three separate modules:
 - Module 1: **How and when to conduct a mapping and profiling of farmers' organizations**
 - Module 2: **How to support farmers' organizations in designing their business plans**
 - Module 3: **Support to farmers' organization business models**

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