The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) programme is filling gaps in rural development cooperation; strengthening the capacity of forest and farm producers and enabling them to engage in policy advocacy. There is however a scope to enhance sustainability of the value chains being developed by further upgrading the status and capacity of producer organizations, says the report of a recent evaluation by the FAO Office of Evaluation.

The mid-term evaluation, which was conducted between January and June 2016, used data from interviews with national and sub-national stakeholders in five countries (Gambia, Kenya, Guatemala, Myanmar and Vietnam) and a desk review of activities in the other five focal countries (Bolivia, Liberia, Nepal, Nicaragua and Zambia).

According to the report, FFF has made good progress on regional and global levels, with variations in performance at the country level. It has supported sub-regional initiatives to link local voices to global agendas on forest and farm issues, and at the country level, it has developed strong partnerships for implementation of unique and innovative actions.

Target forest and farm smallholders interviewed said that FFF is addressing issues that other programmes do not usually address, particularly the support to producer organizations for business and policy engagement.

For delivering support through the forest and farm producer organizations (FFPOs), stakeholders described the FFF model as a more practical and effective methodology than traditional development models. The model has thus received strong response in the 10 participating countries in a relatively short time, says the report.

In Guatemala, for example, the government credited FFF for supporting coordination of multi-stakeholder and cross-sector dialogue on forests and related agendas. In Gambia, it was commended for strengthening the experience gained through the National Forest Programme facility and for supporting community forests. And in Kenya for supporting the consolidation of agricultural and forestry services governance by the governments of Nakuru and Laikipia Counties.

Stakeholders interviewed said that the provision of funds directly to FFPOs is filling a gap in both donor and government assistance. FFPO representatives in Kenya and Gambia said it was the first time a development programme would directly fund their projects.
In Bolivia, stakeholders said the training of FFPOs in market analysis and development has boosted their capacity to engage in policy advocacy. With FFF support, the National Federation of Cocoa Producers and Collectors of Bolivia (COPRACAO) contributed to the validation and approval of the National Policy for Cocoa Production, which has motivated the government to allocate US$33 million to national cocoa production.

FFF has implicitly supported value chains upgrading through activities aimed at value addition, with interesting results reported in Bolivia, Gambia, Guatemala, Kenya, Vietnam and Nicaragua.

In Myanmar, opportunities exist for community forestry groups to integrate into specific value chains, but further FFF support is needed to ensure that this value chain integration takes place.

The report however notes that although FFF is a five-year (December 2012 to December 2017) programme, the first significant funding was received in August 2013, and only 25% of the total estimated funds had been secured by FAO as of June 2016. This shortfall is capable of limiting the achievements of the programme.

It notes that the inability to advance FFPOs to a higher status limits their capacity to engage, for example, with financial institutions for loans. It notes that although there have been positive experiences in the value chain upgrading of grassroots value-addition activities, FFF approach in those activities remains implicit and, consequently, fragmented. It further notes that political economy assessments were missing from the baseline assessments in focus countries. Such analysis, if conducted systematically, may help in understanding the key agents of change in the country for future implementation, the report says.

The report recommends that FFF should improve its value chain development approach by adding elements which focus on value addition, processing and linkage to various actors in the same chains. It recommends that FFF should enhance support to the development of women entrepreneurs in forest and farm-based value chains in order to ensure equal participation in value chains.

It further recommends greater capacity building support to FFPOs to help them acquire minimum level of organizational and business skills, as well as political and rights awareness, required to influence rural development policy agendas.

For further information on this evaluation, please contact:

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