



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

Reducing rural poverty through farmer-to-farmer exchange



GUATEMALA

A group of Latin American farmers exchanging experiences on agroforestry. ©Forest and Farm Facility

Currently, some **500 hundred million** farms worldwide provide over **80 percent** of the food consumed in the developing world. Farm producers are also the primary actors in rural transformation and sustainable development, constituting a large proportion of the rural private sector.

However, farmers, in particular smallholders and family farmers, are frequently marginalized from decision-making processes at national and local level. They often live in remote areas, depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and lack access to markets, services, technologies, information and economic opportunities. This hinders their economic potential, perpetrating low productivity, poverty and hunger.

Farmer-to-farmer exchanges have strong potential to improve the organizational and technical capacities of small producers, increasing their productivity and contributing to rural poverty reduction.

Farmer-to-farmer exchange is a concrete example of South-South Cooperation among FAO member countries, which put rural people back in the drivers seat. It helps countries and regions learn from each other through sharing experiences and field visits and provides an excellent opportunity for policy change in support of small farmers, as government representatives participate in the exchanges.

FAO supports farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange to help small producers fulfil their potential and accelerate progress towards a world free from poverty and hunger.

FARMER-TO-FARMER EXCHANGES WITHIN THE FOREST AND FARM FACILITY (FFF)

Farmer-to-farmer exchange is an important component of FAO's Forest and Farm Facility (FFF). This programme is part of FAO's efforts to empower rural people to access markets, technologies, information and services while achieving the sustainable management of natural resources.

Forest and farm producer organizations play a vital role in creating income and job opportunities in rural areas, where poverty is most concentrated and youth migration is rife. Improved access to markets and knowledge for forest and farm producers has a direct impact on rural poverty reduction.

Thanks to the FFF, forest and farm producers have strengthened their organizational and productive capacities, increasing their bargaining power and achieving better prices for their products. Through training, producer organizations have also acquired the skills needed to elaborate enterprise development plans and proposals for achieving small grants, thus gaining better access to markets.

Exchange visits have become the key to sharing knowledge, successful experience and good practices on agriculture and the sustainable management of natural resources among forest and farms producer organizations from different countries and regions involved in the programme.

Between 2014 and June 2016, FAO has supported 9 exchanges in-country and between countries through the FFF, involving more than 200 participants, including representatives from producer organizations, governments, national institutions and key stakeholders.

Exchanging experiences in agroforestry in Guatemala



...IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Agroforestry is one of the main sources of income for smallholders and family farms in Latin America and the Caribbean. Thanks to the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF), many of them organized themselves into groups, increased production and are now able to manage forests and farms more sustainably.

In April 2016, through the FFF, FAO organized an exchange of experiences among producer organizations from the region on successful examples of integration of small-scale producers, women, indigenous people and youth in forestry and agroforestry value chains.

The exchange included visits to industrial wood processing plants, coffee, cocoa and cardamom producer organizations and tea and crafts cooperatives belonging

to the Federation of Cooperatives of the Verapaces (FEDECOVERA, R.L).

With the support of FAO, participants discussed public policies and strategies to strengthen access to markets, and climate resilience capacities for producer organisations while contributing to more inclusive rural development. Thanks to this experience, participants also identified opportunities for producer organizations from different countries to collaborate and thus improve their knowledge and the way that they work.

Women producers from FEDECOVERA will support indigenous women from the MAYARING organization in Nicaragua. The aim is to strengthen the organizational capacities of indigenous women producers and enhance access to markets for their products. As part of these efforts, FAO will promote further exchange visits between the two countries on topics related to quality standards of production, registration of patents and commercialization of handcrafts.

"I am glad to have here in my community our Honduran brothers and to be able to share with them the steps we have taken. Five years ago, when we were just starting to get organized, we visited Honduras to see good examples. Now we have made progress and they come to learn from us. This is a real gage of progress".

Roberto Luc Cuc
Cooperative President Chilte, Guatemala

... IN ASIA
AND
THE PACIFIC

Viet Nam and Nepal: a mutually beneficial exchange



FAO's FFF has proven to be crucial for strengthening producer organizations and reducing rural poverty in Viet Nam and Nepal. This is why FAO organized a farmer-to-farmer exchange between the two countries in October 2015.

The aim was to enhance participants' knowledge of systems, technologies and in the management of forests and farms. Eighteen participants from Nepal, including government officials and producer organizations, met in Viet Nam with local cinnamon and timber producers

to learn from each other new ways for improving livelihoods through business-oriented forestry and agroforestry systems.

Thanks to the exchange visit, Nepalese farmers enhanced their understanding of integrated forest and farm management, cooperatives and forest-based enterprises, timber processing and marketing forest-based products. The group also met with representatives from the Viet Nam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST) to understand how national forest policies have contributed to sustainable management, conservation of forests and rural poverty reduction.

Based on this experience, the Nepalese acknowledged that economic specialization, particularly in flagship products, helps increase production and improve market access. Linking forest and farm activities to other sectors with government support is also crucial to improve the integration of smallholder farmers into the value chain and thus help to reduce rural poverty.

Once back in Nepal, participants shared the lessons they had learned and set up an action plan for improving forest and farm management.



VIET NAM

In Viet Nam, wood products and furniture help forest farmers improve their income.

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Kenya and Zambia share their experiences in charcoal and tree nursery value chains

Kenya has recently hosted representatives from Zambian producer organizations as part of the farmer-to-farmer exchange organized by FAO through the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF). Small farmers from Zambia met with local

producers and members of the Farm Forestry Smallholder Producer Association of Kenya to improve their capacities in the charcoal and tree nursery value chains and to learn how to up scale greening agriculture in Africa.

Thanks to this experience, charcoal and tree nursery producers from Zambia improved their organisational capacities and business skills. Creating charcoal

associations of smallholder producers was recognized to be beneficial for business and influencing policy dialogue. Next steps are for Zambian producers to register the National Forest commodity committee as a formal association and establish a Tree nursery association.

The Zambian policy framework in support of smallholder charcoal and tree nursery producers will also benefit from this exchange with Kenya. Participants identified the need for improving government revenue collection from charcoal through community participation as well as strengthening the forest extension services in charcoal and tree nursery value chains. In the next months, Zambia will start a multistakeholder policy dialogue to agree upon a national charcoal regulation to further improve the productivity of smallholders engaged in this sector.



KENYA

Zambian and Kenyan farmers sharing knowledge on tree nursery value chains. ©Forest and Farm Facility

THE WAY FORWARD

Sharing good practices and experiences through farmer-to-farmer exchanges has been crucial to improving organizational capacities, managing financial resources and giving small producers access to markets.

Farmer-to-farmer exchanges have given voice to poor people and small farmers in rural areas, who are often neglected by public policies at all levels. These experiences have served as a catalyst for developing proposal mechanisms and actions tailored to small farmers' needs and aimed at improving their livelihoods in order to reduce rural poverty.

The strength of this method lies in the fact that it is based on direct knowledge exchange among rural people from different countries involved in the same productive activities. While constraints to agriculture development can be culturally and geographically specific, many of the challenges that small farmers face are similar worldwide.

This is why FAO through the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) will continue to promote farmer-to-farmer exchanges as a way to empower small producers and reduce rural poverty.

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