



Forest and Farm Facility

Forest and farm producers and their organizations confronting the COVID-19 crises - heavily impacted but already providing solutions

"These are really challenging times. The situation in our communities worry me very much. As you know, many of our territories have absolutely no access to healthcare. Added to that, many young indigenous persons who were living in the cities are now migrating back to the communities due to COVID-19, not knowing if they are taking it with them into their families and communities. It is a surreal situation." (Feedback from indigenous partners, whose community lost 8 members last week in Belize Central America)

"We just felt that we need to do something and since access to vegetables is already felt, we thought that this allow us to use our network for the response." (Feedback from the Farm Forestry Smallholder Producers Association of Kenya, who is taking immediate measures to support food security for its members)

The power of working together

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are already being felt all over the world. Rural communities, indigenous peoples, forest and farm producers and their families face a unique set of growing uncertainties and concerns about how to respond to this challenge, which is felt through multiple current and potential disruptions to their lives and livelihoods. But it is equally clear that their forest and farm producer organizations (FFPOs) working in forest and farm landscapes are critical to building lasting, grounded solutions for resilience to the economic, social and climatic changes. FFPOs can offer services and information to their members enhancing their capacity to deal with the situation and to continue assisting them to keep up with their businesses and livelihood. In addition they provide solidarity and social support systems between their members, both women and men extending information and innovations to their large membership and networks. They can draw on traditional knowledge and experience and look at collective responses for recovery and rehabilitation. Understanding some of the challenges FFPOs face and gathering better information on emerging solutions can help FFPOs guide their members and support governments to respond quickly and extensively, even while movement, transportation and many of the basic systems are slowed down. FFPOs are key players in a recovery process. Working together we can all help build back systems that are more transformational!

1. Major impacts of COVID-19 on FFPOs

Short term demographic changes

Urban to rural migration is already occurring in many countries which puts more immediate stress on

resources and family livelihoods, and possibly increasing the risk of exposure to COVID 19. It also provides an opportunity to re-imagine how youth and other family members who have returned could look for new opportunities to stay on in productive roles.

Food security and supply chain interruptions

While FFPOs produce a diverse basket of products, they play a particularly crucial role in food supply chains and in fuelwood supply chains that enable people to cook food. With social distancing now applied in many countries, reduced mobility could lead to less access to traders and buyers and to temporary closures of farmers' markets. This may present a challenge to food security, as farmers are prevented from transporting and selling their products. Such restrictions would also affect the millions of families in Africa, Asia and Latin America that rely on charcoal every day for cooking their food.

Higher pressure on biodiversity

Without access to charcoal, many people in urban and peri-urban areas could be pushed into harvesting wood themselves, putting unprecedented pressures on the few forest reserves that remain close to urban areas. There could be pressure to clear more land for food production to ensure local self sufficiency and accommodate the needs of returning migrants.

Increased poverty and reduced well-being

In both rural and urban areas, the impact of lost income and shortages of food will be most severely felt by those already at risk of falling below the poverty line especially women, the landless, and daily wage workers, but also producers with very small holdings and those not linked to FFPOs or strong social and economic networks. On top of these challenges, many smallholder producers and rural communities are already highly vulnerable to climate and market related risks. Indigenous peoples face their own unique set of challenges while women groups and female members of FFPOs may bear a disproportionate share of added work and insecurity.

2. FFPOs have a vital role in the responses to COVID-19 to play

Lack of coordination between partners

Within this context, FFPOs and small scale enterprises play a vital and positive role in the economy as employers, suppliers and as buyers of products. Not to mention their role in linking people, goods and services between rural and urban areas. However, despite their importance, FFPOs and smallholder farmers are often overlooked by donors and policymakers. In current COVID-19 responses they are generally left out of coordination efforts. Despite the food crisis in 2008, the official development assistance (ODA) funding for the agricultural sector has remained at the same level and most of the farmers in Africa have no access to extension services. Also, the Maputo declaration on agriculture (2003) where the African governments pledge 10% of their budgetary expenditures to be directed to agriculture, has almost no follow-up and most countries are not at this level. This is also the case for that other global crisis: climate change, which requires similar kind of buffer mechanisms for resilience. According to an estimate in 2018 done by AgriCord based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development- Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) statistics, only 2 to 5 percent of total climate-related development aid funding (USD 36 billion) had trickled down to smallholder farmers.

FFPOs a vital partner

Being part of strong member organizations is already showing benefits as these FFPOs are already responding in many ways. Collective action to share information and innovations between different FFPOs will be important in addressing these challenges, as many grapple with similar issues. There is a strong call for coordination globally to translate knowledge into actions on the ground. In this regard, tiered FFPOs, with their established networks at local and national levels, have a vital role to play. They should be considered as vital partners in the creation of responses to COVID-19.

3. What could the Forest and Farm Facility do to support FFPOs and governments address the COVID-19 pandemic?

Support National FFPOs and governments to engage in response strategies

As most COVID-19 measures are taken by national governments, it is crucial that national level FFPOs are involved in policy and decision making with national governments. This will ensure that the new policies, and funds being allocating through stimulus packages channel resources and incentives go directly to FFPOs. These should be channeled not exclusively to the big business sector, but also to the FFPOs and small and medium scale enterprises that reach and are member-owned by local people reinforcing the local and global economy. They are suppliers in the food value chain and consumers in the local markets. All ongoing efforts to channel existing funds and programmes to FFPOs should be accelerated.

Support FFPOs to demonstrate, expand and replicate practical solutions

It is vital that FFPOs have access to on-going support to continue to develop their capacity to demonstrate alternative solutions to the closure of transport links for food and inputs, for preparing food stocks with local farmers organizations, and to be part of advocacy budget discussions mentioned above related to the COVID-19 response. This support needs to be provided directly to FFPOs and be guided by them. The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF), a partnership between FAO, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and AgriCord already has functional mechanisms providing that support – and is ideally placed to help coordinate such efforts given that it is hosted by FAO. Additional networks of AgriCord with its agri-agencies at regional, national and local levels, including funding mechanisms that can facilitate the establishment and implementations of rapid actions, further strengthens that mechanism. Larger regional and global federations of FFPOs, including indigenous peoples organizations, women's federations and other member organizations also provide vital capacity development support to national and member FFPOs and should be supported.

Strengthen knowledge, information, and communication

FFPOs play an essential role in communication and information at the local level. On the one hand in mediating economic and livelihood opportunities and on the other in adapting responses to the community context. These local FFPOs are in many places the first point of reference and support for individuals and families. Regarding COVID-19, they are already serving as primary communication channels about health, hygiene practices and so on. In the area of digital media and virtual communication the COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to support FFPOs in delivering information and services through their networks with new tools for e-commerce, finance and technical extension services. Building on traditional knowledge systems they can also spread information about important

inputs into health and well being that may not be circulating in the mainstream media. The FFF and FAO could play an important role in facilitating such partnerships between FFPOs, the private sector and national governments and in ensuring that such services become available free of charge. Linking this with other major initiatives like the United Nations Decade of Family Farming and existing knowledge sharing channels will increase impact.

Special focus on vulnerable socio-economic groups and gender

Women are particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis as they make up most of care workers (paid and unpaid). Additionally violence against women has risen alarmingly with “stay at home” orders in place and men returning from urban to rural households. Therefore, women groups and female members of FFPOs are crucial for targeted community response supporting those most affected economically by the crisis, and in channeling public health education messages to women. Increasing the financial support to these actions would give recognition and can support further scaling up. Additionally, continuous effort to enhance gender equality in FFPOs and at household and community level is crucial to lower the burden of women due to their traditional roles. In all activities, FAO and its partners need to ensure now more than ever the integration of gender equality as well as the full inclusion of youth and highly vulnerable groups.

Establish linkages with social protection programmes

FFPOs already usually provide a range of social protection services in terms of health and childcare. They could play an important role in strengthening the social protection programmes of the government at a time when resources are highly stretched to make sure that they reach people on the ground. FFPOs could ensure that these take into account vulnerabilities such as unpaid care by women and addressing the specific constraints for workers in the informal sector (of which many are women too), and people returning to rural communities because of economic downturns and reduced employment opportunities in urban areas.

Develop specific programmes for youth employment

Young people will be seriously affected from a global recession. Youth un-employment rates will increase. Most FFPOs already have active youth programmes and could develop specific programmes for youth employment in rural areas in the wake of COVID-19. Additionally, youth members of FFPOs have a big potential to be part of the solution. Young people all over the world are joining the global response against the COVID-19 pandemic in many ways, for example the Indigenous Youth Caucus. Young people are running awareness campaigns, handwashing campaigns, volunteering to support the elderly and vulnerable populations and are innovators that can serve in many ways.

Document best practices, and support implementation

FFF partners FAO, IUCN, IIED and AgriCord, could help FFPOs in documenting and sharing best practices and foster the implementation of some of the measures listed below.

- Collective actions addressing limitations showing how FFPOs are becoming more resilient.
- Measures which are actually delivering financial support to FFPOs to strengthen production.
- Participation of FFPOs in the national social protection programmes for food supply.
- E-commerce for FFPOs.
- Aggregating, logistics, distribution of basket of products from FFPOs.
- Engaging youth for the most attractive messaging and safe action in COVID-19 situation.

- Gender equality and women’s economic empowerment integrated throughout.
- Inclusion of youth.
- Special focus on rural poor and other vulnerable groups.

Enable practical discussions on innovative ways in which FFPOs can help “build back better”

Take this opportunity to encourage FFPOs to lead thinking that is out of the box that defined the pre-COVID 19 reality. Build solutions for recovery which are already different and reflect more sustainable, equitable and caring systems. Build on emerging solutions

- to construct
 - new institutional structures,
 - landscape scale value chains based on baskets of products that enhance climate, ecosystem and social resilience,
 - shorter value chains that reduce carbon emissions, and optimize diversity and more local processing and value addition;
- to support networks that prioritize well-being and strong relationships between people, their communities and their landscapes.

Regional outlooks on COVID – challenges for local economies

The FFF works with countries across sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. Core countries of the programme are Kenya, Ghana, Madagascar, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nepal, Viet Nam. In these countries estimates expect different trajectories of the epidemic.

In **sub-Saharan Africa** a slowdown in overall economic growth is already being felt. Many businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, are under significant cost pressure and face potential closure. This in turn is likely to lead to widespread job losses. At the same time, the pandemic will impact productivity across many sectors. Closures of schools and universities could create longer-term human capital issues for African economies—and could disproportionately affect girls, many of whom may not return to school. Not least, the crisis is likely to reduce household expenditure and consumption significantly. It is estimated that Africa’s gross domestic product growth would be cut between 0.4 percent and 8 percent in 2020, depending on the evolution of the epidemic.

In **Latin America** the epidemic is a new potential source of volatility and a threat to the macroeconomic stability of the region. This is likely to be translated in Latin America and the Caribbean through shocks in trade, commodity prices and foreign direct investment.

Asia faces the prospect of a global financial shock and recession. The COVID-19 shock will have a serious impact on poverty. Under the baseline growth scenario, nearly 24 million fewer people will escape poverty across the region in 2020 than would have in the absence of the pandemic¹. If the economic situation were to deteriorate further, and the lower-case scenario prevails, then poverty is estimated to increase by about 11 million people in Asia.

¹ World Bank, April 2020