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*Editor's note:* Two reports, *Effective Forest and Farm Producer Organizations* and *Democratizing forest business: a compendium of successful locally controlled forest business models*, are available with this statement, as well as interviews with small forest business owners and Jeffrey Campbell, manager of the FAO Forest and Farm Facility.

**PLEASE HOLD FOR EMBARGO UNTIL 0001 GMT ON MONDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2015**

## **Statement from the Forest and Farm Facility of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

- To slow deforestation, climate change and the flood of migrants from rural forested areas, and to contribute to food security, governments and climate finance should prioritize locally controlled forest enterprises to employ rural people and protect forests.
- New research finds locally controlled forest enterprises can outcompete large-scale forestry companies in benefits to locals and forest protection.

**DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA** (7 September 2015)—Deforestation, the loss of land and natural resource rights, and conflict fueled the displacement of some 59 million people in 2014. One-third of the world's internally displaced people—people uprooted in their own countries—are in Africa. Many are leaving rural areas for cities. Meanwhile, forested areas are being degraded for want of clear property rights, or are being grabbed and converted into vast monocultures of oil palm and other plantations. This causes a hollowing out of rural economies, while also placing unbearable pressures on urban areas that have little to offer by way of jobs or decent housing.

As the World Forestry Congress convenes in Durban, South Africa, we call for urgent action to support “forest and farm producers” who can stem the losses of our forests—and the resulting losses of rural sources of income and many of the world's most important remaining carbon sinks.

Forest and farm producers—family farmers, communities and Indigenous Peoples—living in and around forests together comprise the largest forestry private sector in terms of the number of producers and the aggregate income they provide. They are the wood cutters, furniture makers, fuel wood traders and charcoal producers, family farmers growing fruit and nut trees, honey collectors, basket makers and more. Women play a major role in this hidden economy.

And they are rarely included—or even considered—by companies negotiating large-scale land and forest deals. Nor are they considered in development plans by many governments or international partners.

With the right policies, legislation, investments and services, producer groups could ensure the sustainable management of natural resources and promote the livelihoods and well-being of more than a billion people, many of whom today are among the poorest of the poor.

We have already witnessed the impacts when local producers are ignored in development plans. According to the Land Matrix, approximately 130 million hectares of land (or more than 52.7 million football fields) have been acquired globally in settled and impending land deals over the last 15 years. Such acquisitions nearly always displace local people who

often lack secure rights to the land and natural resources that their enterprises have used sustainably for years. These land deals move people off the land, and machines on to it.

Unlike outside corporations with multiple global holdings maximizing profits for distant owners, local forest producers are highly motivated to conserve the natural resource base upon which their survival depends. Through protecting, harvesting and marketing forest products, and integrating forest and farm management, they strengthen the rural economy, increase job opportunities, and slow the flow of youth to cities, maintaining important elements of cultural vitality and well-being.

As forest producers, they are increasingly organizing into producer groups that conserve and generate income from the resources on which they rely. The potential for the expansion of organized and effective producer groups is huge, as they represent the interests of 1.3 billion people—that's more than one in every seven people on the planet. They live directly in or adjacent to forests, depend on its resources and surrounding land for food, fuel, medicine, building materials and livelihoods.

We cannot gain the climate change benefits of our forests without local producers. The loss of forests contributes upwards of 15 percent of global carbon emissions. If we are to end global deforestation, achieve the goals of sustainable development, and ultimately re-stabilize the global climate, forest and farm producers must be recognized and supported to steward the precious resources upon which the world depends.

In advance of the [World Forestry Congress 2015 in Durban](#), South Africa, the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is convening more than 120 indigenous people and representatives of farm and forest producer groups and local communities from around the world. They will agree on a global declaration for the World Forestry Congress.

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The **Forest and Farm Facility (FFF)** is a partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is currently funded by Sweden, Finland, Germany, the USA and AgriCord, through its Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme. We work together with, and provide resources directly to, forest and farm producer organizations and governments in 10 countries.