Deriving landscape benefits through forest and farm producer organisations

When smallholder farmers and local communities organise, they can benefit by restoring the functionality of deforested and degraded landscapes, enhance food production, increase the availability of forest products and access to markets, and effect change.

Organising to overcome barriers

Forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) can include many different groups, such as indigenous peoples and local community organisations; tree-grower and agroforestry associations; forest owner associations; producer cooperatives and community forest enterprises; and their umbrella groups and federations.
These organisations help smallholders and local communities by:

- facilitating access to markets and capital;
- offering capacity building to members;
- providing a platform for improved tenure and access rights to motivate forestry implementation; and
- promoting the exchange of best practices among members.

When small producers organise themselves in cooperatives or associations they can aggregate production and raise their profile among buyers while reaching economies of scale. Strong FFPOs can also train members on business development and production techniques, and help their constituency understand the markets tied to planting specific trees for timber or non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

IUCN has been working to support FFPOs since 2012 as part of the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) in partnership with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and AgriCord.

The FFF supports smallholder, women, community and indigenous peoples’ producer organisations at local, national, regional and international levels. Specifically, FFF strengthens capacities of FFPOs for business, livelihoods and policy engagement; catalyses multi-sectoral stakeholder policy platforms with governments at local and national levels; and links local voices to the global arena through genuine participatory processes, and communication and information sharing.

**Improving access to market information in Gambia**

In Gambia, the FFF is supporting the National Farmers’ Platform, a system where market information is collected from remote rural areas and cross-checked with market data from across the regions. Information is then fed back to producers via text message, radio, telephone calls and meetings. This system is helping farmers become more aware of market trends and to be better organised in their negotiation with buyers.
Helping farmers in Viet Nam develop business plans

Following an exchange visit between FFPOs, organised by the FFF and facilitated by IUCN and the Viet Nam National Farmers’ Union (VNFU), five inspired farmers established a star anise producers’ association. After being trained on market analysis and development, NTFP processing techniques, and organisational development, the members of the Thach Ngoa star anise group gradually improved awareness on the benefits of working together to start a business.

As a result, the star anise oil processing facility now produces quality oil, and the farmers earn more revenue compared to their previous practice of selling just fresh star anise fruits. Many similar stories of VNFU members (of which there are 10 million) have incentivised the planting of acacia, cinnamon and other timber and NTFP species.

Influencing policy for improved tenure rights and market regulations

Securing rights and access to trees or forests on private or communal land is difficult for millions of smallholders and forest communities. However, when they organise in groups, smallholders benefit from a higher collective profile and a stronger voice in local, national and international policy processes.

FFPOs can assist smallholders in lobbying policy makers to improve tenure arrangements and recognise the rights of people to access trees and make their own decisions. Similar influence can also be leveraged to shape favourable market regulations for FFPOs. This organised approach can have a measurable impact on stemming deforestation, motivating forest landscape restoration (FLR) and ensuring the benefits of healthy forests both locally and globally.
Overcoming tenure and market policy barriers in Nepal

Since the mid-1990s, IUCN partner the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) has been lobbying for community forest user rights. Today, almost one-third (1.7 million hectares) of the country’s total forest area is under the control of local communities. Work is still needed, however, to improve the enabling environment for local forest and farm businesses so that rights can be turned into economic opportunities.

In 2016, FECOFUN and the Federation of Nepali Cottage and Small Industries organised district-level consultations to understand the main concerns of local producer organisations. A major issue that emerged from this process was the complicated regulations associated with the transportation of forest products. Through FFF dialogues, a national policy advocacy process emerged, resulting in a review of provisions in forestry sector guidelines such as provision for the free transport of 23 timber species and 15 NTFPs.
Promoting the exchange of ideas

Exchange visits play a significant role in strengthening the capacity of smallholders and in the sharing of new ideas and techniques. Knowledge uptake and replication from visits between these FFPOs is often successful as the sharing of practical examples and discussions with their peers is more profound than simply reading a manual or accessing a website. Exchange visits also allow participants from different countries to compare policy and institutional arrangements implemented by their respective national governments to create enabling environments for forestry-based enterprises.

Grassroots FFPO success in Thailand encourages restoration abroad

On behalf of the FFF, IUCN organised an exchange visit of FFPOs from Nepal, Viet Nam and Myanmar to the Khao Chakhan Community Agroforestry Enterprise (KCAE) in the Sa Kaeo Province of Thailand. The visit proved invaluable for spreading successful and sustainable community forestry enterprise techniques from Thailand to the participating country groups through peer-to-peer learning. The FFPOs from the countries involved translated aspects of the Thai model to their own scenarios, encouraging forestry and promoting FLR action.

The KCAE model

Restoring farmland
The innovative KCAE began as a grassroots concept with ten farmers organising to rent deforested agricultural land, and quickly blossomed into a community forestry enterprise with 70 members. They invested in seedlings and started a nursery, from which they were able to reforest a portion of the land with a diverse array of trees. First they planted fast-growing species to improve soil quality and water retention. Then they moved on to trees with good market value such as teak and rosewood — followed by fruit trees for food production.

Products of restoration
After two years of communal work, the sharing of expertise and the pooling of resources, they began to see returns on their investment in the form of charcoal production from thinned branches, wood vinegar (organic pest control) rendered as a charcoal by-product — and organic compost processed into fertiliser from fallen leaves and other biological material.

The group of farmers became so prolific that their capacity outweighed their own needs, so they applied and received legal authority to sell their products. With the profits they started a wood milling and simple furniture business. Mostly sold and consumed locally, the forest products were sustainable and increasingly popular — and the word spread. Other community members invested in the KCAE and contributed labour as well as money to the enterprise. A successful community forest enterprise model followed.
Unlocking restoration potential through FFPOs

Restoration opportunities often occur on or near agricultural lands, so rural communities have a direct impact on local restoration potential through the associated mosaics of sustainable land uses that they choose. However, as smallholder farmers and local communities engage in FLR, they are often confronted with common barriers to participation, including:

- inadequate business development and market access;
- insecure land tenure and rights;
- weak smallholder organisations or lack of freedom of association; and
- reduced access to technical knowledge crucial to restoration.

Since FFPOs play a central role in unlocking these opportunities, involving FFPOs in restoration initiatives helps smallholders connect their needs with the benefits of FLR and foster a positive environment for on-ground restoration. IUCN and partners are now helping to scale-up FFPOs' awareness of and capacity in FLR, giving millions of people across the world the incentive to restore land and the enabling conditions to do so.
Further reading


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