

EUROPEAN UNION CONFERENCE ON FAMILY FARMING IFSN POLICY BRIEF

Background information

2014: UN International Year for Family Farming (IYFF)

2014 was designated the International Year of Family Farming at the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Led by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), it has the objective of **raising the profile of family farming** by focusing world attention on its role in alleviating hunger and poverty, providing food security and improving livelihoods, while protecting the environment and biodiversity.

Brussels conference, 29 November 2013

The conference "Family farming: A dialogue towards more sustainable and resilient farming in Europe and the world", organised by the European Commission's Agriculture and Rural Development Directorate-General, will draw attention to the important role of family farming, the key challenges and priorities for the future, as well as addressing the best means of supporting family farms. The outcome of the conference will contribute to the FAO European Regional Conference scheduled in 2014 in Bucharest (Romania) as well as other events related to family farming that will be organized in many EU Member States in the course of 2014.

International Food Security Network

IFSN is a grassroots partnership towards democratizing global food security dialogues. The network promotes south-south dialogues and knowledge dissemination and aims at influencing policies and programmes for increased food security at national, regional and international level. IFSN will involve all the membership in the International year of Family Farming to contribute to the discussion around what are the key challenges and priorities for the future, as well as the best means of supporting family farms. The contribution to this conference will draw from an IFSN publication in favor of agroecology as the most viable solution to improve food and nutrition security, reduce rural poverty, build resilience, mitigate climate change and empower small-scale producers. The case studies provided in the report illustrate how through agroecology, poorest households can develop new, affordable, dynamic, low-carbon and locally-adaptable models of agriculture development to meet the multiple challenges ahead.

EC Conference Programme – highlights from the FED UP report we can use to input into the parallel workshops

Workshop 1 - best practices in family farming

In the European Union, the concept of family farming covers various elements. From a sociological perspective, family farming is associated with family values, such as solidarity, continuity and commitment; in economic terms, family farming is identified with specific entrepreneurial skills, business ownership and management, choice and risk behaviour, resilience and individual achievement. Family farming is often more than a professional occupation because it reflects a lifestyle based on beliefs and traditions about living and work.

IFSN doesn't use the term family farming, but often uses the terms "small food producers", "peasant agriculture", "households". It is important to underline what's behind the concept of family farming, which in our view entails households as productive units, farmers as right holders, with access and secure control over their resource base (land, water, seeds), supporting conservation and development of agricultural biodiversity including through agro-ecological approaches, with use of appropriate, locally-adaptable and affordable technologies, traditional knowledge, and access to credit and markets that are remunerative for smallholders and rural economies.

Some benefits from agroecology practiced by households are the following:

1. Improvement in food and nutrition security: 12,500 farm households in drought-prone Cheha in Ethiopia benefited from ecological agriculture on 5,000 hectares of land by introducing new varieties of vegetables and fruit and forest trees, organic manure for soil fertility, natural pest controls and affordable veterinary services. This resulted in a 60% increase in crop yields and a 70% improvement of overall nutrition levels. Other surveys show more diverse sources of food led to increased nutritional security for children and all members of the farmer household. Higher yields led to greater access to food throughout the year and more diverse sources of food led to increased nutritional security for children and all members of the farmer household
2. Increase in household income: organic and ecological agriculture had a positive impact on reducing poverty, with smallholders saving money through less fertilizer and pesticide use, extra income from selling surpluses, and adding value through processing
3. Increase in education, skills and health: all farmers gained increased knowledge of ecological methods, health benefits from more nutritious food, and greater resilience to external threats such as droughts, floods and landslides
4. Benefits to communities: the formation of farmers' groups and co-operatives lowered costs and increased knowledge and trust amongst farmers
5. Infrastructure improvement: reported improvements to physical infrastructure (e.g.transport and communications) and greater access to markets

Workshop 2 - Access to new technologies and research

Cambodia - Multi-purpose Farm through Farmer Association (MPF-FA)

Around 65% of the Cambodian population (or 9 million people) depends mainly on rice farming for their livelihoods, however, many have been unable to produce enough rice to meet their families' year-round consumption needs.

Relying largely on rain-fed agriculture, and with average rice farm landholdings of only 1.3 hectares and national average yields of 2.9 tonnes of rice per hectare in 2009-10, it is not entirely surprising that under-nutrition levels are 32% across the country and that Cambodia was ranked 139th – out of 187 – on the UNDP's Human Development Index in 2011.

To increase their productivity, some farmers were encouraged to use high-input chemical fertilizers and pesticides which have proven to be expensive and harmful for people's health, soil quality and the entire agro-ecosystem.

To address these problems the Centre d'Etude et de Developement Agricole Cambodian (CEDAC) introduced the 'Multi-Purpose Farm through Farmer Association' (MPF-FA) initiative in 2003.

The MPF-FA was designed to promote an integrated and low-external input small-scale farming system – including the production of rice, fruit trees, multi-purpose trees, perennial crops, seasonal crops, vegetables, farm animals, and fish.

Based on building on local knowledge, seeds and varieties, and with an emphasis on the initiative being farmer led and farmer-propagated, the MPF-FA is a system for improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, with field sizes ranging from 0.2 to 0.6 hectares, and who cannot produce enough to feed their families.

Now there are approximately 50,000 successful MPF-FA smallholder farmers across Cambodia under the direct support of CEDAC and the spin-off Farmer and Nature Network (FNN) and particular elements of the approach – such as the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) – were officially endorsed by the Cambodian government in 2005 and included in the national strategy for agricultural development in 2006.

Based on improving the knowledge and skills of farmers in managing plants, water, soils and nutrients, the MPFFA has several components:

- **Ponds and canals** play a multiple role in storing water as a reservoir for growing crops, protecting rice plants during short drought periods, growing vegetables and farming fish.
- **Filling the upper land** with the displaced soil from digging ponds and canals is important for integrating the production of crops and animals. In this filled land, farmers can plant fruit trees, perennial plants and vegetables, while also raising pigs, chickens and ducks.
- **Building bund dikes** soil from digging ponds and canals is used to protect communities from floods, demark plots of land and protect rice paddies and fish, and to prevent soil erosion
- **System of Rice Intensification (SRI)** is an ecological approach revolutionising rice production in Cambodia and beyond. Farmers produce rice on slightly smaller plots in an affordable way by using the best farmerselected local seeds, organic composts, bio-slurry, natural pesticides and more regular hand-weeding.
- Seedlings are transplanted when young, and the rice clumps are planted shallow (only 1-2 cm) and are more widely spaced to permit more growth. Soils are kept moist rather than saturated.
- A recent survey by CEDAC of 107 farmers in Takeo and Kampong Speu shows rice yields increased by 61% under SRI, the amount of costly rice seeds they used reduced by 53%, while the use of expensive chemical fertilisers dropped by 72%. Other research over the last decade shows an increase in rice yields of 30- 150%, and increases in farm profits of 300%.
- **Farmer Associations and Farmer to Farmer exchanges** increasing the strength of smallholder farmer's associations through village-based organizations or self help groups has allowed smallholders to share and exchange cropping techniques, knowledge, skills, labor and market information.

Many local networks have set up savings and loans groups to circumvent ruinous money lending, and CEDAC has supported and trained a 100-strong cadre of key SRI farmers and farmer-promoters to coach, mentor or demonstrate methods to other farmers or stakeholders, such as high-ranking government officials. Farmer

to Farmer Exchanges have already trained a further 500 lead farmers across 10 provinces across Cambodia.

Smallholder Ros Mao, from Chompol village in Tramkok, adopted MPF-FA approaches in 2003 on his 0.48 hectare plot of land, and he has gone from struggling to feed his five-member family to becoming a demonstration farmer producing a steady marketable oversupply of a range of food, including rice, chickens, pigs, frogs and fish, plus cucumber, watermelon and pumpkins.

Workshop 3 - Organization models to strengthen family farms

Pakistan, Allai Valley, agroecology applied to rehabilitate Allai Valley

An ecological and organic agriculture-focused initiative to rehabilitate the remote and rugged earthquake-hit Allai Valley near the Karakorum Highway in the Pakistani Himalayas has transformed the environment, food security, livelihoods and social relations of 172,000 poor inhabitants of this mountain valley since 2007.

The highly-mountainous Allai Valley in Battagram in northern Pakistan was devastated by a powerful earthquake in 2005, and much of the destruction was exacerbated by environmental degradation – such as soil erosion and deforestation caused by illegal logging – which led to widespread and lethal landslides during the earthquake.

Against a backdrop of extremely high rates of poverty, deprivation and food insecurity, and traditionally governed along feudal lines and by powerful clerics and under an especially strict version of Sunni Islam (many women were secluded through purdah and not allowed to visit relatives, for example), the Partnership for Recovery and Development of Allai (PRDA) worked through the Sungi Development Foundation to set up a village-based movement to help repair and reforest the valley and to diversify livelihoods and food security options through an integrated range of low-cost ecological-based agricultural systems and approaches.

Working through a new network of 437 both male and female-governed village committees, thousands of men and significantly women smallholders improved their ecological and organic farming skills and knowledge through on-farm demonstration plots and thousands of ecological farming skills training sessions and farmer-tofarmer knowledge visits and exchanges.

Moving away from simply mono-cropping rice and wheat and transporting key produce and vegetables into the Allai Valley, the villagers set up 35 women-managed local-variety seed banks and learnt to use cow-dung and yeast-based bio-fertilisers and local wood-ash, tobacco and chilli-based bio-pesticides to diversify into growing year-round organic vegetables in home gardens and for markets to generate income (such as broccoli, spinach, turnip, potatoes, tomatoes, okra, French beans and peas).

They also revived traditional and pesticide-free wild honeybee keeping, established fruit orchards, agro-forestry, poultry-rearing and peasantries, introduced Mott grass as fodder, replanted over a million native and soil binding trees, tidied up 10 food bazaar markets, set up the fair trade-based Sungi Organics private enterprise and moved into organically-certified commercial horticulture and floriculture (such as brinjal, walnuts, garlic and gladiolus) and coaxed others out of illegal logging and into growing high-value crops, and reduced the previously endemic use of cutting down local torchwood for lighting and firewood by establishing 18 micro hydro-electric generators to supply electricity after dark. The initiative has had a remarkable impact. Most significantly, the emergence of thousands of poor and secluded women into the governance structures and participatory development of the Allai Valley has been radically transformative for social and cultural relations. Farm profits and productivity, food security, nutrition, health and education

outcomes, employment opportunities, livelihoods, the environment and soil health have all improved considerably, according to recent assessments of the PRDA. Vegetable cultivation has expanded by 1,000 acres in the valley, 80% of households now cultivate their own vegetables, and maize and rice yields have increased by 15-20% under improved organic methods, according to the Sungi Development Foundation.

Vietnam – peasant farming as alternative to large scale capital investment and industrialized agriculture

- 1) In Vietnam, present trends in agriculture are tilted towards large scale ("large area fields") capital intensive farming to the detriment of other systems of agricultural production (e.g. peasant farming, farm workers, pastoralists, animal husbandry, fisheries,...). Lack of recognition of the plurality of agricultural systems reflects uneven development across the country. In total disregard of the reality, the trends are impacted by attempts of introduction of the global homogenization of all agricultural and livelihood activities, arbitrated by the multi-national corporations, by which imperceptibly, these trends are seeking to make agriculture subservient to their profit motive. Especially, it leads to a progressive destruction of self-sufficiency within agrarian communities and progressively annulling diversity of indigenous appropriate seeds and gene structures. The communities of a major population (80% of Vietnamese are linking to agricultural activities) have been rendered increasingly vulnerable to both internal and exogenous shocks.
- 2) The models of agricultural liberalization, privatization of land and export-led growth promoted over the past 30 years and other champions of free market policies have led to the disastrous dismantling of supply management systems and other state supports to smallholder farmers¹, widespread agrarian distress, further marginalization of rural women, and import dependence has put both producers and consumers facing global price shocks. The model mercenaries, totally ignores the irreparable harm that inappropriate technologies, indiscriminate liberalization and rapid mechanization are occasioning to livelihoods, social security systems, local economies and environment.
- 3) The investment in agriculture has been desperately low and insufficient, decreased steadily and to reach its lowest point for the presence (e.g. it was 12% of GDP in 1986 and 7% of GDP for the presence).

Household Farming-based sustainable agriculture can ensure self-reliance in the development of agriculture and the achievement of irreversible food sovereignty.

By the way, we envisage agricultural development that aims to achieve food sovereignty as its starting reference point the right holders. In order to be sustainable agricultural practices must seek to strengthen social structures and farmers' identity as political, social and economic actors while also contributing to women's struggle for rights and economic and social empowerment. It must not merely view the farmer as a means to an end.

Sustainable agriculture must embrace technologies that are eco-friendly and appropriate to geo-climatic conditions. The centre-piece of sustainable agriculture is the access,

¹ 'Farmer', 'smallholder farmer', 'small producer' are used as interchangeable shorthand for the broad class of peasant and subsistence producers that also includes fisherfolk, pastoralists, forest dwellers, landless labourers. etc.

control and ownership of productive resources by the people, as well as democratic control of decision-making regarding agriculture, trade and rural development. In particular, the ownership and control of these processes and factors by women who constitute the majority primary producers.

Bangladesh - Women gain from agro-ecology

Thousands of poor men and marginalized women have benefited considerably under a grass-roots scheme to tackle poverty and hunger through ecological agriculture in Bangladesh.

The Food Security for Sustainable Household Livelihoods project (FoSHoL) targeted 21,656 resource-poor and marginal farm households over five years to mid 2009 in six poor and remote districts of Bangladesh.

Participant households were organized into 813 village-based Sustainable Livelihood groups, which received training and support to transform into village-based farmers' organisations. Each group comprised 20-30 participating households, 60% of which were represented by women.

The self-organized village-level FoSHoL groups engaged in skills training and carried out a range of integrated activities and ecological farming approaches to help boost production, raise incomes, lower costs, improve soils, increase climate resilience and disaster-preparedness, and gain better access to local markets.

Poor women in particular increased their mobility, earnings and access to employment, and their household and wider social self-confidence improved markedly. "We have found the courage to come out of our houses," was one female participant's typical response to how FoSHoL had improved their lives, and "now we can come forward and speak in front of men. We can even speak to officials and strangers," was another.

Using participatory methods, working with organisations such as the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), and adopting, experimenting and testing ecological practices in their own fields, the groups: Produced and marketed high-quality rice (facilitated through a new network of 98 community-based rice seed traders/entrepreneurs and through a seed processing centre run by the Central Farmer Alliance);

Improved access to environmentally-friendly farming techniques and inputs – such as using home-made organic fertilisers and pesticides and integrated crop and integrated pest-management (ICM and IPM) systems (such as mixed cultivation, plant-based insecticides, relay and intercropping, line sowing and improved seed bed preparation);

Diversified livelihoods by increasing access to property resources in their villages, such as fishponds, tree nurseries and mini fruit orchards;

Grew, processed and marketed higher-value vegetables (such as sweet gourd, brinjal, taro, cucumber and red amaranth) on homestead gardens or open fields, and on collective land such as dikes, roadsides and embankments;

Established rice-fish culture and communal or individual pond fish culture (with fish such as silver carp, ruhi, katla and mrigel);

Established homestead and backyard vegetable gardening to improve household nutrition and tackle intrahousehold food intake inequality;

Set up women-only village-level rice grain banks (known as 'the fistful of rice', because women would deposit a 250g fistful of rice at its weekly meetings) to access seed as an additional safety net during lean periods;

Set up village-level savings and credit groups, FoSHoL Bazaar farmers' markets, and bio-diversity centres, to preserve and distribute valuable species and genetic resources such as turmeric, ginger, neem and aloe vera;

Enhanced skills for homestead poultry and livestock rearing (such as chickens, ducks, goats, sheep and pigs), and set up a network of 170 community livestock vaccinators (60% of whom were women);

Built organisation capacity, by promoting skills in effective communication, negotiation and mobilisation to better access to services, government entitlements, information and resources from public and private bodies.

As a result of these ecological improvements and better collective management, rice production rose 5-10%, vegetable and fruit production improved by 25-40%, poultry and livestock production improved by 30-40%, fish production by 20-30%, and average net returns grew by 20-30% because of higher value addition and from cost savings from spending much less on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides.

Overall, food and nutritional intake at the household level improved (with increased fish, eggs, fruit and vegetables available throughout the year), income and earnings increased for poor families through trading and commercialising agricultural produce, and seasonal food scarcity declined considerably, as did skipping meals in its entirety for FoSHoL participants.

Uzzala Rani and her family, from Apuar Khatta village, were used to going hungry before joining FoSHoL, often only eating one meal a day and having to beg for rice. "My poultry and cultivation efforts have added to my family income – so now my husband values my opinion, which is a big change. My family has begun to eat more and we do not face hunger now as we produce our own food."

Recommendation:

The European Union can play a critical role in supporting family farming, as major donor and big player in the global scenario. In order to ensure an increase in the capabilities and assets of the right holders as mentioned above (household income, food self-sufficiency and economic independence..), communities must have control over resources such as land, water, seed, soil, forests and etc. Within communal forms of ownership and decision-making, women must have the same rights and status as men. Beyond the control of productive assets communities should have control over markets or a significant influence over how they are regulated. Farmers' capacity should be built to ensure that they have political understanding of negative impacts of national and international policies and they are mobilized and organized to influence the same.

Through its development cooperation programmes and influence in framing international policies, the EU should:

1. Support and strengthen small-scale farmers', peasants' and producer groups and cooperatives to
2. enable them to further advocate for and scale-up agro-ecology and ecological approaches
3. support other Governments to make reference and incorporate agro-ecology and ecological agriculture into comprehensive national strategies for the realisation of the right to food and ensure they are devised through the participation of small-scale producers and civil society stakeholders and that they prioritize the needs of women and men small-scale producers.



4. Increase and re-orientate public spending in agriculture towards agro-ecology and ecological agriculture and towards the provision of public goods, such as small-scale focused extension services, agricultural research and rural infrastructure
5. support participatory research and plant breeding that combines indigenous and traditional knowledge with science and modern technology. Include schemes designed specifically for women and support its dissemination through existing farmers' organizations, movements and networks. Promote agricultural knowledge systems and protect and promote biodiversity through enhancement and protection of traditional genetic heritage and seed varieties
6. Support the phasing out of input subsidy schemes for agro-chemicals (fertilizers and pesticides) in favor of subsidies to promote ecological agriculture
7. Increase the volume of aid to agriculture and ensure that it is used to support small scale farming with women's rights.
8. Abolish policy conditionality that compromises national sustainable agriculture as well self-sufficiency and food sovereignty.
9. Promote cooperatives as a model of growth. Reverse the growing concentration of market power in the top and intermediate levels of the value chain, both through effective regulation of agribusiness and market intermediaries; as well as through support to cooperatives, small scale agro- processing by the smallholder farmers, fisherfolk, forest-dwellers etc; and other strategies to increase the market power and value addition of small producers.
10. to protect and respect the legitimate tenure rights by households and prevent business from any human rights abuses by supporting redistributive land reforms in favour of women and other marginalized groups (small holder farmers, fisher folks, landless, off farm rural communities,...) as a part of agrarian reform. To ensure that any development programme, EU policy or trade agreement comply with the standards set in the Voluntary guidelines on responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests for the respect of the legitimate tenure rights of people.
11. Following the recommendations of the Committee of World Food security, recognize that smallholders are the primary investors in agriculture and that public policies and funding should support primarily their own investment and efforts in building local food systems.