

15-16 February 2010

The Farmers' Forum

in conjunction with the Thirty-Third Session of IFAD's Governing Council



How to help farmers' organizations provide better services to their members?

Side Event of The Farmers' Forum

Thursday, 18 February 2010 - 14.30-17.00

Oval room

Background

The need to support farmers' organizations (FOs) is no longer in question. FOs are key contributors to achieving the goals of improving the livelihoods of poor rural people, reducing poverty and attaining food security. Through the services they offer their members, they can provide invaluable assistance in improving small producers' production and incomes. Evidence demonstrates their potential to link smallholders to markets; accelerate the adoption of technologies and inputs; encourage the sustainable management of land, water and other natural resources; and articulate and aggregate the voices of smallholder producers in policy-making and implementation processes from national to global levels.

The review of IFAD-FO partnerships for the biennium 2008-2009 illustrates that FO involvement in design and implementation generates better and clearer country strategies, improves understanding of rural poverty and facilitates the identification of IFAD's target groups. Their involvement ensures a stronger focus on small and poorer farmers. It also gives access to a wealth of local and indigenous knowledge and experience, which enhances project relevance. And it contributes to increased project sustainability by developing a strong sense of ownership by FOs. Taken together, the involvement of FOs has a positive impact in terms of project outcomes, i.e. on poverty reduction and food security.

To deliver adequate services to their members, FOs require a wide range of support to improve their internal human and financial capacities, and to develop their institutional organization. Clearly, these needs will vary according to their level of activities (from local to global) and the type of services they provide to their members (technical, economic, social, etc.). FOs' needs are also a function of their maturity and level of development. More and more FOs have strengthened their internal capacities and are increasingly able to define and plan for their priorities. Some of them have even created development agencies that are providing services to their members and other FOs.

Even when FOs have strong internal capacities, they cannot provide all the services that their members need. Moreover, it is sometimes more efficient for them to deliver services that come from outside their organization. Therefore FOs have to rely to some extent on external service providers belonging to the public or the private sphere, including public advisory and research institutions, non-governmental organizations, private-sector enterprises, financial services and input suppliers.

Another important challenge that FOs face is their dependence on, and the risks associated with, external financial support. As such support is generally highly variable (for example, according to project cycles), it does not facilitate service delivery in a sustainable way. External support is also often very demanding in terms of reporting and hence there is the risk that FOs become more accountable to their donors than to their members. External support can also discourage FOs from making efforts to raise internal resources, and governments from supporting FOs' delivery of public services.

Objective

The objective of this side event is to engage in a dialogue with participants and formulate recommendations about how to help FOs provide better services to their members, particularly regarding the following issues:

- How to adapt support to FOs' development, taking into account the diversity of FOs and their various levels of maturity?
- How to reach the right balance between internal and external services?
- How to attain sustainability in service delivery while strengthening the accountability of FOs to their members?

Expected outcomes

- ❖ List of key principles to support FOs for better service delivery to their members
- ❖ Recommendations on how to adapt support to the various types of FOs
- ❖ Recommendations on how to partner with mature organizations that have advanced capacity to support their members
- ❖ Examples of good and innovative practices to support FOs, particularly in gaining sustainability and accountability

Agenda

14.30: **Introduction and presentation of the participants**

14.45: **Presentations:** the discussion will be organized around three programmes or institutions that deliver services to FOs through different modalities:

- 1 *Farmers' Africa Programme supported by AGICORD, the alliance of agri-agencies*, whose central aim is to strengthen national FOs in their capacity to provide services to their members and to advocate on their behalf in policy making.
- 2 *Farmer Organization Support Centre for Africa (FOSCA) supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*, whose objective is to certify networks of providers of demand-driven technical, managerial and institutional services to a range of FOs and to act as a clearinghouse to facilitate market linkages between aggregated farmers' groups and input/output markets.
- 3 *AsiaDHRRA (Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia)* a regional partnership of networks and organizations in ten Asian nations that provides opportunities for rural leaders, both farmers and development workers, to enhance their knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Each presentation will focus on the three issues listed above.

15.30: **Panel:** Three FO panellists from Africa, one from Asia and one from Latin America will provide comments on the presentations.

16.00: **Debate:** A discussion will be held to reflect and provide recommendations on the three issues and expected outcomes.

16.45: **Conclusion:** A summing-up of the main results of the event will be given in line with the expected outputs.