



Empowering Rural Communities as Drivers of Agricultural Research and Innovation

A Collective Action within Key Focus Area (KFA) 1: Empowering Farmers at the Center of Innovation

There are over 500 million family farms in the world. Family farmers range from smallholder to medium-scale farmers, and include peasant, indigenous peoples, traditional community, fisher folk, mountain farmer, pastoralist and many other groups in every region and biome of the world. They produce a significant share of the world's food in value terms, confirming family farming's central importance in world food security today and for future generations¹. Their actions directly address the Sustainable Development Goals providing solutions for rural communities to achieve SDG 1, 2, 13, 14, 15 and 17.

Farmers need the contribution of research and innovation to improve their way of life, just as agricultural research needs farmers to co-innovate and deliver on the potential of its work. Family farmers must preserve their identity, culture and knowledge while innovating, yet must adapt to increase sustainability and the wellbeing of their families. For this reason, agricultural research should act from a wider perspective, with a more holistic view, based on the three pillars of sustainability: social, economic and environmental. The basis should be mutual recognition and joint learning throughout the whole process.

Participatory research should be practical, equitable and effective, with the agenda driven by strong partnerships transforming agricultural

"Farmers should be considered as researchers. As well as the need to institutionalize the participatory process [there] is [the need] to have the farmer organizations owning the initiatives."

—Esther Penunia, Secretary General, Asian Farmers Association, during the GFAR Partners' Assembly in 2016



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research and co-innovation into meaningful impacts at scale, which is key for scaling-up and thus greater impacts. According to Partners in GFAR, agricultural research and innovation combine knowledge and innovation: from science come trusted and validated results from its rigor, method and applicability, from farmers come ancestral knowledge, innovation, adaptation and the take up of new ideas. This approach is holistic, consultative and iterative, and thus trusted by partners and validated by experience. It is important to keep strengthening this relationship between research institutes, scientific community and society and focus on the participation of family farmers' and civil society organizations, and local communities, in the process of research and innovation. Indeed, rural development is based primarily on a comprehensive vision on producers and their rural communities.

Partners in GFAR have long recognized this need and for these reasons, the World Rural Forum (WRF) as the Civil Society Organizations global GFAR constituency representative and COPROFAM as the Regional Farmers Organizations global GFAR constituency representative, joining with other Partners, propose a Collective Action **"To enhance participatory research processes between family farmers, rural communities and research"**, developed during the GFAR Steering Committee in June 2017. The challenge is that

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the products of agricultural research and the demands to support innovation of family farmers and rural communities are mismatched. In order to resolve this mismatch, a strong and ongoing collective dialogue, with action as a direct result, is proposed among all the stakeholders concerned. Family Farmers' Organizations and Rural Communities should be at the center of the process.

The inception activity of this Collective Action has been a global workshop held in Bilbao, Spain, in February 2018 with the aim to agree on concrete steps and activities during the next GFAR MTP 2018-2021. The workshop was a farmer- and civil society-led process, in multiple languages, first discussing and agreeing on principles from the perspectives of smallholder family farmers and resource-poor communities, associating the broader group of concerned constituencies and their stakeholders to develop the Collective Action.

What we are doing together

The Bilbao workshop confirmed the core group driving the Collective Action comprising Regional FOs, Local FOs, CSO/National Platforms, Research Centers/Universities and Donor Entities, with WRF coordinating. A common strategy was agreed upon consisting of actions on governance at three different levels: global, regional and local. These actions would be based on the experiences in progress and circumstances in which organizational and institutional processes and innovations have given rural communities greater negotiation capacities to put their needs and capacities on political agendas, demonstrating in the medium and long term the role and potential of family farming to resolve economic and social challenges. This includes directly mobilizing farmers into collective movements, e.g. on climate change and agricultural implications.

Four main components of the Collective Action were identified, namely:

- 1) Transformation of research governance in favor of family farming. In concrete terms this will mean identifying strategic decision making spaces - at the global, regional and national levels - where farmers' organizations will participate directly. Priorities and allocations of funds in favor of family farming will be enhanced;
- 2) Knowledge management to document and share successful participatory research experiences for family farming. This will entail reaching a replicable and adaptable participatory research model for farmer-led innovation practices, processes and technologies benefitting family farming;
- 3) Capacity building of agricultural organizations, farmers and researchers in participatory research for family farming. The new research model to be promoted will enhance the collaboration between formal research and farmer's led experimentations and knowledge to achieve co-innovation. This will be done within a national innovation system framework developing stronger capacities of all actors to create and deliver appropriate solutions with and for family farmers;
- 4) Coordination and alliances between actors/initiatives. Bridges will be built between components of the Collective Actions and with other similar programs.

A number of activities have been associated to each component with defined outputs and outcomes, and a monitoring and evaluation system will measure performance and impacts of processes and changes. The role of each participant, including GFAR, has been collectively outlined. A Full Design Document is available, countries selection (about three per continent) is being finalized.

You are invited to join Partners in GFAR including WRF, COPROFAM, AFA, PIFON, PROPAC, ROPPA, Civil Society Organizations, National Research Institutions, in creating this process for communities to determine and express their needs for agricultural innovation and research according to their own principles.

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