



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

**JOINT CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME ON THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF FARMERS' RIGHTS UNDER THE  
INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES  
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**



Potato Park, Cuzco, Peru. Photo: Tania Cavenecia

*The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Global Forum on Agricultural Research, both hosted in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, are working in an exciting new programme to assist countries with the implement Farmers' Rights in practice, to the benefit of family farmers around the world.*



## ***BACKGROUND***

The recognition of Farmers' Rights by the international community is based on the awareness of the central role played by family and smallholder farmers around the world, particularly those in the centers of origin and crop diversity, in reducing rural poverty, eradicating hunger and enhancing global food security. More than 500 million family farms produce most of the world's food. However, many are poor and such farmers include many of the world's hungry and malnourished.

The initial stages of breeding for most crops have been based on locally adapted landraces and improvements in agricultural production. Indeed, modern varieties have been possible because of the rich and varied genetic diversity in farmers' landraces, together with material from wild and weedy species.

Women farmers play an important role in agriculture, conservation and transmission of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices to younger generations. They are particularly aware of the usefulness and high value of plant genetic diversity, and in many parts of the world they are responsible for the conservation and production of crops that are essential to household food security.

Further efforts are needed to ensure local, national and global food security, to care for and protect natural environments, promote more equity and fight against poverty and malnutrition. These goals can be achieved with activities and policies supporting and enabling smallholder farmers to maintain, develop and utilize plant genetic resources, and recognizing and rewarding them for their contributions to the global genetic pool and food security.



Women's group, Malawi. Photo: World Agroforestry Centre

## ***THE DEMAND***

In the '80s, the international community in the framework of FAO, decided to recognize the importance of the past, present and future contributions of smallholder farmers and local communities to the conservation, development and availability of plant genetic resources. But it was not until 2001 that such recognition became part of a multilateral legal binding instrument, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Treaty), as the basis of Farmers' Rights.

The Treaty calls for the promotion of Farmers' Rights at the international and national levels and specifically recognizes in Article 9 that the responsibility for realizing these rights, as they relate to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, rests with national governments. Each Contracting Party should, as appropriate and subject to its national legislation take measures to protect and promote Farmers' Rights.

Despite international recognition of Farmers' Rights and the call to governments to adopt measures to promote and protect these rights at the national level, Farmers' Rights are still not promoted or protected by national legal and policy frameworks in most countries. Contracting Parties have expressed uncertainty as to how to implement Farmers' Rights in practice and have requested the Treaty Secretary to help develop their implementation capacities.

In its Fifth Session (2013), the Governing Body endorsed the Programme of Work on Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Programme goals include providing support to Contracting Parties and stakeholders to implement Articles 5, 6 and 9 of the International Treaty and to provide policy direction and guidance by monitoring the implementation of the Treaty. In 2015, the Governing Body endorsed the revised Programme of Work on Sustainable Use (Resolution 4/2015), including training and capacity building on Farmers' Rights. The Governing Body also requested all Contracting Parties to promote, as appropriate, the access to all farmers and local communities to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in the Multilateral System of the Treaty and the broadening of the genetic base of crops in use.

During its Sixth Session (2015), the Governing Body of the Treaty reiterated its recognition of the existing relationship between Farmers' Rights and the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. Through Resolution 5/2015, the Governing Body requested the Treaty Secretary to: ***“launch and implement, subject to the availability of financial resources a Joint Capacity Building Programme with the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (from now on GFAR) and other relevant organizations on Farmers' Rights as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty<sup>1</sup>”***.

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<sup>1</sup> IT/GB-6/15/Report. Resolution 5/2015, available at: <http://www.planttreaty.org/sites/default/files/a-mo938e.pdf>

## ***A UNIQUE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME***

The Joint Capacity Building Programme on the Implementation of Farmers' Rights starts from the local level, recognizing the value of smallholder farmers around the world in the conservation, use and improvement of food crops as the basis of local, national and global food security. Smallholder farmers are at the center of the innovation and development agricultural system, requiring the recognition and implementation of their rights over seeds/propagating material, traditional knowledge, innovations and practices.

The Programme responds to the many requests from national governments and relevant stakeholders, including farmers and farmers' organizations for capacity and understanding of what Farmers' Rights mean in practice. It aims to achieve impacts through collective actions among different stakeholders, including decision and policy makers, increasing capacity and awareness to contribute to the implementation of Farmers' Rights at national and local levels.

It will facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue and networking, to support the role of smallholder farmers as custodians and innovators for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, and increase awareness and support the development of policies and legal measures implementing Farmers' Rights.



Smallholder farmer in India, S. Padulosi / Biodiversity International / CC BY-NC-ND

The Programme will not duplicate or replace existing efforts, but will:

- i) promote the establishment and strengthening of networks of stakeholders implementing Farmers' Rights;
- ii) promote dialogue between and among public, civil and private actors;
- iii) become a common channel for mobilizing required resources; and
- iv) act as an efficient and transparent tool to upscale lessons learned and success stories among Contracting Parties of the International Treaty and other stakeholders

Working in participatory and inclusive ways with smallholder farmers, governments and local authorities, relevant organizations and all stakeholders, the Programme will share knowledge and experiences to build wider awareness and capacity in Farmers' Rights.

### ***OBJECTIVE***

The ultimate objective of the Programme is to improve implementation of Farmers' Rights at national and local levels, through developing and increasing capacity and awareness of Farmers' Rights under the International Treaty.

By increasing such capacities, the Programme aims to:

- enhance national consensus of what is meant by Farmers' Rights under the International Treaty, building on the role of smallholder farmers as custodians of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and developers of food crops
- increase awareness of the crucial value of Farmers' Rights for food security, among smallholder and family farmers, relevant sectors and decision makers
- increase awareness of the role women farmers' play in agriculture and food security
- promote development of policies and legal instruments implementing Farmers' Rights, and the review and adjustment of national measures around Farmers' Rights
- promote access of smallholder farmers to genetic material under the Multilateral System of the International Treaty
- promote the co-existence and mutual reinforcement of Farmers' Rights and breeders' rights
- facilitate the dissemination of best practices and experiences for the implementation of Farmers' Rights among farmers, decision makers and relevant stakeholders
- increase farmers' and local communities' capacity to manage and conserve on-farm plant genetic resources for food and agriculture

## ***EXPECTED ACTIVITIES***



Photo: news.nationalgeographic.com

Expected global activities include:

- Global workshops and consultations to exchange views, experiences and best practices to implement Farmers' Rights
- Collective actions to increase capacities for the implementation of Farmers' Rights, avoiding overlaps and duplication among organizations, maximizing financial resources and increasing mutual support
- Relevant information reported back to the Governing Body of the International Treaty to help shape effective policies

Regional activities will include:

- Development of regional workshops and consultations to exchange views, experiences and best practices in implementing Farmers' Rights

Expected national activities include:

- Development of capacity building materials on Farmers' Rights for smallholder farmers, researchers, decision makers and relevant stakeholders
- National workshops on Farmers' Rights improving multi-stakeholder dialogue, building trust and reaching a common understanding on Farmers' Rights

- Strengthening the capacity of farmers' organizations, particularly women farmers' organizations for their participation in decision-making, at the national level
- Strengthening the capacity of institutions (governmental and non-governmental) for advocacy and implementation of Farmers' Rights
- Equipping decision and policy makers to improve national policy and legal development implementing Farmers' Rights
- Developing capacities for the protection and value of traditional knowledge relevant for agriculture innovation and development
- Promoting smallholder farmers participation in benefits from the use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, associated traditional knowledge, innovations and practices
- Monitoring progress in implementing Farmers' Rights

### ***BENEFICIARIES***

The short-term direct beneficiaries are smallholder farmers; farmers' organizations, researchers, governmental authorities and other relevant stakeholders receiving direct assistance and support from the Joint Capacity Building Programme on the Implementation of Farmers' Rights.

The ultimate beneficiaries are farmers of all regions of the world; particularly those in the centres of origin and crop diversity, with their Farmers' Rights realized in practice at national and local levels and recognized by national legislation.

### ***PROJECT COORDINATION***

The Programme is supervised by the Secretary of the International Treaty, coordinated through the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) and jointly executed with relevant organizations.

GFAR has long been concerned with Farmers' Rights and played a pivotal role in the adoption of the International Treaty. GFAR was established almost 2 decades ago as an open and inclusive multi-stakeholder mechanism, allowing farmers, researchers, extensionists, education, consumers, policy makers, civil society and enterprises to come together and discuss challenges and find solutions on how research and innovation can best meet the needs of smallholder farmers.

As a global platform bringing together relevant stakeholders and working through collective actions, GFAR will coordinate the implementation of the Joint Capacity Building Programme on the Implementation of Farmers' Rights. This will bring together relevant stakeholders, including farmers' and civil society organizations, national institutions, research organizations, small and medium enterprises, and funding mechanisms, to improve grassroots capacity and awareness on Farmers' Rights. Decision makers will be supported to improve national legal and policy frameworks enabling the co-existence and mutual support of formal and informal seed systems for the benefit of farmers, particularly

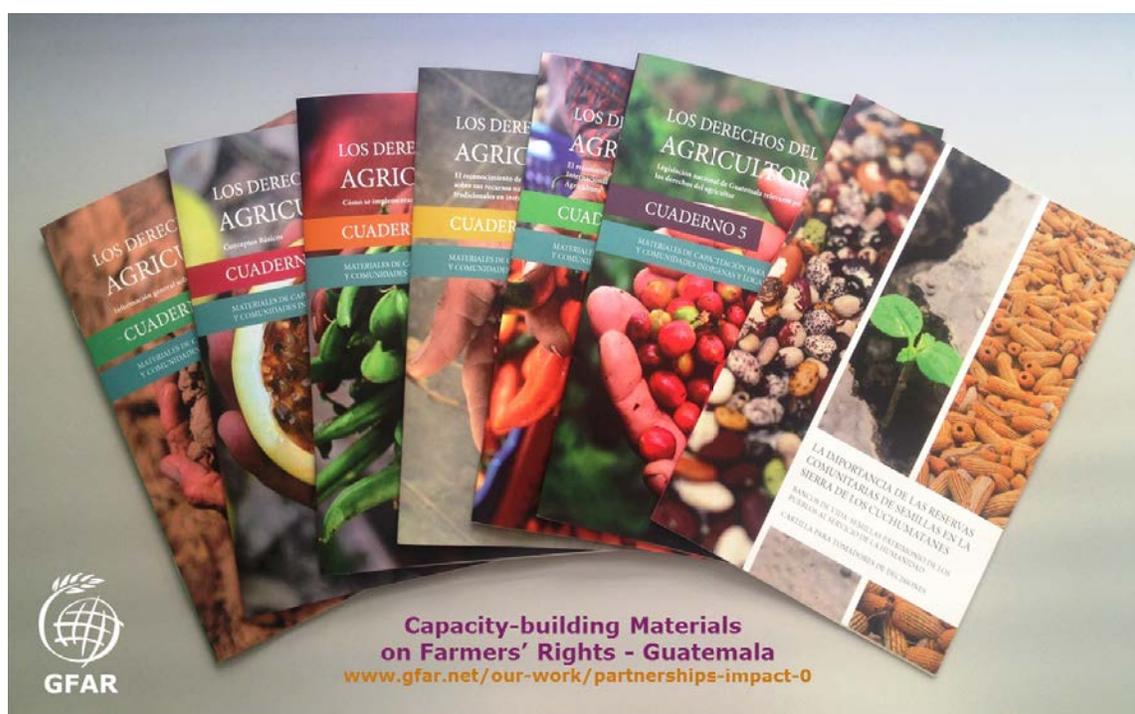
smallholder farmers.

## **ACTIVITIES TO DATE**

Since 2008, the Secretariat of the International Treaty has compiled and disseminated submissions from Contracting Parties of the Treaty and relevant stakeholders on views, experiences and best practices, to contribute to the implementation of Farmers' Rights at the national level. It has also supported the development of regional meetings (e.g. GRULAC 2013) and global consultations (Zambia, 2007 and Ethiopia, 2010) on realizing Farmers' Rights at the national level, increasing capacities and awareness on how Farmers' Rights can be implemented in practice.

Funding has been disbursed through the Benefit-Sharing Fund of the International Treaty to governments, non-governmental organizations, farmers' organizations, regional and international organizations in developing countries to support high impact projects for on-farm management and conservation of plant genetic resources and other activities relevant for the implementation of Farmers' Rights.

GFAR, with relevant organizations including the Development Fund, has supported developing countries and farmers' organizations in Guatemala, Honduras and Malawi to increase awareness and capacities in the implementation of Farmers' Rights. These actions have included development of valuable training materials on Farmers' Rights; national multi-stakeholder workshops; support to national and local seed fairs; and legal advice to improve or develop policy and legal measures recognizing Farmers' Rights.



# Farmers' Rights in Guatemala

## Capacity Building for Smallholder Farmers & National Stakeholders

### Activities Undertaken by GFAR & Partners



**6 workshops**  
in 8 localities in Huehuetenango area, Guatemala.



Distribution of **25 questionnaires** to measure effectiveness & gather feedback on capacity building material



**313 smallholder farmer leaders** (186 men and 127 women) received capacity building on Farmers' Rights.



**400 capacity building materials** distributed to national stakeholders and decision makers.



**5 posters** on Farmers' Rights for smallholder farmers.

Organization



**3 local authorities** Huehuetenango area (local mayors from San Juan Ixcay, Todos Santos Cuchumatán and Chiantla) committed to implementing Farmers' Rights..



**546 smallholder farmers:** 282 men and 264 women, from 11 farmers' organizations in 5 localities of Huehuetenango, Guatemala received capacity building on Farmers' Rights.



**3 capacity building activities** for 92 smallholder youth farmers (57 men and 35 women) in La Sierra de Cuchumatanes.



**40 members** of the National Committee on Plant Genetic Resources of Guatemala trained in Farmer's Rights.



**2 Radio Spots** on Farmers' Rights in Spanish & 2 Maya languages on 6 local radio stations for almost 2 months, reaching about 300,000 smallholder farmers in 4 zones of Guatemala.



The Global Forum on Agricultural Research

[www.gfar.net](http://www.gfar.net)



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



## ***COUNTRIES TARGETED, BASED ON EXPRESS DEMAND***

Subject to funds, the Programme aims to offer capacity building to at least twelve countries in its first four years of implementation (2016-2019), in addition to Guatemala, Honduras and Malawi who have received capacity building support as pilot countries before the Joint Capacity Building Programme was adopted.

Countries will also receive support for the distribution and socialization of capacity building materials on Farmers' Rights; promoting coordination of national actors at national and local levels; stimulating the exchange of experiences; creating national and regional momentum for Farmers' Rights; monitoring the implementation of Farmers' Rights and evaluating the impact of the support received.

The fifth year of implementation of the Programme (2020) will be dedicated to learning from the exchange of experiences and assessing the impact of the support given to different stakeholders.

## ***PARTNERSHIPS***

The Programme operates through close partnerships among relevant stakeholders, such as farmers' organizations; non-governmental organizations; governmental stakeholders; universities, small and medium enterprises, and research institutions. There are several advantages in becoming a partner:

- Working with a multidisciplinary team of experts on Farmers' Rights
- Interfacing with the intergovernmental process guiding the implementation of Farmers' Rights under the International Treaty
- Putting mechanisms into practice to strength the implementation of Farmers' Rights at local and national levels
- Becoming part of a multi-stakeholder dialogue and networking supporting the role of smallholder farmers as custodians of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and innovators of food crops
- Increasing the impact at local and national level in the implementation of Farmers' Rights
- Avoiding duplication of efforts with other organizations and stakeholders

GFAR, as coordinator of the Programme, has also received an expression of interest from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to work together with the GEF Small Grants Programme, to improve the capacity of smallholder farmers and relevant civil society stakeholders in on-farm agricultural conservation and Farmers' Rights, so expanding the Programme to other countries and regions.

For more information and to become a partner in the Joint Capacity Building Programme on the Implementation of Farmers' Rights, please contact:

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