



Rural Communities Shaping their Own Futures through Foresight

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

With the many sustainable development challenges they affect, and are affected by, our agri-food systems and rural populations face an uncertain future; further complicated by shocks and impacts such as from extreme weather conditions and conflicts. Caught in the middle of these challenges are smallholder farmers and rural communities, who produce most of the world's food, yet have little control over their own futures.

To be able to truly achieve sustainable development, farmers and rural communities need new and improved knowledge and technologies from agri-food research and innovation. However, for such products to be relevant and useful, they need to be tailored to smallholders needs and risks – both present and emerging. Too often, agricultural research and technologies are developed *for* farmers without understanding their real needs, nor taking into account their view point and the multiple interacting challenges they face.

This mis-match between what is being offered by agri-food research and innovation, and what is needed by poor communities, leads to low



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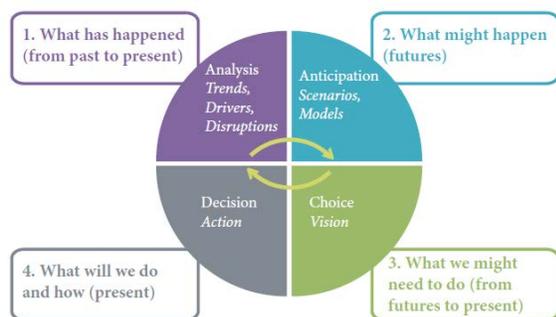
adoption of ARD products; with frustration on both sides, loss of opportunity and further entrenched rural poverty. Participatory processes are vital, to better include farming communities in design and implementation of agricultural research and innovation and enhance their ownership of the products from research.

Foresight for Better Futures

Participatory grassroots foresight provides the inclusive space required for communities in particular territories to set out their desired futures and establish what plausible futures could look like and how they will be impacted by major factors such as climate change. From this, and combined with perspectives from researchers and other service providers, 'back-casting' is used to determine the research and innovation needed now, in order to achieve those desired futures. Such processes greatly enhance rural communities' ownership of research and innovation processes, shaping them towards the future they want. However, for farming communities to be able to use participatory foresight and engage agricultural researchers/innovators to better serve their needs, they need to be able to understand and use foresight approaches to improve their decision making.

The need for using foresight to shape research and innovation also exists at national and international levels. GFAR is currently triggering Collective Action among a range of international partners, through the Foresight4Food initiative, to link diverse foresight and scenarios analyses, and find common learning and understanding by applying these multiple lenses to future food issues.

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What we are doing together

The Collective Action *Empowering Rural Communities to Shape their own Futures* focuses on creating inclusive spaces, through foresight, for the co-development of research needs and priorities, with the aim of producing research and innovations that *truly address farmers' problems as they see them*. It works to develop the capacity of farmers on the workings and use of participatory foresight processes.

Alongside community, and national, scenario-based processes, through the *Foresight4Food Initiative* GFAR is also mobilizing greater cross-linkage among the many foresight and scenarios-based initiatives that seek to understand the future pathways and hence research-investment needs of agri-food systems around the world.

Ultimately, this Collective Action aims to significantly improve the value and sustainability of agricultural research and innovation products to the benefit of resource-poor smallholders, including women and youth. It brings together a diverse field of interested stakeholders, including farmers, development donors, CSOs, rural advisory services, national and international research institutes and the private sector.

Activities are undertaken country by country, working with specific communities and their needs. These will be linked with programmes identifying investment needs in national agricultural research and innovation and supported and scaled out through regional mechanisms and fora.

Recently, GFAR started working with FARA on a Collective Action to establish a long term community of foresight literate agricultural professionals who are able to embed foresight within their engagements; provide future-smart contributions to policy and apply strategic foresight in the implementation of the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa (and other relevant agricultural agendas) at regional and country levels. Already 16 of such professionals have been trained in participatory foresight technique and will serve as the nucleus of the Africa Foresight Academy being facilitated by GFAR and FARA. A plan to expand the academy to train more people and bring in more professionals across Africa is in the works.

At the global level, GFAR is engaged in a Collective Action with the University of Oxford, ACIAR, CIRAD, Montpellier University and other actors called the Foresight4Food initiative. This is a global initiative that is being established to support enhanced foresight and scenario analysis for global agri-food systems. The aim is to provide a mechanism for better analysis and synthesis of trends and plausible futures in global agri-food systems. It will provide a platform supporting more informed strategic dialogue among all actors in the agri-food system.

You are invited to join Partners in GFAR including FARA, AARINENA, CACAARI, APAARI, GCHERA, G-20 Donor Group, GFRAS, Palestinian Farmers Union, YPARD, national research institutes and private sector organisations in GFAR's Collective Action *Empowering Rural Communities to Shape their own Futures through Foresight*.

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