Policy Brief

Farmer Organisations roles in climate change and biodiversity policy engagement

Summary

This PFO Policy Brief takes a global perspective to explore the critical role of Farmer Organisations (FOs) in climate and biodiversity policy engagement at the national, regional and global levels. It builds on previous PFO climate-related policy briefs, such as that on 'Farmer Organisations and Climate Change Adaptation', which highlights the important role of FOs in assisting their farmer members to address climate-related challenges and impacts in the Pacific context, through the implementation of climate adaptation best practices at the farm and landscape levels. Indeed, farmers worldwide are at the frontlines of climate change adaptation and biodiversity conservation — for most, adapting to the effects and impacts of climate change is not simply a policy target and goal, but represents their very survival, both in terms of livelihoods and food security.

Yet, while the important work of smallholder farmers in adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change, alongside their roles as stewards of biodiversity, is relatively well documented, it still lacks the appropriate recognition within international and national policy stages. This represents a significant barrier in terms of scaling best practices in climate adaptation and biodiversity conservation. Achieving climate resilient food systems and adapting to the increasing impacts of climate change requires significant investment at the farm and landscape level. It also requires policies that consider the contexts farmers operate in and their needs.

As advocates and representatives of local communities of farmers and producers, FOs have the power to bring the voices and knowledge of smallholder communities to the international, regional and national policy stages so that their work can be accounted for, and their needs met. This brief explores the roles of FOs within climate and biodiversity-related policy processes at different levels of governance, from the local to the global. It provides insights into the need for enhanced access to climate and biodiversity finance by smallholder farmers, which can be promoted, inter alia, through greater FO representation and strategic engagement within the associated policy processes.

In the Pacific context, this policy brief makes the case for the urgent need for enhanced Pacific Island FO participation within climate and biodiversity policy processes at all levels, to help smallholders apply and scale climate and biodiversity solutions on the ground to create climate resilient food systems and communities in the Pacific.

Introduction

Global agri-food systems are fuelling the climate and biodiversity crises: 30 percent of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, and 60 percent of global biodiversity loss is attributed to agri-food systems. The climate change and biodiversity crises are strongly interlinked, where climate change greatly impacts ecosystems and, together with land-use change, is among the main drivers of biodiversity loss. In turn, biodiversity and its sustainable use can help people and communities mitigate and adapt to climate change by increasing ecosystem resilience.

The high degree of interdependence requires critical consideration of the interlinkages between climate and biodiversity in policymaking.[1] While the conventions that govern each agenda, namely the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognise the strong interlinkages, integrated approaches that make use of synergies are currently not the norm in the implementation of the two frameworks, namely the Paris Agreement and the Global Biodiversity Framework respectively.[2]

Smallholders represent one of the best examples of actors that can apply integrated solutions for climate change and biodiversity on the ground. Indeed, smallholders worldwide have already started implementing adaptation, mitigation, and biodiversity conservation best practices: many are using innovative solutions and practicing climate-resilient agriculture through approaches such as agroecology, agroforestry, climate smart agriculture and organic agriculture, growing a wider variety of crops, including traditional crops (e.g., taro in the Pacific region), mixing crops with forestry, livestock, and fisheries.[3]

When farmers' and producers' actions are summed and, importantly, accounted for, their contributions to addressing global-scale challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss become more significant. **This is where FOs play a key role in supporting the interests of smallholders and their members, including producers, user groups, women and youth groups:** they offer the opportunity for the work and voices of smallholders to come together and have an impact on a larger scale.[4]

FOs are increasingly recognised as farming community representatives within the national and international development agenda and play a critical role in influencing and shaping policies for agriculture and sustainable development, ensuring that smallholders have a say in the decisions that impact their lives. The United Nations declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives and 2014 the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). An effective advocacy campaign driven mainly by FOs led to the proclamation of 2019-2028 as the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF) while the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) was approved in 2018, marking an important milestone in the recognition of the rights of rural people.[5]

Despite this, the work farmers and FOs are already doing on the ground needs to be better acknowledged and recognised and there is an urgent need to close the gap in terms of representation, inclusion, and participation of farmers and FOs in climate and biodiversity policy processes. This urgency is mirrored in the need for increased actions to address climate change and biodiversity loss at the local level, which requires scaled-up international climate and biodiversity finance for smallholder farmers and small agribusinesses, who are currently only benefitting from a small fraction of the available finance at the global level. [6]

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1 *https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/UNFCCC-NWP_synergies_NAP-NBSAP_technical-brief.pdf*
2 *https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=UNFCCC-NWP_synergies_NAP-NBSAP_technical-brief.pdf&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8*
3 *https://www.ruralforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ENG_Untapped-Potential_Embargoed-14-Nov.pdf*
4 *https://www.fao.org/3/i7231e/i7231e.pdf*
5 *https://asianfarmers.org/fostering-the-engagement-of-smallholder-farmers-and-fishers-in-the-policy-processes-and-program-development-within-the-context-of-undff-the-case-of-ardkpp-in-the-philippines/*
6 *https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2021-07/20326iied.pdf*

Climate change and biodiversity: Exploring synergies through smallholders and FOs

Smallholder farmers are highly dependent on healthy and well-functioning ecosystems (and their services) for their food, livelihoods and resilience. Climate change greatly impacts ecosystems and, together with land-use change, is among the main drivers of biodiversity loss. In turn, biodiversity can help communities mitigate and adapt to climate change by increasing ecosystem resilience. Shifting toward more sustainable agriculture and food production contributes to improved biodiversity conservation and management, helps mitigate climate change and promotes more climate resilient food systems. Through such practices, smallholders provide many ecosystem services worldwide, including the protection of old growth and secondary forests, planting of trees, pollinator-friendly farming, improving soil biology and water retention/conservation, reduced pollution (by avoiding synthetic fertilisers and pesticides), reductions in soil erosion and more.

Agrobiodiversity is an important foundation for food security and sustainable agricultural production as it supports productivity and resilience, as well as contributes to the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. Crop diversity, supported by smallholders for millennia, is valued not only as an agricultural resource to be exploited, but also for its role in nutrition and sustainable diets, its ecological importance, and its cultural significance.[7] Smallholder farmers and indigenous communities have been guardians of the world's plant and crop genetic resources for millennia, and they continue to play a crucial role in maintaining the biodiversity of our food crops. The variety of foods available to humanity today is due, in large part, to farmers' continuous efforts in this regard. Since farmers are custodians and developers of crop genetic diversity, their rights in this regard are critical if they are to be able to maintain this pivotal role for food security. Furthermore, diversification in production is naturally more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Sadly, most markets today only include a small proportion of this diversity. [8]

The highly knowledge-intensive nature of the development of agroecological practices, which often requires a combination of farmer's traditional knowledge with scientific knowledge and innovation, lends itself well to the operational modalities and ways of working of FOs, who play a fundamental role in the scaling and diffusion of such practices with smallholders. [9] Integrating ecological principles into agricultural production and optimising the management of agroecosystems necessitates an active mobilisation of diverse actors with multiple perspectives such as farmers, advisory services, government agents, development partners, agro-companies, research institutes and more, as shown in Figure 1. Due to the nature of FO stakeholder relationships, they are the perfect intermediaries of innovation, acting as facilitators in the agroecological transition. FOs organise the management of resources to provide support services necessary to stimulate farmers' adoption of agroecological innovations, and promote platforms for information and knowledge sharing. [10]

Bringing the voice of farmers to the discussions on climate change and biodiversity is an important role that farmer organisations in the region can play.

Farmer Organisations are actively involved in climate adaptation and biodiversity work however this important role is seldom acknowledged by governments and development partners.

7 https://www.fao.org/3/nk642en/nk642en.pdf
8 https://www.fao.org/3/nk642en/nk642en.pdf
9 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/14735903.2021.2002089?needAccess=true
10 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/14735903.2021.2002089?needAccess=true

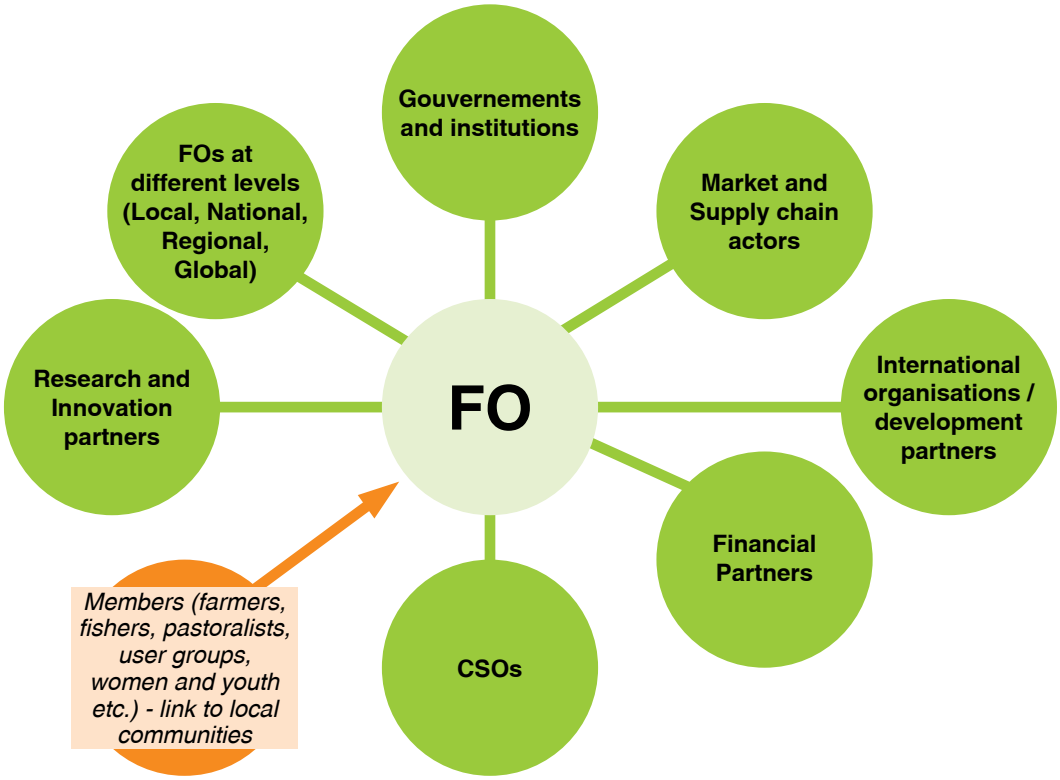

Figure 1. FO Networks and partnerships: aggregators and connectors for their smallholder members

The Finance and Policy Gap for Smallholders

Climate finance remains central to achieving low-carbon, climate resilient development. Many countries have highlighted the need for scaled-up international support in implementing their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and increasing the ambition of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The major challenge is ensuring that finance and investment are available to reach these goals.[11] Despite their disproportionate vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, the **climate finance gap** for small-scale agriculture is large, and trends show it is increasing. In the 2019/20 financial year, small-scale agriculture received only USD 5.53 billion or 0.8 percent of total climate finance, while global agri-food systems as a whole received USD 28.5 billion, only 4 percent of the total climate finance tracked across all sectors (USD 660.2 billion). [12]

Access to finance (or lack thereof) is symptomatic of a much larger problem that sees smallholders and FOs lacking representation and recognition in decision-making and policy processes concerning them. Despite the evidence that shows the importance of smallholder's work at the local level and the potential they hold to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to safeguard critical ecosystems and biodiversity, producers and smallholders have limited access to decision-making processes to claim their rights and to access social benefits. The work and achievements of smallholders is seldom accounted for and/or reported on due to both a lack of skills and competencies of government extension agencies, as well as the inadequacy of monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and project logical frameworks which fail to consider such efforts from the onset. At the national level, many governments and regional government bodies do not yet have policies which give small scale farmers a favourable position in the value chain or in better access to government resources for agriculture development. [13]

At the global level, smallholders and agriculture in general are under-represented within international policy processes that regard them. For example, The Kunmig-montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) makes no specific mention to smallholders or farmer organisations, referring exclusively (and in general terms) to Indigenous peoples and local communities. Out of the 23 targets of the GBF, only a few make a direct reference to agriculture (namely the 2030 targets 4, 7, 10, 16, 17 and 19).[14] FO presence at the COPs (both for the UNFCCC and the CBD) is increasing but remains marginal.

11 *https://climatefundsupdate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CFF2-ENG-2020-Digital.pdf*
12 *https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/publication/the-climate-finance-gap-for-small-scale-agrifood-systems/*
13 *https://www.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2021-07/20326iied.pdf*
14 *https://www.cbd.int/gbf/targets*

As a consequence, agriculture-related policies at the national level seldom address rural realities, and climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives fall short because they do not fully integrate producers and smallholders as active stakeholders, and fail to acknowledge their needs and contributions. [15] For example, even though about 85 percent of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) presented by Governments for the implementation of the Paris Agreement contain a reference to the agricultural sector, only 15 percent of these mention the involvement of FOs. [16]

To further these connections and enhance collaboration, smallholders and FOs should receive more comprehensive acknowledgment within global frameworks and associated national strategies as critical stakeholders. Indeed, smallholders are essential actors in the implementation of the Paris Agreement and of the GBF — achievements of the set targets for the two frameworks can be greatly accelerated by tapping into the potential of implementation at different levels across the value chain — from farm to fork.

To achieve their potential and positive impacts at scale, smallholders will require technical assistance, capacity building, technologies and importantly, access to finance. Fair payments for the ecosystem services they provide, beyond compensation for the food they produce, is not only just, but necessary to finance their efforts.[17] While biodiversity financing represents an opportunity for smallholders, in the same way smallholders and agri-food systems represent an opportunity for the Paris Agreement and the GBF to achieve their targets in a timely manner.

Closing the Gap: The Role of Regional FOs

Over the past decade, platforms such as the Farmers Forum and the World Rural Forum have promoted strengthening these organisations and their global networks. They have been working to build strong partnerships with different development actors, including other FOs, donors (such as the European Union (EU), development agencies, and trust funds), international organisations (such as the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)), research institutions (such as the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR)), different governments and value-chain and market actors.

Global and regional FOs, such as AFA and PIFON, have been implementing various initiatives to help address smallholders' most pressing challenges. Such organisations have the potential to influence national governments to adapt their policies and spendings in the agriculture sector, to favour smallholders and their interests, while promoting climate change adaptation, resilience and biodiversity conservation. [18]

Climate and Biodiversity FO-led Regional and Global-level initiatives

Pacific Farmers Organisation - PIFON

With a rich history of organising farmer-to-farmer learning experiences, PIFON has spearheaded impactful initiatives such as the first Pacific Farmers Opena Pollinated Seed Learning Exchange (2016)[19], the Farmer-to-farmer Exchange Programme in Vanuatu (2017)[20], Farmers Forum and Farmer-to-Farmer Learning Exchange (2017)[21], among others.

The partnership between IFAD and FOs in the Pacific, facilitated by PIFON, has represented a paradigm shift in the dynamics of rural development. IFAD and PIFON collaborated in the FO4ACP programme, which aims to enhance the capabilities of FOs. One notable outcome of this collaboration is the "Climate-Resilient Farmer Framework," which is currently being developed by PIFON's secretariat.

15 *https://www.fao.org/3/i7231e/i7231e.pdf*
16 *https://www.fao.org/3/i6400e/i6400e.pdf*
17 *https://www.solidaridadnetwork.org/news/effective-climate-finance-needed-now-for-locally-led-action-to-build-farmer-resilience/*
18 *https://landportal.org/es/community/projects/advocacy-government-support-sustainable-agriculture-and-farmer-led-enterprises*
19 *https://pacificfarmers.com/resource/report-on-pacific-open-pollinated-seed-learning-exchange-25-oct-29-oct-2016/*
20 *https://www.fao.org/asiapacific/news/detail-events/en/c/1055341/*
21 *https://pacificfarmers.com/fiji-hosts-farmers-forum/*

This framework positions farmers and their knowledge at the core of adaptation measures and has attracted the attention of international donors who have committed to funding it.

PIFON and IFAD have also worked together on various initiatives, including organizing side events during significant agricultural gatherings like the Pacific Week of Agriculture in 2016 and 2019.[22] Additionally, the two organisations have collaborated on essential reports concerning the effects of Covid-19 on agriculture and food security in the Pacific region. These reports have contributed to policy recommendations and led to direct investments in line with the outlined recommendations. Collaboration between international development organizations and regional FOs can result in impactful, community-driven projects. The outcomes listed above underscore the shift from FOs being beneficiaries to active partners, actively involved in the design, implementation, and advocacy.

The Asian Farmers Association - AFA

The Asian Farmers Association (AFA) is a regional alliance comprising 20 national federations and small-scale farmers and producers organisations across 13 Asian countries. AFA is a member of many regional and international fora. It uses this position to influence the agenda of important stakeholders like ASEAN and SAARC to improve the position of small-scale farmers in the market chain. AFA is a prominent voice during regional and global fora on climate change, biodiversity and other agriculture-related policy matters: it represents the voice of hundreds of thousands of smallholders across Asia, advocating to help increase flows of finance, favour policy positions and raise awareness in the global stage.

In 2023, AFA launched the Advancing Climate Resiliency through Farmers' Organizations and Cooperatives Video Contest, an initiative to recognize and celebrate the efforts of farmers, making significant contributions to mitigating climate change and promoting sustainable agriculture practices. The contest is organized in association with La Via Campesina (LVC) through the Asia-Pacific Farmers' Program (APFP) — Farmers' Organization for Asia (FO4A) and ARISE programs[23], with the support of several partners. The contest aims to showcase farmers' resiliency and ingenuity to inspire and empower other farmers to adopt climate-smart practices and raise awareness among policymakers, researchers, and the general public about farmers' positive actions in climate and biodiversity. It also advocates for better access to climate financing by showing farmers as solution providers.[24]

Way Forward

In the wake of the momentum generated by the UN Declaration of the Rights of Peasants and the UN Decade on Family Farming, PFO's programme and policy approach is striving to construct the narrative and evidence-base around the unique and essential role of FOs, its members, in Pacific Island Countries in the transition to sustainable and inclusive food systems, and for protecting biodiversity, essential ecosystem services and adapting to climate change.

Some options for FO potential roles and activities in enhanced climate and biodiversity policy engagement and access to finance are listed below.

22 *https://www.aciar.gov.au/media-search/events/pacific-week-agriculture-and-forestry-fiji-2023*
23 *https://asiapacificfarmersforum.net/home/arise-farmers/*
24 *https://asianfarmers.org/video-contest-advancing-climate-resiliency-through-farmers-organizations-and-cooperatives/*

Examples of FO activities and roles in promoting climate and biodiversity solutions

FO Role	Activities	Benefits
Extension services	FOs as Leaders in promoting agroecological practices & innovative environmental solutions.	Best practices in natural resource management ; food security ; promotion of agrobiodiversity ;
Networks, Partnerships and Research	Key partners for research-extension systems ; Aggregators for multi-partnership initiatives ; promoters of networks for development	Promote innovation and research and building evidence base for best practices; key partnerships for green finance opportunities (bank intermediate ; receive and manage PES & carbon credit etc.) and green market opportunities (i.e. organic certification etc.)
Knowledge Management and Capacity Building	Provide training and capacity building of smallholder members on climate and biodiversity matters; institutional capacity building;	Collect, share and scale best practices ; increased capacities to access and manage long-term funding opportunities
Advocacy and Policy	Mainstreaming climate change and biodiversity plans in agriculture sectors ; representing farmers and participating in stakeholder consultations at the national, regional and global levels	Increased representation in national and international policy fora ; shaping of policies and strategies to meet farmers needs ; increased access to funding opportunities
Access to Funds	Activating funding opportunities across networks; Provide skills, tools and know-how to promote eligibility to different funding mechanisms	Increased funds for scaling of best practices and application of innovative solutions to fight climate change and biodiversity loss and promote resilient food systems transition

Options for Policy engagement of FOs at the national level

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)

Stakeholder Consultations

FOs and Farmers can join stakeholder meetings organized by government responsible for developing or revising NAPs and NBSAPs to share experiences that can shape national strategies to align with local reality.

Provide input or comments

FOs and Farmers can provide input and feedback on draft NBSAP documents by providing share their knowledge of local biodiversity farming practices.

Advocating for Policy Changes

FOs and Farmers can advocate for policy changes that support biodiversity conservation and sustainable agriculture including participating in public awareness campaigns, or joining advocacy groups working on environmental issues.

Participating in Surveys and Consultations

FOs and Farmers can participate in surveys, consultations, or focus group discussions organized by government agencies or NGOs responsible for NAPs and NBSAPs.

Collaborating with Conservation Organizations

By partnering with these organizations working on biodiversity conservation projects, farmers can share their knowledge and experiences, participate in research and monitoring activities. This data can inform NAPs and NBSAP implementation.

Engagement with Local Authorities

FOs and Farmers can engage with local government authorities responsible for drafting or revising NAPs and NBSAPs. Provide insights into local biodiversity, land use practices, and challenges faced on the ground.

Proposed Actions and Recommendations

- Support inclusion of FOs and smallholders within national and international policy processes on climate change and biodiversity (NAPs, NDCs, NBSAPs; COPs; international consultations etc.) and Environment and Climate Finance (ECF) initiatives
- Engage Farmers and related stakeholders in NAPs and NBSAPs for effective Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and Paris Agreement Targets Achievement.
- Enhance FO role in Green Finance: Support FOs and smallholders in accessing and benefitting from climate and biodiversity financing sources i.e., Global Environment Facility (GEF), Green Climate Fund (GCF), Adaptation Fund (AF), Payments for ecosystem services (PES) and Carbon Credit mechanisms.
- Participate within related networks and consultation processes at regional and global levels e.g., GEF CSO network and similar bodies.
- Enhance FOs access to knowledge and information on funding requirements and processes
- Establish knowledge exchange systems for best practices (i.e. through social media and other channels).
- Enhance FOs' institutional capacities to manage and mobilise long-term funds.