

Supporting small forest enterprises

Reports from the field

A stylized illustration in shades of green and yellow. It shows two trees with large, rounded canopies in the foreground. Behind them are rolling hills or mountains. In the sky, two small, dark green silhouettes of birds are flying.

Burkina Faso



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Forest Connect Country Report

Burkina Faso

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Prepared by Elvis Paul Tangem
TREE AID
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Acronyms

ANSAB	Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bio-resources
APFNL	Agence de Promotion des Produits Forestiers Non Ligneux
ARSA	Amélioration des revenus et de la sécurité alimentaire
BDS	Business Development Service
CIFOR	Centre for International Forestry Research
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FC	Forest Connect
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German International Development Support)
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
MA&D	Market Analysis & Development Approach
MECV	Ministère de L'Environnement et du Cadre de Vie
MEDD	Ministère de L'Environnement et Developpement Durable (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development)
MFI	Micro finance Institution
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Product
PAGED	Projet d'Amélioration de la Gestion et de L'exploitation Durable des
PFNL	Produit Forestière Non-Ligneux
SMFE	Small and Medium Forest Enterprises
TCP	Technical Cooperation Project
VTE	Village Tree Enterprise (programme)

1. Institutional History

1.1. Initial motivation and expectations

In Burkina Faso, the contribution of the forestry sector to GDP (along with hunting and fishing) was estimated at 15 per cent in 2007.¹ This is likely to be an underestimate, since several activities linked to NTFPs are not considered.² SMFEs create added value through wood and non-timber forest products, and represent a promising niche to alleviate poverty and diversify livelihoods for rural populations, whilst conserving the natural resource base through sustainable forest management. In Burkina Faso, most SMFEs operate in the informal sector. They are often poorly organised and blocked by an 'isolation and disconnectedness' that prevents them from influencing forest policies and accessing lucrative markets. This discourages the provision of services targeted at business development for SMFEs. The Forest Connect (FC) programme was conceived to counter this isolation and disconnectedness.

1.2. TREE AID vision for Forest Connect in Burkina Faso

TREE AID was selected to serve as the FC national hub in Burkina Faso, on the strength of their strategic commitment to supporting community-based tree and forest enterprise development in the West African Sahel (Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mali). Through its Village Tree Enterprise project, TREE AID has guided hundreds of village interest groups in Burkina Faso, Mali and Ghana through the FAO Market Analysis and Development Approach, to develop sustainable enterprises based on tree and forest products. TREE AID's support, designed to improve income through village tree enterprise initiatives and trade, is integral to a strategy that integrates know-how, motivation and secure access to enable local people to invest in trees and forests to secure their own future. FC is seen as a direct compliment to this work.

1.3. Forest Connect governance

MEDD (formerly MECV) has a policy of only participating in steering committees when they are directly involved in project implementation. TREE AID therefore attempted to establish a project advisory committee with representation from MECV, trade bodies and service providers. It proved impossible to convene a meeting of this committee due to time constraints of the various members. To ensure that the activities of FC BF are not stifled, TREE AID managed FC activities like one of its 'single partners projects', which still go through a board of external local advisers, consisting of seasoned and experienced professionals from state, private, UN system and CSOs in Burkina Faso. All important expenditures and disbursement of funds are authorised by this external body after clear terms of reference and justification of the activities. The planning of FC BF activities agreed with FAO results from a proposal by the TREE AID Enterprise Support Manager who also acts as the FC country Focal Person. The proposed activities are taken to the TREE AID West Africa Office Senior Management Team for scrutiny and advice. The Enterprise Support Manager, together with the necessary team – depending on the activities undertaken – submit a report to both TREE AID West Africa Office and TREE AID UK programme for further scrutiny and quality checking before it is forwarded to FAO for formal approval and contracting as part of Forest Connect.

SMFEs and NTFPs have been effectively moved up the policy agenda in Burkina Faso, however, through TREE AID's interventions and leadership in national workshops and seminars, several of which have been supported by FC. Subsequently, TREE AID has been able to take advantage of the steering committee, established by MECV specifically for projects working on NTFPs (TCP, ARSA, PAGED/PFNL). This forum

1 MECV, Politique nationale en matière d'environnement, 2007

2 Ouedraogo Kimsé, 2001 : Etude prospective du secteur forestier en Afrique : Burkina Faso, FAO Rome

has enabled information sharing on FC activities and achievements, discussions of ensuing issues, the gathering of feedback and the highlighting of lessons arising. This committee brings together key players from the public and private sectors, CSOs and NGOs.

2. Activities

2.1. Planning meetings

FC has convened more than 25 meetings, bringing together more than 300 SMFE actors from all geographical zones, dealing in 12 major NTFP resources and some 30 value chains. The connections between actors and the exchange of knowledge at these meetings has, in itself, contributed significantly to the general development of NTFP value chains.

2.2. Diagnostic studies

One of the first activities within the framework of FC in Burkina Faso was a Diagnostic study on SMFEs, completed in May 2008. The study was based on a review of the literature and on surveys of existing SMFEs, as well as other stakeholders intervening in the sector. It employed individual and group questionnaires and semi-directed interviews targeting different categories of actors: producers/gatherers, processors, traders and support services. These covered twelve main NTFPs in the six regions of the country.

The diagnosis concluded that the NTFP sector in Burkina Faso has been generally neglected, unstructured and mostly informal, but with a lot of potential to contribute to economic well-being, better nutrition and health and a more sustainable environment. The study recommended various measures to be undertaken at the level of legislation, market development and support services.

This study has provided key information on the scale and nature of SMFEs in the NTFP sector in Burkina Faso; identifying their products, markets and also their opportunities and challenges. By filling key gaps in the knowledge of the NTFP sector, this study raised the awareness of decision-makers and financial and business development service providers to the potential of the sector. Being the first such study undertaken in the country, it became a point of reference for future plans to support the NTFP sector and provided a framework for future studies, surveys and research. Stakeholders elsewhere in the West African Sahel, where such studies have not been undertaken, have referred to this study to help understand the value chains in their own countries.

2.3. More detailed analysis of specific SMFE sub-sectors

Two activities targeting SMFEs in three specific NTFP value chains are currently underway:

- o Participatory value chain analyses for Balanites (Desert Dates) and Baobob products (testing the draft of FC toolkit module 7), to understand market systems, who is involved, the dynamics of how they work and critical issues affecting them. The FC programme is establishing credibility with key market actors and will facilitate dialogue between them. This will culminate in the production of Joint Action Plans to address key constraints and identify bottle necks.
- o Review of community enterprise governance and structures in the karité value chain, to identify appropriate institutional structures and governance that will enhance social sustainability of community forest enterprise organisations (testing the draft FC toolkit module 14).

2.4. Information databases

An inventory of business development services (financial and non-financial) was undertaken in October 2008. This inventory pulled together information and contact details for various organisations (from public, private and NGO sectors) offering services relevant to the needs of SMFEs, notably those working in the NTFP sector.

2.5. Communications platforms developed

A Burkina Faso FC webpage³ has been developed in English and French. This contains basic information on the FC programme, links to various studies undertaken on SMFEs in Burkina Faso, and links to other FC websites and to forestry-related sites in Burkina Faso.

In Sept-Oct 2009 a survey was undertaken into SMFE information needs and preferred means of dissemination. The survey covered 29 enterprises and two associations in Ouagadougou and in the provinces of Gourma and Nahouri, Burkina Faso. Of those surveyed, 79 per cent of enterprises reported a need for more information on the market, followed by 41 per cent of enterprises reporting a need for information on available support and subsidies. Some 38 per cent of enterprises were also keen for advice on relevant technology and production techniques. For the least advanced enterprises, the preference was to receive information and support through a resource person, such as a local partner or adviser who could accompany them in their business development. This was followed by 24 per cent of the least advanced enterprises preferring to receive information by radio. For the most advanced enterprises, however, the clear preference was to receive information via the internet, some giving a preference that it is sent by e-mail to cut down research time. A number of recommendations were made by the enterprises, concerning the existing FC website, which many enterprises saw not only as an opportunity for receiving information, but also for publicising their own enterprise activities more widely. The study report has excited a lot of interest, not only in Burkina Faso but further afield in the West Africa region and beyond. This report has been widely distributed to support structures and CSOs in the sector.

2.6. Training with businesses and financial institutions

The SMFE diagnostic in Burkina Faso identified the need to improve knowledge and understanding of the market as a priority for SMFEs. Consequently a training workshop was organised on Market Understanding in Nov 2009. This workshop was designed around expectations of workshop participants. They identified key themes related to practical marketing issues, as well as value chain relations, and organisation to improve sales and knowledge of how to price products correctly. Participants were mostly urban-based processors. This perhaps explains why accessing information on product prices was not an expressed concern for them. The workshop sought to build the capacity of SMFEs on efficient marketing and understanding markets, specifically in the following areas:

- o understanding practical marketing issues;
- o value chain relations and organisation to improve sales; and
- o knowing how to price products correctly.

The training evaluation exercise showed that many of the participants were very satisfied and requested further trainings in some of the topics. The immediate impact was the participants' attendance at the trade fair '*Journées Agroalimentaires*'; one of the biggest national fairs for forest products. This trade fair was opened two days after the workshop, as a direct result of the training, which included 'trade fair participation' as one of the modules. Participants made it clear that the knowledge acquired would be

3 <http://www.treeaid.org.uk/page2.asp?pid=2&sid=88>

ploughed into the businesses and shared with others who could not attend. Subsequent contact with the SMFEs that participated in this training suggests that it has contributed to their adoption of a more professional approach.

2.7. Forest Connect Burkina Faso – connecting with national policies

The FC initiative has as one of its principal objectives the connection of SMFEs to national policies and vice-versa. To achieve this, the initiative in Burkina Faso has engaged closely with the responsible Ministry (MECV, now MEDD) since its inception. The strategy was to contribute to the Ministry's NTFP committee (see 1.3 above), through which TREE AID has been able to make the case for FC, and secure support for a more enabling environment for SMFEs. Since 2008, this strategy has led to FC's representation, through TREE AID, at all influential '*Travaux des groupes thematiques sur la promotion des filiere Agro-sylvo-pastorales, halieutiques et fauniques*,' to chart the way forward for the promotion of value chains in Burkina Faso. This channel of influence has been backed up by TREE AID's input in various meetings, publications, contacts, information dissemination and through collaboration with government departments and important associations in the sector.

MEDD and APFNL have been represented in all activities organised within the framework of FC and have served as an important channel for the distribution of information and publications on FC. The creation of the APFNL is aimed at developing policies and an implementation strategy to promote the NTFP sector in Burkina Faso. In this context, TREE AID has been able to make the case for the critical role of SMFEs in developing this sector.

3. Impacts

3.1. Institutional

FC has provided valuable insight into the NTFP sector (structure, information needs, potential BDS, governance of producer associations), and into the challenges and priorities of SMFEs themselves. SMFEs in Burkina Faso play very important roles in employment, income generation, and livelihoods. They can be classed according to their activities: (i) producers-collectors and traditional small-scale processors in the rural areas, (ii) semi-industrial processors, national traders, and exporters based, in the urban towns. The political and legislative changes taking place in the country for over a decade have favoured an increase in the number of SMFEs. SMFEs in Burkina Faso mentioned here are those involved in the NWFPs value chains; those in wood fuel are not considered in the FC studies. SMFEs can be found in more than twenty two product sectors, many of which are based on particular tree species, amongst which are: Karité (*Vitellaria paradoxa*), *Parkia biglobosa*, *Tamarindus indica*, *Bombax costatum*, *Saba senegalensis*, honey and bee products, *Acacia senegal*, and so on. Poor access to finance is one of the bottlenecks most often cited for SMFE development. SMFEs operating in the NWFP sector are particularly subject to this obstacle. This is because the exploitation of NWFPs has for a long time been regarded as, and to some extent continues to be, a non-economic activity, and therefore of little interest for financial structures. Industrial processors – and to a lesser extent exporters – are the most oriented toward credit. The other categories tend to believe that their business is not profitable enough to ensure loan repayment.

Much of the NWFP market is informal. Consequently, SMFEs have some difficulties, especially those of a certain size, in acquiring a regular supply of raw materials in sufficient quantity and at a good price. We have observed in recent years, however, progress towards better structuring, especially for export chains (cashew, shea, and so on) where financial institutions are becoming more interested. It is worth noting

that the enterprises with whom TREE AID works come in all sizes (from sole traders to large associations or cooperatives) and some of these do not actually fit Government definitions of what is or is not an SMFE — some might formally be defined as nano, mini and small enterprises. (See: Kabore *et al.* 2008⁴) This important research has been critical in supporting arguments for developing an NTFP sector based on SMFEs, and in developing rational, well-justified plans to convince donors and government agencies to support SMFEs in the NTFP sector.

Outcomes of FC have informed:

- National planning on forestry and rural enterprise development, in a period when the government was setting up APFNL and developing a national Forest Investment Plan.
- Expansion of TREE AID's own village tree enterprise programme to assist newly established micro-enterprises in accessing markets and services.
- Decisions of other service providers (including MFIs), helping them to refine their service offers to match the needs of SMFEs.

FC was a catalyst for TREE AID to employ a full time senior specialist on Enterprise Support, to compliment a team with technical backgrounds in natural resource management. It supported the participation of TREE AID at national forums, where they were able to raise the profile of NTFP SMFEs. It also provided a practical vehicle for closer collaboration between TREE AID and CIFOR on participatory value chain analysis.

3.2. Improvements to existing products

FC has brought together many actors involved in the same and different value chains, creating forums for learning and sharing through numerous meetings and workshops. FC provides an arena for producers to overcome economic and geographic isolation, helping them to gain a broader perspective on their activities. They have opportunities to see, listen and understand what other enterprises are doing; to reflect on their work and see how they solve challenges – for example, the producers from different TREE AID VTE sites (Séguénéga, Po and Nobere) working on a range of Baobab and Balanites products have been able to compare field notes and learn from each other. These forums have led indirectly to improvements in products and the 'discovery' of markets for new products, such as Babobab oil and Karilor's latest shea soft/butter.

TREE AID has made good use of the inventory of service providers, in the context of its village tree enterprise programme. This has linked SMFEs to business development and financial service providers, leading to an improvement in their products. FC forums have also provided opportunities for some buyers to give feedback about the quality of certain products. This provides SMFEs and other value chain actors with vital information and recommendations on how to improve their products at various points along the market chain.

Small NTFP enterprises are now returning more income to poor rural households. FC has contributed significantly to this trend, although it is difficult to disaggregate its contribution from the range of initiatives with which it has been integrated. The majority of these enterprises operate outside the formal sector, therefore data on this pathway to growth and poverty alleviation is sparse. However, TREE AID alone is now working with 282 VTE groups, with a membership of 2,275 women and 848 men. These groups have generated \$175,000 of revenue to date, a figure that is expected to more than double within the year.

4 Kaboré, C., Yaméogo, U., Bila, N. and Kamara, Y. (2008) Défis et opportunités pour les petite et moyennes entreprises (PME) au Burkina Faso, FAO, Rome, Italy.

3.3. Cost improvements

FC has directly and indirectly led to a reduction in costs for SMFEs at various levels:

- o Information provided in the BDS services alerted SMFEs to the availability of free and subsidised services for which they might otherwise have paid full price.
- o FC has also delivered training on market understanding to SMFEs at a greatly subsidised cost. SMFEs generally find such training expensive, sometimes prohibitively so, discouraging capacity building.
- o The participatory approaches used in all FC activities (surveys and research) are a cost effective source of capacity building and information gathering for SMFEs.
- o The forum provides a free arena where producers can discuss and compare prices offered by various buyers, undertake marketing intelligence sharing, and eventually fix prices more favourable to them, at little or no cost.

3.4. Sales improvements and business environment

- o FC has helped well-established SMFEs to build their marketing capacity, develop more sophisticated pricing policies and access information about potential new markets.
- o It has also helped build new links between small NTFP enterprises working within the village tree enterprise programme, and with buyers, processors and exporters further down the value chains.
- o Access to data, surveys and publications through the FC webpage, and from meetings and personnel working on the initiative, provides a very useful source of information for SMFEs and improves transparency in the business environment. Most other support initiatives would not focus on, or invest in, detailed information on relevant niche value chains/markets.
- o Many SMFEs use the margins of FC forums as an opportunity to cut smart marketing deals that would not have been possible otherwise. For example, Karilor placed an order for a large supply of shea butter from a VTE group from Manga during one of the recent FC workshops.

3.5. Key factors in success

- o FC targets suitable SMFE-related audiences, support services and service providers. These actors have the capacity and motivation to learn, allowing for approaches to be adapted to the realities on the ground. They are often more open than other major actors in the value chain.
- o A key success factor is that FC ventures into areas that mainstream service institutions have little interest in. The participatory analysis of the Baobab and Balanités value chains is a good example. This is now raising a lot of interest among major organisations, leading to more interest in FC activities and raising the profile of the initiative.
- o The participatory nature of the activities – using a ‘learning by doing’ approach and testing components of the FC toolkit in diverse regions of Burkina Faso – facilitates realistic and practical implementation. The tools are being refined and verified by primary stakeholders prior to finalisation and publication.
- o Using Focal Points rather than establishing dedicated offices and an organisational infrastructure makes the best use of experienced hands and brains to undertake implementation of FC activities. This encourages direct action and makes good use of precious project resources. The value of working with existing institutions in the sector has been made clear through the FC initiative.
- o Working closely with state structures allows local decision-makers or policymakers and state agents to be directly involved and informed first hand. It ensures FC is plugged into the processes that determine government policy. It also helps to bridge the CSO/NGO–public sector divide, which is so evident in some other domains.
- o Engagement with marginalised actors, notably women, gives them an outlet to voice their ideas, talk about their successes and challenges, and propose solutions. This has been well illustrated

in the testing of participatory value chain analysis and strengthening of community enterprise governance.

- o The unique focus on SMFEs sets FC apart from other international alliances in the West Africa sub region and gives special value to its achievements.
- o Outputs of FC studies have been effectively distributed through face-to-face presentations, in hard or soft copy formats, and through the established network of TREE AID contacts. The usefulness of these studies is all the greater because the conclusions have reached many support service agents and SMFEs themselves.

3.6. Reflection on decisions taken

SMFEs differ in their preferences for accessing information, as highlighted in the FC survey of information needs and preferred means of diffusion (refer to section 2.5 above). The FC webpage has been a worthwhile investment for disseminating FC documents and presentations to more advanced urban based SMFEs, and for publicising the initiative internationally. Many useful contacts have come through to TREE AID via the website. Most rural micro enterprises, however, have little or no access to the internet. High levels of illiteracy are also a significant barrier for poor, rural people engaged in these enterprises. TREE AID and their local NGO partners have been able to take advantage of their own network of field facilitators to act as intermediaries, delivering and exchanging information with these rural entrepreneurs. This network is, however, dependent on other project funding and it is an approach that is relatively expensive to replicate and sustain.

On reflection, FC activities could have focused more on the use of mobile phone technology and local radio to connect SMFEs with services and markets. To make and reinforce connections between SMFEs, FC has sought to work through existing producer unions and trade associations. This approach is valid, but most small rural forest enterprises fall outside the geographical coverage and/or thematic remit of existing unions and associations. The development of a new tier of district level producer or trade associations would have been beyond the means of FC, but those involved in FC could have recognised this need and pushed for such a development at an earlier stage.

FC cannot be a ‘panacea’ for all the challenges faced by SMFEs, but it is the right concept at this critical time when SMFEs are gaining in economic importance and their potential contributions to building livelihood resilience and reversing environmental degradation are being increasingly recognised. The initiative could make better links to climate change and biodiversity conservation agendas. Before now, it was more practical to act with a tighter focus on enterprise development, thereby promoting market based conservation approaches.

4. Benefits of the Forest Connect alliance

4.1. The FC website – recommendations for improvements

The internet is an increasingly important medium for the dissemination of information. It is now a first port of call for most development actors – and even government agencies – searching for information in Burkina Faso. There is a lot of competition for attention between websites, however. The FC site could be more interactive and user friendly. The material posted on the website could be made more colourful and simple, easy to read and understand, and easily replicable. In line with the participatory approach of FC, a survey conducted with the target group on how to improve the website could help inform any improvements. The C website, hosted by TREE AID, could also be updated more often, and could become

a more integral part of TREE AID's main website.

4.2. The Forest Connect Toolkit

The FC Toolkit has been a useful vehicle for sharing knowledge within the FC alliance. The draft module prepared by TREE AID on "Developing Market Understanding" was born out of substantial experience implementing both FC and TREE AID's village tree enterprise work in Burkina, Mali and Ghana. Hopefully, this will prove to be of value in its application by other alliance members. TREE AID is currently coordinating the testing of toolkit Module 7 on "Participatory value chain analyses" (in collaboration with CIFOR) and Module 10 on "Strengthening community enterprise governance and structures".

Testing of Module 7 is focused on two underutilised species yielding potentially valuable NTFPs, namely Baobab and Balanites. The approach set out in the toolkit module has proven to be efficient and effective up to this point. CIFOR is now collaborating on the field research for this work and GIZ is interested in undertaking more activities around these value chains, both within the framework of FC activities and through other local partnerships. At present, there are many actors involved in Baobab and Balanite products, however the enterprises are informal and poorly connected. Initial field surveys and value chain mapping has already indicated greater potential for the development of SMFEs based on these value chains.

Module 14 has been used as a template to examine appropriate institutional structures and governance for enhancing the social sustainability of community forest enterprise organisations working in the shea value chain. Interpretation of this module has proven to be more difficult. Established interests in the institutional landscape have presented a number of challenges to what is intended to be an open process of inquiry, strategic planning and capacity building. Nevertheless, the work is still on-going with the promise of some interesting outcomes, notably for new alliances or federations of shea producer groups emerging from TREE AID's village tree enterprise project.

FC's work on SMFE information needs and preferences in Burkina Faso (see section 2.5 above) could inform a redraft of Module 9 on "Designing communication strategies". Similarly, Burkina Faso's experience in the set-up and operation of a national NTFP steering committee (see 1.3 above) could inform the refining of Module 2 on "Identifying national facilitation hub institutions".

In the context of TREE AID's work in Burkina Faso, the FC toolkit can function as a complement to the Market Analysis and Development approach. Application of the latter approach spawned hundreds of micro-enterprises at the village level, the survival and growth of which now depends on their being able to expand their connections with services, markets and with each other.

4.3. Future use of the toolkit in Burkina Faso

In a country where NTFP-based SMFEs have so much to offer in diversifying the livelihoods of poor rural households, FC is a highly relevant initiative for poverty alleviation, climate change adaptation, environmental management and sustainable economic development. The toolkit, once finalised, will be a practical means of disseminating the learning from FC and for replicating its successes.

For Burkina Faso, all 17 modules are potentially relevant at various levels for a range of different development actors. The preceding section refers to the useful experience that has been gained through the testing and adapting of two toolkit modules, which will aid their wider application in future SMFE support programmes in Burkina Faso.

Some of the tools will require more resources, time and expertise to implement, notably the first three modules under the section 'Facilitation Capacity Building'. These are more appropriate for bigger or stronger support institutions with substantial in-house experience, intervening on a large scale and targeting well-established SMFEs. The remaining 13 modules (aimed at National Facilitators), however, are practical and directly applicable for any support structure or CSO working with SMFEs in Burkina Faso, including those focusing their activities on Nano and Mini enterprises. The toolkit format helps users to pick out what is relevant to their specific purpose. Some simplification would be preferable for the final product, notably in terms of language and layout, and the final product should be colourful. It should not be too bulky but should have a reasonably large font size and be available in hard copy on durable paper. For use in Burkina Faso, it must be available in French as well as in English.

4.4. International Forest Connect meetings

Being an international alliance with members spread all over the globe, and having diverse ecologies, socio-cultural contexts and political set-ups, members nevertheless have similar goals. International meetings are one of the highlights of the FC activities. They present a forum for representatives of country hubs to share notes, exchange ideas and experiences on implementing the tools, and discuss the challenges faced and how these have been surmounted. They also enable members to establish personal and working relationships with counterparts from other alliance countries, which are essential for the sustainability of such an alliance. Members can use these meetings to gain greater clarity on issues raised in documents produced by other members. For example, at the meeting in Addis Ababa in February 2011, TREE AID and FC Nepal ANSAB representatives discussed many aspects of their activities, compared the contexts for their work, and found several mutual challenges and opportunities for future collaboration. This interaction between members from around the world was a motivating and inspiring experience for participants, enabling them to recognise their common understanding notwithstanding their diversity of backgrounds. The exercises and group work brought out common conclusions and a shared vision. Participants from Burkina Faso learned a lot through discussions and presentations from all over the world. This was akin to a capacity building exercise; listening to others and reflecting on the work of FC and TREE AID in Burkina Faso, comparing notes, and analysing the successes and shortcomings. Participants also picked up useful knowledge about workshop methodologies at the Addis meetings.

5. Future prospects and sustainability

5.1. Vision for the future

Demand for support from SMFEs in Burkina Faso is likely to increase as the NTFP sector grows in size, scope and economic importance. The government recognises that the sector plays an important role in the development of the country. This should translate into a positive environment for SMFEs. Whilst larger urban based enterprises are in a good position to take advantage of government services and business connections, however, the smallest, emerging forest enterprises in rural areas find it more difficult to connect with services, markets and with each other. For growth to occur in Burkina Faso's forestry sector, the work of FC remains unfinished.

There must be an exit strategy to transition from extra-market interventions in business development to sustainable self-financing service provision. In the medium term, however, there is a strong argument for a bigger, bolder FC initiative to play a more active role in the ever increasing demand for support and services.

In the short and medium term this role might be to:

- Mobilise resources to finalise, customise and promote the FC toolkit and offer technical support to relevant local actors for its implementation.
- Reinforce the role of the national hub as a reference centre for practical action on support services to SMFEs. This work might be integrated with TREE AID's ambition to offer 'training of trainers' sessions and technical support for the implementation of the MA&D approach more widely within the sub-region.
- Persuade policymakers to support necessary changes in the enabling environment for SMFEs and to shape a permanent role for the APFNL in this area.
- Support 'twinning' with other FC country focal points in the sub-region (for example, Ghana and Mali) and extend support for the initiative into other neighbouring countries (such as Niger and Benin).
- Extend the focus of the initiative to SMFEs working in wood energy value chains and possibly even in forest carbon trading.
- Draw on lessons from current initiatives in forest financing in West Africa and investment in locally controlled forestry to consolidate linkages between interested external investors and the opportunities for SMFE development.

5.2. Past and future strategies for sustainable financing

Mobilising sufficient financing for FC activities is indeed a challenge. These activities have relied on modest fixed term project financing, which in Burkina Faso has been effectively co-financed from TREE AID's non-restricted charitable donations, which are also very limited in scale.

Donor project funding remains the best option for extending and scaling up FC activities in the medium term. TREE AID could independently seek support for the type of activities suggested in section 5.1 above, but the scope would be limited to a working area covering just three or four countries. The facilitation of international exchange and learning has been a key attribute of FC. TREE AID would therefore prefer to develop joint funding proposals with FAO, IIED and/or with FC alliance members, encompassing a broad range of member countries.

In the medium term, the route to financial sustainability probably lies with producer-owned associations providing business development services (advice, market information, consolidation and storage, training, representation in policy dialogues, and so on) to their members, through a business model that is fully financed from membership subscriptions and fees for service provision.

There will also be a role for strictly commercial investment:

- By downstream value chain actors in upstream capacity development and injection of working capital. The idea here is for producers or actors involved in production to also get involved in financing or paying for capacity-building activities, such as value addition and marketing trainings.
- Through local financial institutions for capital investments, in processing upgrades, capacity development and possibly for product development if the risks can be reliably assessed and controlled.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that FC Burkina Faso has played an important part in pushing the NTFPs and Mini, Small and Medium Forest Enterprises agenda to the level of having a sub-Ministerial department and in being considered as one of the sectors that will help push the government's vision of making Burkina Faso an 'emerging economy' within the decade. The FC concept and approach have proven to be effective on the ground and have resonated well with SMFE actors. Much has been done and is on-going, but more needs to be done as demands are increasing with each successful step. The poor levels of rainfall and the erratic weather patterns witnessed this year in Burkina Faso are likely to lead to an increase in the NTFP sector's prominence as a source for income generation and subsistence. This makes it all the more important that activities on the ground be reinforced and expanded.

'Forest Connect?' 'I have never known that drivers and potters can attend workshops; I have seen it twice with Forest Connect'. 'It is a wonderful approach, hope others will follow.'

- Mme Ki Thiombiano of Groupe KAIRFORCE Fada Ngoma BF, talking after a Forest Connect workshop on the participatory value chain analyses (in a personal communication).