As a large proportion of the rural private sector, forest and farm producers are the primary actors in rural transformation and sustainable development. They possess knowledge and experience essential to shaping effective successful policies and actions.

Through its support to local and national producer organizations, the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) is working to ensure forest and farm producers are involved in national decision-making processes that impact their livelihoods and the sustainable management of forests, in turn helping to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2015 this support led to major changes in policy in Guatemala and the Gambia that will have a significant impact on the lives of many.

**Influencing the law in Guatemala**

When Alfredo Cu (above) thinks about his childhood, he remembers living in a single-room house in Guatemala. But Cu is now a board member of the Federation of Cooperatives of Verapaces (FEDECOVERA), which represents 38 cooperatives and 25,000 forest and farm producers. FEDECOVERA produces coffee, cocoa, pepper, tea and timber, and is one of the world’s largest exporters of organic cardamom. With support from the FFF, in 2016 it will open an agroforestry business school targeting young people and women from rural communities.

When poor forest and farm producers are organized, they can quickly improve their lives, influencing policies that are affecting them, accessing public funding resources and markets, and becoming pivotal actors for rural development. FEDECOVERA is a member of the National Alliance of Community Forest Organizations of Guatemala (Alianza), which represents more than 400 community groups with 388,000 producers. Together, Alianza members sustainably manage 750,000 hectares of forest – 17.5 percent of national forest cover and more than 4% of the total forest cover in Central America.

Alianza is committed to ensuring its members are involved in national decision-making processes, especially with respect to the exploration of finance instruments to benefit smallholders and forest communities including REDD+. With the assistance of the FFF, Alianza took an active role in the preparation of a new forestry incentive law, known as PROBOSQUE, which was approved by congress in September 2015. The new law assigns 1 percent of the annual national budget (around US$20 million) for the next 30 years to smallholders, cooperatives and indigenous communities to implement agroforestry systems, forest restoration, production and protection of natural forest and plantations. It is estimated that the law will create more than 20,000 jobs, provide indirect employment for a further 60,000 people, and improve the livelihoods of some 1.5 million families – like that of Alfredo Cu.
Securing tenure in the Gambia

With support from the FFF, forest and farm producer platforms in the Gambia have been advocating community forestry, which gives producers secure tenure to manage their resources and protect forests for current and future generations. In 2015 the Gambian Environment Ministry signed 77 community forest management agreements granting local communities the legal mandate to own and manage their forests sustainably for improved livelihoods and sustainable resource management. The agreements cover an estimated total area of 5335 hectares in five administrative regions of the country, and are first step towards a national policy target of transferring 200,000 hectares to the local population by 2019.

Future impact in Bolivia and Myanmar

Cacao producers in Bolivia are set to establish a national umbrella organization and five organizations at sub-national level in 2016 with FFF support. Together with the government, the cacao producers will prepare a national policy for organic cacao and develop a programme to strengthen the value chain of organic cacao in Bolivia. The Bolivian government has already committed US$37 million for the next five years to support the programme.

In Myanmar, community forestry producers associations are growing with FFF support at state and township levels, forming the building blocks of a national federation planned for 2016. These groups may be able to contribute directly to a revised set of Community Forest Instructions which, if approved, will grant communities full commercial rights over timber within their community forests.

Supporting small forest and farm producers to organize themselves into cooperatives is a quick, economic and efficient way to help eradicate poverty and improve livelihoods. This requires targeted investment right from the initial stage of organizing. By including the rural private sector in national decision-making processes, it also positions them to help to achieve many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Creating opportunities for the next generation

Now Alfredo Cu is 49 years old. He is the founder of an agroforestry cooperative and as a member of FEDECOVERA, he is shareholder of the rural development bank of Guatemala (BANRURAL). His children study at university and when they will finish their studies, they will go back to their community to work in FEDECOVERA, just like fellow farmer Miriam Andrea Cu-Ical, who says:

“I am glad that I am member of the Federation of Cooperatives of Verapaces, Guatemala (FEDECOVERA) because, thanks to my producer organization, I have employment, I don’t need to migrate to the capital or abroad to find a job, I don’t need to get married too young. So, I am the owner of my present and hopes for the future.”

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