



# Empowering Rural Communities as drivers of agricultural innovation

A Collective Action within Key Focus Area (KFA) 1 of GFAR's Medium Term Plan 2018-2021

There are over 500 million family farms in the world. Family farmers range from smallholder to medium-scale farmers, and include peasant, indigenous peoples, traditional community, fisher folk, mountain farmer, pastoralist and many other groups in every region and biome of the world. They produce more than 80% of the world's food in value terms, confirming family farming's central importance in world food security today and for future generations<sup>1</sup>. Their actions directly address the Sustainable Development Goals providing solutions for rural communities to achieve SDG 1, 2, 13, 14, 15 and 17.

Farmers need research and innovation to improve their way of life, just as agricultural research needs farmers to apply and deliver on the potential of its work. Family farmers must preserve their identity, culture and knowledge while innovating, yet must adapt to increase sustainability and the wellbeing of their families. For this reason, agricultural research should act from a wider perspective, with a more holistic view, based on the three pillars of sustainability: social, economic and environmental. The basis should be mutual recognition and joint learning throughout the whole process.

Participatory research should be practical, equitable and effective, with the demands driven by strong partnerships transforming agricultural research and innovation into meaningful impacts at scale. According to Partners in GFAR, agricultural research and innovation combine knowledge and innovation: from science comes trusted and

*"Farmers should be considered as researchers. As well as the need to institutionalize the participatory process [there] is [the need] to have the farmer organizations owning the initiatives."*

—Esther Penunia, Secretary General, Asian Farmers Association, during the GFAR Partners' Assembly in 2016

validated results from its rigor, method and applicability, from farmers comes innovation, adaptation and the take up of new ideas. This approach is holistic, consultative and iterative, and thus trusted by partners and validated by experience. It is important to keep strengthening this relationship between science and society and focus on the participation of family farmers' and civil society organizations, and local communities, in the process of research and innovation. Indeed, rural development is based primarily on smallholder producers and their rural communities.

Partners in GFAR have long recognized this need and for these reasons, the World Rural Forum as the GFAR Civil Society Organizations global constituency



Neil Palmer-CIAT

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representative, joining with other Partners, proposes a Collective Action “To enhance participatory research processes between family farmers, rural communities and research”, developed during the GFAR Steering Committee in June 2017. The challenge is that the products of agricultural research and the demands to support innovation of family farmers and rural communities are mismatched. In order to resolve this mismatch, a strong and ongoing collective dialogue, with action as a direct result, is proposed among all the stakeholders concerned. Farmers’ Organizations and Rural Communities should be at the centre of the process. There are multiple starting points:

- Identification of innovation needs through community foresight processes (see separate concept note)
- Inclusion and ownership of the design and implementation of research and innovation processes by the farmers
- Capacity development to empower and inform to better negotiate their own agriculture needs
- Curriculum change for sustainability
- Co-design; Co-innovation; Co-development baseline establishment
- Participation of farmers’ organizations in national agenda design and decision processes.
- Funding mechanisms needed to support the integration of formal and informal research actions (linked with KFA 4)

### What we will do together

This Collective Action will create a learning space and an advocacy and institutional reform knowledge tool, based on fostering: bottom-up processes; mutual learning; open sharing; valuing and recognizing all partners equally and breaking down institutional walls. It will build on collective actions previously created through GFAR, in particular promoting local innovation (Prolinnova) and blending formal and farmer research through use of competitive grants (DURAS).

The inception activity of this collective action proposal should be a global workshop with the aim to agree on concrete steps and activities during the next GFAR MTP 2018-2021. The workshop would be a farmer- and civil society-led process, in multiple languages, first discussing and agreeing on principles from the perspectives of smallholder farmers and resource-poor communities, associating the broader group of concerned constituencies and their stakeholders to develop the Collective Action. The objectives are: i. to create a multi-stakeholder core group of dynamic drivers of the process, who will coordinate the Collective Action; ii. agree on the activities, indicators and the functions of each member; iii. agree on the results and outcomes that we are looking for and iv. map out a process and enable organizations to jointly commit to deliverables for 2018-2021.

You are invited to join WRF, COPROFAM, AFA, PIFON, PROPAC, APAARI, FORAGRO, CORAF, CIRAD, AIRCA, CGIAR, National Research Institutions, BLE, IFAD and FAO in creating this process for communities to determine and express their needs for agricultural innovation and research.

For more information, contact  
[GFAR-Secretariat@fao.org](mailto:GFAR-Secretariat@fao.org)