



# The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) Approach

Delivering climate resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods

A guide for programme developers

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Duncan Macqueen

**Working Paper**

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**Forests**

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*Keywords:*  
forestry, climate change,  
climate resilience, forest and  
farm producer organisations

## About the author

Duncan Macqueen is the Leader and Principal Research of IIED's work programme on forests and prosperity. He is an experienced forest research and development practitioner, delivering impacts in collaborative programmes across 50-plus countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. He has been a conceptual pioneer in the design and implementation of programmes to sustain locally-controlled forest business and strengthen forest and farm organisations. Over the last 30 years this has involved policy and field level impacts alongside academic and practitioner media outreach in the areas of forest governance, organizational development, risk management, locally-controlled forest business incubation, value chain developments (in timber, non-timber forest products, biomass energy, and ecotourism), forest climate action on adaptation, mitigation and resilience, and forest development ethics.

Corresponding author: [Duncan.macqueen@iied.org](mailto:Duncan.macqueen@iied.org)

## Forest and Farm Facility

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) is a partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the European Agri-agencies (Agricord). FFF strengthens the organisations of Indigenous Peoples, forest communities and family smallholders to secure their rights, organise their businesses, sustainably manage their forests, and provide social and cultural services to the poor and marginalised.

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International Institute for Environment and Development  
235 High Holborn, Holborn, London WC1V 7DN, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399  
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In this working paper, we explain the strategic logic and practical approaches that have allowed FFF to support Forest and Farm Producer Organization (FFPOs) in delivering climate resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods at enormous scale. The intention is to spread understanding on how these participatory, bottom-up approaches can provide nature based solutions for people and planet.

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# Acronyms

AFA	Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development
ComDev	FAO's Communication for Development programme
COP	Conference of Parties
CTOP	Federation of Peasant Organisations and Agricultural Producers, Togo
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFF	Forest and Farm Facility
FFPOs	Forest and farm producer organisations
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IPLCs	Indigenous peoples and local communities
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
M&L	Monitoring and learning
MA&D	Market analysis and development tool
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCSAT	Organisational capacity self-assessment tool for producer organisations
ODA	Official development assistance
PGS	Participatory Guarantee Scheme
ROPPA	Network of Peasant Organisations and Agricultural Producers in West Africa
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VSLAs	Village savings and loans associations

# Introduction

## Background to this report

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) is a co-management partnership between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and AgriCord. It delivers support directly to local forest and farm groups so that they can act as key change agents in promoting climate-resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods. The FFF was established in 2012, its second phase began in 2018 and will continue through 2025.

Successful impact was the main reason resource partners opted to expand support to the FFF from its first phase (US\$16.2 million between 2012–2017) and its second phase (US\$53 million between 2018–2025). By 2017, the FFF had provided direct support to 947 forest and farm groups, supported 262 diversified businesses with added value, changed 33 policies in favour of forest and farm producer groups, and leveraged an additional US\$100 million in government incentive programmes. In the second phase, by 2021 the FFF had supported hundreds more groups, which in addition to adding value to a further 115 businesses and changing 82 more policies, helped 100 groups to develop climate action plans and imprinted its DNA on a further US\$1.2 billion in large-scale programmes.

Many programmes document what impact they have achieved. But few make the same effort to show how they have achieved impact (their trade secrets, so to speak). However, FFF was influencing to such an extent the design of other large-scale programmes (such as the Global Environment Facility's Dryland Sustainable Landscapes Impact Program) that the steering committee and co-management team commissioned this document. The aim is to provide the reader with an understanding of the logical flow behinds how FFF delivers impact – but also to avoid other programmes badging themselves as FFF without really adopting the FFF approach.

To help future programmes develop, this report has been structured to provide an introduction to why FFF is special in Chapter 1, and in Chapter 2, why its positioning of forest and farm groups as key change agents works. Chapters 4 to 6 then give more detail on how FFF works to achieve each of its four main outcomes and how they align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- Outcome 1. More enabling policy and legal frameworks for forest and farm organisations delivered through more inclusive governance and cross-sectoral processes (SDGs 16 and 17).
- Outcome 2. Increased entrepreneurship, access to markets and finance through gender-equitable value chains delivered through new capacity to provide business incubation within forest and farm organisations (SDGs 1, 5, 8 and 12).
- Outcome 3. Improved delivery of landscape-scale mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and climate resilience through the direct engagement of forest and farm organisations, and integration with inclusive livelihood approaches (SDGs 2, 13 and 15).
- Outcome 4. Improved and equitable access to social and cultural services (SDGs 3 and 10).

Each chapter is divided into several sections that reflect key elements of the FFF approach. At the end of each section are text boxes with text that can be cut and pasted into proposals hoping to adopt the FFF approach. It should be noted, however, that these elements are integrated. Each element may require the other elements to achieve full impact. Cherry-picking a few elements without abiding by the full spirit of the approach is to be avoided. Every element involves hard-won knowledge in the field – and none should be lightly discarded.

Finally, it is worth noting that almost all elements of the FFF approach described in brief here have more detailed methodologies or thinking behind them. The references throughout the text guide the reader to where that more detailed information may be found.



# Summary

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) is a partnership of FAO, IIED, IUCN and AgriCord that delivers finance and other capacity-building support directly to the local level. Its goal is to strengthen those forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) as the key agents in bringing about climate-resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods. A successful Phase I (2012–2017) led to an expanded Phase II (2018–2025). This paper explains why support to FFPOs is so effective, and how that support is being delivered.

The paper encourages other programme developers to adopt the FFF approach. This is not out of any sense of FFF superiority (although the partnership believes in its approach, refined over more than a decade). Rather, it is because all too little climate and development finance is reaching local organisations at field level. FFF wants to share tactics that work. With such high demand for support, the more agencies that can do this kind of work together the better.

The first chapter describes why FFF is special. It begins by explaining the core benefits of supporting local organisations: enhanced knowledge sharing, cost efficiencies and scale to negotiate better market access and prices, and strength in numbers in securing tenure, rights and enabling policies. It outlines why forest action can often best be achieved by working with farmer organisations. It unpacks why accountable organisation is a stepping-stone to secure tenure, business support and climate-smart technical extension. It sheds light on how to structure programme management – with a steering committee comprised in its majority of FFPO representatives themselves, a co-management team of complementary agencies, in-country facilitators, and national advisory groups. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how supporting interlinked tiers of organisation can build synergies that achieve different functions at different levels – local tenure and productive capabilities, regional aggregation, value addition and service provision, and national and international policy impact.

The second chapter explains in more detail why FFPOs are such effective change agents and presents ways to improve their internal governance to ensure impact. It draws attention to the many negotiated values that FFPOs pursue, so that small amounts of financial

support deliver benefits in many integrated areas. It details how peer-to-peer exchanges have proven an especially useful tool that FFF has used to upscale progress across regions – with thematic content driven by demand surveys of the FFPOs themselves. The chapter concludes with a summary of FFF's approach to the co-production of knowledge with FFPOs, such that action is grounded and workable.

Chapters 3 to 6 provide insights into how FFF supports FFPOs to deliver its four main outcomes: policy change, business incubation, climate-resilient landscapes (that adapt to and mitigate climate change), and improved access to social and cultural services.

The third chapter introduces how the strength in numbers of FFPOs' memberships can be used to negotiate policy change. FFF facilitates multistakeholder dialogue at different levels: local, regional, national and international. It does this because each level has its own set of institutions and resources to better enable FFPO activities. While gender and youth inclusion are mainstreamed across all elements of FFF work, detail is given here on how their voices are empowered to shape policy and improve inclusion in the leadership, membership composition and benefits of group business.

The fourth chapter turns its attention to using FFPOs' experiences of business to spread business incubation support. It starts by noting the importance of working in groups to aggregate products and ensure common quality standards for market access. It then goes on to describe the market analysis and development (MA&D) tool through which promising business options can be screened to create viable enterprise development plans. But it also notes the attention to diversifying into a basket of products to achieve economic and climate resilience. For more established businesses, tools for risk self-assessment and management are described. If undertaken regularly, these can advance business performance in a continuous way. Finally, the chapter concludes with a description of how business experience can then be embedded in financially sustainable regional or national FFPOs as business incubation units that pass on that knowledge, or facilitate access to it, for other member-based groups.

The fifth chapter focuses on the significant scale that FFPOs' large memberships can bring to climate action. It explains FFF training materials on climate action. These include both vulnerability assessment tools and 30 options for resilience responses that FFPOs can adopt. These options are spread across the dimensions of social organisation, on-farm ecology, business, and technology and infrastructure development. Many of these options deliver both adaptive capacity and climate change mitigation. The chapter also covers approaches to access climate finance. As elsewhere, the challenge lies not primarily in knowing what to do, but how FFPOs can organise in innovative ways to get things done and finance them. Shaping markets that are more appreciative of the biocultural heritage and climate action of local groups through the collective use of shared labels is one tactic that is proving effective.

The final chapter shows how FFPOs can ensure no one is left behind. It describes how FFF helps local groups to mobilise and manage their own finance to invest in value addition that benefits their many members – while

also building a track record that improves access to finance from buyers, banks, government programmes, and climate and development programmes. It explains how FFF supports local groups to map and improve access to social protection services. Where these are not available, FFPOs often provide their own cultural and social services that can target vulnerable groups including women, youth and the elderly. Specific mention is made of support to Indigenous peoples and other local communities in campaigns to defend their territories, rights, and traditional biocultural heritage and knowledge of biodiversity. The chapter concludes with details on how FFF supports the local communication capacity of FFPOs using radio, smartphones and other appropriate media to enhance the impact of their commitment to working together.

In summary, this paper tries to capture the main ingredients of an FFF approach that works from the bottom up to provide solutions at enormous scale for people and planet.

## 1

# What is special about the Forest and Farm Facility?

## 1.1 Investing in local organisations – getting money where it matters

*The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) is a co-management partnership hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) but also including the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and AgriCord, that directly funds local organisations. Its goal is to make them the key change agents in delivering climate-resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods. FFF gets money where it matters for poverty reduction and full-spectrum climate action.*

Local people are best placed to manage forest landscapes sustainably. It is they who must survive the threats of climate change, biodiversity loss, pandemics, wars and economic hardship. Groups help them do that. FFF therefore ensures that **most financial resources directly reach local groups.**

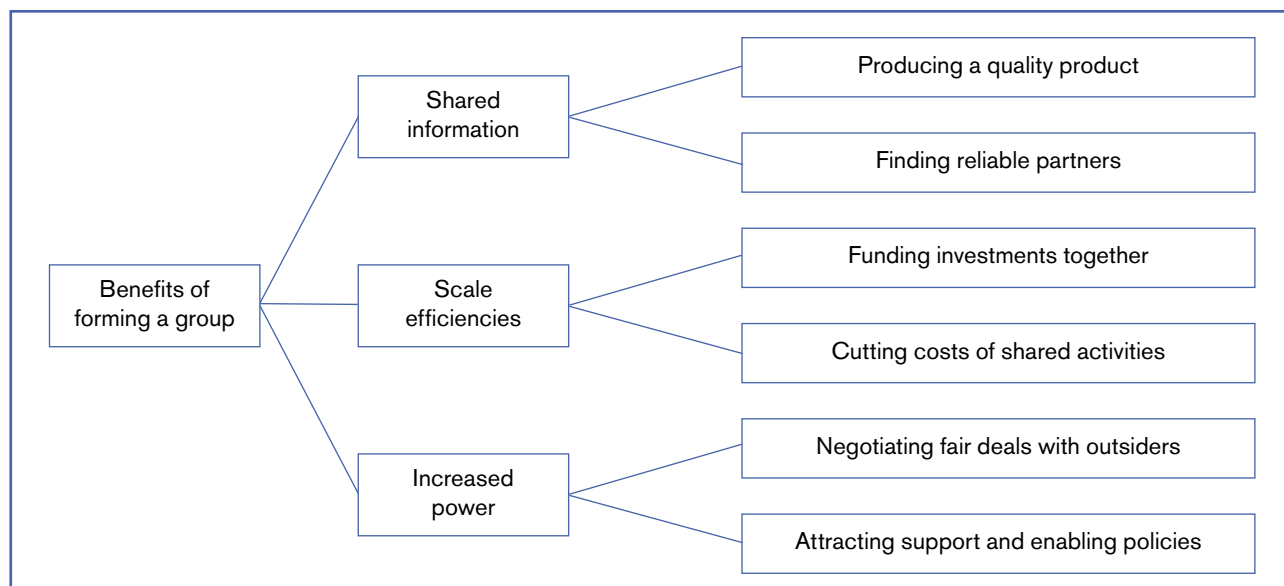
Organisations form to do things that are best done together. They form typically to share information, cut costs and strengthen their voice (see Figure 1). Together, people are stronger (see FAO and AgriCord

2012; Macqueen *et al.* 2014b; Pasiiecznik *et al.* 2015). Local organisations are not an occasional thing. They form in all places and countries. Collectively they have huge significance. While difficult to assess (Mayers *et al.* 2016) smallholder forest and farm producers collectively constitute the largest private sector (Verdonne 2017).

The important benefits of working together result in local empowerment (FFF 2016a) that is highly effective in securing tenure (FFF 2016b), reducing poverty (Piras 2013), improving access to markets (FFF 2016c), attracting private-sector investment (Baral *et al.* 2016), formalising problematic sectors such as charcoal (Ziba and Grouwels 2017; Grouwels *et al.* 2021), deepening democracy and improving governance (Macqueen 2013a; Pias *et al.* 2014), upscaling climate change mitigation and adaptation (FFF 2016d; FFF and FFD 2017), shaping global agendas (FFF 2016e), and delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (FAO and AgriCord 2016) across entire landscapes (IUCN 2017).

The effectiveness of working together is found across the diverse groups that FFF supports among Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs). Member-based groups of this sort live in and have decisive power in shaping forest landscapes. Some of the groups with which we work are Indigenous peoples managing forest

Figure 1. Investing in organisation – the main benefits



territories based on ancestral traditions and cultures; others involve forest and farm producers organised in cooperatives or associations or linked to the villages or territories in which people live. Cultural and ethnic identity plays a central role in certain groups, especially those of Indigenous peoples and minorities, and is less important in others.

These diverse groups describe themselves in different ways. Most produce things, and FFF often uses the term forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) as a short-hand for these organisations. But not all groups self-identify as producers. Some may think of themselves more as ‘communities’, ‘peoples,’ ‘territories’ or some other name. What all these groups have in common is that when well organised, they can use trees, forests and landscapes sustainably. Their control over what happens on the land can make an immense, transformative contribution to almost all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, these groups make major contributions to goals such as no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, reduced inequalities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals.

**‘CUT AND PASTE’ PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: ‘This proposal partners with and assumes the financial risk of providing more than 50% of project funds in direct small-grant support to local forest and farm groups for activities that strengthen their organisations and capacity as key agents of change.’

## 1.2 Built on what exists – forest action by farmer organisations

*FFF knows that self-motivation and trust sustains local organisations over time. It therefore maps and works with pre-existing groups wherever possible.*

The initial step in FFF’s in-country work is to conduct **baseline surveys**. These surveys identify and describe groups that already exist from local to regional and national levels within a partner country. The main sections in those baseline studies are shown below in Figure 2. Examples of such baselines are available for each FFF partner country. It is often the case that existing farmer groups are better organised than equivalent forestry groups. Experience has shown how productive it can be to work with these stronger farmer groups to build up tree-growing and forest-management activities (FAO 2014; Campbell 2015).

In the run up to the creation of the FFF, the main founding partners took part in a global series of 11 country dialogues. These gathered investors, Indigenous peoples, local communities and family smallholders to discuss what could be done to attract investment into locally controlled forestry (see Macqueen *et al.* 2012; Elson 2012). The dialogues informed FFF’s strong conceptual understanding of the pre-conditions that are required for forest and farm producers to plant or manage trees and forests. These can be expressed as a series of questions that a farmer might ask in deciding whether planting or managing trees makes sense (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Main headings for baseline studies that inform which groups FFF will support

	Introduction to purpose of the study
	Typology of forest and farm groups
	Description of main groups in target area
	Key technical, business, and financial support agencies
	Relevant forest, farm, and climate policy processes
	Main social and cultural support services

FFF takes as its entry point the final pre-condition – strengthening accountable forest and farm organisations. It does this deliberately. Accountable forest and farm organisations provide the strength in numbers to fight for enabling policies, business support and technical extension (the other three pre-conditions). This logic is built into FFF's theory of change.

The FFF provides **a mix of grant funding** to suit different scales of organisation. In every case the primary aim is to ensure that these groups strengthen their capacity as key change agents. Small grants (US\$10–25,000) are offered to local groups, often through a competitive call. Larger grants (US\$50–100,000) are offered to larger regional, national or even global organisations. To be eligible, groups must develop a proposal around at least one of FFF's four main outcome areas:

- Outcome 1. More enabling policy and legal frameworks for forest and farm organisations delivered through more inclusive governance and cross-sectoral processes (SDGs 16 and 17).
- Outcome 2. Increased entrepreneurship, access to markets and finance through gender-equitable

value chains delivered through new capacity to provide business incubation within forest and farm organisations (SDGs 1, 5, 8 and 12).

- Outcome 3. Improved delivery of landscape-scale mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and climate resilience through the direct engagement of forest and farm organisations and integration with inclusive livelihood approaches (SDGs 2, 13 and 15).
- Outcome 4. Improved and equitable access to social and cultural services (SDGs 3 and 10).

The theory of change for the programme is shown in Figure 4.

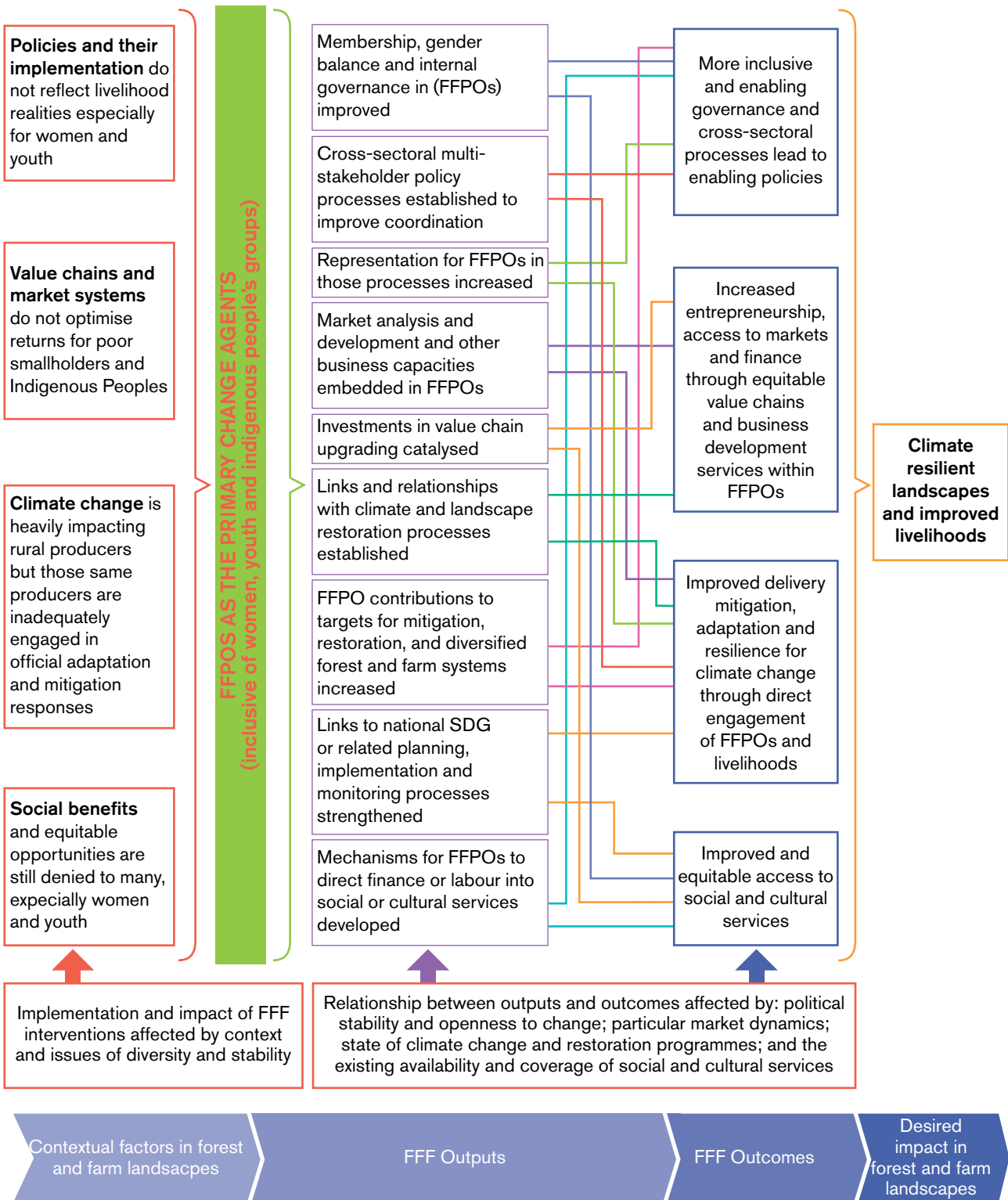
#### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal will map existing forest and farm organisations, and provide support to those that fall within the project target area and that have developed their own proposals for action in line with FFF's four desired outcomes: more enabling policies, sustainable businesses, climate-resilient landscapes and more accessible social and cultural service provision.'

Figure 3. Four main preconditions for farmers to plant or manage trees and forests

Questions a farmer might ask	Preconditions for forest management or tree planting
If I plant or manage trees, can I sell and benefit from them?	Enabling policies for secure tenure
If I can grow tree products to specification, will I get a fair price?	Business support for market access
If I can sell tree products, can I grow them to specification?	Climate-smart technical extension
If yes to all three, will a group ensure that remains the case until harvest?	Accountable organisation

Figure 4. Theory of change of the Forest and Farm Facility



### 1.3 Overseen by producers and delivered through partnership

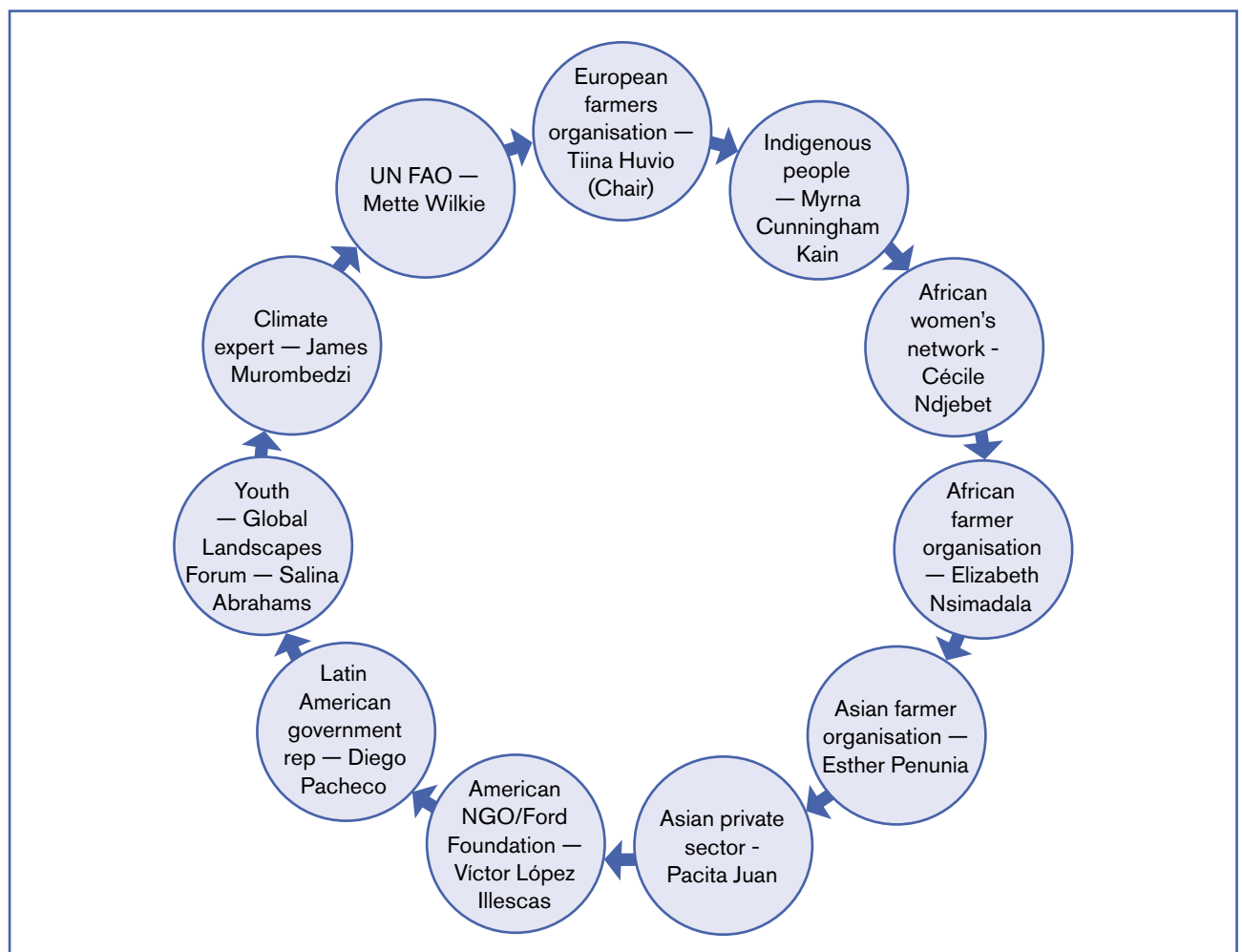
*The FFF approach in Phase II is guided by a global steering committee whose membership always includes an overall majority of representatives of local organisations. This ensures producer interests prevail in the co-management partnership that manages FFF.*

This **majority steering committee representation by member-based forest and farm groups** includes specific representation from Indigenous peoples, women and youth groups (see representational chart in Figure 5). This ensures that strategies and workplans fit the priority of those groups. Current steering committee members come from community forestry, family forestry and farmer producer organisations, Indigenous people's organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs),

government, finance, research and international development organisations with representatives covering gender and youth. The steering committee approves which partner countries FFF works in and reviews and approves annual reports and annual work plans for the year ahead. Funding partners continue with a separate donor support group and participate as active observers in the steering committee.

In country, work is overseen by relevant platforms or multisector steering committees. These structures provide in-country leadership and guidance in coordination with FAO representatives (FAORs) and FAO regional initiatives and any collaborative programmes from the other partners of IUCN, IIED and AgriCord. A key in-country role is that of **national facilitators** who brings together the different elements. At national level, strategy and activities are guided by annual work plans developed in each country and led by a national facilitator (often FAO staff but sometimes involving IUCN or FFPO staff).

Figure 5. Representation categories in the FFF steering committee



FFF works in partner countries with focal points identified in a relevant government ministry. This is usually an agriculture, forest, or environmental ministry. But it depends on which ministry supported the Expression of Interest submitted jointly by apex-level FFPOS and government to join FFF. A national advisory group or steering committee is then established to provide guidance to the programme. This advisory group normally consists of representatives from the government focal point, the key change agents (the majority of which will be leading FFPOs) plus other relevant national partners or experts. Clearance for the selection of larger regional or national producer groups is provided by this advisory group, alongside processes for competitive calls for small grants to local groups. Often cross-sectoral platforms are established or used to provide additional advice.

The primary partners within FFF are the forest and farm groups themselves, but the FFF co-management team also constitutes a formidable international partnership to help build capacity and linkages at all levels. The FFF is hosted by the FAO which leads overall coordination of implementation, technical support under guidance of the steering committee, and government liaison with continuous coordination with regional offices and partner country FAO representatives and advisory groups. The IIED team leads on knowledge generation, particularly around governance tactics, business incubation approaches, climate resilience, and social and cultural service provision alongside a synthesis of monitoring and learning efforts. The IUCN team leads on regional and global support to federations and related conferences and campaigns with regional IUCN offices playing a supporting role to coordinate major programmes. AgriCord leads strengthening programmes for farmer organisations in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific. It aims to ensure resources flow to primary FFPOs, while also facilitating in-country coordination and engagement with its member agri-agencies and their partner farmer organisations, and building FFPO-to-FFPO support, and triangular North-South-South engagement through a pool of 'producer experts'.

A regular annual cycle of monitoring and learning (M&L) involves **annual in-country monitoring and learning workshops** to ensure that multiple local grant recipients within countries share progress in a peer-review fashion to spread good practice. The workshops, and all other elements of M&L, are guided by a detailed facilitators' guide to M&L prepared by IIED. As part of the annual cycle, all the in-country facilitators meet with other co-management partners of FAO, IUCN, IIED and AgriCord in an **annual management retreat**. This enables staff of the four partner organisations plus all in-country facilitators to meet for a week to

develop programme strategy based on lessons from the preceding year. The important operational practices ensure that the partnership is maintained and that all those involved are pulling in the same direction.

#### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal sets up a steering committee comprising majority membership of forest and farm producer organisations to guide and approve work led by a facilitator. This facilitator solicits proposals and disburses funds to local groups, requests and helps them with reporting, while also linking to relevant government contact points, and other relevant partner programmes.'

## 1.4 Successful at scale through layers of organisation

*The FFF recognises the different roles played by forest and farm groups at different levels – local, subnational, national and global – and deliberately supports the emergence and capacity of these useful interlinked structures to achieve scale.*

A local-to-global programme like the FFF has inherent advantages. Not only does it provide important local benefits for thousands of communities, it also creates powerful opportunities for South–South learning; champions grassroots organisations at regional and global levels as potent agents of change; encourages the creation of a global community of practice on how best to strengthen rural organisations; and enables global and national efforts to channel financial, political, capacity-development and informational support to those working on the ground.

A well-organised forest and farm group can tap its own pool of talent, its own traditional knowledge. But it can also make it easier for outside help to connect with its members to create successful enterprises and ensure the well-being of its people and the sustainability of its natural resources. Many well-organised groups, formed into cooperatives or associations, can improve each other's prospects and practices through mutual learning and by speaking with one voice in markets and among policymakers. Groups of such cooperatives or associations can create alliances and federations to amplify their voices manyfold at the national level. Alliances and federations, united internationally, can bring the diverse voices of millions of local farmers, tree-growers, forest managers and other rural producers to the global stage.



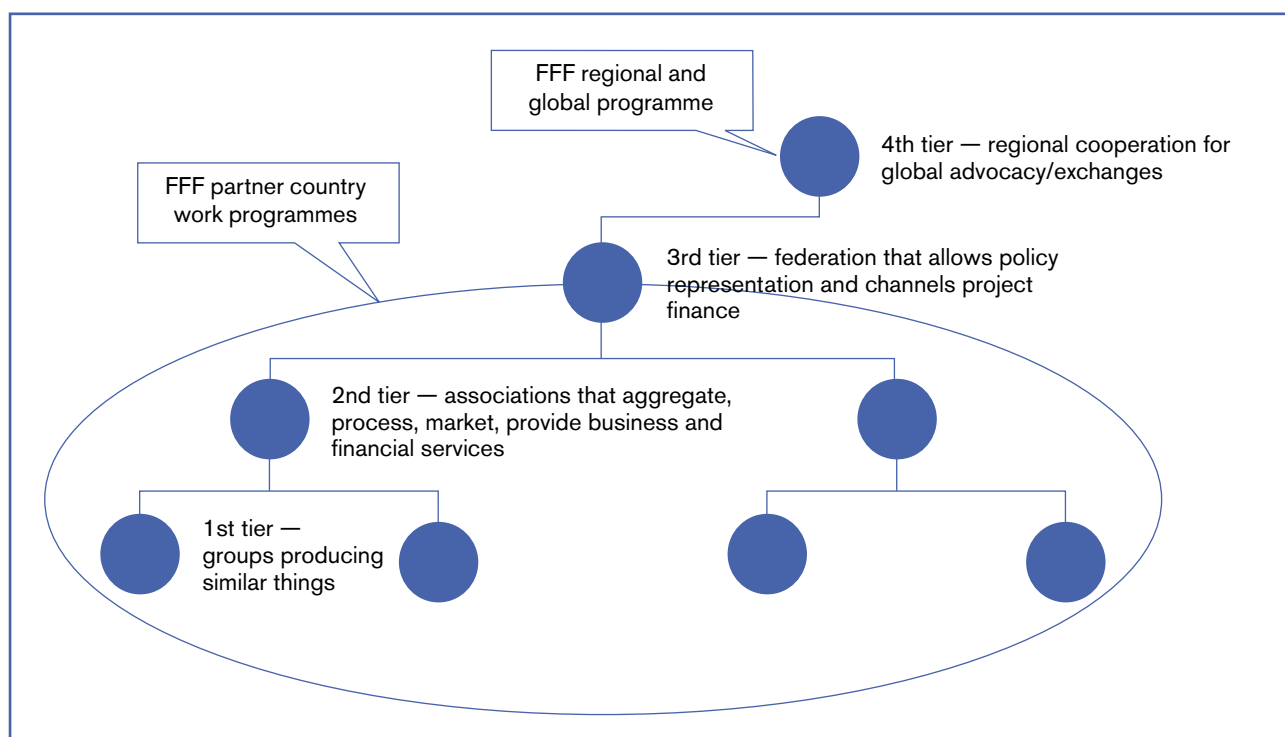
This is the rationale for the FFF (see Figure 6). FFF regularly educates people about **the benefits of organisation**. We work to strengthen links between local groups and subnational, national, regional, continental and global organisations to which they might belong, creating powerful networks at four tiers of geographic scale.

The various levels to which FFF channels finance include:

- **Tier 1. Local groups:** Tackling economic, social and environmental challenges requires collective action at the local level. But studies show that overall, very little climate and development funding is getting to those groups. The FFF provides competitive small grants to enable such local groups – sometimes representing fewer than 100 households – to develop their enterprises, adapt to climate change, improve social protection services and support cultural activities.
- **Tier 2. Regional associations:** The FFF offers funding, training and other types of support to subnational organisations – such as those at municipality or provincial level – representing clusters of local associations. This enables them to aggregate and add value to their products, provide technical and business support to their members, and to advocate on behalf of local producers. These subnational organisations often manage significant land and group businesses, employ large numbers of people, and source goods from hundreds or thousands of smallholders.
- **Tier 3. National federations:** At the national scale, the FFF provides funding and other assistance to ‘apex’ organisations that represent local and subnational groups in policy dialogues, and broker deals with government and markets. With FFF support, many such organisations have taken on the role of business incubation, using the best of what they know to assess risks and link member organisations to relevant experts, or foster peer-to-peer learning. They act as hubs of expertise and conduits to get money where it matters.
- **Tier 4. International alliances:** The FFF helps regional and global networks of Indigenous peoples, forest communities and small farmers increase their visibility and influence. We do this by supporting their participation in regional and global events, communication activities and efforts to improve specific aspects of their work. We use the analytical and communications capacity of our four partner organisations to raise the international profile of these grassroots organisations and share lessons from their work.

For example, in Togo, FFF provides small grants to many local groups such as the Novi Va cassava cooperative, run mainly by women, to improve its agroforestry production system. But it has also supported the subnational Centre for Producers of Cereal (CPC) to help local groups with processing, packaging and marketing of four different types of cassava products.

Figure 6. Achieving scale by supporting interlinked tiers of organisation

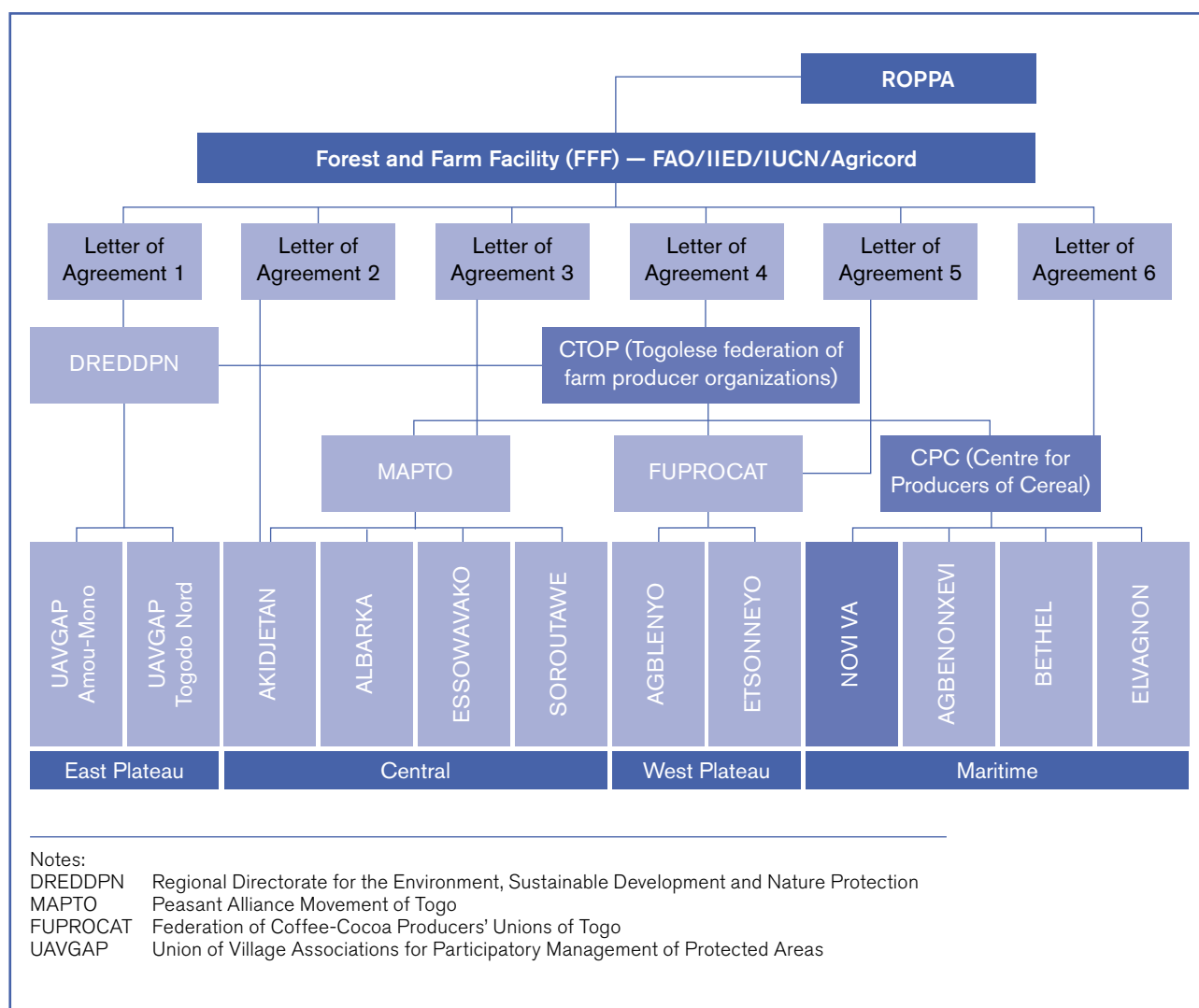


Both these organisations also belong to the Togolese Federation of Peasant Organisations and Agricultural Producers. (CTOP) in which FFF is supporting the development of business incubation and training capacity. CTOP itself is a member of the Network of Peasant Organisations and Agricultural Producers in West Africa (ROPPA) with whom FFF works to represent issues in international advocacy around food security and climate action (Figure 7).

**‘CUT AND PASTE’ PROPOSAL TEXT BOX 4**

In line with the FFF approach: ‘This proposal seeks to strengthen the membership links between local groups, regional associations and national federations – providing differentiated support that strengthens local group accountability and business, helps regional product aggregation, added value and service provision, and builds powerful national and international representation for effective lobbying.’

Figure 7. Togolese example of differentiated support to different tiers of local organisation



# 2

## Forest and farm groups as the primary change agents

### 2.1 Strengthening organisations as the route to empowerment

*The FFF approach gives direct grant funding to the various tiers of organisations described above. This is the quickest route to increase group capacity – earning by doing. But FFF also recognises that it must assume risk to do this, and that capacities within a group need strengthening if trust is to be maintained both within groups and between those groups and support agencies. Capacity building of this sort can also facilitate progressive change within an organisation, like breaking down traditional barriers to women’s and youth empowerment.*

Grants are often accompanied by the use of FFF’s organisational capacity self-assessment tool for producer organisations (OCSAT) that assesses basic organisational systems in nine areas (see Figure 8). OCSAT is a simple checklist tool that provides guidance to groups relating to the documents and processes that will prove helpful to ensure good internal governance (see FFF 2018).

FFF believes in **organisational strengthening as a foundation for all subsequent work**. The OCSAT checklist covers the development of overarching documents such as a founding charter, with vision, goals

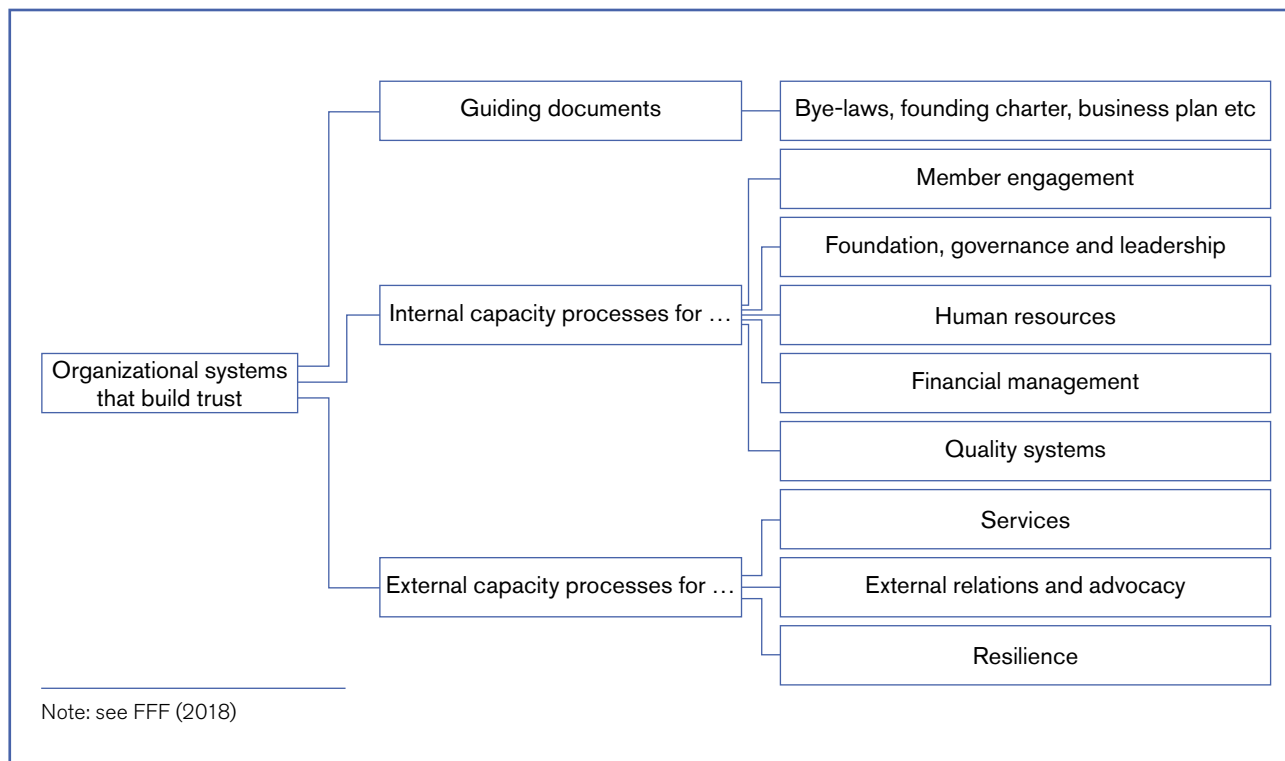
and objectives agreed by the members of the group – or its business equivalent such as a professional business plan. But there are also a series of suggestions for routine processes to do with internal governance – such as the rules on who can be a member, how decisions are made, and choosing and changing leadership positions.

For each of the areas shown in Figure 8 there are lists of the helpful processes or systems that can be developed. OCSAT provides a quick checklist to assess (and score) which of the processes or systems are non-existent, very weak, weak, adequate, good or excellent. This can help the group identify areas which require development, and track progress over time to ensure that the many elements of a mature organisation are gradually put in place. FFF partners have also helped other agencies such as the Rainforest Alliance develop similar tools for tracking and improving community forest organisations (see Milla *et al.* 2022).

#### ‘CUT AND PASTE’ PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: ‘This proposal seeks to build the internal governance capacity of local, subnational and national groups, using toolkits such as FFF’s organisational capacity self-assessment tool for producer organisations (OCSAT) that guides groups towards better internal governance structures and processes.’

Figure 8. Organisational systems that build trust

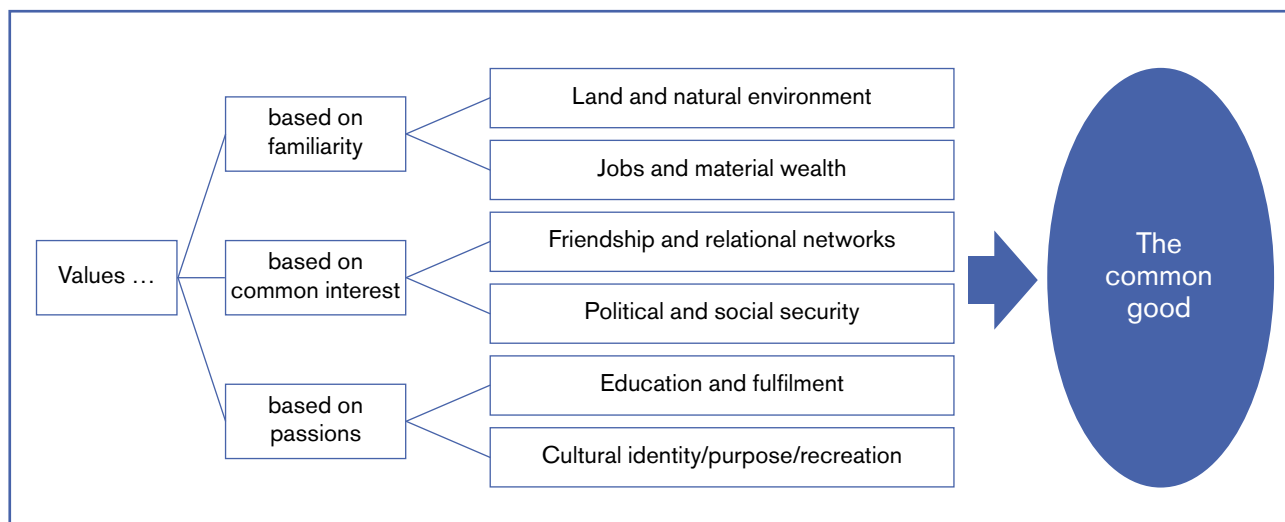


## 2.2 Aligning with member-based organisations that pursue prosperity

*The great strength of FFF's approach is that it aligns with the aspirations and internal finances of tens of millions of local people whose organisations embody attempts to pursue sustainable development for their members.*

Organisations are always founded on the shared pursuit of values oriented to the common good of their members (see Figure 9, based on Macqueen *et al.* 2020). It can take groups time to negotiate what values to pursue and build trust. But organisations with a robust purpose, identity and self-esteem, and that value equity and transparency have long-term benefits. When trust is built, these groups soon enhance sustainable livelihoods and become crucial players in mitigating climate change and conserving biodiversity.

Figure 9. The values that organisations pursue

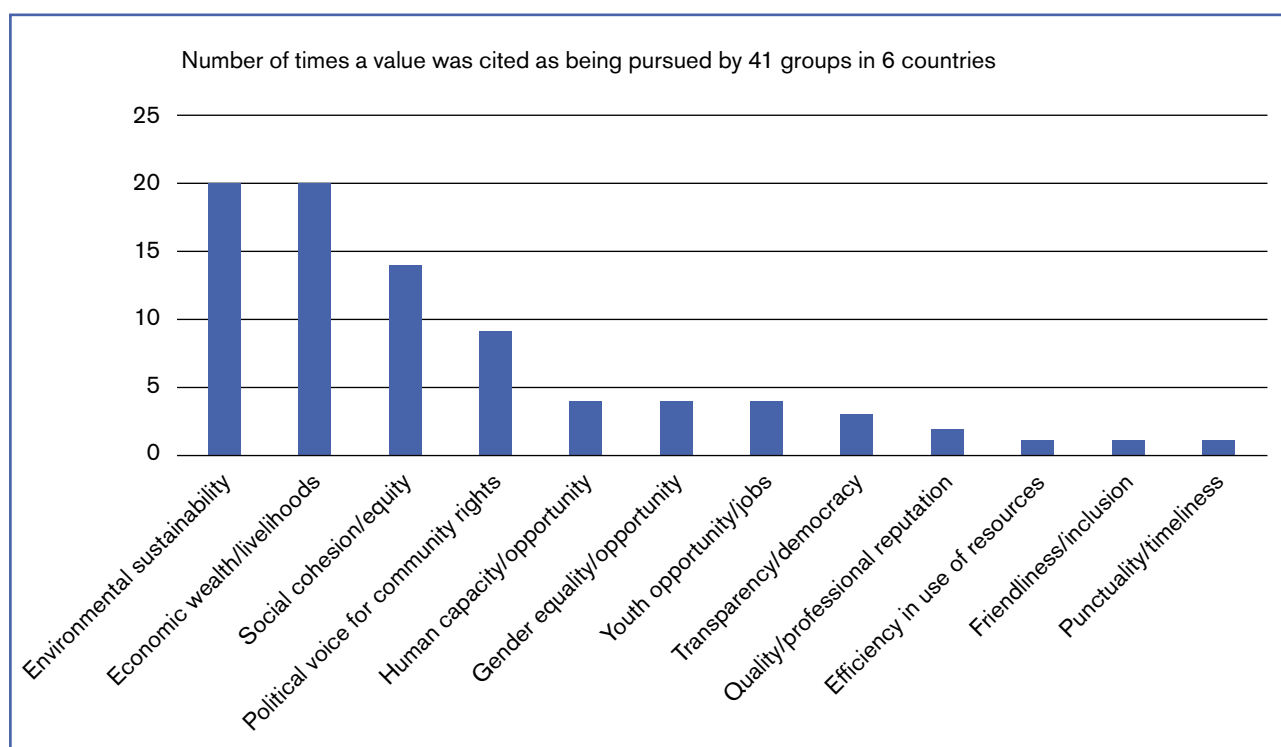


FFF regularly survey the groups with which they work about their support needs. In answer to introductory questions in one such survey of 41 forest and farm groups spanning six countries, it was found that most groups pursued a wide range of values beyond income (see Figure 10). The broader pursuit of values by such groups means that small amounts of support from FFF can achieve rapid progress against a series of interlinked objectives. For example, gains in economic wealth quickly translate into investments in other social and environmental benefits.

### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal recognises the broader aspirations of local groups beyond income generation and therefore seeks to provide funding in ways that allow those groups to fulfil the entirety of their stated goals and ambitions in economic, social and environmental areas.'

Figure 10. Values most frequently pursued by forest and farm groups in Ecuador, Kenya, Ghana, Nepal, Vietnam and Zambia



## 2.3 Building on traditional knowledge through peer-to-peer exchanges

*FFF recognises that local traditional knowledge, grounded in a daily battle to cope with multiple inter-linked risks, is of inestimable value in finding ways forward, and balancing difficult trade-offs. Local groups often trust and learn fastest from each other rather than external experts. So FFF invests heavily in making peer-to-peer learning possible through shared events and field visits between groups. While costly, FFF's annual reports testify to the rapid spread and uptake of useful approaches that have come through such investment.*

Rapid progress has been made through peer-to-peer learning to take advantage of traditional knowledge around useful organisational structures, communication strategies, cultivation and land-management techniques, business start-up processes, risk assessment, value addition, and business incubation. Most recently, we are seeing rapid jumps in knowledge around climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience. Smallholder forest and farm groups often manage huge tracks of forest and agricultural, rangeland and wetland landscapes, and are the traditional custodians (in other words, the local experts) for valuable plant and animal genetic resources. Indigenous people and local communities have managed their territories over centuries using their traditional knowledge systems – and often develop innovative tactics to enhance those systems. Incorporating that traditional knowledge base into the

Figure 11. Thematic learning and events to allow peer-to-peer learning



development of new programmes not only secures the buy-in from the local communities. It also ensures the cross fertilisation of traditional and scientific knowledge for sustainable and resilient communities.

One general way in which FFF supports the respect for forest and farm group’s traditional knowledge is by raising its visibility through **thematic peer-to-peer exchanges**. Typically, FFF tries to ensure that these involve both representatives of producers, and members of relevant government agencies. These regional meetings offer a highly effective way for forest and farm producers to see innovations developed by their peers (which enhances the likelihood of adoption) while also demonstrating to decision makers how important it is to work with forest and farm groups in addressing the sustainable development challenges faced by rural people. For example, since 2012, FFF has been organising a series of thematic learning events based on some of the knowledge co-production themes shown below in Figure 11.

**‘CUT AND PASTE’ PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: ‘This proposal recognises the importance of traditional knowledge that local groups have in ecological, economic, social and technological areas – and their awareness of trade-offs that must be made to progress. It therefore plans to facilitate peer-to-peer learning events as a key strategy for spreading knowledge between groups that can be taken up.’

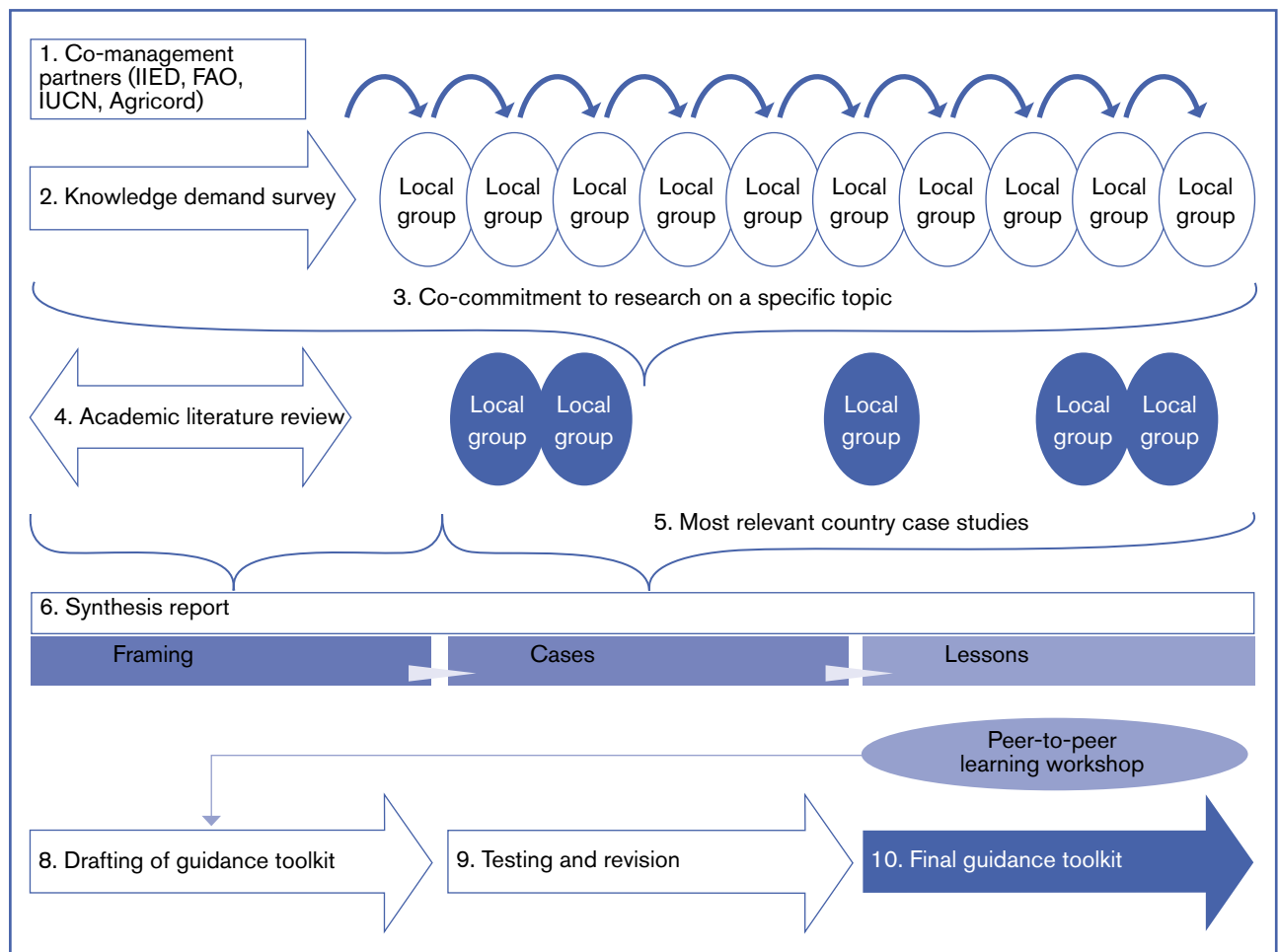
## 2.4 Co-learning by doing as the means of capacity development

*The FFF believes in the co-production of knowledge to meet the needs of its core audiences, including local organisations themselves, their technical and academic support partners, policymakers, and funders and the media.*

The **knowledge demand surveys** that FFF undertakes inform the programme’s research priorities (Covey *et al.* 2021). Methodologies have been designed for researchers and farmer organisations to produce knowledge together. This is much more responsive to local group efforts to meet their members’ needs. In several instances, there have been topics that many local groups across regions have all wished to know more about (such as how to shift policy in their favour, how to incubate businesses, how to assess and manage risks, how to become more resilient to climate change, and how to better use unique production characteristics such as origin or cultural processing to improve marketing).

The established practice of FFF has been to co-produce knowledge through a series of participatory steps shown in Figure 12. The process of **knowledge co-production** starts with co-management partners identifying local groups through baseline studies and field missions. The lead knowledge-generation partner then conducts knowledge demand surveys as a collaborative exchange to identify areas of interest.

Figure 12. Process of knowledge co-production undertaken by FFF



Once priority thematic areas have been identified, there is co-commitment to a topic by the FFF co-management team, in-country facilitators and key FFPOs. For example, knowledge about business incubation was one area of early joint interest. The lead research partner (IIED) conducted an academic literature review while commissioning FFPOs or their support partners to compile case studies relating to the theme. A synthesis report was prepared within which the academic literature review framed the case studies, with a tail-end analytical section that drew lessons of wider application (Macqueen and Bolin 2018). A peer-to-peer workshop to discuss these lessons and hear directly from the case-study authors then led to a drafting of guidance for local groups and support partners more broadly. For example, a toolkit was prepared about how local groups could install business incubation services within their own institutional structures (Bolin *et al.* 2018). This underwent a process of testing and refinement before being spread as a mainstream toolkit within FFF.

In many instances, the development of such information has implication for changes in policy that might lead to a more enabling environment for local groups. These are often distilled in the form of a policy brief – that can serve as a basis for local groups to push for more enabling policy support. So, for example, a policy brief was prepared to show how business incubation by FFPOs is integral to climate-resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods (Macqueen 2019a).

#### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal seeks to talk with local groups about their knowledge and capacity development needs and then co-develop useful knowledge with those groups. This will involve documenting successful local approaches and innovations and combining them with scientific and technical insight. There will be strong emphasis on producing guidance in formats that are accessible to those local groups – such as video clips, face to face trainings and graphics'

## 3

# Strength in numbers that drives policy change

## 3.1 Using hierarchical tiers of organisation to channel information and advocacy

*The FFF understands that the ‘strength in numbers’ of forest and farm groups is powerful in lobbying and advocacy. Large numbers of rural producers together have a powerful voice to shape policies, markets, and investments in producers’ favour. The co-production of new knowledge or evidence described above is one small part of that process. But evidence alone is insufficient to shift policy and practice in an era of information overload through social media. More critical is the interaction between forest and farm organisations and decision makers (deMarsh *et al.* 2014).*

Organised forest and farm groups can install strong representatives in **multistakeholder policy dialogues** of various sorts. These can help producers enter dialogue with governments, the private sector and civil society partners to debate and resolve difficult issues (Macqueen *et al.* 2014c). The logic of that is shown in Figure 13, where associations and federations of local groups provide increasing opportunities for representation at local, regional and national levels.

Indigenous people and local communities face many challenges to secure their rights, production and trade capabilities and to access finance for their forest and farm products. For example:

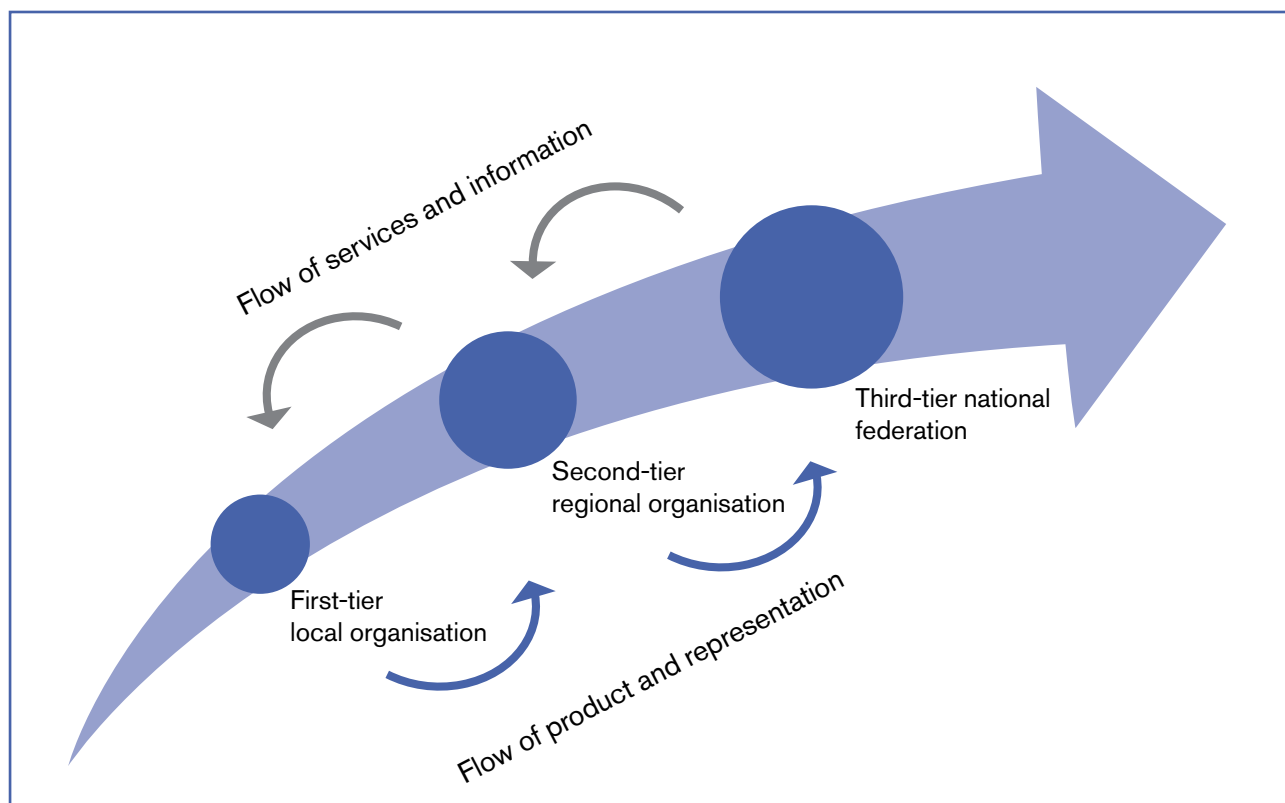
- The high administrative costs of securing tenure and registering organisations
- Poor infrastructure and inherent biases against smaller-scale operations in the form of complex management-plan obligations, trade requirements and restrictions on high-value products, formal and informal taxes, and legality assurance processes, and
- Perceptions of high risk by finance organisations.

However, these challenges can be addressed through concerted government engagement (FFF 2014).

At its heart, the FFF approach recognises that considerable ‘enabling investments’ (money that does not require a return) in self-organisation are necessary preconditions for local groups to shape better policies and attract ‘asset investment’ (money that does require a return) (Macqueen and deMarsh 2016). Clarity about the importance of investment in organisation to achieve useful change emerged through a series of 11 dialogues between IPLCs and investors prior to the start of FFF (see Macqueen *et al.* 2012; Elson 2012).



Figure 13. Advantages of association and federation for political representation



Part of the investment that is required is providing support that gives local groups the time, space and logistics to think through and develop advocacy strategies. In other words, they need the resources to decide among themselves what it is in current laws, policies and practice that they wish to change. FFF encourages all the organisations it supports to develop clear advocacy positions – and is currently compiling guidance on tactics that work for policy engagement work.

#### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal will provide resources and space for local groups to meet to discuss what they wish to change in current laws, policy and practice. It will also equip local groups with advocacy training around tactics that work for policy engagement, and with resources for stronger representation in processes that might enable those changes to be understood and applied.'

### 3.2 Facilitating dialogue to solve policy and market barriers at many levels

*An early lesson from FFF interventions is to target policy change at the appropriate level – the point at which relevant decision-making and budgetary allocations are made. So, while FFF does support policy engagement by forest and farm producer groups at national level, it also helps local and subnational groups to interact with local and regional programmes and budgets to tailor their objectives to producer needs.*

For example, budgets for local infrastructure development and farmer support budgets may best be addressed at the local or district level of government. More strategic decisions about the development of certification schemes and credit programmes for on-farm tree growing may best be handled at provincial levels of government. National issues of land and forest rights, tax incentives and management requirements also can be handled at that level. By approaching it

this way, when a problem cannot be solved at one level it can then be elevated to a higher level to be solved. Many apex-level organisations in FFF partner countries have therefore developed a differentiated strategy which seeks to make gains not only at national level but also at subnational policy levels. **Subnational policy dialogues** are a key feature of the FFF approach (see Figure 14).

Examples of subnational policy engagement are seen across FFF partner countries. For example:

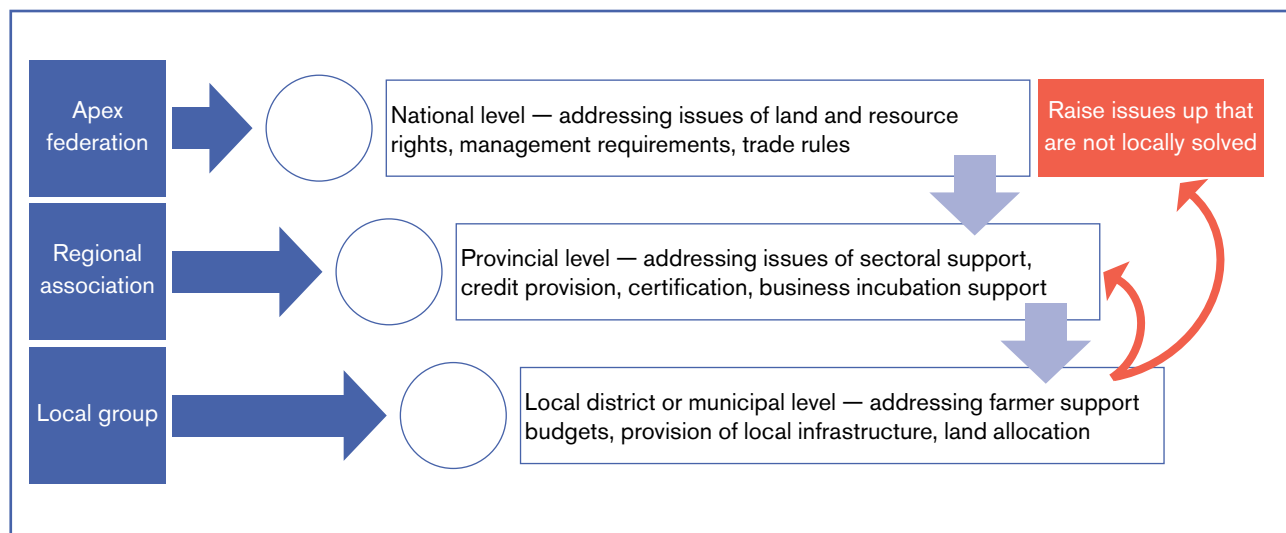
- In Vietnam, the Viet Nam Farmers Union (VNFU) holds policy roundtables at commune, district and provincial levels with great success in shaping road infrastructure development and farm credit programmes.
- In Nepal, the Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal (FECOFUN) has had immense success through the use of its Kishan Chautari dialogue structures at municipal levels to upscale allocation of funds to support the adoption of diversified nutritional gardens, agroforestry and provisions for climate-resilient farming.
- In Zambia, work with the district development coordinating committees and local chiefs has seen allocation of land for timber and NTFP production facilities.

- In Ghana, work with district chiefs and traditional councils has protected women’s savannah tree resources (such as shea and baobab) through the development of a new bye law.
- In Ecuador, the FFF-supported producer organisation Sumak Pacha worked with provincial governments and the Imbabura Local Consultative Council for Environmental Education to develop a Participatory Guarantee Scheme (PGS) in the Imbabura and Otavalo provinces.

**‘CUT AND PASTE’ PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: ‘This proposal will identify and open space for forest and farm producer groups to enter into dialogue with government authorities at different levels through the facilitation of policy roundtables or dialogues at local/district level, provincial level and national level. It will help groups to elevate issues that cannot be solved locally to higher levels of decision-making.’

Figure 14. Apex organisations can target changes to policies and incentives at different levels



### 3.3 Including specific approaches for women and youth

*From the outset, FFF has sought to place particular emphasis on the empowerment of women and youth within forest and farm organisations. FFF's strategy for gender and youth empowerment rests on the recognition of the equality of the individual but also the differentiated barriers faced by women and youth due to cultural patterns that affect decision-making, resource allocation, education and job opportunities. Those barriers require targeted support which FFF offers through weighted funding allocations and specific empowerment tactics.*

In terms of women, the FFF **gender strategy** seeks to address gender inequalities. It does this at the individual, household, community organisation, business and policy levels. Opportunities and entry points are identified to enable gender-sensitive change, particularly at the level of women's entrepreneurial empowerment, that then spread to the other institutional levels as shown in Figure 15. (Bolin 2020a). There is also a strong emphasis on working to support women-led organisations and to develop gender strategies within apex-level organisations such as the good gender strategy developed within the Ghana Federation

of Forest and Farm Producers (GhaFFaP) (Sutz *et al.* 2021).

In terms of youth, the FFF has engaged regional farmers associations such as the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA) in **youth training programmes and exchange events**. A key initial focus of youth work has been to address youth outmigration from rural areas (see Macqueen and Campbell 2020; Macqueen and Mayers 2020). FFF encourages forest and farm groups to differentiate and develop strategies for youth who remain, for those who leave and for those who return to maximise their opportunities and contributions to the group at each stage (see Figure 16).

#### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal will adopt specific actions for gender and youth empowerment. These will include gender and youth disaggregated recordkeeping; setting and tracking targets for increased inclusion in group membership and decision-making; work with women-only or youth only groups; and the development of differentiated approaches to leadership training, capacity development, networking and representation.'

Figure 15. Interconnected levels of gender representation, recognition and resources

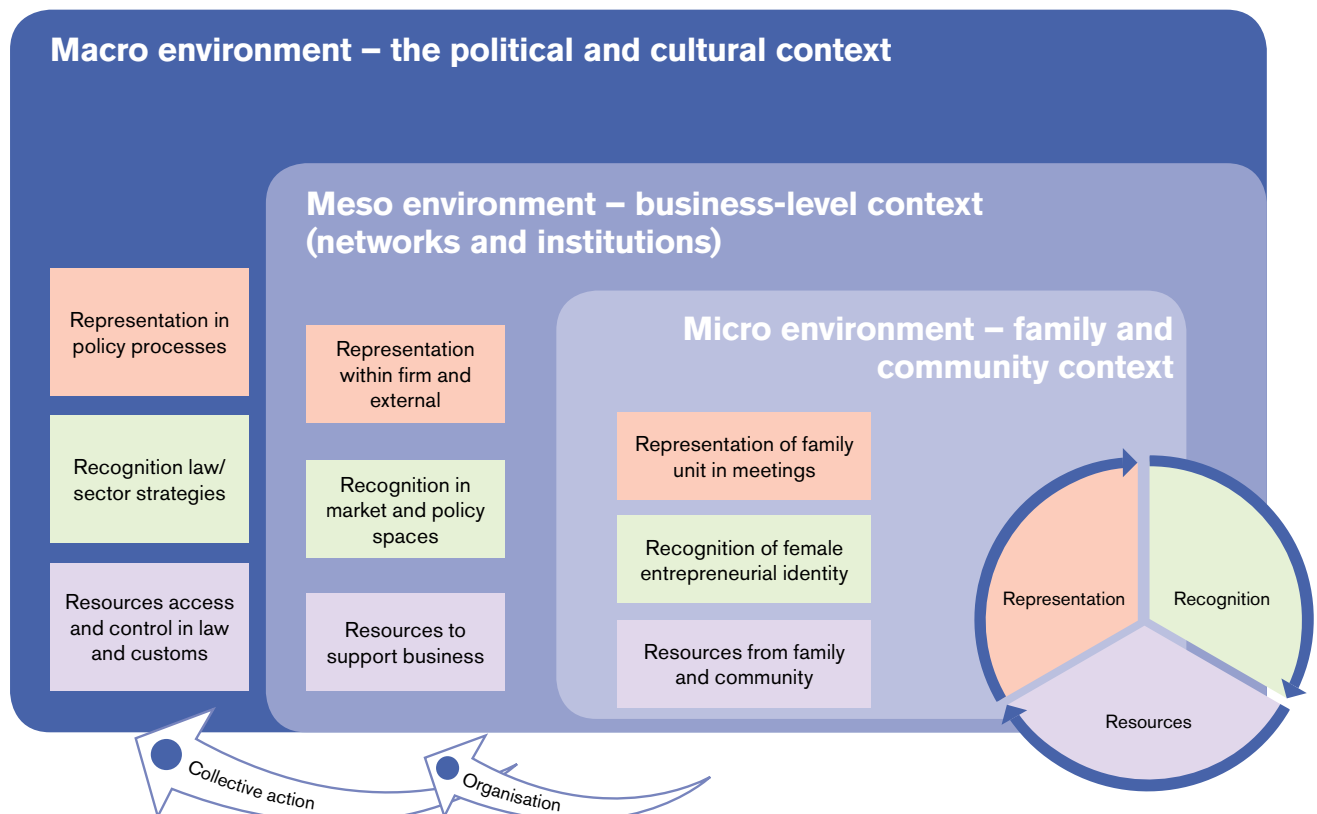
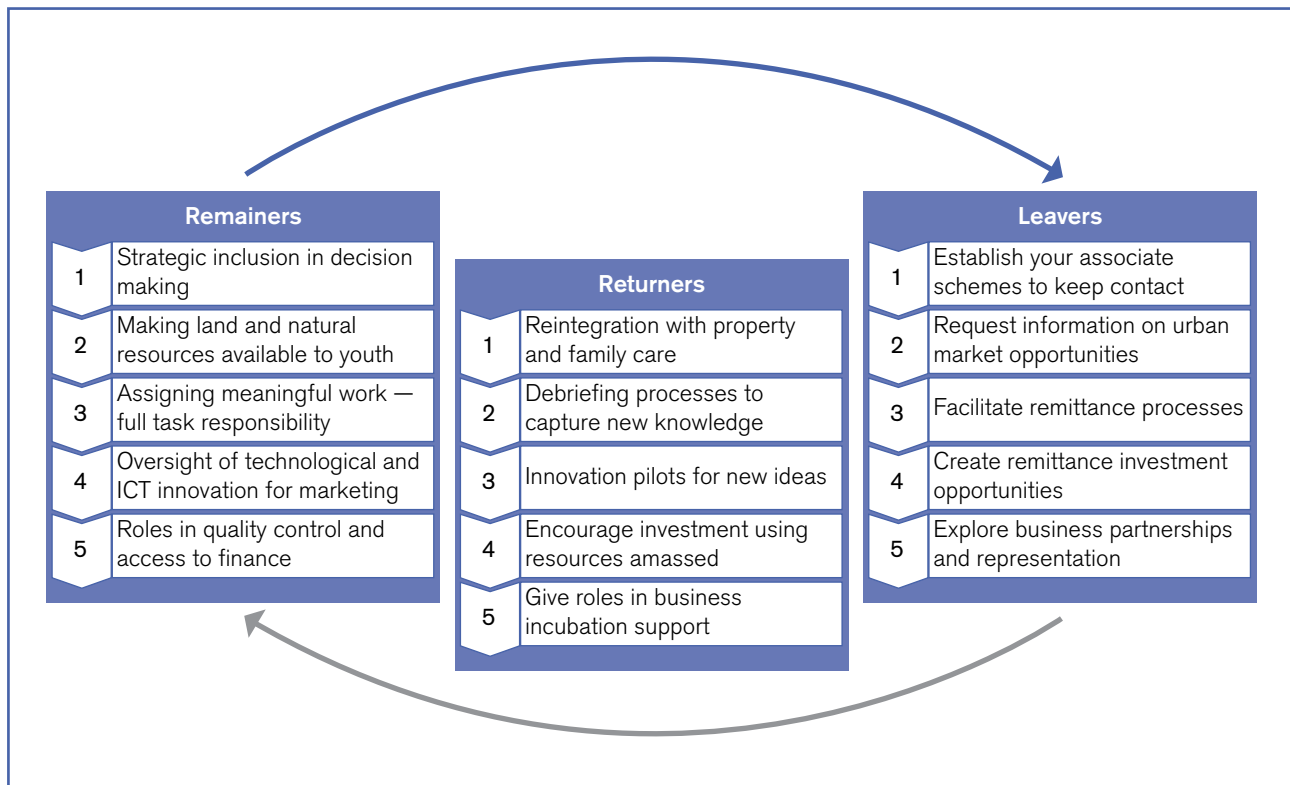


Figure 16. Strategies for youth engagement for remainers, leavers and returners



# 4

## First-hand experience that grows business incubation

### 4.1 Tackling the market challenge of meeting demand for quantity and quality

*FFF was founded to strengthen the organisations of local forest and farm producers. A key part of that is to help them increase the scale and quality of what they can offer to markets. Funding is offered for groups whose members wish to expand, consolidate and improve production volumes and quality. This often involves supporting market research to identify processing, packaging and quality-assurance requirements. As noted above, the FFF also sponsors peer-to-peer learning exchanges to the sites of successful businesses where some of these challenges have been addressed.*

Decades of prior work on supporting small forest and farm businesses by the FFF co-management partners, notably through the Forest Connect alliance, have highlighted the importance of smallholder producers working in groups to improve market access (see

Macqueen 2013b). The market challenge is that isolated producers alone struggle to meet market demand both for quantity and quality supply of products. The formation of producer groups who sell collectively can immediately help them to negotiate for fairer prices with traders. Groups enable product aggregation and quality control to meet the volumes that buyers want from a sustainable supply base. Groups can also pursue product branding and certification to meet niche markets as described further in section 5.3.

As local groups become stronger, they may also wish to develop the ability to improve records on their membership, land area controlled by those members and forest stock on that land. Data is power, and FFF strongly believes in supporting local groups to improve the data that they hold. One practical example is in negotiating timber sales. Groups are at a disadvantage unless they can calculate the volume of timber they have to sell. So FFF has developed a simple toolkit for undertaking timber inventory – so that tree growers are better equipped to negotiate with buyers (FAO 2021). Another example is around geospatial assessments of tree-cover data. Local groups are much better able to benefit from climate finance if they can show how their activities impact forest areas. For this reason, FFF is

currently developing guidance on different geospatial forest cover assessment tools and soil carbon measuring and modelling tools that can equip local groups with data that can empower them (Bowers 2022).

**‘CUT AND PASTE’ PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: ‘This proposal will support local forest and farm groups to expand their membership to aggregate larger volumes of product, develop quality-control standards for their members to improve the standard of product offered to buyers, develop better stock control and recordkeeping on volumes and prices, and track and improve efforts to manage resources sustainably.’

## 4.2 Developing entrepreneurship around a basket of products

*FFF supports collective entrepreneurship and business incubation based around a basket of products. It facilitates market analysis and development (MA&D) to screen, prioritise and advance enterprise development plans for new products, as well prioritising peer-to-peer exchanges between entrepreneurial groups for shared learning. From the outset, FFF’s research recognised that offering support to single value chains would be*

insufficient to deliver the full mix of local and global public goods required for sustainability (Macqueen 2013a; Macqueen *et al.* 2014a). Different production systems contribute to different ‘goods’ (see Figure 17). It was necessary to start up and incubate many different businesses within sustainable landscapes, both to deliver the full range of ‘goods’ desired by local and global publics (such as income, food security, renewable energy, biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation) and to ensure the resilience of those responsible for the delivery.

When increasing entrepreneurship, access to markets and finance, FFF’s approach is to help local groups develop a basket of products. When few commercial activities exist (such as in subsistence contexts), FFF uses an approach called **market analysis and development (MA&D) training** (see Lecup 2011). MA&D is primarily focused on building the entrepreneurial capacity of groups to research and develop the five main elements of business shown in Figure 18.

Entrepreneurs themselves must be able to assess economic viability and finance, technology research and development needs, sustainable natural resource management requirements, institutional and legal compliance processes, and any social and cultural constraints. A structured and iterative training programme helps those groups to produce an enterprise development plan that is based on their own research and understanding.

Figure 17. Example of contributions different forest and farm productions systems make to different local and global public goods – an assessment in Tanzania

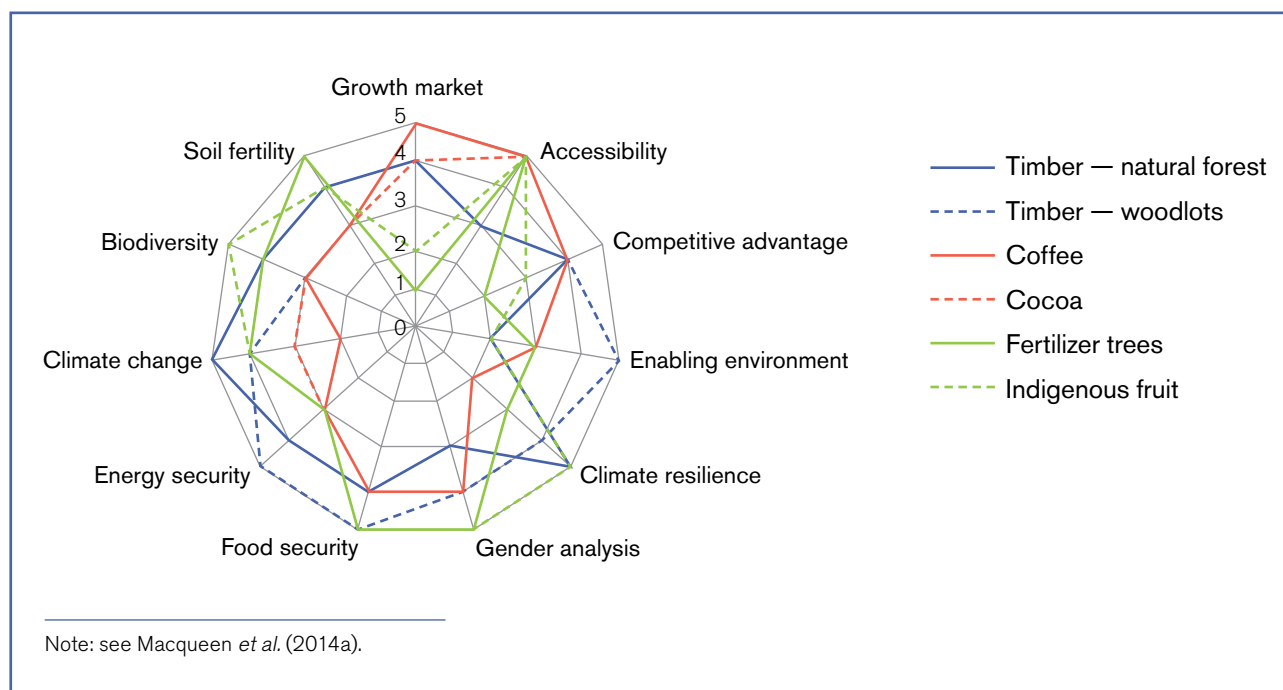
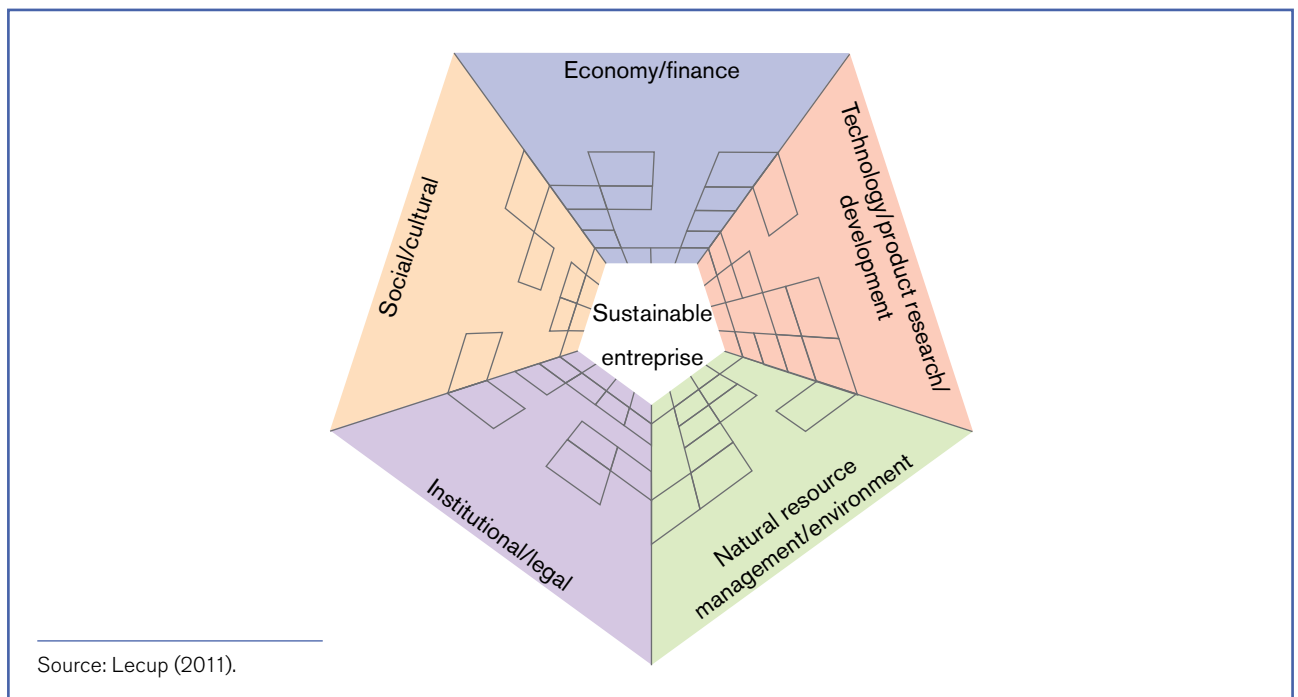


Figure 18. The five main areas that require proactive solutions



The business skills instilled through MA&D and that are required to develop and manage a functional group enterprise are often readily transferable between different products, despite huge variations in the value chain contexts and dynamics of those products. This core realisation – that people who run businesses are best place to teach business – has subsequently shaped the FFF approach to business incubation. Central to the new approach has been a higher emphasis on both documenting successful models of locally controlled forest business (see Macqueen *et al.* 2015a; 2015b) and on peer-to-peer exchanges to allow forest and farm groups to see and learn from successful business models functioning in the forest landscape (see FAO 2015a; 2015b; FFF 2015; IFFA *et al.* 2015).

#### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal will help forest and farm groups to screen viable business start-ups using the market analysis and development (MA&D) tool. With a strong emphasis on proactive entrepreneurship, this method helps forest and farm group leaders to search out the information they need to run a successful business. As business knowledge matures, support will be given to develop a basket of products that spread risk of failure while increasing incomes.'

### 4.3 Prioritising risk assessment and management

*Where local groups have already established flourishing businesses based on a range of forest and farm products, start-up training is no longer the priority. Instead, FFF provides training in risk self-assessment and management – as a tool to identify and address the most pressing challenges facing those businesses in an annual cycle.* Group businesses, like all small and medium enterprises, have high failure rates. The reasons for failure are varied but often include the failure to proactively manage risks and challenges. Risk management is a well-established necessity in private-sector circles, and the FFF team have surveyed relevant methodologies, then developed and tested an approach that has proved useful for forest and farm business groups (see Bolin and Macqueen 2016; Bolin *et al.* 2016).

**Risk self-assessment and management** are best conducted broadly across wide categories of risk (for example revenue flows, resource access, business relationships, operational capacity, security, brand reputation) and cross-checked against the five areas of MA&D shown in Figure 18. An annual cycle of risk assessment, prioritisation and then management has proved especially useful in shifting local businesses towards proactive management over time (see Figure 19).

FFF does not encourage enterprise groups to do separate climate risk assessments. Climate risks need to be considered as one of many sources of risk. A broad risk-assessment approach makes sure that other business-critical risks that need to be tackled are given fair consideration. In this way, the climate agenda (often donor driven) does not prevent crucial and timely business responses to other critical risks. There is a growing emphasis on climate-resilience thinking among forest and farm groups. Because of this, the FFF has developed an entire training approach to building climate resilience (see Section 5).

An annual cycle of proactive risk self-assessment and management is described in the Securing Forest Business toolkit (Bolin *et al.* 2016). This starts by clarifying the objectives of the forest and farm group (risks can only be assessed against what a group is trying to achieve). The group then goes through a process of identifying risks in the year ahead. They then prioritise that list by assessing both the probability of occurrence and the scale of consequences should that risk materialise. This allows the forest and farm group to first tackle risks that are highly likely to occur and would have high impacts if they did. Next, they discuss risk management options, drawing on examples from many other risk-management exercises with forest and farm groups. Responsibilities and monitoring systems

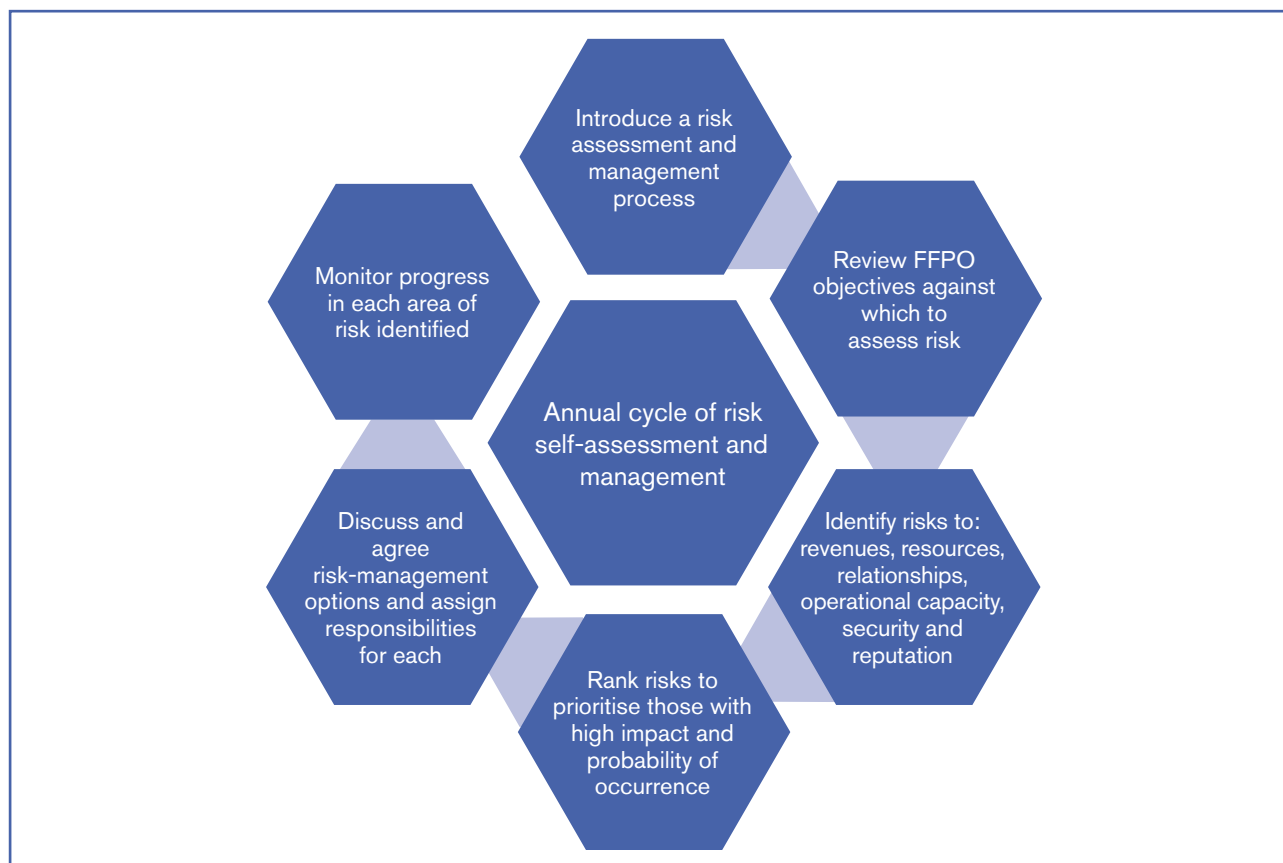
are set up. All these steps help to turn static, reactive businesses into forward-thinking, proactive businesses that constantly evolve and have a much higher chance of survival.

FFF also seeks actively to counter the misperception that forest and farm businesses are peculiarly high risk. It does this by documenting examples from many different countries of successful group businesses in the forest and farm landscape (see for example Macqueen *et al.* 2015a; 2015b). FFF has also led work to document how the business models developed by democratic groups can be much more effective in delivering a wide range of elements of prosperity rather than profit alone (Macqueen *et al.* 2020).

**'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal will take a different approach to forest and farm groups that already have established businesses. In those cases, support and training will be provided for those groups to undertake risk self-assessment and to develop management responses for the highest-priority risk each year with assigned roles and responsibilities. Risk management provides businesses with a proactive agenda of annual improvement.'

Figure 19. Annual cycle of risk self-assessment and management





## 4.4 Embedding incubation services within FFPOs

*The FFF approach seeks to embed active business incubation into the very fabric of forest and farm producer organisations. These organisations' revenues sustain their own businesses – and their knowledge can be used to help their members develop other businesses. The proven idea is that groups that already manage successful business operations are well placed to help others do so too.*

FFF has conducted assessments of many businesses incubation services in remote forest landscapes. The conclusion was that a 'for-profit' model of business incubation, where clients pay for the incubation services, was non-viable due to lack of clients (Macqueen and Bolin 2018). A more sustainable model was found where business incubation had emerged within successful second- or third-tier organisations that were themselves founded on successful business. Knowledge co-production resulted in a toolkit for how to install business incubation services into existing apex-level forest and farm organisations (Bolin *et al.* 2018).

FFF's approach to forest business incubation is one of facilitation. It sees apex organisations as facilitators or brokers. They link their members to different sorts of expertise that might be needed by their businesses. No one person can be expected to know everything about business. The key is to know the right people who can help. So, the role of a business incubation unit is to find out who can help to resolve different challenges – creating and bringing in a network of useful contacts. This network of useful support develops over time and with the growing experience of the staff in the apex-level organisations (see Figure 20).

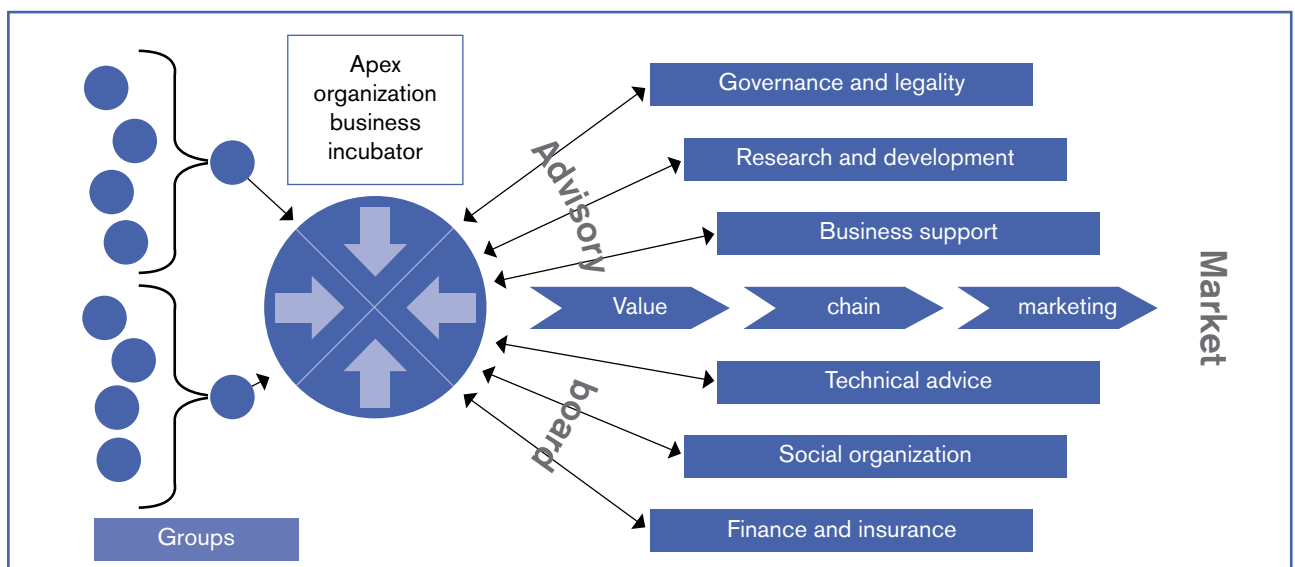
Any incubator must first assess client needs. This will involve identifying client groups within the broader membership of that organisation who wish to develop businesses, assess their needs and map potential service providers. It must also match incubator staff capabilities with those needs. This may involve internal staff, but often also involves identifying external sources of support. It must structure and manage a programme of support with the finances available to it. Finally, it must install some form of monitoring process to track the impact of its support. All these elements are well covered in the forest business incubation (ForBInc) toolkit developed by FFF (see Bolin *et al.* 2018).

FFF has found from experience that **business incubation services embedded into apex-level organisations** are highly effective. Forest and farm groups that have developed their own businesses can then go on to develop new businesses (developing a basket of useful products and services) while also helping other groups to copy that pattern. Since those business generate revenue, the business incubation services they then go on to provide are much more likely to be sustainable than services offered by external providers.

### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal aims to install dedicated business incubation units within the management teams of apex-level forest and farm organisations. These units will be staffed by people who already manage successful businesses for that organisation. They will map out member-based groups who they want to help (clients), identify their needs, and then act as a facilitator that either delivers support themselves or draws on a network of experts to do so.'

Figure 20. Business incubation embedded in apex-level forest and farm organisations



## 5

# Full-spectrum climate action at landscape scales

## 5.1 Diversification for climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience

*FFF takes climate action seriously: climate change seriously affects forest and farm producers. At the same time, forest and farm groups are also best placed to respond to it. Groups manage land across the landscape and so can work across whole ecosystems to deliver 'full-spectrum climate action'. FFF rejects the simple black and white carbon calculus. Instead, FFF supports the full technicolour of inclusive efforts to diversify social, ecological, economic and physical structures in ways that mitigate climate change, adapt to it and build resilience at a landscape scale. FFF believes forest and farm groups to have unique agency for climate action as climate change sentinels (Simola et al. 2021).*

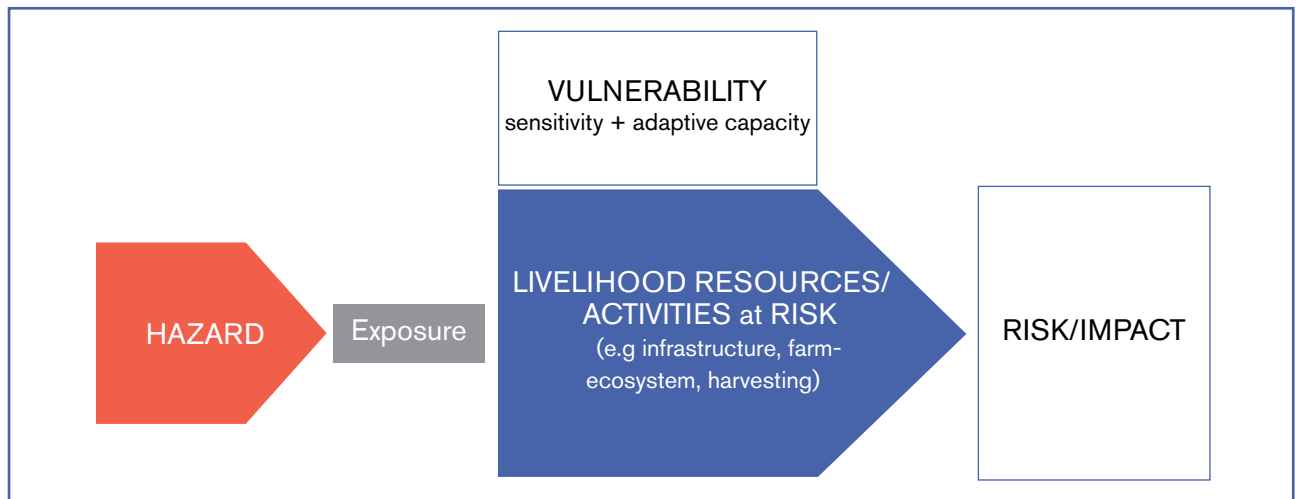
The FFF approach to climate action is built around the concept of resilience (combining mitigation with adaptation). This has traction with forest and farm groups themselves. The FFF partner AgriCord conducted surveys of 111 FFPO respondents from Africa, Asia and Latin America on the main challenges

and actions for FFPOs resilience (Pentilla and Simola 2021). Findings showed how significant climate (and COVID-19) challenges were to those groups. It also showed that 96% of

the FFPOs surveyed had implemented adaptation and/or mitigation activities or projects to tackle climate change (99% in the case of COVID-19). The importance of FFPOs for COVID-19 recovery was further elaborated (Covey and Bolin, 2022). AgriCord then developed **training materials for climate vulnerability assessment** to support forest and farm groups to assess and find responses to the hazards they face, as shown in Figure 21 (AgriCord 2021).

FFF assembled examples of practical approaches that forest and farmer groups had used to address climate risks. These examples were then presented to allow forest and farm groups to share tactics with one another (Simola and Vuori 2021). The examples were complemented by case studies showing the wide range of resilience actions taken by forest and farm groups from FFF's 10 partner countries (Adhikari et al. 2020; Aro 2020; Arawegya and Amoah 2020; Gaglo 2020; Machona 2020; Noasilalaonomenjanahary and Ramaromisa 2020; Poso 2020; Thoan et al. 2020; Timbula 2020; and Wekesa 2020).

Figure 21. The elements and central concepts of vulnerability and risk assessment



It is not just what happens in the forest or on-farm that allows people to persist, adapt or transform their production systems (the ecological dimension of resilience). There are also a range of ways groups can strengthen their social organisations, climate-proof their businesses and develop physical and technological infrastructure to become more resilient (the social, economic and physical dimensions of resilience). In each of these four dimensions, actions can be put in

place at the individual, group or system-wide level as shown in Figure 22. Together, these options provide ways for local groups to **diversify for resilience** (see Macqueen 2021a). There is some logical flow between the different options. For example, diversification in a local group's social networks can pave the way to technical inputs that improve their ecological diversification and resilience. This can in turn improve the group's economic diversification and resilience.

Figure 22. Dimension of climate resilience adopted by the FFF approach

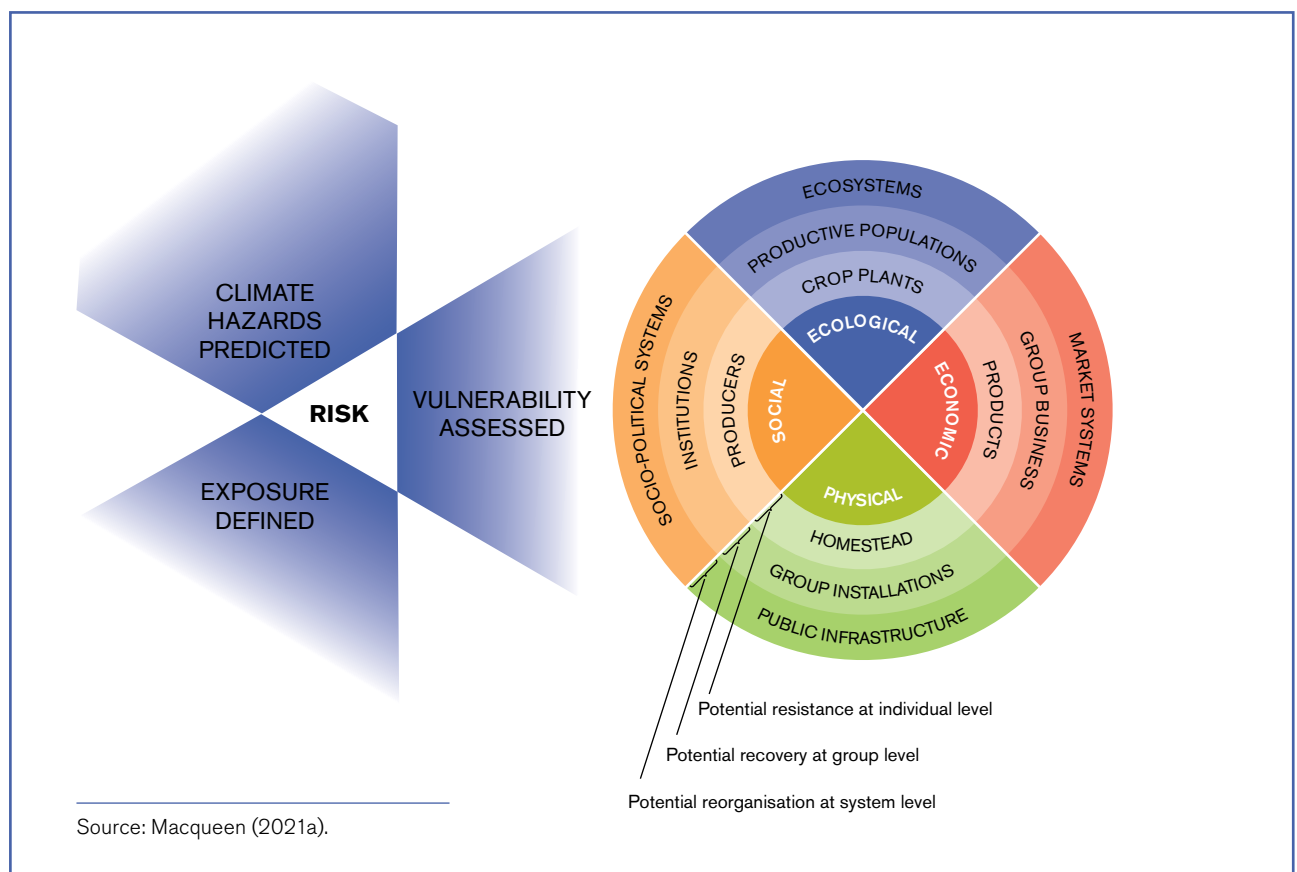
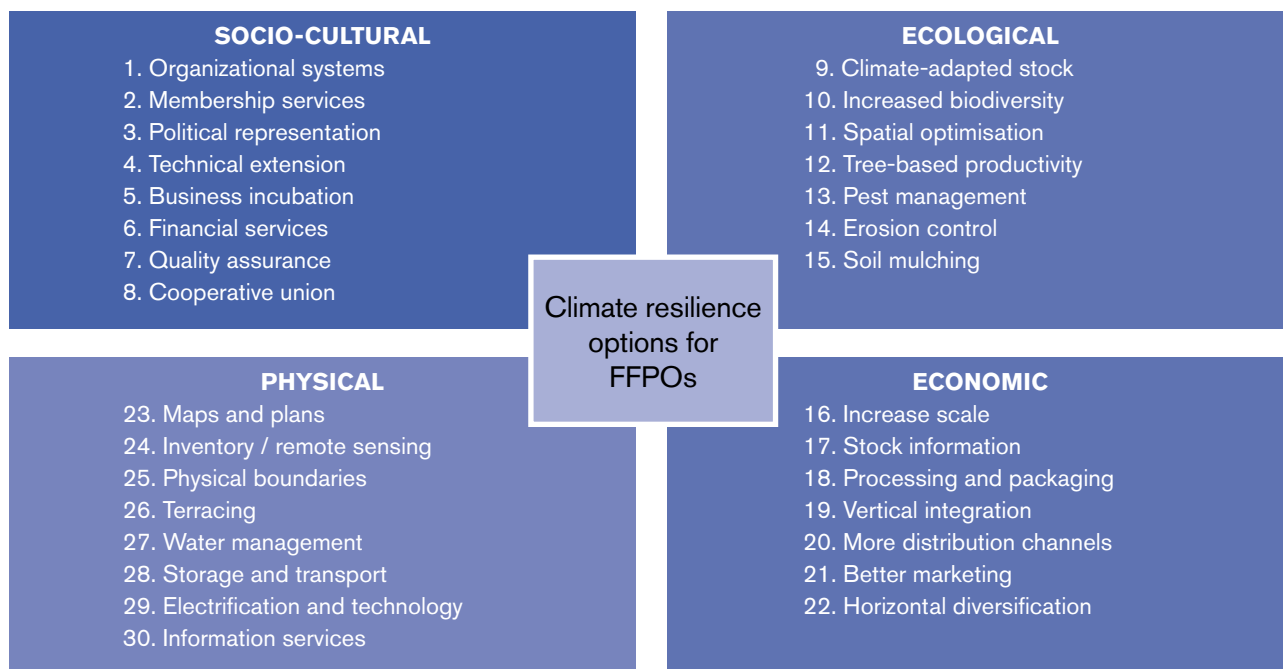


Figure 23. Thirty options for climate resilience by forest and farm groups



Source: Macqueen (2021a).

The options to develop resilience are not infinite in number. Despite many terms, the practical options available to build resilience in ecological, social, economic and physical dimensions are limited. FFF recognises **30 resilience options for forest and farm groups** in a checklist that has also been developed into climate-resilience training materials (Macqueen 2021a; 2021b) shown in Figure 23. The aim is to show how such groups thrive in diversity (Hou-Jones and Macqueen 2019).

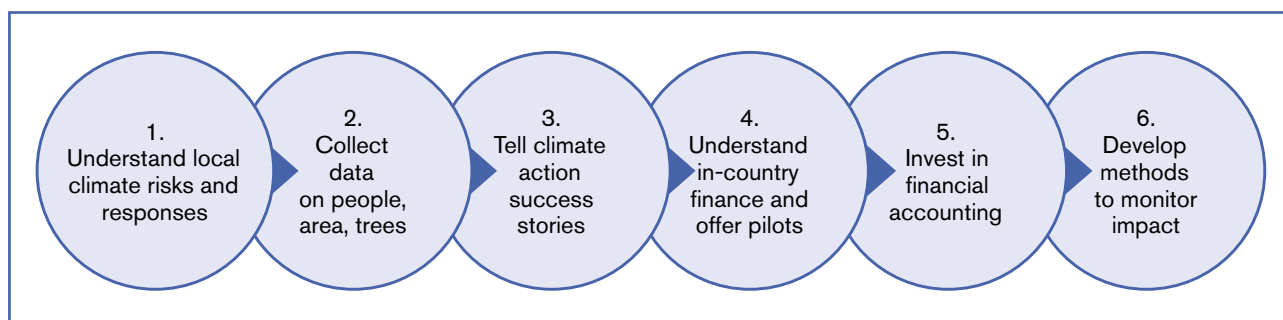
Many of the ecological options listed in Figure 23 also have benefits for climate change mitigation, by enhancing the quantity of carbon stored either in above-ground woody biomass or in enriched soils. All the options might be taken as examples of adaptation to climate change. Because of these intrinsic links, FFF also focuses on better **linking forest and farm groups to climate finance**. A toolkit has

been prepared that take groups through a structured consideration of how to appeal to and engage with different types of climate finance, from mitigation to adaptation finance (Kerr and Diaz 2021). The toolkit outlines six main steps that FFPOs might take along with their support agencies (Figure 24).

**'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal aims to equip forest and farm groups with an understanding of at least 30 social, ecological, economic and physical/technological options available to them to become more climate resilient. It will support them to diversify into those options and document their impacts (both on climate change adaptation and mitigation) to be able to pursue access to climate finance.'

Figure 24. Six main steps that forest and farm groups can use to access climate finance



## 5.2 Using organisational innovations to make diversity pay

*FFF helps forest and farm organisations to innovate in ways that make the sale of diverse baskets of products commercially attractive. It regularly brokers meetings with financial institutions to help finance those developments – most notably through a pilot programme known as Forests, Farmers and Agriculture, Sustainable Together (FFAST) – An Alliance for Action (AAA).*

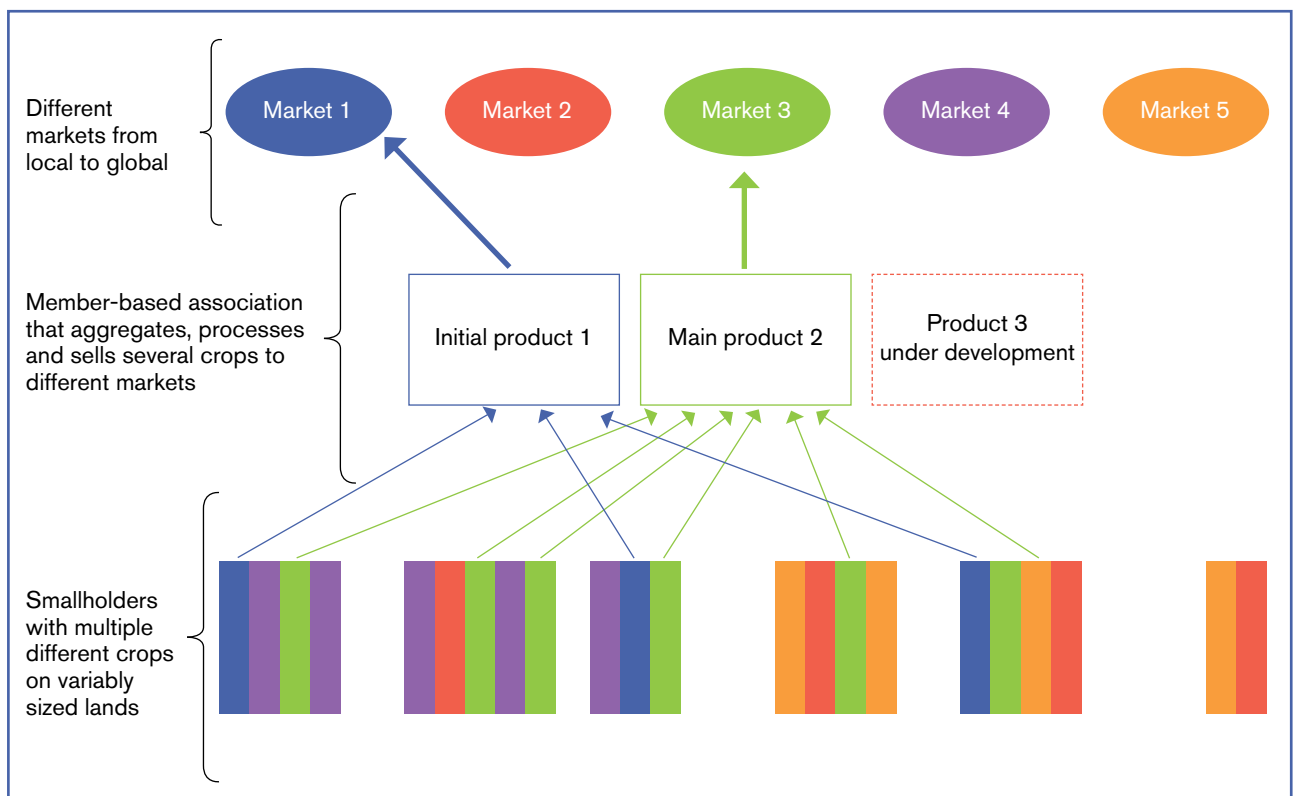
Markets homogenise. The requirements for uniform quality and scale efficiency tend to drive monoculture production systems. But for climate resilience, diverse landscape mosaics with diverse species and ecologies are needed (see Macqueen 2013a, Hou-Jones and Macqueen 2019). The challenge is: how to enhance market access without sacrificing diversity?

FFF answers this challenge by strengthening second-tier groups (for example regional product aggregators and value-adders). These second-tier groups, often associations made up of many local producer groups, usually start by building a single value chain. But once established, they often then move quickly to develop

market access for a range of other products found on the mixed farms of their producer members. Examples include Las Verapaces Cooperatives Federation (FEDECOVERA) in Guatemala that became the world's largest cardamon exporter but now also trades in coffee, cocoa, timber, ecotourism and more (Macqueen and Bolin 2018). Similarly, in Vietnam the Cinnamon and Star Anise Cooperative grew from four cinnamon-grower associations, but now also trades in star anise, handicrafts, herbal plants and honey (Thoan *et al.* 2020).

The model of second-tier 'aggregators' that have the capacity to market baskets of products is illustrated in Figure 25. Smallholder farmers grow a range of crops on farm, some for subsistence, some for sale. The agrobiodiversity inherent to their smallholdings gives them resilience to climate change. The member-based association develops storage, processing and marketing capacity – initially for one or two main products. Farmers who produce those products may join the association to improve their income. Over time, the association sells an increasing number of products. This gives it economic resilience in the face of both economic and climate-related shocks. But expanding the number of products it can sell also increases the number of farmers who may want to belong to the association, which may then also expand as that association finds markets for new products.

Figure 25. Organisational structures that can market large volumes of diverse products from biodiverse smallholdings



While good for people and nature, there are substantial challenges in financing such a model through conventional banks, who view variably formal, member-based organisations with multiple complex value chains as a high risk (Elson 2012) – a fact that we return to in FFF’s approach to access to finance (see Section 6).

**‘CUT AND PASTE’ PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: ‘This proposal aims to strengthen associations of local producer groups that aggregate and add value to a range of products at regional level. It will support them to diversify the markets into which different products are sold and so provide an ever-greater diversity of products, both in the market and on farm. In so doing, the resilience and diversity of the production systems will be enhanced – with benefits to climate change adaptation and mitigation.’

- **Celebrating difference** (for example promoting biocultural heritage). Conventional market wisdom creates brands that make limited offers of identical quality and experience. FFF’s partners celebrate the unique identity of each geographical location and biocultural group.
- **Nurturing agroecology** (for example enhancing agrobiodiversity). Conventional market wisdom discards environmental externalities as unnecessary costs and limits sustainability to crops or production systems. FFF’s partners aspire to resilient forest and farm landscapes in which sustainability is spread across a basket of products in landscape mosaics that sustain agrobiodiversity.
- **Fostering inclusion** (for example through fair trade). Conventional market wisdom excludes the marginal or weak as substandard to offer the highest quality at minimal cost. FFF’s partners deliberately foster opportunity for women, youth, ethnic minorities and people of disability.

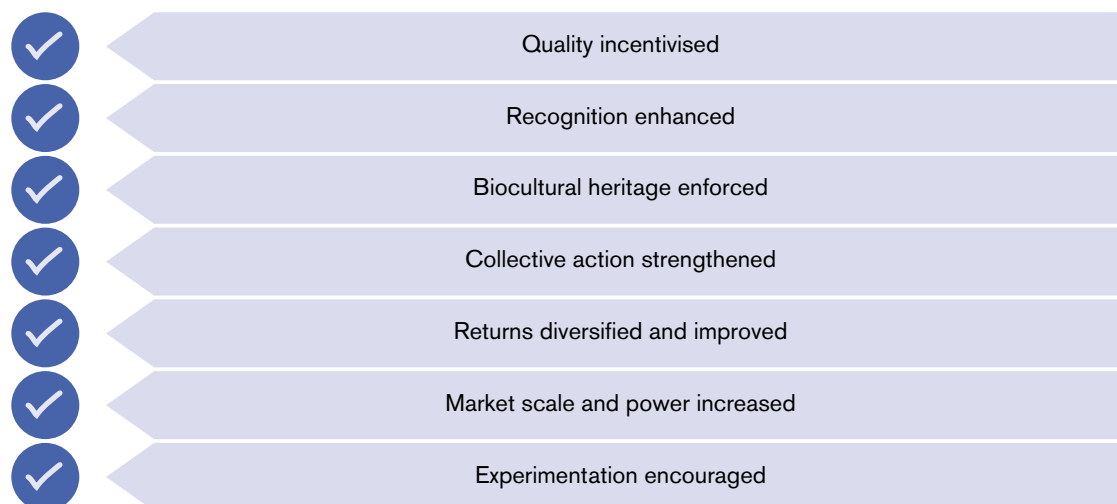
### 5.3 Shaping markets through biocultural labelling

FFF invests in marketing that highlights the biocultural heritage, landscape sustainability and equitable benefit sharing of the model described above. It seeks to build inclusive enterprise groups that restore productive and sustainable forest and farm landscapes in a range of unique contexts.

FFF’s support for forest and farm groups is climate smart and runs counter to the conventional market approach in three important ways:

Labelling to promote these main areas of benefit is another area in which FFF invests. Even before the FFF emerged, its co-management partners recognised the inherent bias against smallholders that comes from conventional marketing and third-party certification (Macqueen *et al.* 2008). Within the FFF itself, considerable effort has been put into exploring how trust-based second-party certification schemes such as Participatory Guarantee Schemes (PGS) might offer a better alternative for local and regional markets. FFPOs mainly sell into those markets which rarely demand costly third-party certification (Bolin 2020b; FAO unpublished; Wagner 2022). PGSs can be developed by local groups. Case studies from six FFF partner organisations showed several advantages that local forest and farm groups gain from developing these PGS shared labels (see Figure 26 below)

Figure 26. Documented advantages of local groups pursuing shared labelling for their products



A possibility is emerging within the PGS systems that FFF is pursuing. The idea is to have one overarching 'shared label' to cover certification of origin, sustainability, fair trade and traceability. One example is the Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme in Asia (NTFP-EP) Forest Harvest shared label. That overarching label could be used to endorse many product-specific labels that cover particular value chains and have specific criteria relevant to those value chains. This opens the possibility of broader consumer recognition of a shared label without sacrificing the need for product-specific standards. The idea is not new. Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) has product-specific standards which all use the same Fairtrade label. But the claims that individual producer groups wish to make about their products can

also be tailored to market demand within the system. For example, it might be possible to make 'climate-positive mitigation' claims within the same system.

### **'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal aims to help forest and farm groups to develop marketing strategies, including labelling, in line with the needs of their market context. This may involve developing second-party Participatory Guarantee Schemes (PGS) that make specific claims about the sustainability, equity, traceability and cultural significance of production processes.'

## 6

# Leaving no-one behind through social and cultural services

## 6.1 Mobilising internal finance to address finance gaps

*FFF improves access to finance for forest and farm groups. It places strong emphasis on groups developing their own savings and investment funds to establish financial accountability and a track record – then linking them to value chain investors and banks over time.*

Financial services are an important primary social service that FFF seeks to support. Forest and farm producers usually generate income through the sale of agricultural and tree crops. When organised into accountable groups, these revenues can form the basis of investment finance to upgrade value chains or meet the needs of vulnerable members.

Individual forest and farm producers can often ill afford even the annual cashflow investments to replant crops each year, let alone invest in more substantial items such as processing, packaging or transport equipment. Groups can help provide loans to their members for smaller cashflow needs through village savings and loans associations (VSLAs). Within VSLAs (or equivalent rotational savings and loans systems),

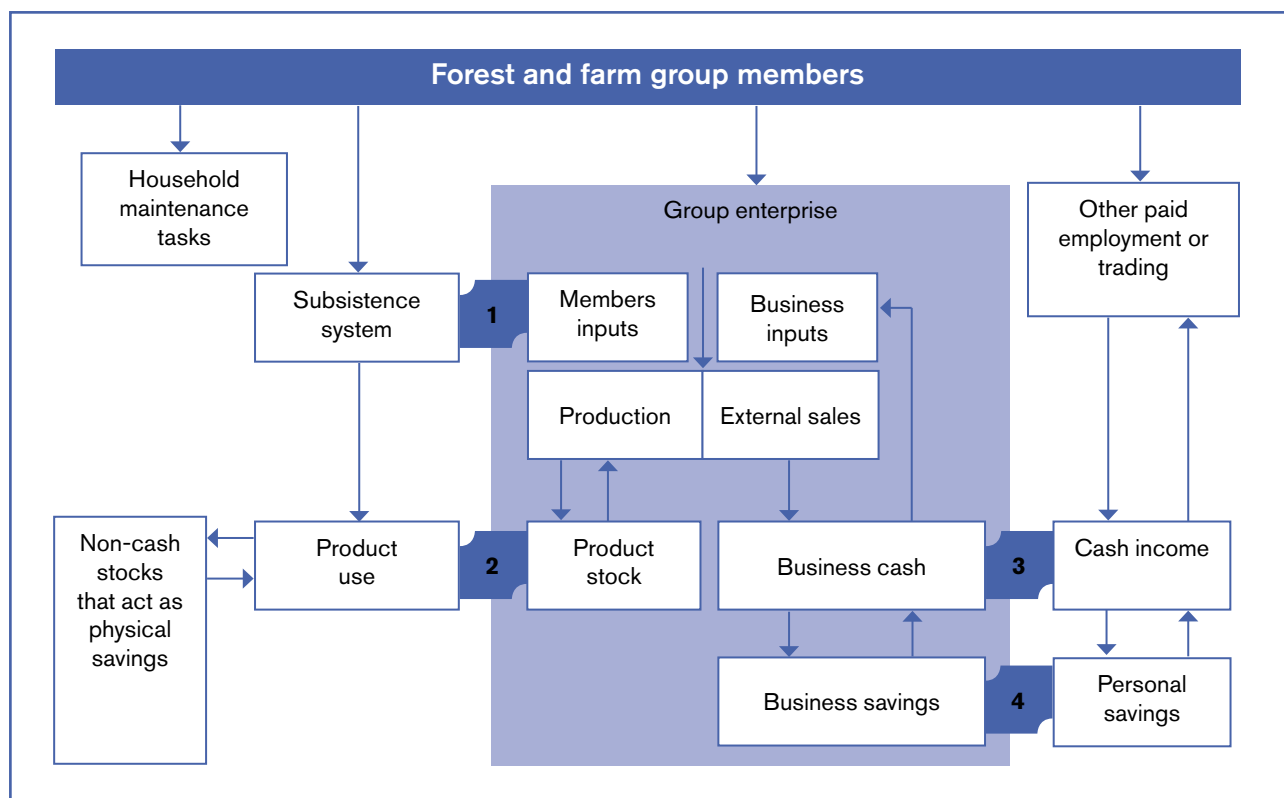
members put money into a common fund. This is then lent to members at an agreed rate of interest for a short period, usually a year. Profits from the interest are then distributed to members at the end of the year.

For more substantial investments, groups can place profits from sales into an investment fund. But groups often struggle with basic financial accounting to make that possible. Poor financial accounting reduces trust and increases the risk of abuse of a group's business structure by its leaders. Informal groups with poor accounting practices suffer four potential areas of leakage between members' individual products and cashflows and the products and cashflows of the group's business (see Figure 27). Poor financial accounting is very frequent. So, **training in financial accounting and access to finance** is a priority for FFF support.

With limited internal finances, forest and farm groups often look to external sources of finance. Here, there is often a finance gap (see Figure 28). While asset investors are comfortable with the risk-return ratio and transaction cost profiles for microfinance and industrial-scale investments, they struggle with the profile of small- and medium-scale enterprises (perceived as high risk, low return and with considerable transaction costs) (see Macqueen *et al.* 2018; Macqueen 2019b).



Figure 27. Four areas of leakage between members and group business products and cashflows which must be plugged by good financial accounting and stock control



Filling that finance gap requires three complementary actions to improve access to finance require different sorts of partners and partnerships:

- Organisational strengthening that formalises rights and reduces the transaction costs of dealing with local forest and farm groups
- More sustainable business incubation that addresses technical issues to improve the attractiveness of group business returns, and
- De-risking of investments in forest and farm group businesses for financiers through concessional finance, guarantee funds, innovative use of collateral, and credit reference partnerships.

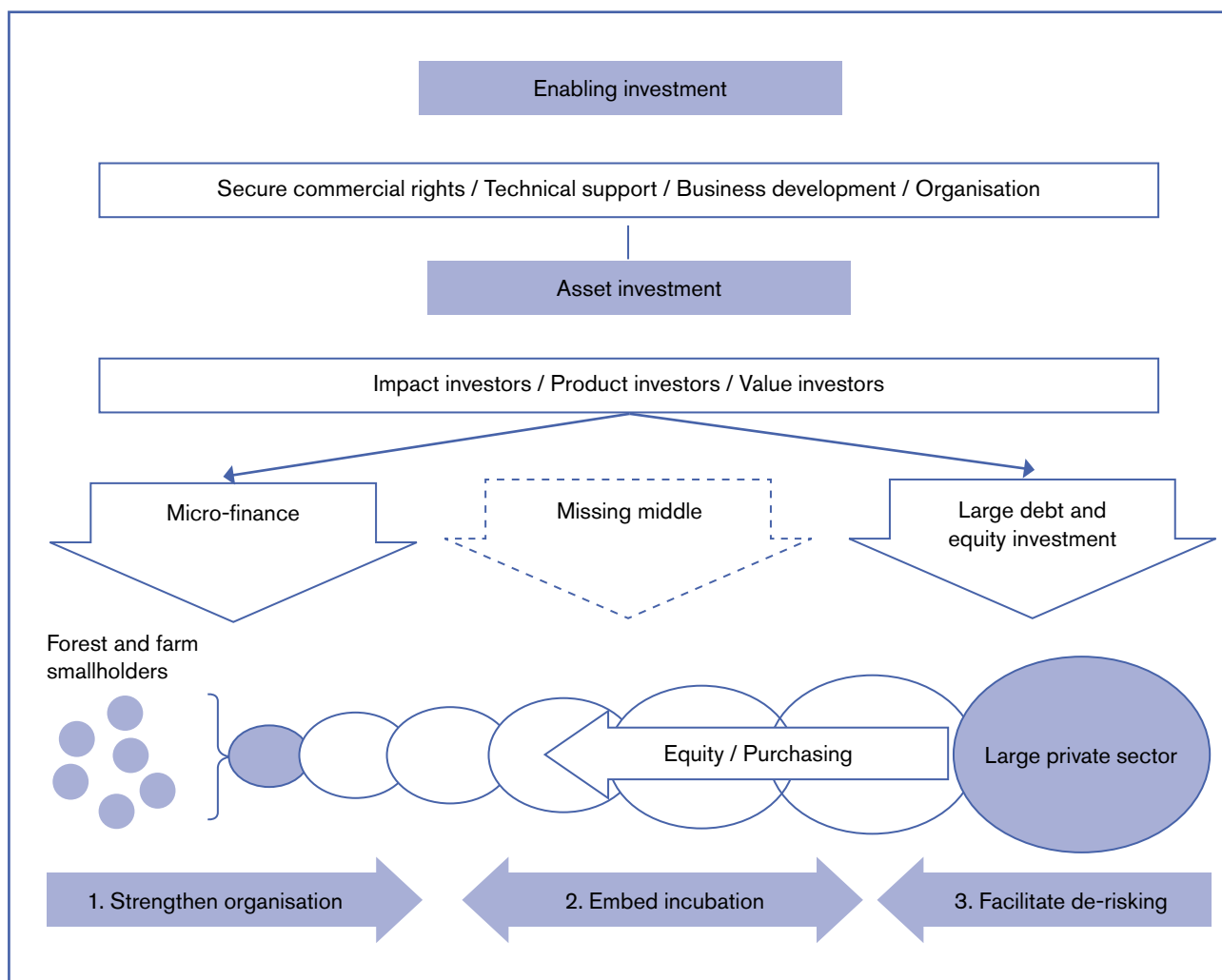
FFF both builds those financial partnerships and provides direct enabling investment to strengthen the organisation of forest and farm group businesses within those partnerships. The FFF approach acknowledges six main sources of finance for which access can be improved (see Figure 29). By far the most important of these is the first: finance from the members of the group business themselves. It is here that groups can develop VSLA models or larger investment funds from their profits. Many groups collect membership fees or levy a small tariff on sales made through the group to build up such funds. These sources of internal finance, if banked, can form the basis of a financial track record. A solid

financial track record is key to attracting external finance – but only if the group also has a clear management structure, investment proposal and often collateral against which to secure a loan.

FFF works to **improve access to each of these six types of finance**. For (1) producer, friend and family finance, FFF provides grants for membership expansion, internal financial management, building up women's collective agency, and risk self-assessment and response. This increases the scale of internal finances and the creditworthiness of forest and farm groups as clients for external financiers. In-country facilitators work to link forest and farm groups to (2) buyers and trade chain finance, brokering meetings with potential buyers, researching leases, factoring, purchase ordering or warehousing options, and exploration of out-grower arrangements.

In terms of (3) semi-formal and microfinance, FFF provides iterative business training that develops internal savings and loans procedures, explores potential crowdfunding, fosters links between formal and semi-formal providers and provides longer-term business incubation and coaching to improve the perceived creditworthiness of forest and farm groups to those external financiers. For (4) formal banking finance, FFF facilitators help map the terms and conditions of different lenders, organise financial literacy training, try

Figure 28. External finance gap for forest and farm groups



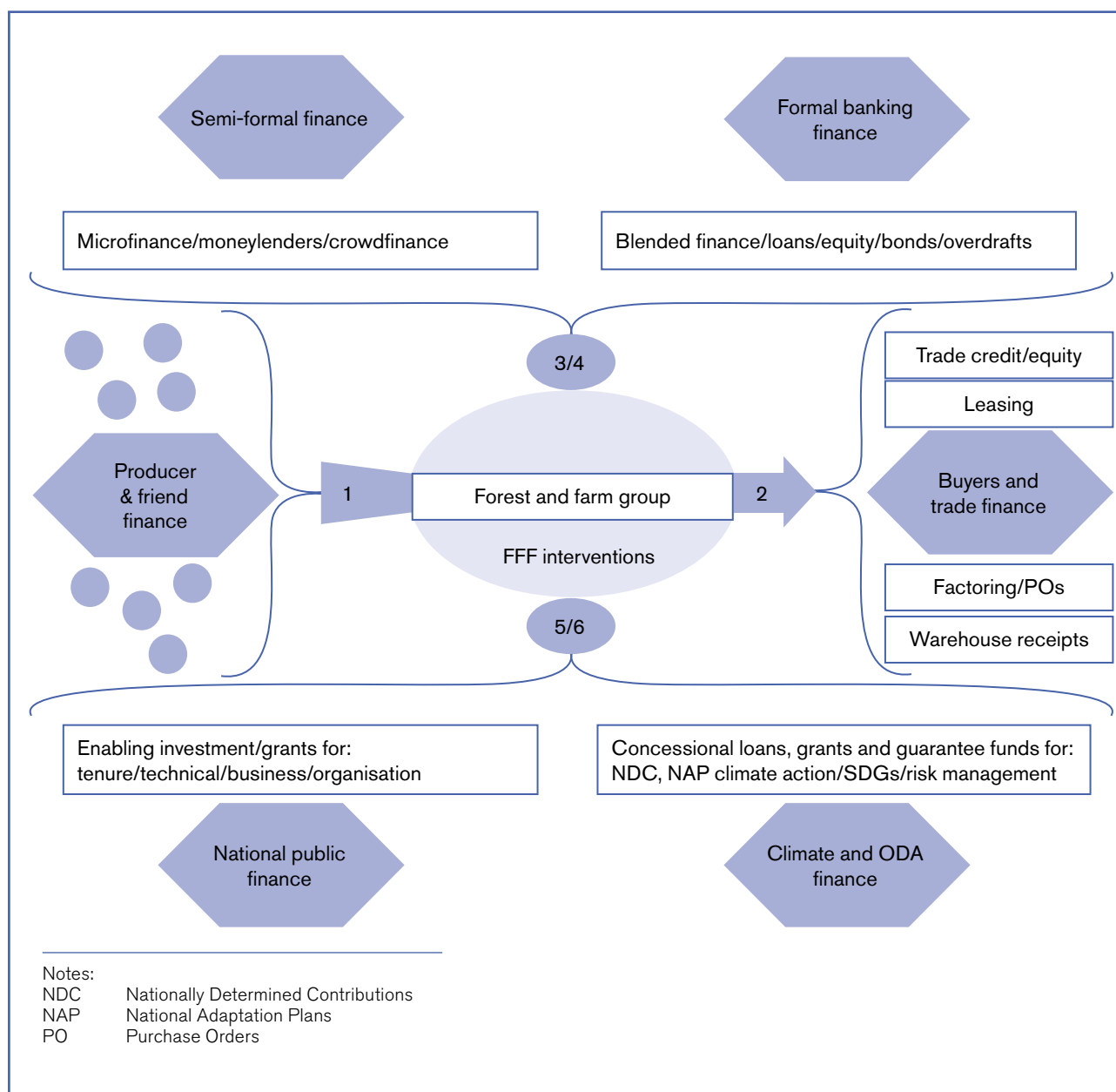
to broker the design of new financial mechanisms, and promote credit risk databases and assessments and digital banking outreach.

Regarding (5) national public finance, FFF works with government partners to develop National Forest Finance or incentive schemes, advocates for secure tenure, technical extension and business incubation support, and works with government on any financial regulatory reforms and reduced bureaucracy or to develop sectoral guarantee schemes. This complements FFF work with (6) climate finance and official development assistance (ODA) to tap into in-country donor programmes and adapt eligibility criteria to be more inclusive of forest and farm groups in project execution; as well as pushing for donor-backed guarantee schemes.

**‘CUT AND PASTE’ PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: ‘This proposal aims to help forest and farm groups improve their financial accounting and explore ways of mobilising and banking their own internal investment funds (either through membership fees or the use of a portion of profits). It will also explore how to attract necessary external finance from value chain partners, banks, national programmes and official development assistance (ODA).’

Figure 29. The six main sources of finance for forest and farm groups



## 6.2 Improving provision of social protection and cultural services

*FFF has found that some forest and farm groups provide social protection services through traditional systems that could be enhanced for better coverage. FFF also works with forest and farm groups to map the social protection services that their members should be able to access. It provides grant support to improve coverage of services that forest and farm groups already offer their members and to better document and link to external services.*

Social and cultural services are both material and non-material benefit systems that cover common interests (see Figure 30). But although they can overlap, there are some important differences. Social services help vulnerable people 'secure prosperity through more efficient product and labour markets, rights representation, diminished exposure to risks, and enhancement of capacities to generate and manage income and economic and social risks throughout the life cycle' (Bolin and Macqueen 2019). Cultural services help them 'derive or maintain cultural integrity through spiritual and religious values, inspiration, aesthetic values, social relations, sense of place, cultural heritage values, recreation and ecotourism' (Bolin and Macqueen 2019).

FFF helps forest and farm groups to **map and link to government social services** that should reach their members. These might include social protection payments that act as safety nets for vulnerable groups, or more specific services such as farmer input support programmes that might be available to those groups and their enterprises as springboards to development (see Figure 30).

FFF support for forest and farm groups around social protection has been particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, FFF support allowed more than 56,000 forest and farm producers to benefit from services such as food relief, and increased access to hygiene products and government social protection programmes thanks to the work of 47 forest and farm groups. FFF has also supported research to document vulnerabilities that might make groups eligible for social protection – for example charcoal producers in dryland Kenya in the wake of a charcoal ban.

**‘CUT AND PASTE’ PROPOSAL TEXT**

In line with the FFF approach: ‘This proposal aims to help forest and farm groups to extend the coverage of services they provide for vulnerable groups within their communities, and to map and link better to social protection and other services provided by government.’

### 6.3 Defending territorial rights, biocultural heritage and diversity

*FFF provides direct grant support to Indigenous people and local community groups for advocacy work in defence of territorial rights and biocultural heritage and diversity. While not set up primarily as a tenure facility (which exists elsewhere), FFF does help local groups gather evidence to support their messages and amplifies their voice at national and global levels. This enables FFF to achieve substantial impact at scale by influencing narratives and policies in favour of IPLC groups.*

The FFF co-management partnerships all play a role in building evidence in support of messaging from forest and farm groups. Often this is built into a concerted campaign with a particular theme. For example, FFF gave support to Indigenous people as ‘guardians of the forest’ in the 2021 ‘super-year’ building up to the 2021 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP 26) (Figure 31). A coordinated set of messages was built up over the year through carefully facilitated representation by forest and farm groups, often facilitated through FFF’s co-management institutions – and with a wide variety of communication products.

Figure 30. Functions and relationships between different types of social protection social services

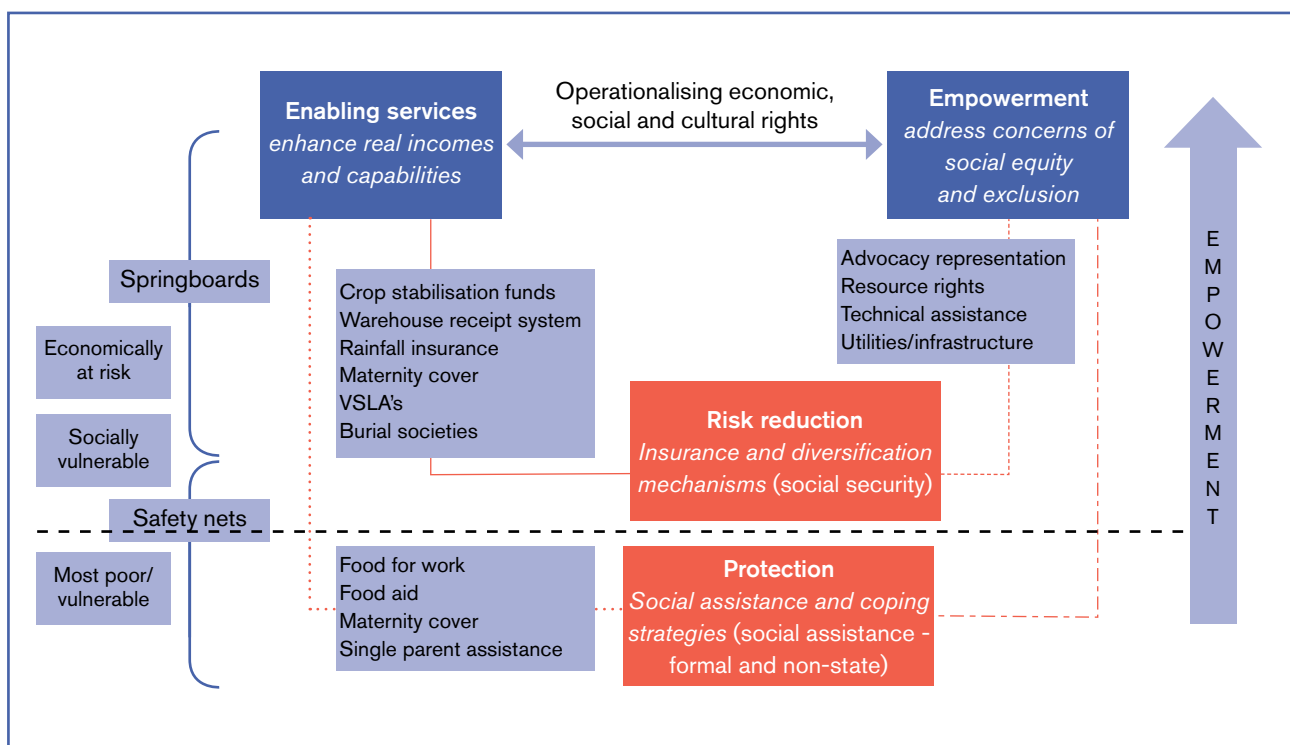
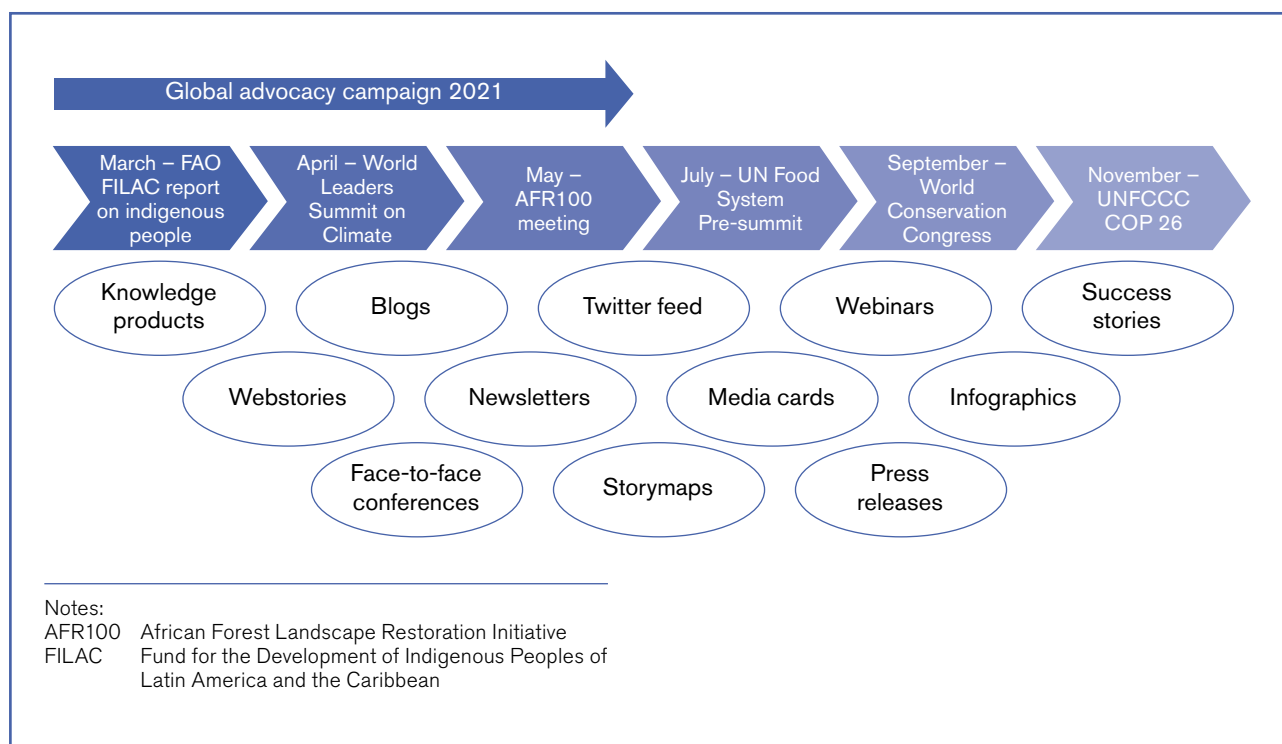


Figure 31. Examples of events and communication products used in support of Indigenous peoples in 2021



An important element of this work is the FFF regional and global programme managed by IUCN. This provides support to larger associations of forest and farm groups, such as the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GACF), the Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), the Network of Peasant Organisations and Agricultural Producers in West Africa (ROPPA), the East African Farmers Federation (EAFF), and the Mesoamerican Alliance of People and Forests (AMPB). This support often involves a measure of regional or global advocacy, as representation at that level is often among the reasons for the establishment of those associations and alliances. It has also involved developing and applying tools that link FFPOs to regional or global initiatives, such as those to do with Forest Landscape Restoration (Endamana *et al.* 2021).

#### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal aims to help forest and farm groups to gather evidence to support their messages and amplify their voice at national and global levels. It will identify key meetings and prepare with those groups a coordinated communication campaign around areas of most interest to those groups.'

## 6.4 Strengthening local capacity to communicate and use social media

Through FAO's Communication for Development (ComDev) programme, FFF also works closely with local forest and farm groups to build their communication capacity. This work uses a range of locally appropriate media to enhance the way groups communicate with their members and the broader community and raise their voices to address policy and institutional barriers.

The long-standing partnership with ComDev has been successful in developing targeted communication strategies, services and products. These help empower FFF stakeholders through access to information, knowledge sharing and engagement. The programme organises **communication and outreach trainings** with local forest and farm groups. The focus is on capabilities to use appropriate local media suited to illiterate audiences (such as community radio), or media-constrained contexts (such as making use of almost ubiquitous smartphone platforms). ComDev is a cross-cutting component in FFF activities to facilitate two-way, dialogic processes and ensure that local communities and producer organisations are informed and actively

engaged in policy dialogue. Targeted communication strategies, services and products help empower FFF stakeholders through access to information, knowledge sharing and engagement. The work dovetails with direct FFF funding to those groups for advocacy strategy development within its small grant support.

ComDev strategies are designed through a participatory communications appraisal and provide a framework for community empowerment through better communications within and from the group. They often have the following key elements:

- A participatory communication plan that draws members in and improves member's access to information and knowledge in priority areas for local groups
- Enhanced communication services that can be sustained by the local group, and
- Content that is farmer-led and inclusive, that documents and spreads lessons in each partner countries.

Special attention is given to enhancing the communication capacities of local groups. For example, assistance is given to local groups to develop their

own communication strategies (the stories they want to tell to serve their objectives). Training courses and coaching are provided for particular media (social media, mobile phones, participatory video, brochures, and leaflets; edu-communication materials and infographics) with special attention to women and youth. Experience sharing among groups in communication media is facilitated. Groups are encouraged to apply communication solutions to specific value chains and landscape management issues. Efforts are also made to link groups to existing community media and radio as well as with broadcast media (for example with a corporate and social responsibility angle).

#### 'CUT AND PASTE' PROPOSAL TEXT

In line with the FFF approach: 'This proposal aims to build the internal communications capacity of forest and farm groups, through an assessment of their communications capabilities, tailored training in locally appropriate communications media use, and linking with relevant local communication services.'

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In this working paper, we explain the strategic logic and practical approaches that have allowed FFF to support Forest and Farm Producer Organization (FFPOs) in delivering climate resilient landscapes and improved livelihoods at enormous scale. The intention is to spread understanding on how these participatory, bottom-up approaches can provide nature based solutions for people and planet.

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International Institute for Environment and Development  
Third Floor, 235 High Holborn, London WC1V 7DN, UK  
Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399  
Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055  
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