



Food and Agriculture
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FOREST AND FARM FACILITY

Achieving more together: empowered forest and farm
producer organizations



Getting organized puts smallholders in charge. Through farmers groups, cooperatives and networks, forest and farm producers can help each other not only through marketing advantages and access to finance, but also through the exchange of knowledge and experiences, increased bargaining power, and a stronger voice in national decision-making.

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) works at national level to strengthen producer organizations for smallholders, women, communities and indigenous peoples in order to improve business, livelihoods and policy engagement. At regional and global level, the FFF works to help forest and farm producer organizations play a more strategic role by linking local voices and learning to global processes.

Building capacity in Viet Nam

The acacia growers group in Lem village, Yen Bai Province, northern-central Viet Nam, is well on its way to becoming a successful forest and farm producer organization. This is especially remarkable as Viet Nam has gone through cycles of institutionalized collective farming in the past, which have left farmers frustrated. But now farmers are slowly losing their mistrust of collective action, and groups like the Lem Village Acacia Growers are leading the way.

Nguyen Dinh Hai and his neighbours created an informal group of 15 acacia growers, including six female headed-households, in 2008. The group managed a total of 57 hectares of forest and gathered to share information and labour in the forest plantations. However, members continued to sell their timber individually, mainly to middlemen.

In 2014, the Forest and Farm Facility supported the group through the Viet Nam National Farmers Union (VNFU) to formalize its registration as a collective. The group received training on facilitation, enterprise development, proposal writing and wood sawing techniques, as well as study visits to successful forest-based business models. They also participate in roundtable discussions at commune, district and provincial level with local authorities, banks and other stakeholders.

Learning from the process

This initial success in Viet Nam is explained by several factors. First, Hai is young, active and willing and able to take risks. He is also comfortable with sharing benefits with others. Second, trust has been built between members through transparent financial management, good communication and regular monitoring. Third, VNFU has provided timely support at an early stage of the group's development to bring them to the point where they are investing their own money in value-added production. This support also included opportunities to network with other producer organizations, other actors along the value chain and cooperation with local authority and other stakeholders.

Bolstering the local economy

Thanks to the market analysis and development training they received, seven members of the the Lem Village Acacia Growers pooled their money to raise 500 million VND (US\$ 23 000) of initial capital to invest in a small-scale sawmill. The group did its own market research for customers, including big processing companies, and as result the sawmill generated revenue of more than 720 million VND (US\$ 33 500) within seven months. The income of the group members increased by around 10 percent, and the sawmill also buys raw materials from people outside the group, offering a higher price than the middlemen.

In 2016, with the support of the FFF and the Yen Bai Department of Forestry, the group will extend its membership and apply to become a cooperative allowing it to benefit from government incentives. It will also request all members to comply with Forest Stewardship Council criteria in forest planting and harvesting as a market advantage.

Addressing legality issues in Zambia and Liberia



Charcoal and firewood make up over 70 percent of the national energy consumption in Zambia, where only 20 percent of the population has access to electricity. But most of the charcoal trade is conducted illegally, without obtaining licenses and contributing significantly to forest degradation. Mr Muleya, a charcoal trader from Choma District, southern Zambia, is one of many producers who has lost business when law enforcement officers have confiscated his charcoal.

The recent formation of a district charcoal platform with support from the FFF will finally allow a dialogue between all actors about how to best conduct the charcoal business. This new district charcoal platform is part of Zambia's renewed efforts to find solutions to address a vital sector in the rural economy.

In Liberia's Great Cape Mount District, the National Charcoal Union of Liberia has supported the organization of 5 district charcoal associations with

a small FFF grant. Mr Sonii, chairman and Mrs Gray, Chairwoman represent their respective male and female branch of the Commonwealth District Charcoal Association (CODCA), which comprises a total of 390 male and female charcoalers of which also a few traders. Through these district associations, the Liberian Forestry Authority will be able to roll out a new Charcoal Regulation, for which the associations were also consulted during the vetting process.

Thanks to an exchange visit to Kenya facilitated by the FFF in 2015 for producers and senior forestry officials, the Zambian Forestry Department was inspired to adapt best practices from Kenya and Liberia to the local context. The recently approved Forest Act 2015 regulates charcoal production, but a 50 percent increase in licence fees and transport has seen charcoal producers and traders continue to struggle. Helping to develop producer and trader organizations allows them to clarify their concerns, trade legally, and receive focused and structured technical support from government.

This is a first small but essential step towards sustainable charcoal production for producers and traders like Mr Muleya and Mr Sonii. But on a much larger scale, strengthening the capacity of groups like the Lem Village Acacia Growers and the Choma Charcoal Platform or CODCA plays a vital role in working towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, implementing responses to climate change such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), and improving governance through Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT).

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Funded by Sweden, Finland, Germany, the USA and AgriCord, through its Farmers Fighting Poverty Programme.

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